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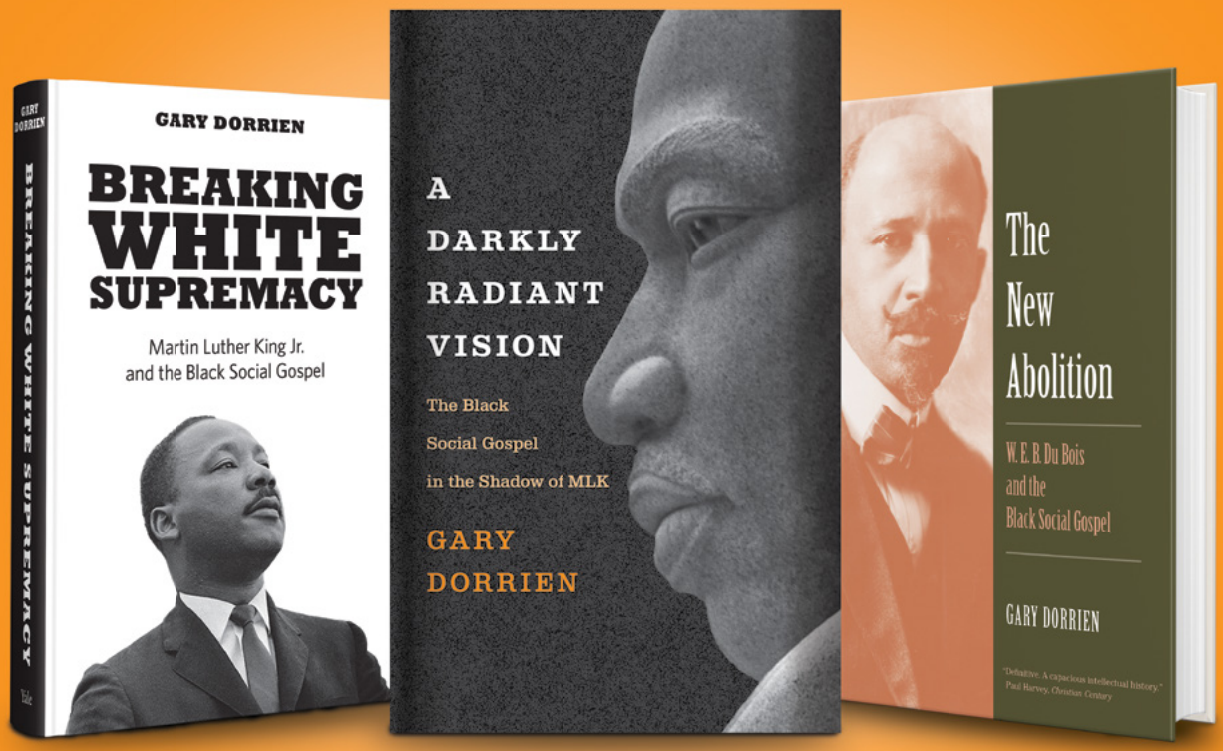

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LETTERS

Robert Bellah's socialism, the war in Ukraine, and Catholic higher education

SERIOUS ANTI-CAPITALISM

Thank you for Matthew Rose's excellent article on Robert Bellah, "Serious Play" (July/August 2023), which ranges insightfully over Bellah's intellectual career, astutely describes his thinking about the role of religion in human existence, delineates the successive influence of Émile Durkheim, Paul Tillich, and George Lindbeck over Bellah's thinking about religion, and makes a good stab at summarizing his capstone book on the evolution of religion. However, once past the opening paragraph in which Rose acknowledges that Bellah supported "the ideals of democratic socialism," he trivializes Bellah's progressive politics and omits any mention of his mature commitment to economic democracy. *Habits of the Heart* (1985) had no integral principle or constructive political force without its advocacy of economic democracy. Then the Bellah group doubled down on economic democracy in *The Good Society* (1991), a book and argument that go unmentioned in Rose's rendering. Bellah's anti-capitalism was principled and constructive, not gestural, nostalgic, or the irrelevant afterglow of his Marxist phase.

Gary Dorrien
New York, N.Y.

AN URGENT IMPERATIVE

I take serious issue with the article by Andrew Bacevich ("Waist Deep in the Big Muddy," September 2023) concerning the ongoing war in Ukraine. While pointedly ignoring the first Iraq war following the invasion of Kuwait, Bacevich attempts to draw comparisons between the Vietnam War, the (second) Iraq War, and the current war in Ukraine. In doing so, he creates a convenient false equivalency.

Russia is currently a terrorist state. This is self-evident—dropping a bomb on a hospital, a school, a theater, or a home is no different, either in substance or intent, from flying an airplane into the side of a building. Terrorism is evil. Bacevich seems to deride, or even negate, the "imperative of confronting perceived evil." In contrast, I do believe that such an imperative exists. The people of Ukraine are faced with such an imperative, and the alternative to assisting them in confronting that evil is to accept it.

Harry W. Fenton
Philadelphia, Penn.

DYING FOR SOMETHING

Andrew J. Bacevich is a gem of a human being. His voice of restraint in our foreign policy carries a message that ought to awaken our political and military leaders. He knows personally the ultimate sacrifice people have made to maintain our freedom, having lost his son fighting in the war in Iraq just sixteen years ago.

However, when he refers to the Vietnam War in his article ("Waist Deep in the Big Muddy," September 2023), he blatantly states that "fifty-eight thousand Americans died for nothing." Not so. They died because, however misguided our nation was, it believed that it was in our national interest to keep communism at bay in Southeast Asia. The young men who died there did die for something. That something was their beloved country and their beloved comrades. The Vietnam Memorial is a stark, heartbreaking, glorious reminder that our United States is worth dying for even if "big fools" push us deep into the "Big Muddy."

Peter M. Murray
Wauwatosa, Wisc.

PRESERVING CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

Nancy Dallavalle's thoughtful and perceptive review of Bernard G. Prusak and Jennifer Reed-Bouley's *Catholic*

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LETTERS

Higher Education and Catholic Social Thought ("Do Catholic Colleges Have a Future?", September 2023) neatly formulates some of the many challenges facing Catholic higher education today, particularly if the parties involved are seriously concerned with preserving a measure of Catholic values, attitudes, and assumptions at their respective institutions. Not everyone is.

The great temptation of upper-level administrators at those places that seek to establish practices congruent with their secular counterparts is to defer to the faculty in all apparently academic matters, come what may. This can lead to misunderstandings. At a recent departmental meeting in which the questions posed to faculty members on Georgetown's annual report were being discussed, one colleague objected, with considerable irritation, to being asked about any work in the community. "What difference does it make to my scholarship if I work in a soup kitchen?" he angrily demanded.

Some agreed with him, while others noted that, historically, Georgetown was Catholic, and that was probably why the question, for now at least, remained on the report.

John C. Hirsh
Professor of English,
Georgetown University
Washington D.C.

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‘Moral Clarity’?

In joint statements about Hamas’s October 7 attacks on Israel, which left more than 1,400 people dead—including more than a thousand civilians—both U.S. secretary of state Antony Blinken and Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu used the phrase “moral clarity.” Netanyahu called it “the first prerequisite of victory” in the coming war, while Blinken invoked it in a call for everyone to “unambiguously condemn” the attacks.

Blinken is right, of course, that Hamas’s leadership and fighters—who shot infants, raped women, burned bodies alive, beheaded soldiers, murdered 250 innocent concertgoers, and took more than two hundred hostages—deserve unequivocal condemnation. The celebrations of the attack by some Western leftists as an act of self-defense or “decolonization” display deep-seated moral confusion and, in the worst instances, anti-Semitism.

But “moral clarity” should extend beyond Hamas’s actions, both to the wider context in which they took place and to Israel’s ongoing response. Later in his remarks, Blinken said, “We democracies distinguish ourselves from terrorists by striving for a different standard.... That’s why it’s so important to take every possible precaution to avoid harming civilians.” President Biden has similarly urged that Israel abide by international law and “protect civilians in combat as best as they can.” But these admonitions ring hollow without an acknowledgment that Israeli forces have *already* flagrantly disregarded civilian life and international law, both in a decades-long occupation that deprives Palestinians of basic human rights and in the ongoing bombardment of Gaza.

In the first six days of airstrikes, the Israeli Air Force dropped six thousand bombs, nearly as many as the United States dropped in an entire year during the war in Afghanistan. Israel, which withdrew from Gaza in 2005 but still controls its borders, also cut off water, electricity, and fuel. On October 13, it ordered more than one million residents in northern Gaza to evacuate, initially giving them only twenty-four hours to comply. Some evacuated families were later killed by Israeli airstrikes within the southern “safe zone.” Many others have refused to leave, fearing another Nakba (Arabic for “cataclysm”), the 1948 expulsion of seven hundred thousand Palestinians from what is now Israel.

International efforts to create an aid corridor at the Egyptian border were stymied for twelve days amid Israeli concerns that weapons might be smuggled in. As of this writing, according to the Hamas-run Gaza Ministry of Health, more than five thousand Palestinians have been killed, nearly half of them children. Meanwhile, the United States vetoed a UN Security Council resolution calling for a humanitarian pause in the fighting.

Hamas’s attacks ended a period of relative calm in Israel. Biden has said that they were likely spurred in part by his administration’s negotiations to establish diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Israel. These talks were an extension of the “Abraham Accords” negotiated by the Trump administration, which saw Israel gain recognition from Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Morocco. Like Saudi Arabia, these states had previously refused to recognize Israel without a path to Palestinian statehood, but economic partnerships, arms deals, and a mutual interest in countering Iran’s regional influence convinced them to sideline the Palestinian question. Though Saudi Arabia was demanding much more than the other Arab countries had, including NATO-like defense guarantees from the United States, the Saudis and Israelis appeared close to a deal before Hamas’s strike. Biden had hoped normalization with Saudi Arabia would better integrate Israel into the Middle East, while promoting stability and countering China’s efforts to become a force in the region by brokering a pact between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

By taking the Palestinian question off the table, these deals allowed Netanyahu’s far-right government to facilitate new settlements in the West Bank and further cripple the prospect of a two-state solution. Israel’s border with Gaza was so poorly protected partly because soldiers had been redeployed to protect West Bank settlers engaged in clashes with Palestinians, including a riot against a Palestinian town that an Israeli general described as a “pogrom.” Netanyahu’s explicitly stated strategy has been to strengthen Hamas at the expense of the more moderate Fatah, which controls the West Bank: “Those who want to thwart the establishment of a Palestinian state,” he said at a meeting of his Likud party in 2019, “should support the strengthening of Hamas and the transfer of money to Hamas.” Biden claimed the United States remains “committed to the Palestinian people’s right to dignity and self-determination,” but he has thus far failed to restore a State Department policy, reversed by the Trump administration, that treated Israeli settlements as a violation of international law.

If the United States really wants stability and democracy in the Middle East, it should promote Palestinian self-determination and leverage its influence to curb Israel’s Far Right instead of brokering pacts between authoritarian states and the deeply compromised Netanyahu government. To his credit, Biden seems to be discouraging an all-out Israeli ground invasion that would likely create even more resentment and extremism. It will take further diplomatic efforts to prevent the war from spreading north to the Lebanon border, where skirmishes with Hezbollah have already broken out. Whatever happens in the days to come, one thing is already clear: U.S. policy with respect to Israel has long lacked “moral clarity” and is due for reexamination. —*October 26, 2023*

Reading 'Laudate Deum'

Pope Francis concludes *Laudate Deum*, his new apostolic exhortation on the climate crisis, by pointing to carbon emissions in the United States and condemning the "irresponsible lifestyle connected with the Western model." What is this lifestyle, exactly? Think of the little daily actions that rarely inspire much reflection: flipping on a light switch or picking up a coffee. Behind these actions is a web of interdependence. A cup of coffee is the result of cultivation, packing, shipping, brewing, and service. The environmental costs of such processes are very often concealed from view: How often do we encounter those who bear the special burdens of environmental degradation, the people who live, in Pope Francis's disquieting phrase, "at the bottom of the pile"? Even those of us with firm ecological commitments find that we contribute, in countless small and mostly unconscious ways, to the destruction of our common home.

The human species, as Francis reminds us in his two ecological writings, has acquired for itself awesome and terrifying powers. Every individual is, in fact, radically dependent on the whole of Creation, but the practices associated with what the pope calls "the technocratic paradigm" allow us to imagine ourselves as autonomous. In *Laudato si'*, Francis insisted that human beings are created for relationship with God, with the earth, and with our neighbors, especially the poor. "These three vital relationships," he wrote, "have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin."

The new apostolic exhortation is an urgent call for us to develop the habits and institutions that would foster and protect these vital relationships. Francis calls for coordination on a massive scale and for the erection of a true world political authority. He demands a response to the climate crisis that is "drastic, intense, and counts on the commitment of all." In the face of technologies and economic institutions that appear to have escaped human control, he insists that human beings must "control political power," subjecting new technologies to some conscious plan. Yet the pope also warns against the assumption that human power is limitless and invites us to rediscover the virtues of humility and restraint.

While Francis makes it clear that effectively repairing our common home will require "major political decisions" at the highest levels of power, he worries that such large-scale efforts at transformation are unlikely to be sustained if we do not cultivate the habit of ecological care. "It is we human beings above all who need to change." In *Laudato si'* and *Laudate Deum*, Francis describes a whole host of ecological virtues: care, love, gratitude, humility, sobriety, solidarity. All such virtues require us to learn to *see* differently. We need to perceive that Creation is a sacrament, a material manifestation of God's love, which is, Francis writes, "the fundamental moving force in all created things." Only by first learning to see Creation in this way can we react with the proper dispositions to ecological destruction. Francis wants us to *feel* "the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement," the sickness of the earth as our own ailment.

Virtue, the saying goes, is its own reward. The exploitative and extractive practices on which our way of life now depends estrange us from God, the earth, and ourselves, turning us into anxious, aimless creatures. In his call to construct a new order sustained by the ecological virtues, Francis offers the promise of internal peace, a "serene attentiveness" that regards every creature as a gift from God.

—Max Foley-Keene

Europe's Zebra

In Poland's October 15 parliamentary elections, the governing Law and Justice Party (known by its Polish acronym PiS) faced a challenge from the centrist Civic Coalition. Almost three-quarters of the Polish population cast their votes, the highest voter turnout since the country won its independence from the Soviet Union more than thirty years ago. Ultimately, PiS won more votes than any other single party but could not form a parliamentary coalition. So the Civic Coalition will form a government under the leadership of ex–prime minister and former European Council president Donald Tusk.

Opponents of PiS considered this election a pivotal one that would determine the future of Polish democracy. Before the election, historian Karolina Wigura warned that "Poland is like a 'zebra,' which in recent years has displayed in turns both an authoritarian character and democratic remnants. If PiS wins a third term, then the stripes will wash out." Since winning parliamentary and presidential elections in 2015, PiS has undermined the independence of Poland's courts in order to pursue its agenda and entrench its power. It has also implemented openly xenophobic policies in response to the "threat" of immigration from the Middle East and Africa. Journalist Anne Applebaum has accused the PiS of "state capture," in which a "political party or clique typically consolidates control over a state's institutions" through legislation, the use of state media to broadcast propaganda, and pervasive corruption. In Poland, PiS "began with an assault on the highest courts. Then it set out to dominate everything else: the national and local civil administration, regulators of all kinds, even seemingly apolitical institutions such as the forestry

service." In this election, PiS used state media to smear Tusk as treasonous, more loyal to Germany than to Poland. It also employed voter-suppression tactics and gerrymandering. The result, Applebaum writes, is that "only one issue [was] really on the ballot: Do you want PiS to complete its capture of state institutions, or do you want those institutions to belong once again to the entire country?"

The Civic Coalition will not have an easy time untangling state institutions from PiS. President Andrzej Duda, who is supported by PiS, remains in power and holds a veto over legislation. Tusk will have to maintain a center-left/center-right coalition of three parties that may be unable to agree on legislation: the centrist Civic Platform party, which dominates the Civic Coalition, will have to be able to work with the Third Way coalition, an alliance of centrists and agrarian conservatives, as well as the New Left, a progressive social-democratic party.

One of Civic Coalition's first decisions will be whether to continue PiS's widely popular social-welfare programs. A child benefit called "Family 500+" sends 500 zlotys (about $118) a month to parents with children under the age of eighteen, and during the campaign PiS promised to raise it. PiS also increased pensions, lowered the retirement age, made medicines free for young people and the elderly, and doubled the minimum wage. The Civic Coalition initially opposed these policies and later reversed course. But there is disagreement within its coalition; Third Way insisted that the "government handouts" should end, while the New Left will likely want to increase them.

Still, the three parties in the Civic Coalition agree on at least one thing: the hard work of democratic governance is better than the shortcuts of authoritarians. At least for now, Poland is no longer an example to the growing right-wing nationalist movements in Western democracies, and relations between Poland and the European Union will likely improve. The zebra still has its stripes.

—Regina Munch

Supreme Chutzpah

On May 4, 1969, Supreme Court justice Abe Fortas resigned following revelations that he had accepted $20,000 in payment from a foundation controlled by Louis E. Wolfson, a friend and former client then under federal investigation for violating securities laws. Though Fortas had previously returned the money to avoid the appearance of impropriety, he ultimately decided to step down amid intense political pressure and increasing public concern. "It seems clear to me that it is not my duty to remain on the court," Fortas wrote in his resignation letter, "but rather to resign in the hope that this will enable the court to proceed with its vital work free from extraneous stress."

Since its last term, the Supreme Court has proceeded with its vital work under the extraneous stress of what Senate Judiciary Committee chairman Dick Durbin described as "a steady stream" of ethics scandals. According to a series of damning ProPublica reports, Justice Clarence Thomas has repeatedly been treated to luxury vacations by Harlan Crow, a Texas billionaire and conservative donor. Crow also paid the private-school tuition for Thomas's grandnephew and in 2011 donated half a million dollars to a Tea Party group founded by Thomas's wife, Ginni, who urged Arizona legislators to overturn the results of the 2020 election. Justice Thomas refused to recuse himself from cases involving the election and failed to report any of the gifts from Crow. Thomas also neglected to disclose a six-figure real-estate transaction involving his family and Crow in 2014—a clear violation of the Ethics in Government Act of 1978, which requires federal officials to disclose real-estate transactions totaling more than $1,000. ProPublica also reported that Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr. took a luxury vacation to Alaska as the guest of a hedge-fund billionaire with frequent business before the court. Alito did not report the trip to the public.

Unlike Justice Fortas, the last justice to resign under threat of impeachment, neither Thomas nor Alito will face any real consequences for flouting ethical norms or, in Thomas's case, for a brazen disregard for federal disclosure laws. The Supreme Court remains the only court in the country without a written code of conduct.

These recent scandals have renewed calls for that to change. In July, the Senate Judiciary Committee advanced an act requiring justices to adopt such a code, but it has yet to be voted on. More than 90 percent of Americans now say they want the court to adopt a formal code of ethics. So do some of the justices themselves. On the same day news broke that Thomas secretly attended two Koch Network events, Justice Elena Kagan publicly endorsed a code of ethics. In early October, Justice Amy Coney Barrett did the same.

Chief Justice John Roberts has said he wants his court "to adhere to the highest standards of conduct," but so far he has done little to make sure he or his colleagues do so. It's no wonder, then, that trust in the court continues to erode. If Roberts insists on letting his colleagues act with impunity in the name of judicial independence, the extraneous stress currently burdening his court may become a full-blown crisis of legitimacy.

—Miles Doyle

MATT MAZEWSKI

A Star Recruit

Under Jennifer Abruzzo, the NLRB is changing how labor law is enforced.

When evaluating the job performance of government officials, I like to apply one of the few sports analogies I understand and consider their "wins above replacement," a sabermetric term that refers to a baseball player's record relative to that of the average player with whom their team could replace them. Given who the president is at any particular time, for instance, there may be only so much one can reasonably expect of those selected for certain federal posts; if the bar is low enough, just having key positions filled by those who are not either ludicrously corrupt or actively working against the public interest might be cause for celebration. But when expectations are high, even competent bureaucrats may seem like a disappointment if they fail to truly shine.

With that in mind, one of the star recruits of the Biden administration has been a woman whose name is probably unknown to most Americans, and who rarely, if ever, makes the evening news. Jennifer Abruzzo has served since July 2021 as the general counsel of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the independent agency that administers federal statutes around collective bargaining and unfair labor practices. In her role as the nation's chief enforcer of labor law, Abruzzo has displayed remarkable creativity in how she has used the power of her office to help ordinary people secure more power in their own places of work.

The NLRB's general counsel under Donald Trump, Peter Robb, had been on a more or less explicit mission to kneecap the agency, and so virtually anyone that Biden could have selected would have been an improvement. But considering that many of the president's appointees—especially to agencies charged with overseeing public health, immigration, or foreign affairs—have ended up pursuing policies not very different from those of their predecessors, Abruzzo's tenacious efforts to advance a pro-worker agenda have been especially impressive. One of her most significant accomplishments to date came this summer, when the Board issued a ruling that some observers have hailed as its most consequential in decades.

The United States has seen a resurgence of union activity in recent years, with major strikes rocking industries from auto manufacturing to health care to TV and film production in the past few months alone. Yet despite the renewed attention paid to organized labor, the fraction of workers who belong to a union remains at or near its historic nadir: according to the U.S. government's Current Population Survey, as of 2022, just 6 percent of private-sector workers are union members—down from around 25 percent half a century ago, and the lowest figure on record. At the same time, polling has shown that a much larger share of non-union workers say they would join a union if they could, and that this number has only been growing over time. This naturally raises the question: Why aren't they?

Part of the explanation has to do with the fact that starting a union in your workplace is not easy, and often becomes even more difficult once your boss catches wind of what you're up to. Although employers are legally prohibited from interfering with workers' right to join a union—by, say, threatening to fire them if they do—the penalties for such interference are, in practice, very weak. As MIT economist Anna Stansbury has argued, it should come as no surprise that this sort of illegal behavior is pervasive when there are so rarely any meaningful consequences.

Thanks to Abruzzo and her fellow Biden appointees at the NLRB, however, that might be changing in a big way. In a decision known as *Cemex Construction Materials Pacific, LLC*, handed down in late August, the Board made a major revision to the rules around how private-sector unions are formed. Typically, unions come into being in one of two ways. With *voluntary recognition*, a majority of employees in a particular workplace announce their desire to unionize by presenting signed "authorization cards" to their employer, who then willingly agrees to begin contract negotiations. With a *certification election*, a secret-ballot vote is overseen by officials from the NLRB, usually at the request of would-be union members whose employer has declined to recognize them voluntarily.

The case that led to this decision originated in 2018 when a group of truck drivers employed by Cemex, a Mexican distributor of cement and ready-mix concrete, began an effort to organize a union affiliated with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Although close to 60 percent of eligible workers had signed authorization cards, the company refused to recognize the union and the workers moved to petition for an election. This is not at all uncommon: businesses that want to remain "union-free" will often withhold voluntary recognition in order to buy time to dissuade their workers from opting for union representation.

And Cemex really made the most of its extra time. In the run-up to the NLRB vote in early 2019, the corporation spent well over a million dollars on high-priced lawyers and "union avoidance" consultants, and engaged in aggressive tactics to undermine the organizing drive. It fired one driver for her pro-union stance, threatened to fire or freeze the wages of others, and even hired private security guards to intimidate workers outside the polling place on the day of the balloting. As one Teamsters official put it, "The way Cemex conducted itself when its workers sought to organize five years ago was on par with the way elections are undertaken in a tin-pot dictatorship."

In the end, the drivers voted not to unionize by a narrow margin of 179–

Jennifer Abruzzo at a Senate hearing in Washington D.C., April 2021

166. Their organizing committee filed a complaint with the NLRB alleging that the company's coercive behavior had created an environment of fear that tainted the outcome of the election. Ordinarily, even when the Board finds that an employer's bad behavior may have tipped a vote against a union, the prescribed remedy is to order a do-over, with a warning against trying the same thing again. In rare cases, though, the NLRB has concluded that an employer's conduct was so egregious that a fair rerun of the election would have been effectively impossible. In such instances, the Board has ordered the employer to recognize and bargain with the union without a do-over, provided there was an earlier showing of majority support in the form of signed authorization cards.

In the *Cemex* case, the Board agreed that management's antics had likely not only affected the result but also made a fair do-over unworkable, and ordered the company to bargain with the union. But it also established a wholly new algorithm for handling such cases in the future: from now on, if an employer is presented with a request for voluntary recognition from a majority of its workers but insists on an election, there will be no do-overs. If the employer is found to have intimidated workers ahead of a vote, the Board will immediately compel it to bargain.

According to Harvard Law School student Tascha Shahriari-Parsa, this new arrangement has the potential to "significantly dissuade flagrant transgressions of our labor laws—possibly more than any Board decision of the last half-century." The *American Prospect*'s Harold Meyerson wrote that, when taken together with other recent Board actions, the *Cemex* ruling "makes union organizing possible again." Georgetown Law professor Brishen Rogers thinks that it "may be the most important NLRB decision in a generation."

Precisely for those reasons, organized capital has denounced the *Cemex* decision as a radical departure from long-settled precedent, even though the truth is closer to the opposite: the new framework the ruling sets up harks back to an older labor-law principle known as the "*Joy Silk* doctrine," which was embraced by the NLRB from the Truman Administration until the mid-1970s. Under *Joy Silk*, employers could not refuse to voluntarily recognize a union simply because they didn't feel like it; they could only insist on an election if they had a "good-faith doubt" that a majority of their workforce really wanted one. Labor lawyer Brandon Magner has maintained that the principle's abandonment "explains much of the chronic under-enforcement of federal labor law over the last half-century" and is a crucial reason why employers are now more brazen in resisting unions than they were in the past.

After taking office, Abruzzo made clear that she intended to ask the Board to revive the *Joy Silk* doctrine whenever it had an opportunity to do so. Although the *Cemex* decision does not fully resurrect that earlier precedent, it moves in that direction by effectively declaring that employer intimidation or coercion is evidence of *bad-faith doubt* that warrants calling off an election. Thanks to Abruzzo's knowledge of labor-law history—and willingness to support an idea that even most scholars in the field had come to assume was a dead letter—a more effective system of deterrence against union-busting is beginning to take shape.

Some have expressed doubt that the *Cemex* precedent and other recent actions of the current Board can survive the inevitable onslaught of employer lawsuits. But as Georgetown's Rogers has also emphasized, "labor and the state can use [*Cemex*] to change power alignments right now through organizing—which in turn would *help* it survive review." Labor-law reforms are no substitute for the difficult task of convincing workers to engage in collective action in their workplaces. But history suggests that tearing down obstacles to organizing can spark a virtuous cycle: as unions become stronger, they can apply more pressure on elected officials to enact other policies that empower workers. *Cemex* could create an opening that makes it possible to pass other helpful measures, like monetary fines for unfair labor practices of the sort included in the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act or Build Back Better Act, both of which passed the House of Representatives in 2021 only to die in the Senate.

No matter how capable, civil servants or politicians will not be able to revitalize the labor movement in America on their own. The contributions of committed individuals outside government—academics, journalists, lawyers, organizers, and workers themselves—are needed, too. To return to the baseball analogy, one star player will not be enough: only a real team effort will win the game.

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New York City mayor Eric Adams after the St. Patrick's Day Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral, March 17, 2023

OSV NEWS PHOTO/GREGORY A. SHEMITZ

PAUL MOSES

'When an Alien Resides with You'

Responding to the migrant influx in New York City

New York City's Mayor Eric Adams is fond of speaking about how his religious faith guides him. "I can't separate my belief because I'm an elected official," he said earlier this year at an interfaith prayer breakfast. "When I walk, I walk with God. When I talk, I talk with God." It's consistent with his upbringing in a Pentecostal church in Brooklyn where the Rev. Herbert Daughtry presided, merging religious faith with political activism as a critic of Mayor Edward Koch in the 1980s.

It's a Bible-based faith, so as Adams confronts the crisis of finding housing for the more than 113,000 migrants who've come to New York in recent months, he would need to wrestle with one of the central themes of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament: the imperative to welcome strangers. For Christians, there is Jesus' standard for final judgment: "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35). This distills dozens of references to migrants in the Hebrew Bible. For example: "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:33–34).

It's a challenge not only for Adams, but for the entire city. The crunch of asylum-seeking migrants from across the southern border has more than doubled the number of people needing housing in city-run shelters, with 64,100 migrants being sheltered on October 16. The city's "right to shelter" policy does not stem from charity; in 1979, a judge ruled that under the New York State Constitution, the city and state were required to shelter the unhoused, or "Bowery derelicts," as the opinion said. In 1981, the Koch administration settled the case by agreeing to standards for the shelters and compliance monitoring. Ever since, mayors have been trying to water down or get out of the consent decree, and Adams has joined them.

The multi-billion-dollar cost of sheltering such a sudden influx of homeless people has touched a sore spot in the city's psyche—the fear of fiscal insolvency, which has lurked ever since near-bankruptcy in the 1970s. The budget challenge is real, but Adams's hyperbolic attempt to focus attention on it has stoked anti-immigrant fervor both locally and nationally. He made headlines with remarks that "this issue will destroy New York City" and that "the city we knew, we're about to lose."

When facing budget shortfalls, New York mayors tend toward doomsday predictions in order to get attention from aloof federal and state officials. Adams's estimate of a $12 billion cost over three years is close to a worst-case scenario, judging from a report from the city's Independent Budget Office. But in any scenario, the cost is still big enough to plan for across-the-board spending cuts in the city's annual budget of $107 billion, larger than that of all but four states. (The City Council has to approve the budget for it to take effect.)

Adams is right that, in this case, the feds and the state have a responsibility to do more to help the city out of its hole. President Biden and Congress have a duty to fix a long-broken immigration system, or at least, in the short term, to make it possible for arriving asylum applicants to take jobs so they can work their way out of city shelters. For the 2023 fiscal year, New York City received 29 percent of the pot of money the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Shelter and Services Pro-

gram allocated nationally to organizations that help migrants during the first forty-five days after federal immigration authorities release them. But the amount the city got—$107 million—is minimal compared to the need, and shows how badly Congress has failed to help localities across the country with expenses that the federal government should be responsible for. For 2023, the grants totaled $364 million nationally.

The state, which has a legal responsibility for housing New York's homeless, has tinkered with state and federal funding formulas over the years to reduce its share of the overall expense, according to the city's Independent Budget Office. So the city's share of funding shelters for families increased from 42 percent in 2018 to 76 percent in 2022, even before the current crisis.

Meanwhile, a frenzied "No Migrants" movement will ensure that any budget cuts needed to balance the books in New York will be blamed on the asylum seekers, the poorest of the poor. My Brooklyn neighborhood, located three miles from a national recreation area where the Biden administration has agreed to let the city shelter more than two thousand unhoused migrants, has become a hotbed for this anti-immigrant sentiment. With a go-ahead from the National Park Service, the city was moving quickly to build temporary shelter for five hundred families at Floyd Bennett Field, a former airport that has been part of Gateway National Recreation Area since 1972.

There are many good arguments against sidestepping a federal law that created parkland "to preserve and protect for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations an area possessing outstanding natural and recreational features." I've been part of a community garden at Floyd Bennett Field for more than thirty years, and I go fishing there occasionally—yes, a place in Brooklyn for casting for bluefish, growing zucchini, and even camping. I can't say I like the idea that the Interior Department has given in to the latest of various city attempts over the years to push its problems to this parkland on the city's periphery.

But then there's that inconvenient bit of Scripture: "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me."

Radio personality Curtis Sliwa, the Republican candidate on the losing end of Democrat Adams's landslide mayoral victory in 2021, has played the role of outside agitator at multiple rallies in the neighborhood, trying to stoke fears that the migrants will be terrorists.

In one rally outside Floyd Bennett Field, he recalled the 1993 and 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. "We seem to forget and now we are allowing terrorists to cross our border," he continued. "Their number one location to strike and try to clear the table for a third time is New York City. And we have made it so easy for them." All the terrorists have to do is to "cross over the Rio Grande.... Who meets them on the American side?" he asked.

"Eric Adams?" someone shouted.

"Nope," Sliwa replied. "Catholic Charities, which is a racket." Sliwa, who spent several of his high-school years at a prestigious Jesuit school, Brooklyn Prep, castigated the church agency for carrying out its mission of welcoming the stranger. Brooklyn's bishop, Robert Brennan, called this an "unjustified insult" in a column that urged a Catholic response to migration. He pointed to St. John Paul II's teachings on solidarity—that "we are really responsible for all."

Local Democratic elected officials in Brooklyn have shared the stage with Sliwa. My Assembly representative, Jaime Williams, was especially enthusiastic. "Our mayor said it will destroy our city!" she shouted at a rally. Williams, herself an immigrant from Trinidad and Tobago and a former project director at Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens with a master's in social work from Fordham, declared herself "sick and fed up," then led the crowd in a chant of "Close our borders."

One of the most telling comments I've heard about the controversy came from Anne Williams-Isom, deputy mayor for health and human services and a Fordham alumna who held a chair in child-welfare studies at the university. In one of her periodic briefings, she noted that resources had to be set aside to provide mental-health services, not only for asylum seekers traumatized by their journey, but for the employees who experienced secondary trauma while trying to counsel them to find jobs and housing.

In observing the immigration courts, I've noticed that so many of the people who work in this terrible system are coping with some degree of trauma. It comes from hearing asylum seekers tell their stories in harrowing and often credible detail. I think of the case of a Guatemalan woman whom I saw cry through most of a two-hour hearing as she described how a failed relationship with a man who had political influence led to years of threats and beatings, and then escalated into blackmail threats aimed at her children, which prompted her to flee. I don't think anyone disbelieved her, but her sufferings didn't fit easily into the legal categories for asylum. Her petition was denied.

Defense and government lawyers, judges, court staff, caseworkers: many seem burnt out. And now the same is happening to some of the city workers who are trying, person to person, to undo the knots of the U.S. immigration system. It's a system that, over time, shocks the conscience.

As for Mayor Adams, he would lead us to believe his conscience is clear. "When I'm talking about making sure that we handle the asylum-seekers crisis, that's based on my faith," he said in an interview with WINS Radio's Susan Richards. "And so instead of saying, 'He's making these tough decisions because he's inhumane,' no, I'm making them because I'm compassionate, because I care about people, because that's how I was raised: to care about people."

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AUSTEN IVEREIGH

It Works

A report from the Synod

In the early decades of the twenty-first century, historians will say, the Catholic Church sought a new way of operating that would allow it to travel into a new era. The clerical, centralist, hierarchical, authoritarian model, barely distinguishable these days from a corporation, was built to survive and even thrive in modernity. But it is no longer feasible in an era when modernity itself has collapsed. How, then, to reconfigure the Church's inner culture to enable all to participate in its mission and to let the Spirit lead, as Jesus promised?

There is little desire to adopt an ecclesial parliamentary democracy, as liberal Protestant churches have done. Parties and debates settled by votes harden division rather than transcending it. The challenge is instead to recover a Catholic way of proceeding for our times, drawn from the Church's own tradition of synods, councils, and chapter meetings that allow for the growth of consensus over time. What used to be the Church's normal *modus procedendi* can become so again, not by recreating a carbon copy of what once was (if that were even possible), but by reconfiguring the synodal tradition for our own age.

This means that Catholics must relearn how to convoke and gather, to consult and discuss, and, above all, to *discern*—that is, to discover, collective-

Pope Francis joins a working session of the Synod of Bishops in the Vatican, October 23, 2023.

ly, what the Holy Spirit is calling the Church to do. This requires practicing a kind of kenosis. We, the baptized, share what we see the Spirit doing, and we pay close attention to what others see. In this way, we come to the kind of consensus described in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, one that allows us to declare, "It has seemed to the Spirit and to us." That is the goal. And we will only get to it by a conversion that is simultaneously cultural, spiritual, and structural. The means of that conversion is a three-year journey known as the Synod on Synodality, the most significant attempt at renewal since the Second Vatican Council, and arguably the Council's greatest fruit.

The sixteenth assembly of the Synod of Bishops that just concluded in Rome opened the last part of that journey, which will end with the final assembly in October 2024. The two preceding parts were both innovations. The first was the diocesan or national phase from the end of 2021 through the first half of 2022, in which ordinary Catholics around the world gathered to share their hopes and anxieties about the Church and to consider what becoming synodal might mean. The second part—from October 2022 to July 2023—was the continental phase, in which seven areas of the world (Europe, North America, Latin America, Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the Middle East) organized "assemblies of the people of God" to consider the fruits of that first phase. The assemblies varied, but most were four-day events attended by a mix of bishops, priests, religious, and laypeople sent by each bishops' conference in that continent. The reports summarizing the fruits of each assembly were then studied and synthesized in the *Instrumentum laboris*, or "working document," for the October 4–19 Rome assembly. But unlike the working documents for every previous synod of bishops, this was not a draft text to be worked on, but rather a series of questions to be answered through the discernment of thirty-five *circoli minori* (groups) of around ten people each. The groups communicated in one of the synod's five languages: fourteen in English, eight in Italian, seven in Spanish, five in French, and one in Portuguese.

The decision to hold the whole synod assembly in small groups was transformative. Rather than use the theater-style hall in the Vatican's Paul VI building, round tables with screens, microphones, and swivel cameras were spread across the building's audience hall—a place familiar to pilgrims attending a General Audience with the Pope in winter. It was a striking sight, all the more so because of the diversity of each *circulo minore*. Of the 364 members (those with voice and vote), 75 percent were bishops, most of them delegates of their conferences from around the world. This was, after all, a synod of *bishops*. But the other 25 percent were what the Vatican described as "members not vested with the episcopal *munus* who witnessed the synodal process." These non-bishops were clergy (including one permanent deacon), religious, and laypeople sent by the continental bodies: ten from each, making a total of seventy. They were, like the bishops, from every corner of the globe.

It was widely reported that, for the first time, fifty-four women—15 percent of the total body—could speak and vote as full members. This was true, but it is only part of the bigger story: so could laypeople and religious of both sexes, as well as priests and deacons. Some of these non-bishop members were present *ex officio*, by virtue of representing, say, the unions of religious orders. But a significant number were there *ex nomine pontificia*, appointed by the Pope because they led organizations that serve and represent the disabled or migrants or LGBT people. The pope wanted voices from the margins to be heard in the hall.

All the members, however they got there, were present as equals, with the same opportunity to speak within the groups and to address the assembly. The groups used a method called "Conversation in the Spirit," now seen as the synodal method par excellence. First, after some prayerful silence, all listened patiently and carefully as each member delivered prepared reflections. After another period of silence, they were invited to share the "resonances" that struck them in what they had heard. With the aid of one of the sixty-one non-member facilitators, the group then had a freer discussion, identifying areas where they converged or diverged and suggesting ways forward—whether concrete proposals, questions to be answered, or issues that needed further reflection.

During the "general congregations"—usually attended by the pope, who listened carefully and occasionally intervened—a rapporteur elected by each group read a three-minute summary of its reflections to the whole assembly. This was followed by a half-day of "free interventions," when individuals could ask to speak about what they had heard. Finally, the thirty-five groups hunkered down to revise their reports before sending them to the secretariat.

In this way, the assembly worked through the four "modules" of the sixty-page *Instrumentum laboris*, forming new groups at the start of each module. Module A was an invitation to review all that had happened since the Synod's kickoff in October 2021, and to identify priorities for developing synodality in the Church. Module B dug into the three main dimensions of synodality—communion; co-responsibility in mission; and participation, governance, and authority. These dimensions were explored by means of a series of questions, such as how the Church could better recognize the baptismal dignity of women (B2.3) or how the Synod could be strengthened as "an expression of episcopal collegiality within an all-synodal Church" (B3.5). Finally, in Module C, the groups considered a draft of the synthesis document, amending it before voting on a final version.

I was invited to the assembly not as a facilitator but as part of a smaller group of "theologians," a term that covered a variety of knowledge and

CNS PHOTO/LOLA GOMEZ

What is the greater obstacle to the Church's witness in our time: A moralism that obscures God's mercy or an inclusiveness that avoids the challenge of God's truth?

skills deemed useful to the assembly. We were not members and so had neither voice nor vote. We were seated at tables at the edge of the hall, and our task was to listen to and read the reflections of the *circoli minori*, along with the various speeches and reflections at the start of each module. These were given by the assembly's *relatore generale*, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, and the two spiritual guides who accompanied the whole process: the English Dominican Fr. Timothy Radcliffe and the Benedictine abbess Mother Maria Angelini, who, in another innovation, had given the members a three-day pre-assembly retreat. After listening to and reading all this material, we worked against the clock to write up summary reports that the final synthesis document would distill.

Did it work? Speaking to members during the coffee breaks over the three weeks, I heard of many different experiences. Most were overwhelmingly positive. The Conversation in the Spirit method allowed for amazing juxtapositions of cultures and outlooks, and helped the members work through tensions and disagreements peacefully and creatively. Everyone could speak with total freedom, yet also had a duty to listen carefully to others. One might disagree strongly with what one heard, but also better grasp why someone else held those views. A bishop from Africa, for example, might find talk of ordaining women to the diaconate or blessing same-sex couples bizarre or offensive, but the same bishop might be deeply concerned—in a way hard for an American or European to grasp—with the pastoral injustice of a polygamous man having to sever bonds with his wives as a condition of receiving the sacraments. A woman from North America might regard admission to the diaconate as a simple matter of justice, while an Asian woman might see it as an attempt to clericalize the distinctive contribution women make to ministry.

All might agree that Jesus held together love and truth in perfect harmony, and that the Church must do likewise. Yet the conversations revealed deep differences over whether truth or mercy now seemed more threatened, and which needed greater emphasis. What is the greater obstacle to the Church's witness in our time: A moralism that obscures God's mercy or an inclusiveness that avoids the challenge of God's truth? How one answers that question will depend on one's experience, and how one reads that experience.

Learning to journey together in the crazy diversity of our global Church is not easy. It demands a lot of patience, trust, and, ultimately, a confidence in the action of the Spirit to get past our stumbling blocks and dead ends. I don't want to gloss over the difficulties. Rebuilding a group dynamic every few days at the start of a new module was tiring. Many said the assembly was just too long, the themes too broad, the method too restrictive, the speeches too repetitive. There were attempts to deny important tensions and conflicts in order to present a mask of unity, and sometimes attempts to promote a point of view in ways that produced pushback. In order to preserve the freedom of discernment, participants were bound to confidentiality, so I cannot indulge my writer's instinct to offer the details that tell the bigger story. There were clashes, tears, and even an indignant departure. But these were rare, and hardly surprising: it was grueling to listen to dozens of three-minute interventions for a whole day, especially when many of them drifted far from the main matter. By the end of Module B, the strain showed.

Yet the bigger story is that, despite these difficulties and longueurs, the Synod did work. The Conversation in the Spirit method was, at least for most of the members most of the time, brilliantly successful; most left the assembly eager to apply it at every level of the Church. The sheer joy of forging bonds across boundaries was the consolation of the assembly—a sure sign of the Spirit. If there was a gift God was offering us there, it was the lens through which to see the Church as a global whole, in all its variety, in its fragility as well as its resilience.

Now begins a period of evaluation and a year's discernment before the final assembly in October 2024, which will need to decide on some of the major questions identified in the synthesis report. There will be commissions to propose revisions to canon law, and theological papers to deepen and clarify the questions this year's assembly raised. Much has already been learned, and much will no doubt be different next year. But at least we now have a map to get there and good news to tell: the triumph of a new way of discerning and deliberating that, despite all odds, shows that the Church's diversity is compatible with unity. By putting synodality into action, this assembly showed that there is a way to go ahead *together* into a new era, with the confidence that Christ has gone there before us.

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JOHN CAVADINI

The Eucharist & the Poor

The real meaning of the Real Presence

In the Eucharist, all of Christ, including his commitment to the poor, is shared with every recipient.

CNS PHOTO/GREGORY A. SHEMITZ

As many readers will know, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is leading a three-year National Eucharistic Revival. It began with locally organized parish and diocesan events on the Feast of Corpus Christi, 2022. The coming year, 2024, will feature nationally organized events, culminating in the 10th National Eucharistic Congress—the first in eighty-nine years—to be held in Indianapolis July 17–24. The idea of the Revival was partly motivated by recent studies that seemed to reveal that a shockingly small percentage of Catholics actually believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The Revival has, therefore, promoted the renewal of catechetical efforts in teaching eucharistic doctrine, emphasizing especially the unique, substantial presence of Christ.

In this regard, it is important to remember—though it may seem unrelated—that "the Eucharist commits us to the poor." So says the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1397).

This corresponds to an ancient Christian intuition rooted in Scripture (see, for example, James 2:2–4). We find it already well developed in Justin Martyr, who, in his *First Apology*, famously describes the eucharistic celebration at Rome in the middle of the second century. He emphasizes that the "eucharistized bread and wine" are not received "as common bread nor common drink," but are, "by transformation," the "flesh and blood of Jesus," the Word of God who became incarnate by taking on both flesh and blood "for our salvation." Justin is very conscious that the "flesh and blood" of the Eucharist is not just an inert reality whose principal attraction is that it was miraculously produced. It is *someone's* flesh and blood, that of the very "Logos" or "Word" or "Reason" of God, who took it on "for our salvation." It is the body of someone who willed to suffer and die, and in that body he rose. Risen, *he* is present in *his* "flesh and blood." In the story of this flesh and blood, we see God's Reason displayed, the very "Rationale" of created reality. "Eucharist" means "thanksgiving," and the celebration of the Eucharist is the Thanksgiving par excellence. Just as the Word of God became visible to us by taking on flesh and blood for our salvation, so, in being "eucharistized" (we could say, "thanksgiving-ized"), the transformed bread and wine make the very flesh and blood that the Word took on "for our salvation" visibly

Devotion to Christ in his eucharistic presence is devotion to his concrete, real poverty, the poverty of our flesh.

present again, making *him*, the foundation of reality revealed as mercy, present again.

At the same time, the poor and the vulnerable also rise to visibility. Justin adds that immediately following the Eucharist, "the wealthy come to the aid of the poor." He mentions that the deacons take up a collection for the use of the presider, charged with the care of orphans and widows, the sick, the imprisoned, resident aliens, indeed "all those in need." This, for Justin, is a matter of sheer gratitude. Formed in the gratitude for the gift we are celebrating, the needs of the poor are recovered from invisibility and distance. Eucharistic realism means we *see* the poor and vulnerable, just as we see the Real Presence. We learn to see as God's merciful Reason sees. Whether Justin knew the Letter of James or not, he echoes its rebuke of those who would put the poorer members of the assembly in the least visible, lowest-status positions. In a homily, John Chrysostom also speaks of how the Eucharist ought to adjust our vision: "You have tasted the blood of the Lord, yet you do not recognize your brother.... God freed you from all your sins and invited you here, but you have not become more merciful." Eucharistic realism is here short-circuited.

Justin's theology was developed partly in reaction against the charge that Christians participated in "Thyestean banquets." This phrase recalls the story of Atreus, who served his brother Thyestes a banquet consisting of the flesh of Thyestes's own children in retaliation for Thyestes's seduction of Atreus's wife. Note, this is not just a generic charge of cannibalism. Atreus regarded his brother's vulnerable and powerless children as totally dispensable. Justin distinguishes eucharistic realism from the grim realism of a world where power and status define reality and the poor and vulnerable are instrumentalized and rendered invisible—"eaten." Justin is defending a different kind of realism, made present in a new kind of banquet where the vulnerable are not eaten but rise to visibility.

The Church's continuing reflection on eucharistic presence is rooted in the sensibility to which Justin is an early witness. To be in continuity with Justin, eucharistic realism must make us see that mercy, not power, is the foundational reality worthy of worship. Justin avoids an overly physicalist understanding of the Eucharist, one that would make the flesh and blood of Christ an inert object like the flesh of the children served up in the myth of Atreus. The Eucharist is not to be understood as a thing at our disposal and under our power, together with the miracle which produces it.

Paul VI was careful to distinguish Christ's presence as unique and to mark that uniqueness by the use of the word "substantial": it is "presence in the fullest sense," he says, "that is to say, it is a *substantial* presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present" (*Mysterium Fidei*, 39, cited at CCC 1374). Here he echoes Trent: "In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist 'the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, *the whole Christ, is truly, really, and substantially* contained'" (CCC, 1374, citing the Council of Trent). This is why the transformation is called "transubstantiation," because "by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood" (CCC, 1376, again citing Trent).

It is true that later in the same text, Paul VI notes that "once the substance or nature of the bread and wine has been changed into the body and blood of Christ, nothing remains of the bread and the wine except for the species—beneath which Christ is present whole and entire in His physical 'reality,' corporeally present, although not in the manner in which bodies are in a place." But Paul VI is careful not to say that Christ is present "physically." Of course, if it is body and blood, it is corporeal; and bodies are a physical reality, but Christ's body is present not "in the manner in which bodies are in a place." These words echo the explanations of Thomas Aquinas, who specifies that presence "according to substance" is *distinguished* from ordinary presence in space. If Christ's presence were mere ordinary physical presence, then when the Host was broken and divided, the body of Christ would be broken and divided—and ultimately chewed up as the children in a Thyestean feast would be.

Just as Justin taught, this is a different kind of feast. Because Christ is substantially and not physically present, each communicant receives him—not just an inert "piece" of him, but all of him. His complete self-giving act of mercy is offered to us under these visible forms, with nothing held back, neither body, blood, soul nor divinity. Just as in Justin, the mechanism of this presence is not explained, but the doctrine of transubstantiation gives us a vocabulary for articulating this presence in a way that definitively distinguishes it from a Thyestean feast.

The doctrine of transubstantiation thereby helps connect eucharistic realism to the Church's commitment to the poor and vulnerable. This connection has been forcefully rearticulated by both Popes Benedict and Francis. After explaining that the doctrine of transubstantiation means that in the Eucharist we do not receive "a thing," but Christ himself, made present in the hour of his oblation, Benedict says:

> It is precisely this personal encounter with the Lord that then strengthens the social mission contained in the Eucharist, which seeks to break down not only the walls that separate the Lord and ourselves, but also and especially the walls that separate us from one another. (*Sacramentum caritatis*, 66)

Being drawn by the sacrament into Jesus' self-gift creates what Benedict later called a "sacramental mysticism," which, he says, is "social in character." Benedict continues, "Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself.... A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented" (*Deus caritas est*, 14).

I like the expression "sacramental mysticism," but I'd also like to suggest the phrase sacramental, or eucharistic, realism. One does not usually find an exploration of the idea of transubstantiation in a paragraph together with the exploration of the preferential option for the poor. But if the poor are all those who are "unreal" to us, invisible and unseen—not only those in literal poverty but anyone whose presence we are blind to because of our social and personal preferences—then perhaps it is not so unlikely to put these ideas together. Devotion to Christ in his eucharistic presence is devotion to his concrete, real poverty, the poverty of our flesh. And the more one is formed in such a realism, the more it enables one to see the reality of his flesh in the poor whom he espouses in the sacrifice of the Mass.

Pope Francis, for his part, speaks about the Eucharist in extravagant terms that presuppose the doctrine of Christ's substantial presence in the Eucharist: "The Eucharist is the living center of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life. Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God." The Eucharist thereby "sheds light on the whole week, and motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor" (*Laudato si'*, 236–37). Creation itself, joined to the cosmic act of love that is the Eucharist, rises to visibility in and with the eucharistic elements. The Eucharist enables the earth itself, "among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor," to be recovered from the Thyestean feasts in which it is served up as mere matter to be consumed.

In this year of eucharistic revival, it is worth asking if one of the reasons that so many Catholics now say that they do not believe in the eucharistic Real Presence is that this ancient and intrinsic dimension of eucharistic realism has been overlooked. The full impact of the Real Presence is thereby diminished; it becomes fetishized as a sacred object that Catholics have and others don't. But this almost sectarian approach is contrary to the dynamism of transubstantiation itself, which turns the Church *outward* to the world that God "so loved that he gave His only-begotten Son" (John 3:16), who, out of mercy, "emptied himself and took on the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:7).

In *Loaves and Fishes*, Dorothy Day recalls the priestly service of Fr. Pacifique Roy to the Catholic Worker community: "During even the coldest weather, when the water froze in the cruet and his hands became numb, he said Mass slowly, reverently, with a mind intent on the greatness, the awfulness of the Sacrifice." The awfulness of the Sacrifice is reflected not only in Fr. Roy's gestures but in the frozen water of the cruet, the hard reality of the poor, made visible because of that community's commitment to serve them. "The Eucharist commits us to the poor." Perhaps our own eucharistic realism would be enhanced if we, too, committed ourselves to embracing the "awfulness of the Sacrifice" in its full dimensions.

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Better Off Without Us?

A symposium

Gilbert Meilaender
John F. Haught
Nolen Gertz
Frank Pasquale

Every day comes more news of the devastating consequences of climate change: floods and fires, droughts and rising sea levels, forced migrations and extinctions. Almost as frequent now are headlines about the potential benefits and harms of artificial intelligence: maybe it will cure cancer and Alzheimer's, or maybe it will first replace us at work and then enslave us. On the surface, these two topics seem unrelated, but they both stir up deep anxieties about the long-term future of humanity. Not everyone, though, is anxious about the prospect of a future without us. Some radical environmentalists believe that the earth would be better off if the human race went extinct, while transhumanists promise that AI will soon replace our frail organic brains and transmit what is most valuable about humanity—our rationality—to the farthest reaches of the universe. The radical environmentalists condemn technology; the transhumanists embrace it. But despite their obvious differences, the two groups agree in welcoming the end of humanity's reign. Or so argues Adam Kirsch in *The Revolt Against Humanity: Imagining a Future Without Us.* We asked four writers—two theologians, a philosopher, and an expert on the law of artificial intelligence—to discuss the developments Kirsch describes. Should we be worried about a posthuman future, and if so, why? Do Christianity, humanism, or democracy have the resources to resist either the radical misanthropy of what Kirsch calls "Anthropocene antihumanism" or the siren song of techno-utopians?

All the illustrations for this symposium, including the cover image, were generated by artificial intelligence. They exhibit some of the strengths that appeal to transhumanists: the ability to quickly illustrate concepts like "a world where humans are no longer physically present." But they also demonstrate some of AI's weaknesses: because it is not, in fact, human, the AI image generator made bizarre mistakes no real illustrator would make—a bird's wing morphing into a moss-covered line, a seagull-eagle hybrid, neatly pruned trees in a world without gardeners. The images, though serviceable and suggestive, are also cautionary examples of what we lose when we replace the human hand, eye, and mind with AI.

DAVID SANKEY VIA BING IMAGE CREATOR

The Risk of Birth

Gilbert Meilaender

Adam Kirsch's examination of "Anthropocene antihumanism" and "transhumanism"—two quite different ways of revolting against humanity and welcoming the end of human life as we know it—is readable, informative, and bracing. Nonetheless, it ends not with a bang but a whimper, suggesting that even a true humanism might have to welcome, albeit sorrowfully, a world in which human beings no longer exist. Perhaps, however, before endorsing a prescription of species-suicide we should at least consider what insight Christian faith might offer.

Kirsch's concluding chapter is titled "The Sphere of Spiritual Warfare." And he is, in fact, depicting what might almost be called competing *religious* views. According to antihumanists, our species has exploited and despoiled the natural world, and our "disappearance would be a net benefit to life on earth." The best thing we could do is to stop giving birth to others like us. Transhumanists, with their technocratic confidence in scientific progress, might at first seem to be the polar opposite of antihumanists. But not really. Their goal is to get beyond the limits of the body, tied as it is to organic life, and then experience a "virtual" existence, having uploaded to a computer the pattern of information that is one's brain. If there is a sense in which this approach hopes for a continued existence, it is no longer what we normally think of as human existence. Hence, Kirsch writes, beginning from very different premises, "transhumanists and antihumanists could converge on an ideal of extinction, with rapacious humanity making way for wiser virtual beings who tread more lightly on the planet."

From the perspective of either of these two seemingly different yet converging views, what is the real problem with the continued existence of our species? In a word: birth. The transhumanists have a vision of virtual human nature that makes it unnecessary. The antihumanists hope for a human destiny that will exclude it. In her poem "The Risk of Birth," Madeleine L'Engle captures the despair of what Kirsch calls Anthropocene antihumanism and the gnostic dream hidden beneath the desire of transhumanism to slip the bonds that tie us to organic, bodily life.

> This is no time for a child to be born,
> With the earth betrayed by war & hate
> And a comet slashing the sky to warn
> That time runs out & the sun burns late.

What, if anything, can we set over against such a reluctance to give birth, to commit ourselves not just to the continuation of "intelligent life," but to the survival of *Homo sapiens* in particular?

Perhaps an old-fashioned humanism of the sort Kirsch seems to favor? Will it do? He characterizes such humanism as a belief that "the individual human being is the *source* of all value" (my italics). And, of course, that little word "source" suggests that this approach, too, has a religious flavor. But Kirsch himself is not optimistic that such a humanistic commitment can or should survive in the coming spiritual warfare; for it seems to encourage us to set "an arbitrary limit to progress." And doing that, he claims, is "the classic posture of the reactionary" and is "fundamentally incompatible with the principles humanists claim to honor—freedom, reason, moral autonomy."

I myself do not think Kirsch's understanding of humanism is adequate. To see why, we can ask whether setting limits to progress is always best characterized as arbitrary or reactionary. Kirsch's example of such an arbitrary drawing of a line in the sand is Leon Kass's well-known appeal to "the wisdom of repugnance" in opposition to proposals for human cloning. Such wisdom, going beyond what reason alone can demonstrate, may, Kass suggested, help us to honor moral limits that are integral to our humanity.

We should not dismiss this suggestion too quickly, for it invites us to wonder whether human reason alone will suffice as a source of either moral insight or a full understanding of human nature. "The head rules the belly through the chest," C. S. Lewis wrote in *The Abolition of Man*. That is to say, rational insight and argument alone cannot enable us to live well. There is a humility here that draws back from thinking of ourselves as the source of all value. On the contrary, a rightly ordered life depends on trained emotions that control and shape our desires, enabling us to love what is good and experience repugnance at what is evil. Aristotle said that only one who has been brought up well—one in whom those trained emotions have been inculcated—can usefully study ethics. We might add that only such a person can usefully consider what limits are essential to our humanity. Without good moral habits, reason may simply lead us astray. And the first such habit that we need is a commitment to the goodness of human, bodily life—a sense of its centrality to both human nature and destiny.

Of course, this way of thinking is not obvious to everyone. "It is a loathsome and cruel trick," Mike Treder once wrote, "that nature takes such an exquisitely wondrous creation as the human brain and imprisons it inside the weak, inefficient, fragile, and short-lived structure that is the human body." But we inculcate a contrary belief—a belief in the goodness of human, bodily life—every time we hear and take to heart the Johannine teaching, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Since God has a human body, we need not run from our own bodies and their limits in the way transhumanists recommend. Moreover, in the resurrected Jesus we are given an intimation of the destiny of those

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bodies. They have a future. Christians honor human life not because it is the *source* of all value, but because it has been honored by God and drawn into the divine life.

Given that sort of commitment to human life as embodied life, we should think of the body as integral to who we are, not just as a prosthesis used by our real, disembodied self. We can then come to appreciate the way an embodied life is also an embedded life—embedded in a series of relationships that involve both coming into being and going out of being. Having a beginning, middle, and end, our lives take a narrative shape that is more than just a succession of bare, momentary presents. After all, even without the transhumanist dream of a virtual existence, a desire to overcome that "short-lived structure that is the human body" can threaten to make nonsense of life. The philosopher Larry Temkin once made this point in an arresting thought experiment: "As things stand today, the physical, psychological, and experiential gap between a grandmother at sixty, a mother at thirty-five, and a daughter at nine is enormous. But the physical, psychological, and experiential gaps between a grandmother at 10,060, a mother at 10,035, and a daughter at 10,009 would be practically inconsequential." Embodied life has a shape. Memory and anticipation—as well as the virtue of hope—are built into lives that take the risk of birth. Appreciating and embracing those risks and limits lies at the heart of a true humanism. We can and should set it over against the transhumanist desire to overcome human nature rather than honor it.

If transhumanists move us to think in particular about human nature, antihumanists direct our attention more to human destiny. As transhumanists hope for a "human" future that is bodiless and virtual, in a quite different way antihumanists would prefer that human bodies simply cease to exist. They do not want to take the risk of birth. We should always remind ourselves that rejecting such antihumanism does not mean supposing that earthly human life as we know it will or should endure forever. "Anyone who intends or perceives the world as a Christian," Paul Ramsey once wrote, knows that "one day there will be none like us to come after us.... The Revelation of St. John is still in the Bible."

Written into our nature is the hint of a greater destiny than continued earthly existence as we now experience it. In the words of a character in Wallace Stegner's novel *The Spectator Bird*, "[a] reasonably endowed, reasonably well-intentioned man can walk through the world's great kitchen from end to end and arrive at the back door hungry." That eros, that hunger buried deeply in our nature, is the hint of a destiny that has been given shape and form in the Word made flesh, who was given into death and raised to a new, transfigured life.

Hence, Christian hope for a human future is not simply anti-antihumanism. It is not hope for more of the same, more of the life that is ours here and now. Nor is it hope for a future produced by the ingenuity of those who imagine themselves the source of all value. It is hope for a qualitatively different life—though, of course, what our freedom and reason cannot produce, we also cannot fully imagine. In that respect we will always be a little like the small boy C. S. Lewis described who, "on being told that the sexual act was the highest bodily pleasure, should immediately ask whether you ate chocolates at the same time." What a new creation and a resurrected life will be like we cannot fully fathom, but what we need in the face of such mystery is clear. We need commitment to what is truly human, even as the Logos of the universe, the Word who was with God from the beginning, committed himself to us and took our human nature into his person. The whole of L'Engle's "The Risk of Birth" beautifully expresses such commitment.

> This is no time for a child to be born,
> With the earth betrayed by war & hate
> And a comet slashing the sky to warn
> That time runs out & the sun burns late.
>
> That was no time for a child to be born,
> In a land in the crushing grip of Rome;
> Honor & truth were trampled to scorn—
> Yet here did the Savior make His home.
>
> When is the time for love to be born?
> The inn is full on the planet earth,
> And by a comet the sky is torn—
> Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.

The virtues that we need are, as always, three. Faith that sees gift and grace at the heart of human life and that seeks, in turn, to be faithful to the gift we have been given. Hope that looks to the future, grateful for God's embrace of our human life, and generates others like ourselves. Love that does not cling to the gift of life, keeping it for ourselves, but gladly hands it on, taking the risk of birth.

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An Awakening Universe

John F. Haught

In *The Revolt against Humanity*, Adam Kirsch observes that as long as humans are around, life on earth is in trouble. In view of rapid anthropogenic climate change and other threats humans have posed to plants and other animals, Kirsch wonders whether our species can any longer justify its presence on our planet. He does not answer the question himself, but his readable survey of recent antihumanist environmentalism and adventurous transhumanism gives rise to an uncomfortable thought: perhaps now is the right time to let humanity perish from the earth for the sake of the rest of life.

How, I want to ask here, may contemporary Christian thought respond to such a proposal? Christians have previously been taught that humanity is not just one species of life among others. We are uniquely created in God's image, called to be stewards of creation, but endowed with freedom to do wrong as well as right. To save life on earth, including human life, we need to pull away from our wasteful abuse and follow our true calling to care for the nonhuman natural world. We need to get rid of our sins, not ourselves.

Kirsch's book provokes us to think anew about humanity's place in nature. In addition to contemplating the antihumanist solution, the author considers another way of "revolting" against humanity: contemporary transhumanism. Current scientific developments in the fields of biochemistry, robotics, nanotechnology, information science, artificial intelligence, evolutionary biology, and neuroscience seem to promise unprecedented new offshoots of humanity. Perhaps we don't need to get rid of human beings; perhaps it is enough to transform them into more durable and portable vessels of rationality, the kind of creatures who do not depend on a planet we may have damaged beyond repair.

First, though, let's consider the antihumanists. As a Christian theologian with a long interest in science and theology, what strikes me most about the antihumanist recommendations is their avoidance of a cosmological point of view. Their ideas are narrowly earth-centered, biological, and geological. After Einstein, scientifically educated people must acknowledge that the journey of life on earth is part of a much longer epic, that of a whole universe coming into being. The four-billion-year-long journey of life and the much shorter period of human existence are part of an immensely long, and still unfinished, cosmic drama. The universe is an epic of awakening whose massive spatial and temporal dimensions we began to learn about only in the past century. After Einstein, I suggest, the antihumanists should reexamine their schemes by taking a more panoramic, cosmic point of view. What would they see?

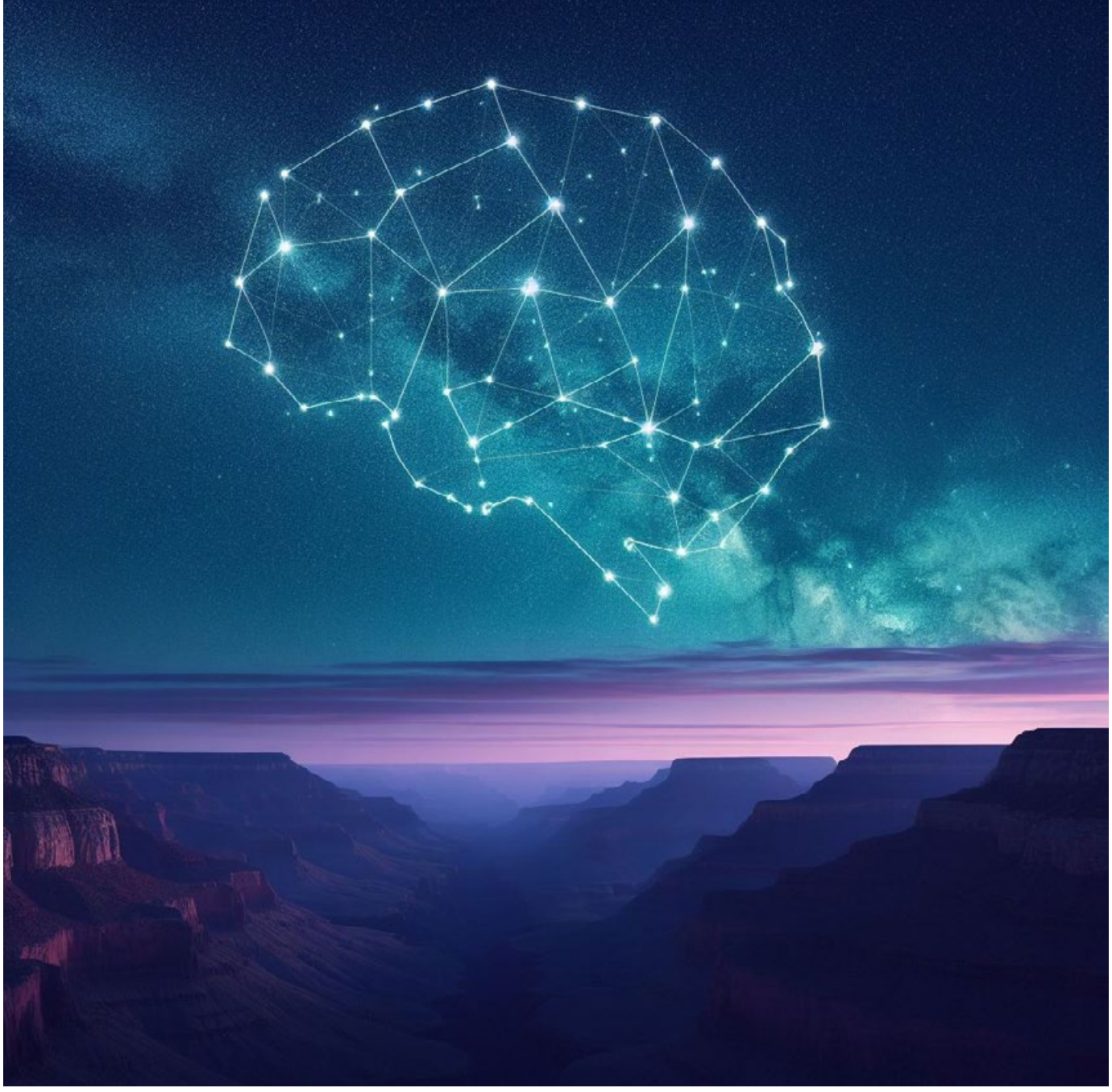
The new scientific story of cosmic awakening tells us that after ten billion years, matter became complex enough that what we call life began to stir on at least one planet in our average-sized galaxy. With the arrival of life, the universe—at least on earth—began playing host to something unprecedented: the interior experience of organisms striving and struggling. Starting around 541 million years ago the embers of life on earth billowed into increasingly more complex organisms, some of them eventually endowed with sentience, subjectivity, and ever wider patterns of awareness. With each new advance in life's complexity, the element of striving and struggling intensified. So did the prospect of failure and tragedy. The universe had become dramatic.

Then, with the more recent arrival of humans, the universe gave birth to "thought." A conscious and self-reflective species came into cosmic history (starting around three hundred thousand years ago on earth) and began hunting large animals and taking over local environments—all in what Charles Darwin called the struggle for existence. Endowed with the capacity to see, understand, seek truth, and aspire to goodness and beauty, this thinking species has also damaged, wasted, and destroyed life along the way.

So yes, our human presence here has been problematic. By welcoming the extinction of our species, however, antihumanists are not simply offering a strange new solution to ecological calamity. They are also severing thought from the long cosmic drama of awakening life, a remarkable story to which their own ethical sensibility is also contributing. In the phenomenon of thought and moral aspiration, something of undeniable value has come into the universe. The discovery of deep time—in which we learn that evolution's most precious outcomes take millions and even billions of years—is one of the great achievements of scientific thought. But for many thoughtful people today, including Kirsch's antihumanists, deep time is a vast emptiness. For them, the improbable arrival of self-conscious minds in cosmic history is a lonely blossoming in a desert, soon to be blown away. The universe does not really need to carry the disruptive burden of thought any longer. Let it go, and everything may improve.

The antihumanist intuition that life and the universe will be better off without us is not entirely new. It can claim the backing of ancient and modern myths according to which our most distinctive traits—self-awareness and the capacity to reason—have never fully belonged to the cosmos anyway. It may be seen as no great loss to the universe, then, if the thinking species just vanishes for good.

But what if the phenomenon of thought is essential to the very definition of nature? The intuition that nature and mind are somehow inseparable still lacks the support of conventional science, but clearly the cosmos is not just a meaningless gathering of stuff. It has given rise *naturally* to self-awareness and the capacity for ethical reflection.



Human thought is a development in the long timeline of the universe, not an intrusion apart from "nature" that must be expunged.

DAVID SANKEY VIA BING IMAGE CREATOR

Even though our minds often stray from truth and goodness, thought is a wondrous instance of cosmic beauty no less deserving of preservation than any other expression of life. To revolt against humanity, then, is to revolt against the universe itself.

How so? While Albert Einstein was developing his theory of general relativity (first published in 1916), he was not yet aware that the cosmos was still undergoing a long birth-process in time and that the seeds of thought may always have been present in nature. Like so many other modern scientific thinkers, he had assumed that the universe was eternal, impersonal, and standing still. Consequently, he was uncomfortable, at least for a while, with the revisions made to his theory of gravity by several physicists and mathematicians who found in relativity's equations something we had never seen before. Supported by new discoveries in astronomy, they uncovered the trail of a universe that has been on an immensely long journey in deep time. Their science made it possible for us to think about thought—the human capacity to experience, understand, judge, and decide—as a momentous new stage in the story of the universe rather than as an intrusion from outside.

After festering quietly for billions of years, as the story goes, the phenomenon of thought finally began to break out into the open here on earth (and possibly elsewhere, for all we know). In the appearance of thought on our tiny planet over the past three hundred thousand years, something of incontestable worth and exquisite beauty has established itself as a whole new chapter in a cosmic epic. The fact that organisms capable of self-reflective con-

sciousness have also caused immense damage needs to be acknowledged. But the antihumanist welcoming of the extinction of human beings, even if it seems right ecologically, needs to consider what such an abrupt and dramatic termination of thought would mean for the universe.

As we now know from astrophysics, consciousness has been in the cosmic works ever since the first micro-seconds of our 13.8-billion-year-old universe. The relatively recent appearance of a reflectively conscious living species is not a terrestrial fluke, but a signal of what sort of reality the universe is and always has been. To rid the universe of thought, or even to welcome its elimination, is to tolerate violence on a cosmic scale.

Antihumanism, I believe, depends for its appeal on the modern intellectual fallacy that understanding the universe objectively requires our subtracting from it any traces of subjectivity, especially intelligent subjectivity. There is something perverse about antihumanism's reliance on the power of thought to welcome the extinguishing of thought. And there is also something morally amiss about placing misanthropy in the service of biophilia. Such intellectual contortions did not drop out of the blue. They are rooted in the ancient suspicion that humans have never really belonged to nature anyway. A strain of deep dissatisfaction with the physical world has been present in religious mythology for centuries, and it has only intensified in modern secular thought. The root of what Kirsch calls the revolt against humanity is this sense of our species's cosmic homelessness, a bias that has shaped both traditional piety and modern scientific naturalism. If anything has proved to be ecologically noxious it is not our presence here, but the sense that we humans—beings with minds—do not belong to nature in the first place.

Instead of subscribing to antihumanism, then, humans need to learn the harder lesson of feeling fully at home in the universe. Unfortunately, the alienation of human minds from nature still affects not only religions but also the sort of deep ecology promoted by the antihumanists. The philosopher Thomas Nagel has rightly reminded us in his provocative book *Mind and Cosmos* that the thinking species has yet to locate an intelligible place in the natural world for the phenomenon of thought—and hence, in effect, for human beings. Mind has yet to be embraced as integral to nature. I worry that antihumanists are taking advantage of this unsettled status of human consciousness to kick it out of the cosmos altogether. But if the phenomenon of thought is so worthless that we may now allow it to just vanish, one may ask why the antihumanists expect us to value their own thoughts as exceptionally trustworthy.

Where does that leave transhumanism, a reader may ask? The drama of cosmic awakening, for all we know, allows for countless future epochs of surprising new creation stretching far beyond the range of what we humans can now foresee. Meanwhile, understanding nature as a long awakening invites new thoughts about what it means to be faithful "stewards" of creation. If the cosmos is still coming into being, then our caring for creation would entail not only the preservation of nature's treasures but also the vigilant preparation of new pathways for adventures of life and thought in the future of our still-developing universe.

We may wonder, therefore, whether a Christian vision of creation and divine incarnation allows for—and may even foster—a morally chastened implementation of transhumanist dreams. New scientific ideas and techniques are now opening up the possibility that we could one day change not only what it means to be human, but also what it means to be part of nature. So, here again, I think we need to reflect on what transhumanism might mean not just for our species and our planet, but also for the cosmic future.

Here I will limit myself to two brief comments. First, instead of asking with Kirsch whether the *earth* could benefit from a transhumanist "revolt against humanity," let us ask with Teilhard de Chardin whether the *universe* may be ennobled and enhanced by the arrival on earth of a new, ecologically sensitive ultra-human chapter in the drama of its ongoing creation.

It seems fitting for Christians to take up this line of theological inquiry. For centuries, biblical faith has been looking forward to a new and transformative ultra-human epoch of creation. Such anticipation is present in the prophetic tradition's prayers for the coming of the Kingdom of God and the spiritual renewal of the face of the earth, as well as in the Christian hope that the whole of creation may be transformed into the extended body of Christ. Such hopes are best understood not as the private longing of souls to be transferred from time to eternity, but as a longing arising from deep inside the whole creation for opportunities to become *more* as time moves irreversibly from past to future.

My second comment is that the coming of an ultra-human stage in the drama of cosmic awakening does not require the replacement of humanity. Nor, in order to be consequential on a cosmic scale, would an ultra-human stage of new creation necessarily entail a radical reconfiguration of the human organism. Any such tinkering, as Teilhard wisely pointed out, would in any case be tangential to the real drama of a universe becoming new by virtue of a plurality of conscious beings gathering themselves around "a great hope held in common." The prospect of human bodies, hearts, and minds being drawn to a new and higher center of attraction—one that offers forgiveness, freedom, and a new future—would be a momentous development in the drama of cosmic awakening. In the promise of a new future for the whole of creation, expectation of the coming of God should be enough to incentivize ecological responsibility without having to eliminate a whole species beforehand.

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The Revolt Against Responsibility

Nolen Gertz

Adam Kirsch's new book, *The Revolt Against Humanity*, is a very short volume concerned with a very simple yet "seemingly inconceivable" idea: "The end of humanity's reign on Earth is imminent, and…we should welcome it." The idea, according to Kirsch, unites two camps that would otherwise seem to be at odds with each other. On the one hand, there are the "Anthropocene antihumanists," who see climate change as evidence of humanity's crimes against nature, which can only be expiated by our extinction. On the other are the "transhumanists," who see in technological progress evidence of nature's crimes against humanity and our ability to transcend them. That is, developments in genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and robotics show that our inborn limitations are not parts of our nature to be cherished, but mere obstacles to be overcome on the way to a new, superior species.

Kirsch catalogues the central views espoused by each camp not in order to support or criticize them, but because he believes that their prophecies may be sufficiently influential to become self-fulfilling. That is, the idea that humanity's extinction should be welcomed might motivate people to speed up the death of our species in one way or another. Climate change is already being cited as a reason to forgo having children, for example, and a fixation on technology that liberates us from human limits may come at the expense of projects that make ordinary life on this planet livable. Kirsch's concern, then, is not whether the predictions of either Anthropocene antihumanists or transhumanists are correct, but whether they are convincing.

So, are they convincing? To start with the former, it is certainly hard to deny that climate change is underway and that human action is to blame for it (though that doesn't stop some people from denying it). Floods, fires, and all manner of devastating weather events are becoming more and more common. At the same time, calls to reduce emissions, waste, and consumption seem to be met with derision and defeatism, and policy solutions lag far behind what's needed. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that climate activists see humanity as both in danger and a source of danger. We are destroying ourselves and the planet, and not only are we doing little to stop it, we are seemingly only making things worse. So why try to save the planet *for* humanity? Why not instead try to save the planet *from* humanity?

A major problem with this view—one Kirsch neglects—is that it conflates the destructiveness of particular humans with the destructiveness of humanity in general. Acknowledging that climate change is driven by human activity should not prevent us from identifying precisely which humans and activities are to blame. Plenty of people are concerned about climate change and have altered their behavior by, for example, using public transportation, recycling, or being more conscious about what they buy. Yet this individual behavior change is not sufficient because climate change is driven by the large-scale behavior of corporations and governments.

In other words, it is somewhat misleading to say we have entered the "Anthropocene" because *anthropos* is not as a whole to blame for climate change. Rather, in order to place the blame where it truly belongs, it would be more appropriate—as Jason W. Moore, Donna J. Haraway, and others have argued—to say we have entered the "Capitalocene." Blaming humanity in general for climate change excuses those particular individuals and groups actually responsible. To put it another way, to see everyone as responsible is to see no one as responsible. Anthropocene antihumanism is thus a public-relations victory for the corporations and governments destroying the planet. They can maintain business as usual on the pretense that human nature itself is to blame for climate change and that there is little or nothing corporations or governments can or should do to stop it, since, after all, they're only human.

Kirsch does not address these straightforward criticisms of Anthropocene antihumanism. This throws into doubt his claim that he is cataloguing their views to judge whether they are convincing and to explore their likely impact. Kirsch does briefly bring up the activist Greta Thunberg as a potential opponent of the nihilistic antihumanists, but he doesn't consider her challenge in depth. He simply writes:

> Thunberg's speeches are calls to action, which implies that there are remedial actions to take and that people are capable of taking them. But for the most committed antihumanists of the Anthropocene, the corruption of our species goes deeper than today's feckless governments and corporations. The state of the planet reveals that humanity is essentially a destroyer, and has been from the very beginning of its appearance on the planet.

To be sure, the goal of Kirsch's book is to introduce, not refute, Anthropocene antihumanism, but a fuller introduction would present and evaluate basic criticisms and explore what resources, if any, antihumanism might have for responding to them. Absent this critical work, Kirsch makes these views look more convincing than they are.

This view that "humanity is essentially a destroyer" leads from Anthropocene antihumanism to Kirsch's other main topic: transhumanism. The "corruption of our species" that makes our destruction as a result of climate change inevitable goes hand in hand with the transhumanist view that the human species must be replaced.

In his analysis of transhumanism, Kirsch's presentation goes even further to make its adherents seem more convincing than they actually are. Some readers may be attracted to the antihumanist idea that our inherent corruption has led us to the brink of disaster but repelled by their embrace of extinction. Transhumanism seems to offer a more hopeful option. Instead of simply letting

humanity go, transhumanists propose to replace us with something better. Their embrace of technology that can create a new, "posthuman" species makes them look like saviors compared to the Anthropocene antihumanists. As Kirsch writes, according to transhumanists, "It's true that humanity has reached a point where our technological power threatens to destroy us. But if that power continues to grow at the same pace it has over the past two hundred years, it will become the means of our salvation."

There are two big assumptions involved here that Kirsch helpfully—for transhumanism—fails to unpack. The first is that technological progress from the past to the present can be projected into the future. This makes predictions of the "posthuman" seem logical rather than ideological. The second is that replacement is "our salvation." Transhumanists assume that technological progress will culminate in a new step in human evolution where the "posthuman" won't really replace us but will instead improve us—extend our existence in a new and better form. In other words, transhumanism requires that we can remove our identities, conceived basically as "software," from our bodies and simply move them onto new "hardware."

Kirsch does point out that "transhumanism has an innate tendency to overpromise" and that "the big breakthroughs always seem to lie just over the horizon." But he then immediately defends the prognostications of transhumanists by claiming that "they are extrapolating from developments that are undeniably real."

Many of these "developments," however, are both deniable and not real. For example, without citing evidence, Kirsch echoes transhumanist claims that "we know that the human mind has a completely material basis" and that "the brain itself is a computer." This means that we can have "an uploaded mind" in the virtual reality of the "metaverse" where "we will need our physical bodies as only a substrate for our virtual ones." Alternatively, through "laser porting," we can "free our consciousness to explore the galaxy or even the universe at the speed of light." Kirsch doesn't treat these claims with enough skepticism.

Philosophers have long aimed to overcome this kind of simplistic Cartesian mind-body dualism. Even Descartes did not think the mind could actually be separated from the body. He denied that the relationship between mind and body is comparable to that between a sailor and a ship. Our minds cannot be reduced to our brains, and our brains cannot be reduced to computers. What has come to be known as "the hard problem of consciousness" (explaining how something entirely physical can possibly be conscious) remains unsolved. And it may remain so, despite the confidence of some scientists and philosophers. Similarly, the "hard problems" of the metaverse—that no one has legs, for example, or that no one seems to want to use it—may remain unsolved as well. Mark Zuckerberg, it seems, has already gotten bored and pivoted to something else.

Yet it must be recognized that whether or not these "developments" are currently real, or even possible, is less important than whether they sound plausible to investors. Even more tempting and persistent than mind-body dualism is the idea of immortality. And there is perhaps no one for whom it is more tempting than the aging billionaires nowhere near done spending their money and enjoying their lifestyles. Transhumanist tech companies promising digital immortality are, therefore, attractive investments. Of course, were such mind uploading to become possible, only the wealthiest would be able to afford it. Still, investment in digital immortality might eventually begin to sound reasonable, especially if Anthropocene antihumanism has made it seem futile to use that money to combat climate change instead.

Anthropocene antihumanism and transhumanism do not just involve a "revolt against humanity," but a revolt against responsibility. Combined, they make the CEOs of tech companies look like our saviors rather than our destroyers. Those who have become wealthy by destroying the planet in the name of technological progress can use that destruction to justify their pursuit of further technological progress, which now appears as the only solution to the crisis they helped to cause. Kirsch suggests that "ultimately, transhumanists and antihumanists could converge on an ideal of extinction, with rapacious humanity making way for wiser virtual beings who tread more lightly on the planet," but this vision reinforces the fantasy that tech companies are a solution to climate change rather than among the drivers of it. The creation of "virtual beings" requires massive data centers and massive amounts of electricity, and so the pursuit of transhumanism reinforces Anthropocene antihumanism, much like Anthropocene antihumanism reinforces transhumanism.

Fittingly, given the nihilism behind both Anthropocene antihumanism and transhumanism, Kirsch concludes by discussing Nietzsche. Nietzsche railed against the "ascetic priests" he thought offered nothing but cures to the diseases they were spreading. In the same way, he would have rejected both Anthropocene antihumanism and transhumanism for not only seeing humanity as fundamentally sick, but for offering solutions that can only serve to make humanity sicker. Kirsch worries that these views are convincing enough to have an impact on society whether or not they are correct, but too often he is unwilling to point out basic flaws in these views or the interests they serve. Anthropocene antihumanism and transhumanism are dangerous not only because they might stop people from caring about the destruction of the planet, but because they embolden the people actually destroying it.

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The Great Chain of Bing

Frank Pasquale

Arthur O. Lovejoy's 1936 book, *The Great Chain of Being*, tells the story of a remarkably durable conception of humanity's place in the cosmos. Imagine every mineral, plant, and animal arrayed vertically, from least to greatest. Humans stand at the top, followed by other sentient beings, then plants, and, finally, the rocks and soil that support the whole. Some thinkers have interpreted this hierarchy as man's dominion over earth, justifying all manner of depredations of the living world. Catholic social thought has emphasized a duty of stewardship, particularly in Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato si'*. The Chain of Being admits of both interpretations, encapsulating both hierarchy and interconnectedness. As Lovejoy shows, it is a capacious metaphor, embraced by very different thinkers in very different times to contemplate ultimate questions.

Both modernity and postmodernity have undermined this metaphor. David Hume saw our reason as little more than a servant of our passions—the kind of irrational appetites and aversions we share with other animals. In the work of Darwin, Dennett, and Dawkins, the human appears less as the apex of nature than as one of myriad possible outcomes of blind evolutionary struggle. On this view, the planet could just as easily have been dominated by cockroaches or crabs. Despite the refinements of civilization, psychologists affirm the enduring influence of our "lizard-brain" limbic system. Meanwhile, what were once deemed lasting cultural achievements now appear, from some postmodern perspectives, as little more than a matter of taste, itself as contingent as the evolution of humans. These intellectual currents have coalesced around a posthumanist consensus on the exhaustion of "the human" as a normative category: it no longer provides reliable guidance on what we ought to do as ethical, political, or social beings.

Adam Kirsch's *The Revolt Against Humanity* tours a variety of posthumanist worldviews, ranging from "dark ecology" to transhumanism. In the antihumanist environmentalism of dark ecology, we are culpable for having destroyed too much nature already, and incapable of conserving what remains. The dark ecologists despair of coordinated climate action, and also doubt that we're capable of any effective defense against other threats arising from the Anthropocene, such as future pandemics. Some even welcome the imminent extinction of human beings and celebrate the endurance of an earth without us.

Kirsch ably contrasts this fatalist creed with transhumanism's immortalist plan for superhuman self-improvement. For transhumanists, human bodies and brains as we know them are just too fragile, especially when compared with machines. "Wetware" transhumanists envision a future of infinite replacement organs for failing bodies, and brains jacked into the internet's infinite vistas of information. "Hardware" transhumanism wants to skip the body altogether and simply upload the mind into computers. AIs and robots will, they assume, enjoy indefinite supplies of replacement parts and backup memory chips. Imagine *Westworld*'s Dolores, embodied in endless robot guises, "enminded" in chips as eternal as stars.

Kirsch worries that eco-antihumanism and tech-driven transhumanism are poised to ensnare even well-meaning persons in a baleful rejection of the human. It is indeed possible that new media will push these now-marginal viewpoints toward mainstream

Transhumanists would see the "wetware" of our bodies replaced, in part or in whole, by technology that would supposedly transcend human frailty.

DAVID SANKEY VIA BING IMAGE CREATOR

While Kirsch calls for a renewed defense of the human in an era of anti- and transhumanism, it might be just as effective to deflate AI's reputation and aspirations.

acceptance, just as they have so often promoted anti-vax nonsense. But both antihumanism and transhumanism are also susceptible to critical thinking, and that should prove resilient over time.

The worldview of dark ecologists is relatively easy to refute. Failures to arrest global warming, or to respect biodiversity in an equitable manner, are contingent. They are political failures; they are not determined by human biology. Skillful politicians and cultural leaders can change minds. There have already been enormous technological advances toward affordable green energy. Wilderness reserves are a proven preservation tactic, and wise governments will invest more in them. If we expand existing nature preserves, we might eventually move toward a respect for biodiversity that enables a high percentage of present species to persevere, bothered only by the occasional ecotourist or nature documentarist.

The transhumanist challenge is more difficult to answer, because of the varied and overlapping efficiencies that advanced computation now offers. A law firm cannot ignore ChatGPT; not only can it automate simple administrative tasks now, but it may also become a powerful research tool in the future. Militaries feel pressed to invest in AI because technology vendors promise it will upend current balances of power. Even tech critics have Substacks, X (formerly Twitter) accounts, and Facebook pages, and they are all subject to the algorithms that determine whether they have one, a hundred, or a million readers. In each case, persons with little choice but to use AI systems are donating more and more data to advance the effectiveness of AI, thus constraining their future options even more. "Mandatory adoption" is a familiar dynamic: it was much easier to forgo a flip phone in the 2000s than it is to avoid carrying a smartphone today. The more data any AI system gathers, the more it becomes a "must-have" in its realm of application.

Is it possible to "say no" to ever-further technological encroachments? For key tech evangelists, the answer appears to be no. Mark Zuckerberg has fantasized about direct mind-to-virtual-reality interfaces, and Elon Musk's Neuralink also portends a perpetually online humanity. Musk's verbal incontinence may well be a prototype of a future where every thought triggers AI-driven responses, whether to narcotize or to educate, to titillate or to engage. When integrated into performance-enhancing tools, such developments also spark a competitive logic of self-optimization. A person who could "think" their strategies directly into a computing environment would have an important advantage over those who had to speak or type them. If biological limits get in the way of maximizing key performance indicators, transhumanism urges us toward escaping the body altogether.

This computationalist eschatology provokes a gnawing insecurity: that no human mind can come close to mastering the range of knowledge that even second-rate search-engine indexes and simple chatbots can now summarize, thanks to AI. Empowered with foundation models (which can generate code, art, speech, and more), chatbots and robots seem poised to topple humans' self-regard. Call it the Great Chain of Bing: a new hierarchy placing the computer over the coder, and the coder over the rest of humans, at the commanding heights of political, economic, and social organization.

While the appeal of a Great Chain of Being has slowly eroded over time, the Great Chain of Bing should appear ridiculous at its outset. Microsoft's many missteps, from the annoying Clippy to force-fed adware on newer versions of Windows, leave us rightly skeptical of any metaphysical aspirations the company may have—even when its search engine becomes AI-powered. Even major AI achievements can shrink under scrutiny. There is no path from a machine's mastery of the board game Go to a supreme military strategy—and researchers recently discovered a method to beat the best AI Go program. Chatbots generate plausible-sounding text, but in high-stakes areas, they will need intense scrutiny from experts for the foreseeable future. Given the recent rash of crashes in San Francisco, even self-driving cars seem to be far from a solved problem.

Compile enough of these disappointments, and the acids of modernity, now directed at "the human," can just as easily be flung at its would-be usurpers. Thus, while Kirsch calls for a renewed defense of the human in an era of anti- and transhumanism, it might be just as effective to deflate AI's reputation and aspirations. The more parochial, venal, and destructive the enemies of the human are revealed to be, the more plausible humanism becomes. As Oz's Dorothy might advise: pay attention to the men behind the curtain.

Speculating about the long-term future of humanity, OpenAI's Sam Altman once blogged about "the merge." "A popular topic in Silicon Valley is talking about what year humans and machines will merge (or, if not, what year humans will get surpassed by rapidly improving AI or a genetically enhanced species)," he wrote. "Most guesses seem to be between 2025 and 2075." Altman writes of the merge with a mix of wonder and horror, delight and

dread. He does not think the enlightened "spiritual machines" anticipated by Google's Ray Kurzweil are inevitable. But he does believe the merge of human and machine is already underway and unstoppable:

> We are already in the phase of co-evolution—the AIs affect, effect, and infect us, and then we improve the AI. We build more computing power and run the AI on it, and it figures out how to build even better chips. This probably cannot be stopped. As we have learned, scientific advancement eventually happens if the laws of physics do not prevent it.

But is this a story of progress, or one of domination? Interaction between machines and crowds is coordinated by platforms, as MIT economists Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee have observed. Altman leads one of the most hyped ones. To the extent that CEOs, lawyers, hospital executives, and others assume that they must coordinate their activities by using large language models like the ones behind OpenAI's ChatGPT, they will essentially be handing over information and power to a technology firm to decide on critical future developments in their industries. A narrative of inevitability about the "merge" serves Altman's commercial interests, as does the tidal wave of AI hype now building on Elon Musk's X, formerly known as Twitter. Start doubting this inevitability, and other horizons of technological development open up.

Other daunting challenges appear when one looks behind the curtain of the wizards of AI. Chatbots have spewed all manner of false and defamatory content, in contexts ranging from eating-disorder hotlines to courtrooms. What company, let alone person, would want to "merge" into that? Liability concerns are also real. First Amendment scholar Eugene Volokh has warned about the risk of "large libel models," and the concern is not just hypothetical: a chatbot recently fabricated abuse allegations against a professor.

Copyright lawsuits also loom, as artists protest wholesale appropriation of their work. If a company's generative AI creates works that draw on existing art, and its creations are substantially similar to it, why shouldn't that company be liable for copyright infringement? While intellectual-property lawyers scrutinize generative AI output, privacy lawyers are keen to challenge its inputs. Are personal emails, social-media posts on locked accounts, or other private or semi-private communications part of the text-training models? How much personal information is already in these massive databases? Who consented to having their information processed in this way, and by what authority?

Taken together, these issues are not merely engineering problems or a list of concerns easily translated into a compliance checklist. The rapid development of AI hangs in a legal balance now, as jurisdictions around the world decide just how much lawbreaking and social harm to tolerate from it. The European Union and Japan are already investigating generative AI.

This is the social context for the sudden rise in claims about sentient chatbots, AI existential risk, and the like. While big tech's lobbyists and lawyers work to ensure favorable legal treatment, their propagandists try to convince the public that AI is a generalized technological revolution as fundamental as the shifts to fossil fuels and electricity (or, in the remarkable opinion of Google CEO Sundar Pichai, even more fundamental than those). Such claims should be received with a healthy degree of doubt. Here, credulity leads to deference, and deference to inadequate regulation. Lina M. Khan, the current chair of the U.S. Federal Trade Commission, has also noted this problem, and proposed extensive solutions. Regulatory agendas for generative AI have already been developed by NGOs like the Electronic Privacy Information Center. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation, Digital Markets Act, and Digital Services Act may also hammer firms that concentrate power or spew disinformation, even when they try to shift responsibility onto "experimental" AI. The more that rules of transparency, nondiscrimination, and public responsibility are imposed on firms like OpenAI, the less they can pass off their wares as the irresistible next stage of human evolution.

Kirsch's learned exploration of the darker corners of posthumanism is both lucid and thought provoking. He is right to observe that "secular reverence for humanity nurtured…humanistic culture," and to indict the antihumanist worship of nature and the transhumanist worship of machines. But the path back toward accepting the well-being of human persons as the measure of all things may be less direct than he hopes. Rather than re-inflating "the human," deflating the promise of the transhuman—particularly in its overhyped guise as "AI"—may be key. Skepticism has eroded the primacy of the human in many minds, but it should also discredit the wan, wacky, and weird visions of posthuman grace now hawked by so many tech propagandists.

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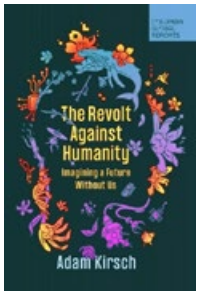

THE REVOLT AGAINST HUMANITY

Imagining a Future Without Us

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From Bernalda to Bleecker St.

Helene Stapinski

A young Italian priest makes his way in New York City.

Fr. Luigi Portarulo steps through the tall red doors of La Scuola D'Italia into a maelstrom of activity. Children are hugging each other goodbye, meeting parents for pickup, or dashing to classrooms for extracurricular activities. All are loudly speaking Italian. A group of students dressed in blue uniforms with Scuola crests on their chests clowns around inside a small classroom. But as soon as Luigi arrives, they run to take their seats, notebooks open, pencils in hand.

Don Luigi (as he is called by some Italians) is dressed in black sweatpants, black sneakers, and a gray shirt with a priest's collar. He's thirty-six but looks even younger, and he is the new catechism teacher at this immersive private school on the Upper East Side of New York City. He smiles warmly at the group and then starts today's lesson—not in a stern way, but as a coach might address his team, with enthusiasm and confidence. Instead of soccer or baseball, his goal is to get them excited about prayer, not an easy task in twenty-first-century America.

EVAN DANIELS

Opposite: Fr. Luigi Portarulo prays before Italian Mass at Our Lady of Pompeii church, October 22, 2023.

Want to listen to this article? Visit **commonwealmagazine.org/bernalda-bleecker** to hear it read by the author.

But Fr. Luigi has charisma and gets them to work together—"*insieme*," as he says. The Our Father and Hail Mary, which Luigi scrawls in both Italian and English on the whiteboard, are brand new to most of these young children—not rote prayers that have already been memorized and drained of meaning. The children ask him what the words, "thy," "thee," and "thou" mean, and Luigi explains it's an antiquated form of English, a language whose modern equivalent he has yet to master. The students painstakingly copy his words into their lined notebooks, and then on cue, with gusto, recite the prayers *insieme* at his direction. When they're finished, he claps and yells, "*Benissimo!*"

Half the class will make their First Holy Communion next weekend at the school's associated church downtown, Our Lady of Pompeii, where Luigi is a pastor and will be administering the sacrament to his young charges. The oldest and tallest boy in class is eleven-year-old Enrico, who has already made his Communion and serves as an altar boy at Our Lady of Pompeii.

"We like Fr. Luigi," he says, "because he doesn't scream at us." The other kids laugh and nod.

For Luigi, this school is a comfort zone in chaotic, indecipherable New York City. In December 2022, Luigi moved to the United States from Italy with very little knowledge of English. He was one of dozens of foreigners filling the empty slots in American parishes amidst the priest shortage. (One in six priests in the United States is now foreign-born, according to the Official Catholic Directory.) Luigi has been settling into his pastoral job at Our Lady of Pompeii, a mostly Italian parish in Manhattan's Greenwich Village, but it has been a long, strange journey.

Luigi was born and raised in the small southern Italian town of Bernalda and spent much of his adult life at the Vatican, during one of the most turbulent times in recent Catholic history. Bernalda is in the remote Basilicata region, a forgotten land on the instep of Italy's boot, so isolated and hidden that many Italians don't really know where it is. At the turn of the last century, millions of Basilicatans left the south's *miseria*—the systemic poverty and feudal farm system—to settle in America. The families of both Francis Ford Coppola and the Cake Boss emigrated from Bernalda. A decade ago, Coppola converted a grand nineteenth-century palazzo there into a hotel. Since then, tourists have begun to trickle in. When Coppola's daughter Sofia returned to her family's ancestral town to get married, Luigi's mother, Enza, made the wedding meal. "She is the best cook in Bernalda," Luigi proudly says.

Catholicism remains ingrained in the day-to-day culture of Italy. In small southern towns like Bernalda, paintings and statues of the Virgin Mary and saints decorate many of the street corners. As a boy growing up there, Luigi went to church regularly with Enza and with his grandmother, Mimina. When he was four years old, he would carry a picture of the Blessed Mother tightly in his fist and refuse to open his hand. (Luigi's last name, Portarulo, translates as "carry it" in Italian.) For a first-grade homework assignment, he said that when he grew up, he wanted to be pope.

His mother, Enza Paradiso, is extremely devout, even by Bernaldan standards. She has a small chapel in her apartment, which includes a giant crucifix, a blue-painted dome, statues and reliquaries of the saints, candles, cherubs, and a stained-glass Madonna and child. Luigi, she says, was a very sickly baby; he had to have surgery as an infant because he

Fr. Luigi teaches catechism class at La Scuola D'Italia in New York City, October 22, 2023.

EVAN DANIELS

couldn't hold down any milk and was badly dehydrated. "The doctor called him St. Luigi," she says. Enza says she thinks that maybe his calling began when he was a baby, and that he was saved from death for a reason. "Maybe it was God's plan for him to serve Him."

Like many boys in his neighborhood, Luigi became an altar boy at his local church, Mater Ecclesiae, known as "the new church" in Bernalda. It was built in the late 1960s, as opposed to the Mother Church on the other side of town, which dates to the 1530s. But while most boys were collecting toy cars, Luigi was collecting prayer cards of the saints. "He loved to serve the Mass," says Enza. "He was different than the other boys of his age. It was never a chore for him. He would run with enthusiasm to each Mass all weekend."

When Luigi was twelve, he read a story in his mother's copy of *Famiglia Cristiana*, a Catholic magazine in Italy, about altar boys serving at a Jubilee Mass at the Vatican, and he told his parents he wanted to do it, too. Though it's only a five-hour drive, Rome is a world away from provincial Bernalda. His parents took him there themselves so he could serve at the Jubilee in 2000. "I thought he would just serve the Mass and come home," says Bernardino, his father, who is named after their town's patron saint. "But he wanted to stay."

Enza tried explaining that the Vatican might be too far away to live without your parents. But Luigi persisted. That autumn, he was accepted to the St. Pius X Pre-Seminary altar-boy program and enrolled in school at the Vatican, the same school for boys who serve in the Sistine Chapel choir. "It was difficult for me, but I knew he was in the right place," says Enza, who, after every visit to see Luigi, cried in the car for the five-hour ride back home to Bernalda.

At first, living at the Vatican was both magical and very difficult. "I loved the Vatican the moment I arrived," says Luigi. "Every Sunday we received Communion from the pope. But I was also homesick"—he uses the Italian word for homesick, *nostalgia*—"especially at night." Vatican City, at 0.19 square miles, is a small town in itself. Over the next twenty-three years, Luigi would come to know all of its eight hundred residents.

After arriving, Luigi lived in a dormitory with three other boys and attended the rigorous school there, Puerorum, eventually learning French, Spanish, Greek, and Latin, but very little English. Over the years, he served Mass for three popes. Luigi would return to Bernalda only for Christmas and for two months in the summer, where he played soccer on the Corso with the other boys just like a normal kid. But he was considered a bit of a celebrity.

When he was growing up in Bernalda, the unemployment rate for young men was 60 percent. As in all of Italy's small towns, for the past two centuries, the best and brightest have usually left. The whole town knew about Luigi leaving for Rome. One mother told her daughter, a schoolmate of Luigi's, that "one day he will be pope."

Just as Luigi arrived at the Vatican, the sex scandal erupted, first in the United States and then across the globe. More than four thousand priests worldwide had been accused of sexual abuse, including priests at the pre-seminary at the Vatican from the 1980s and '90s. Enza says she knew about the problems with pedophiles in the Church but never worried about Luigi when she left him at Vatican City. "He has always been a very strong person," she says. "And I knew him so well. I would have known if something was ever wrong in his life."

As his family expected, Luigi eventually entered the seminary in Rome, majoring in philosophy at Pontificia Università at the Vatican and developing a special affection for the writings of Aquinas and Augustine. "Thomas Aquinas tells us that through the knowledge of God, one can become his friend," says Luigi, with an earnestness befitting a life lived almost entirely at the Vatican. "Every man possesses the ability to know and love God."

As Luigi came of age inside the Vatican's walls, the Church underwent a major upheaval. In addition to the emotional damage to tens of thousands of abuse victims, the sex scandal has rocked the hierarchy of the Church. Its effects are felt by the rank-and-file—the priests who have had to carry the burden of the Church's grave mistakes, day in and day out. "Hearing about abuses committed by other priests doesn't make life any easier for the other priests, the many good priests," says Luigi. "In this moment and this society, it's not very easy to be a priest. But it's very important to be a role model, especially for the young people."

The scandal has of course affected the way the public views both the Church itself and the priests who serve it, and it has also discouraged young men from entering the priesthood, especially in the United States. According to a study from CARA at Georgetown University, the number of Catholic priests in the country has dropped by more than half in the past fifty years, leading to a shortage in parishes across the country. Which is how—and why—Luigi ended up in America.

Luigi's journey to the United States began four years ago, when he was invited by a Basilicatan family from Our Lady of Pompeii to visit for a few weeks. It was his first time in New York City, and he met Fr. Angelo Plodari, the church's pastor. Because of the shortage of clergy, Angelo was doing the job of two priests.

Originally from Brescia in Northern Italy, Angelo was not only running Pompeii; as provincial head of the Congregation of Scalabrinian priests, he was also overseeing ninety missionaries working to help immigrants in North and South America. He often travels to Venezuela, Colombia, and Haiti for work. "Doing two jobs is very difficult," says Angelo, dressed in an Adidas jacket and sweats and, with dark circles under his eyes, looking very tired.

Angelo, who recruited Luigi last year to carry some of the load at Pompeii and eventually fill his position as pastor, is now training him to take over. Though Luigi is now celebrating the Italian Mass and is leading the large Italian congrega-

tion, he is still only assisting with the English Mass. "When he asked me to take this job in New York, I thought, 'I can do this. I am the right age. In the future, the train passes by. Life goes fast and you have to do many experiences,'" Luigi says.

Though Angelo is Luigi's mentor, the two have also become good friends. They both love to play and watch soccer. "But we have a big problem," says Angelo with a smirk. "Luigi is for Intervista and I am for Juventus. We love different teams." Despite this conflict, they jog along the Hudson River together some mornings when the sun has barely risen. Luigi's only other fault is that he's not a very good cook, says Angelo. "On the weekend, when the cook in the rectory is not here, he will ask me to make him some pasta or something. So I have to teach him to do that, too," he says, smiling.

In Rome, Luigi was the captain of the Vatican soccer team and got a reputation as a strong athlete. Pope Francis often saw him running in the Vatican gardens and started referring to him as "Sporto" whenever he saw him—the Sportsman. Now, not knowing the language in America, Luigi has turned to sports as a universal language. "When I play football or run with someone, it's as if we speak the same language because we have the same goals and share the same efforts and the same values," he says. Luigi hasn't found a new league in Manhattan, but "I only just arrived," he says. "I will find."

Though he is a talented athlete, Luigi's true gift is in his homilies, Angelo says. "He's just very, very human and creates an opportunity for people to reflect and understand the readings they've just heard," says Angelo. "He's become very close to the people here and is very generous."

Luigi says his biggest help of all in adjusting to New York has been his faith. "God is helping me all the time, through the people," he says. Before the sex scandal, people would come from out in the world to the Church. But now, with declining Mass attendance, it's the job of the Church to go out into the world, explains Luigi. "We have to go to the people," he says, "wherever they are. Just like Papa Francesco teaches us."

Enza and Bernardino accept that their son's dream is no longer to become pope but to serve the people. He has worked at a Zulu camp in South Africa, which he loved. When Luigi fed the homeless in Rome, he always befriended them first and got to know them as human beings before offering them a sandwich, Bernardino says. "Luigi's only attachment to material things is his attachment to the Inter soccer team."

Luigi and Angelo reach out into the community, bundling clothing and food donations for homeless people in New York. Because of Luigi's presence, Angelo is free to handle his international duties and to tend to the Scalabrinian Migrant Center located at the parish, which helps new immigrants and refugees find jobs, navigate the legal system, and learn English.

Luigi feels their pain. Twice a week, he meets with an English tutor in a conference room in the rectory. Using work sheets intended for children, with illustrations of animals amid everyday objects, Luigi is slowly building his vocabulary. Glancing up now and then for help from his teacher, Lynne Hayden-Findlay, he fills in the words for hedgehog and boar. "*Si?*" he says, asking for her approval.

"You got it," she says. Whenever Luigi slips back into Italian conversation, Lynne refuses to engage him. "In English," says Lynne, a strict taskmaster.

Learning English has been a challenge for Luigi, she says, because he is fully immersed in the Italian community in New York City. Our Lady of Pompeii offers the only Italian language Mass in Manhattan, so it attracts Italians from across the borough, including those who aren't officially registered as parishioners but call the parish their spiritual home. Due to Covid and the sex scandal, the drop in Mass attendance has been as high as 30 percent in some places, according to the Catholic Leadership Institute. But not at Pompeii, thanks to a strongly devout Italian population. On any given Sunday, when Luigi says Mass, the church is packed with more than 150 people: young couples who've arrived on Vespas that they leave outside the white stone columns, toddlers being chased along the side aisles by their Italian parents, old men and women, and babies crying in the universal language that babies cry in.

When he first arrived in New York, Luigi was a bit overwhelmed, says Lynne. "Not knowing the language is a big drain," she says. "I can tell by his English how tired he is when he's in his lesson with me." To make New York feel more like home, and to share a bit of his past with Our Lady of Pompeii, Luigi had a life-sized statue of San Bernardino shipped over from Italy. After it arrived carefully swathed in bubble wrap, the church held a San Bernardino festival on May 20. Bernalda celebrates the festival every year at the same time, with a street procession, a brass band, and fireworks. Pompeii's version was a bit more subdued: it included a special Mass, a blessing of the statue, and a lunch in the church basement.

Just as they did when he first went to Vatican City, Luigi's parents came with him to New York. They stayed for two months, not only to spend some quality time with him and to see America, but also to help him adjust to his new environment. They had never left Italy before. After they headed back to tiny Bernalda, Luigi was homesick, not only for his own family, but this time for his extended family.

At the Vatican, where Luigi taught catechism to children for ten years and prepared baskets of food for Rome's homeless, Pope Francis always stopped and asked him how his mother was doing. Enza was known for baking focaccia for Pope Francis, which she brought on her visits to see Luigi. For Pope John Paul II, she brought handmade pasta, and for Benedict XVI, a sachertorte, a Viennese chocolate-covered cake with apricot marmalade filling.

When Pope Francis was in the hospital earlier this year, Luigi called the Vatican to speak with his doctors and nurses to check in on him. "The pope's personal nurse used to be on my soccer team," he says, slightly embarrassed.

Luigi not only misses the people there, but also the exquisite artwork that had become part of his everyday surroundings—the Michelangelos, the Berninis, the Giottos. "The beautiful thing is that everything I experienced in the Vatican already belongs to me," he says. "And I keep it in my mind and heart."

Fr. Luigi with altar servers at Our Lady of Pompeii, October 22, 2023

On a Sunday morning in May, the area around Bleecker St. and Sixth Ave. is relatively quiet. The gutter is filled with bottles and trash from revelers the night before. Homeless men sleep in doorways and at bus stops. Just south of the tattoo parlors, smoke shops, CBD stores, and street vendors stands Our Lady of Pompeii, its black-and-white bell tower reaching above the shorter buildings and graffitied storefronts.

It's Mother's Day, which happens to coincide with First Communion day for Luigi and his twelve students. But the Italian mothers, all young and very stylish, are thrilled to be here at Our Lady of Pompeii rather than at brunch somewhere in Manhattan. The young communicants are dressed in long white robes with wooden crucifixes dangling from their necks, the boys with fresh haircuts and the girls with sparkly barrettes in their hair. During Mass, they recite the Our Father, having been well prepared in class. Fr. Luigi stands on an altar adorned with white orchids, then steps down to be closer to the congregation, delivering a sermon the children can understand. Receiving Communion for the first time, he says, is "like eating sugar. It makes you happy and filled with joy."

He calls all the children by name and asks them if they are ready to receive Jesus into their hearts. When they quietly answer yes, he enthusiastically shouts, like a soccer coach, "*Forte!*"—"Louder!" The children giggle and yell, "Yes!" all together. *Insieme*. The young mothers smile widely and take photos, even those mothers without children receiving first Holy Communion.

Alice Zuccoli moved to New York from Rome four years ago with her husband and three sons and attends Italian Mass here regularly, even though it's not her parish or neighborhood. Until a reporter told her, she didn't even know about Luigi's life in the Vatican. Because of Luigi and Angelo, there is a strong sense of community here, she says, something that's lacking in the fragmented world today. Luigi, she says, is a much-needed example for her sons and for all the people in the parish.

Enrico, her eleven-year-old, is the altar boy from Luigi's catechism class. Even though he's already attended Mass this weekend, he's made another trip to serve Mass at First Holy Communion because, he said, "Fr. Luigi needs me to help him."

"Imagine," says his mother, "an eleven-year-old wanting to go to Mass twice." Zuccoli says her children were not so interested in catechism before Luigi arrived, but now it's a highlight of their week. "Don Luigi reaches them as no one did before," she says. "He's sincere and somehow reaches them on a children's level." For the first time, they come home and ask her questions about their religion.

When asked about the crisis in the Church over the last decade, Zuccoli nods and looks down. "There are problems with some in the world, I know," she says. "I also know many good priests." She glances at the altar. "But Don Luigi is especially good. I have three boys, and if one became a priest like Don Luigi, I would be so happy."

HELENE STAPINSKI *is a journalist and the author of four books, including* The American Way: A True Story of Nazi Escape, Superman, *and* Marilyn Monroe, *published in February 2023 by Simon & Schuster.*

EVAN DANIELS

ALEXANDER STERN

Getting Through Life

Aki Kaurismäki's 'Fallen Leaves'

Finnish filmmaker Aki Kaurismäki was once asked why there is so little camera movement in his films. "That's a nuisance when you have a hangover," he responded. His joke captures three elements of the prolific director's latest feature, *Fallen Leaves*: wry humor, a spare style stripped of any distraction or nuisance (not to say nuance), and alcoholic depression.

Fallen Leaves—which won the prestigious Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival and was recently screened at the New York Film Festival ahead of a November U.S. release—is, as Kaurismäki put it, the "fourth part of a trilogy"—namely, his "Proletariat" series, dealing with despair and hope among Finland's working class. These films, along with many others by Kaurismäki, share a number of plot elements: at least one character loses a dead-end job; there is at least one act of random violence; a lot of the action takes place in dive bars; and there's often a dog—in this case named "Chaplin" after the filmmaker Kaurismäki idolizes. Lastly, there's typically a sweet but awkward, nearly mute courtship, in this case between two struggling forty-somethings: Holappa, a sandblaster and construction worker who keeps losing jobs because of his alcoholism, and Ansa, a grocery-store stock clerk. Their romance is tenuous from the beginning—Holappa immediately loses Ansa's number after their first date—and threatened by their deteriorating circumstances and Holappa's drinking.

Kaurismäki's style is minimalist and sometimes absurdist. Apart from their bold color scheme—teals, mustard yellows, and maroons—his sets are almost comically spare and populated with anachronistic technology and furniture that make contemporary Helsinki look like East Berlin at the height of the Cold War. This distinctive style, sometimes referred to as "Aki World," finds parallels in the work of American directors like Jim Jarmusch and Wes Anderson, who traffic in similar deadpan humor and stylized mise en scène and who have both been influenced by Kaurismäki.

This absurdism and humor might seem at odds with a social realism that tracks the deprivation of working-class characters, but Kaurismäki follows both Charlie Chaplin and Bertolt Brecht in distancing his characters from strict naturalistic reality in order to bring intellectual and political ideas to the fore. In an interview, Kaurismäki said, "I like Brecht's idea that the actor should regard himself as a narrator who only quotes the character he is playing. In this way, audiences are provoked to draw intellectual conclusions instead of just becoming emotionally attached to what they see." In one example of this kind of distancing, Holappa broods over yet another beer while he tells his friend Huotari he's depressed because he drinks so much. So why, Huotari asks, does he drink so much? "Because I'm depressed." The wry detachment of the actors from their characters, along with the eccentric sets, eases our distress at their penury while also providing a distance that invites us to reflect on it. In another scene, after a sad dinner of eggs and potatoes, Ansa informs Holappa that her dreary one-room apartment was passed down to her by an aunt. "So you're an heiress," he replies.

Early in the film, Ansa loses her job at the grocery store when an overbearing security guard catches her giving expired food to a homeless man and taking some home for herself. "It belongs in the waste bin," her boss tells her when he fires her and two friends who stand up with her in solidarity. "I suppose I do, too," Ansa responds, establishing disposal as a central motif of the film. What Pope Francis has called a "throwaway culture" insists that we waste food and other goods in the service of an exploitative system of production and consumption that thrives on our renewable dissatisfaction as it damages the global environment and local communities alike. But it doesn't stop there: human lives, like Ansa's, are used up and thrown away, too, all while being meticulously surveilled to ensure the highest degree of efficiency and obedience. (At least, in Kaurismäki's low-tech world, that surveillance still has a human face.)

Ansa shuts off her electricity when she realizes how much trouble she'll have paying the bill, but Kaurismäki doesn't wallow in characters' victimhood, nor, as film scholar Thomas Austin writes, does he "elevat[e] them to simplistic icons of heroic labour or 'authentic' folk culture." Instead, Ansa busies herself with what Brecht, as Austin notes, called "the greatest art of all: *Lebenskunst*, the art of getting through life." She picks up work, first as a dishwasher at a bar and then sweeping the rubble from a factory floor. Kaurismäki shoots these scenes at length with an unemotional camera that conveys the subordination of workers to vast mechanized forces beyond their control. ("Ansa" means "trapped" in Finnish.)

Ansa gets out, too. She meets Holappa at a karaoke night after the older and much more outgoing Huotari drags him there. After Ansa's friend Liisa compliments Huotari on his singing, he starts flirting with her, unsuccessfully. As they banter, Ansa and Holappa engage in a silent dialogue of shy, expectant glances. It's not till he meets her outside the bar where she's been working (and where her boss is being arrested for dealing drugs) that Holappa works up the nerve to ask her out, first to coffee, which Ansa catches him supplementing with vodka, and then to a movie, which turns out, not accidentally, to be Jim Jarmusch's zombie comedy *The Dead Don't Die*.

Kaurismäki's films are rich in quotation and allusions to film history—along with Charlie Chaplin, David Lean, Robert Bresson, and Jean-Luc Godard all get nods—but rarely are the references as explicit and meaningful as the one to Jarmusch. Kaurismäki's

Alma Pöysti and Jussi Vatanen in *Fallen Leaves*

use of this film-within-the-film is not just a humorous wink to a friend and kindred spirit; it's also a playful counterpoint to the themes of his own film. In *The Dead Don't Die*, Jarmusch's zombies are symbols of mindless consumerism—at one point zombie caffeine junkies attack a coffee shop—and a consequence of environmental degradation: "polar fracking" has sent the earth off its axis, somehow causing a zombie apocalypse. By placing his protagonists—the "dead leaves" (a more literal translation of the title)—in the audience of *The Dead Don't Die*, Kaurismäki makes a sly reference to their resilience and a somewhat more hopeful modification to Jarmusch's symbolism. What better analogy for a resilient working class left for dead by an uncaring society than zombies? Ansa's wry reaction to the Jarmusch film can be read almost as a warning to that society. "There's no way the police could have handled it," she says. "There were simply too many zombies."

To left-leaning American viewers, it may be surprising to find that the leading filmmaker in Finland, sometimes represented as a quasi-socialist paradise, is so preoccupied with economic inequality and the depredations of capital. But despite a robust welfare state, a workforce that is 90 percent unionized, and high degree public ownership, especially compared to the United States, Finland has had its own downturns. During the 1990s, its poorly regulated banking industry fell into crisis, causing a depression and mass unemployment. Full employment never returned. As elsewhere in Europe, recent years in Finland have seen battles between labor unions and welfare advocates, on the one hand, and austerity-minded neoliberal reformers on the other. Finland's current government, formed over the summer, is led by the conservative National Coalition Party, which promises to cut spending and crack down on unions. The governing coalition also includes the far-right, anti-immigration Finns Party. Recent Kaurismäki films, *Le Havre* and *The Other Side of Hope*, have taken European hostility to immigration head-on.

In April, spurred by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Finland joined NATO (a move Kaurismäki opposed). The war

in Ukraine plays a constant background role in *Fallen Leaves*. Every time one of many old-fashioned analog radios comes on, reports of Russia's vicious assault blare. Clashing with the film's otherworldly aesthetic, these blasts of death and destruction serve as another Brechtian interruption, challenging us to see the story in a wider social and historical context. In Finland, which shares a border and an imperial history with Russia, the war looms especially large. Arriving as they do on the outmoded medium of radio, these reports both distance us from and highlight the intrusive, almost compulsory nature of our own tech-facilitated consumption of crisis after crisis. At one point, Ansa, looking for music to play and finding only news of war, uncharacteristically explodes: "That bloody war!"

The characters in *Fallen Leaves* do find music eventually, and, through it, a kind of upside-down hope. At his lowest point, at the end of a days-long bender, Holappa is at a bar when two young women with blank expressions and dead eyes start playing the guitar and keyboard. They're the Finnish synth-pop duo Maustetytöt (literally "Spice Girls"), and the song is called "Born to sadness and clothed in disappointments." As Holappa watches, transfixed, the Spice Girls sing the bleak chorus: "I'm a prisoner here forever / Even the cemetery is surrounded by fences /When my earthly assignment is finally over /You can just dig me deeper into the ground." It's not a ballad one would expect to bring hope to a down-and-out, lovesick alcoholic. But in Aki World, where even the zombie apocalypse can become a symbol for renewal, genuine hope springs from the deepest despair, just as life eventually springs from death, no matter how deeply buried. It's the role of art, for Kaurismäki, to locate hope in the dimmest places, often by the light of humor. "Life is intolerable without humor," Kaurismäki has said. "It's intolerable with humor, too."

ALEXANDER STERN *is* Commonweal*'s features editor.*

ADAM'S LAMENT

Gary Stein

Like many fathers God had no patience
for infants. So he made us older
but naïve. We never needed
to crawl, bruise bone on stone

or feel the sting of his rod.
We lacked experience with failure.
Unlucky that way, our lost childhood
was like a death from the opposite end.

He may have been bored as hell
in heaven, alone with his stars, empty
space and that initial Word yet undefined.
He had little to do but play

with the things he'd made. Eager
for us to make sense or mistakes,
he sent that darker ego with a tiny tongue
and tempting promises.

With so much to learn, who wouldn't
be curious? Many men envy their fathers.
We wanted all he knew, the whole garden,
but we hoped he would leave us alone.

GARY STEIN's Touring the Shadow Factory *won the Brick Road Poetry Press annual competition in 2017. His chapbook,* Between Worlds *(Finishing Line, 2014), was a contest finalist. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in journals such as* Poetry, Prairie Schooner, Poet Lore, Folio, *the* Penn Review, Atlanta Review, *and the* Asheville Poetry Review. *He holds an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop, co-edited* Cabin Fever *(The Word Works, 2004), and has taught creative writing in high schools and colleges.*

JONATHAN MALESIC

Cartography of Abandonment

The serious subtext of Julian Montague's 'cosmic jokes'

Last spring, a shopping cart drifted through my Dallas neighborhood. It was the sort with a plastic car attached to its front, allowing a child to "drive" through the grocery aisles. I first saw it next to a dumpster behind a sports bar. Within days, it was gone, presumably to a landfill.

Weeks later, though, I spotted it a block away on a side street, near the alley. No one had claimed it, not even the trash collectors. The cart's chipped paint and rust suggested it had been out of official circulation for a few years. It bore no store's name. It had become a loose feature of urban space: available to anyone, the responsibility of no one, and a nuisance to everyone, much like the e-bikes and scooters that litter the sidewalks.

The next day, the cart sat in an empty corner lot, where a modest postwar home had just been demolished to make way for a colossal duplex. The wrecking crew had placed the cart under a tree. But then the tree was cut down, and the cart went to the curb along with other detritus for bulk-trash pickup. The next time I walked by, more than a week later, the cart had disappeared.

I would have barely noticed this shopping cart, and certainly would not have cared about what happened to it, if I had not first read the graphic artist Julian Montague's book, *The Stray Shopping Carts of Eastern North America: A Guide to Field Identification*. The book, originally published in 2006, is the unquestioned, definitive classification guide to shopping carts found in the wide world beyond their home stores or parking-lot corrals. In Montague's taxonomy, the cart in my neighborhood was, when I first saw it, a Class B, Type 19, stray, "in/as refuse," and then, on the side street, an instance of B/16, "edge marginalization." Ultimately, it once again became a B/19. Given what I know of temptation, I suspect that the demolition workers considered turning it into a truly rare specimen: B/20, "bulldozed."

THE STRAY SHOPPING CARTS OF EASTERN NORTH AMERICA

A Guide to Field Identification

JULIAN MONTAGUE
University of Chicago Press
$22 | 184 pp.

I loved the book when it was first published, and not only because Montague photographed most of the stray carts in Buffalo, where I grew up. (I admire his style enough that, a few years ago, I commissioned Montague to design an alternative cover to my wife's book.) The project of classifying the carts by their condition and location—"A/2, Plaza Drift," "A/3, Bus Stop Discard," "B/13, Complex Vandalism"—is brilliantly pointless, a triumph of form without function that nevertheless got me to see my environment in a new way.

Now *The Stray Shopping Carts of Eastern North America* is being reissued in a revised edition. The classification system is unchanged. The photos, some of them updated, depict a broad range of a cart's possible lives and deaths. One photo shows how the basket of a B/8, "structurally modified" cart was sawed in half and turned into a fence for a small garden. Another shows an A/8 "mixed group" that grew almost gravitationally at the edge of a plaza; each additional cart in the group makes the spot seem more and more like where all carts belong. These carts will likely return to their "sources." The same can't be said for the ones depicted in a carefully mapped study of Buffalo's Scajaquada Creek, where dozens of carts fell victim to B/12, "simple vandalism," and were "naturalized" (B/21). Mired in silt, they become part of the ecosystem. Plants sprout through their rusting cages.

Montague adopts the bone-dry, documentary tone of a wildlife field guide. He explains that an A/9, "remote false" stray—that is, a cart observed beyond a store parking lot but nevertheless within the cart wranglers' orbit—is "impossible to differentiate from B/1 Open True without long-term observation and tracking." Unlike in a guide to birds, though, the key designations have nothing to do with a cart's inherent qualities. Whether a cart is made of metal or plastic, or whether it has one basket or two, is irrelevant. "True strays exhibit a degree of drift where the source lot becomes indeterminate, and the cart's new placement mysterious proof of an invisible urban infrastructure," Montague wrote in a 1999 version of the system reproduced in a new afterword. It's as if currents in our cities keep the carts in motion until they find a stable niche in someone's garage, wedged between disused buildings, in a landfill, or, as Montague documents, at the bottom of the Niagara Gorge.

The currents, of course, are human beings, but they are all but absent from Montague's photographs. Remarkably, just a handful of people are visible in the deep background of a photo of a mangled A/6 ("plow crush at source") resting atop a huge snow pile in a busy parking lot. The photos suggest that

behind the currents are familiar forces like neglect, mischief, and thoughtless do-gooderism. Ingenuity plays a role, too: Montague shows carts employed in apartment complexes to help residents carry laundry and carts with their baskets removed so they can carry bulkier loads. The range of the carts' experience shadows our own.

This year, the Burchfield Penney Art Center in Buffalo held a mid-career exhibition of Montague's work. The hundreds of paintings, prints, fliers, and books on display borrowed heavily from mid-twentieth-century graphic design: the colors are bold, the borders crisp, the type Helvetica.

Much of Montague's work is presented as the often-ephemeral products of fictional characters or institutions. The evolving project "Secondary Occupants / Animals & Architecture," which he began in 2008, posited someone with a keen interest in creatures who live as uninvited guests in human habitations. Montague searched buildings and automobiles for spiders, collected representatives of each spider species, and preserved their bodies in alcohol. He then scrutinized their faces through a microscope, created simplified designs of those faces, cut the designs from felt and affixed them to banners, hung the banners in the original locations where the spiders were found, and photographed the locations. Later, Montague designed the covers of books that someone obsessed with spiders and other creatures in human spaces might own—titles like *Exterminator: A Psychosocial Study of Pest Control Workers* and *An Infinite Kingdom: Civilization, Fungus, and Time*. Even as the exhibition followed a thread to its absurd end, it raised sincere questions about what constitutes a home, what a face looks like, and whether nature is harmonious. I thought of it often while dealing with a series of mammalian and insect invaders in my home a few years ago.

Montague spun additional projects out of "Secondary Occupants" to extend the fictional world. He created covers for the books and records produced by the Waldron Institute,

"This B/15 Gap Marginalization, B/18 As Refuse Receptacle specimen was found at the end of a small shopping plaza. It is not uncommon to find traffic cones near stray shopping carts."

JULIAN MONTAGUE/IMAGE COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

96 interior, 2008

a made-up religious sect that derives apocalyptic meaning from their study of honeybees. Likewise, he designed the exhibition posters for the Thorold Gallery, a fake 1970s art community. In a video worthy of a Christopher Guest film, two real university professors play faux scholars offering context and analysis of the work of the gallery's contributors. In 2013, Montague and several German collaborators designed an entire ersatz conference for their fictional organizations to participate in, including a ninety-two-page program complete with presentation abstracts and presenter bios. In these projects, Montague told me in an interview, he's often "appropriating the authoritative voice of modernism" to tell a "cosmic joke." You can create a scientific system, he said, but it "doesn't make the world any less absolutely bizarre."

The central characters in these fictions are as absent as the human agents are in the shopping-cart project. We only know them through the artifacts they leave behind, just as we often know a creature by its abandoned nest or web. It's worth asking if an artwork also tells us something about its maker. Montague insisted that the person who immersed himself in "the world of the spiders" is a character, not really him. Fair enough, but whereas a novelist's character only acts within the imaginary world, Montague really did document all the spiders and shopping carts, using the same skills and aesthetic he employs to design posters and murals for real galleries, companies, and schools.

We only know these fictive characters through the artifacts they leave behind, just as we often know a creature by its abandoned nest or web.

The members of the Waldron Institute may be "psychos," as Montague described them, but his designs for them and his other clients, real and fictional, exhibit an earnest belief that the world, however bizarre, is intelligible, and it can be represented via an almost universal visual language. Montague draws influence from designers like Fred Troller, whose countless book covers for Doubleday became the graphical signature of Cold War intellectual life. Troller's minimalist designs reflect a conviction that ideas matter, that they are accessible to a mass audience, and that a systematic approach to societal problems could solve them.

Montague has said the shopping-cart project makes no social commentary. But it does call attention to the cart as a contested object dwelling at the fuzzy boundary between public and private. Carts belong to stores, but they *feel* like common property, not unlike the parking lots where they spend much of their

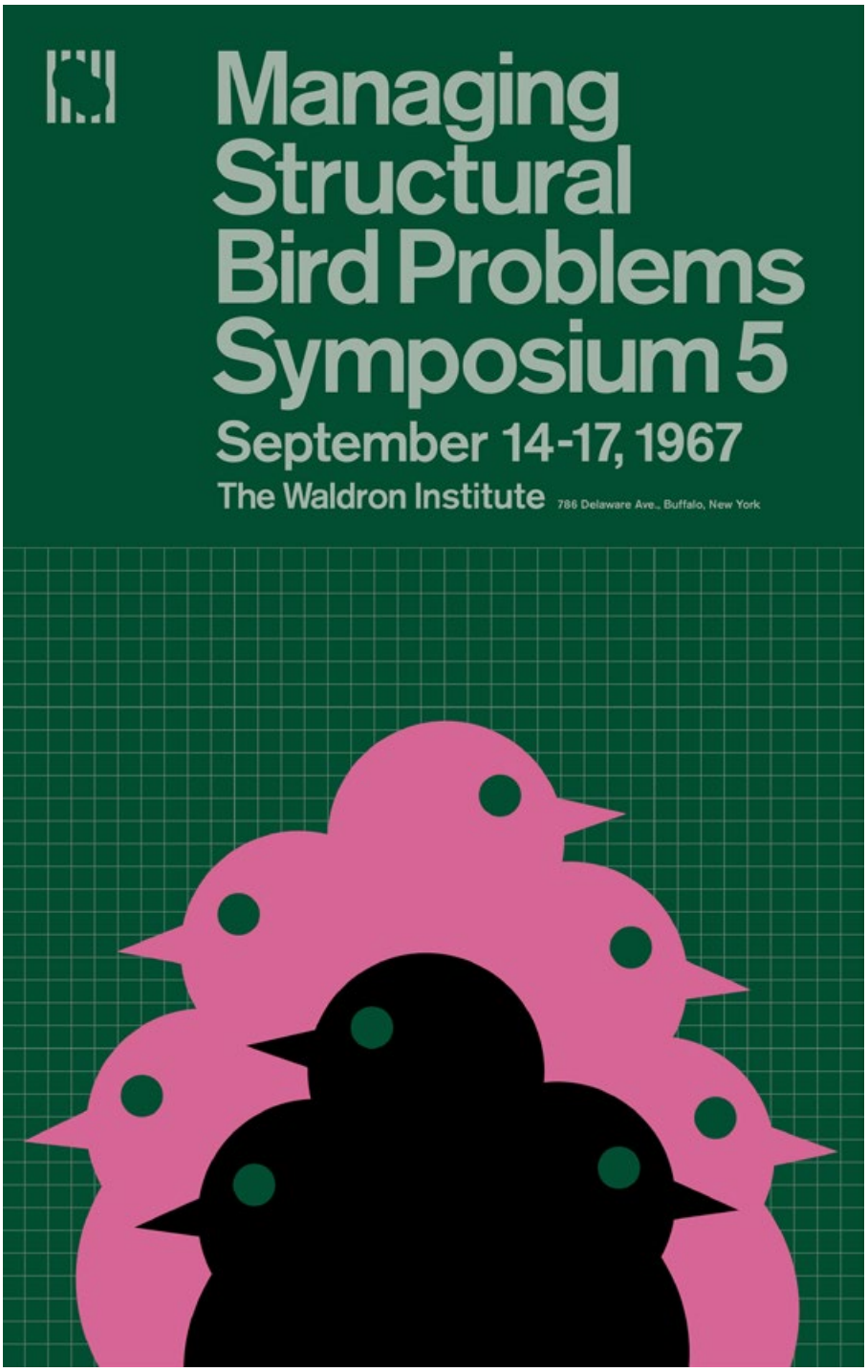
JULIAN MONTAGUE

At some point, these shopping carts were likely someone's transportation or shelter.

time. The carts are there for the taking, but they are meant to be returned and infinitely reused to facilitate commerce. People who steal or vandalize them, then, both strike a blow against consumer capitalism and signal a degraded sense of social trust. Or, as advocates of the "shopping-cart theory" claim, people who fail to return a cart to its corral reveal their bad personal morality.

The world of shopping carts is changing. Smaller families and the explosive growth of delivery services have surely altered who uses carts, and how often. Today, more than 15 percent of U.S. retail sales occur online, compared with less than 3 percent in 2006. A "shopping cart" is now often a virtual entity, an icon in the upper-right corner of a webpage, visible only to you and your sock retailer. These carts don't go astray, but online shoppers do "abandon" them without making a purchase nearly 70 percent of the time. The carts we leave behind on our browsers say something about us as individual consumers, but because they leave no physical trace, they say nothing about our life together in the world.

I have noticed a spike in stray shopping carts in Dallas, especially along the bike trail I use several times a week. Conditions for cart-spotting are ideal: many big-box stores and apartment complexes sit adjacent to the trail, as does a shallow creek. Carts often appear beneath overpasses, where I occasionally see small encampments, though rarely any inhabitants. Almost invariably, the carts become B/18 specimens, used as "refuse receptacles." But at some point, they were likely someone's transportation or shelter. People who appropriate shopping carts may be grabbing onto one of the few public goods they can find.



A poster advertising a fictitious event sponsored by the Waldron Institute, 2014

In an essay collected in *The White Album*, Joan Didion claims that she listens to call-in shows to understand what is really happening in the country. Today, the news tells us there is a housing crisis, that homelessness is a growing problem, that the social safety net has too wide a mesh. We don't need stray shopping carts to tell us these things. But if we train our eyes to see them, the carts can tell us something more specific and poignant: Here are the gaps, the edges, the hollows in society. Here are the places where public life gives out.

JONATHAN MALESIC *is the author of* The End of Burnout. *He teaches writing at Southern Methodist University.*

JULIAN MONTAGUE

GRIFFIN OLEYNICK

Redemption Songs

'Dead Man Walking' at the Metropolitan Opera

It's been thirty years since the publication of *Dead Man Walking*, Sr. Helen Prejean's bestselling memoir about her ministry to two Louisiana men on Angola's death row in the 1980s. The crimes of Elmo Patrick Sonnier and Robert Lee Willie—abduction, rape, and murder—were indeed awful. Even so, Prejean argued, the state had no right to kill them. In simple prose shorn of pieties, she textured her own wrenching encounters with the killers and the parents of their victims with lucid writing on history, sociology, constitutional law, philosophy, and theology, building a persuasive case for the abolition of capital punishment in the United States. Prejean's book instantly made her a public figure; her advocacy paid off, inspiring a generation of American Catholics to embrace nonviolence and influencing Pope Francis's 2018 modification of the Catechism that declared the death penalty "inadmissible" in all cases. (Her work remains urgent; though down from its peak of 80 percent in the mid-nineties, public support for the death penalty in this country remains at a disconcertingly high 55 percent.)

The story of *Dead Man Walking* also resonated with wider audiences. In 1995, it was adapted into an award-winning film by Tim Robbins, starring Susan Sarandon as Sr. Helen and Sean Penn as the convicted murderer Matthew Poncelet, a composite character based on Sonnier and Willie. (Robbins's screenplay wisely shifted the method of execution from the electric chair to lethal injection, inviting audiences to consider whether such a killing, which imitates a medical procedure, could ever be considered "humane.") Then in 2000, *Dead Man Walking* became an opera, the result of a collaboration between veteran playwright Terrence McNally and first-time composer Jake Heggie. Since its premiere at the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco, *Dead Man Walking* has received close to eighty productions and hundreds of performances around the world. (It even caught the attention of *Commonweal*, whose critic reviewed it favorably in 2002.) Now, more than two decades later, *Dead Man Walking* has at last arrived at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, where it opened the 2023–24 season in late September. The powerful new production, directed by Ivo van Hove and conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin, enjoyed a month-long run at the Met, culminating in a Live-in-HD broadcast screened in cinemas around the world on October 21 (now available for streaming on the Met website).

Opera can be synonymous with excess, but McNally's libretto (which borrows much of its structure from Robbins's screenplay) is economical, moving briskly from Sr. Helen's work at Hope House in the New Orleans projects to Angola's death row, then on to the Pardon Board, and finally to the execution chamber. We've barely been introduced to Sr. Helen (voiced by mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, who sports a shock of short blonde hair and a modest gray habit) before she makes the "long, hot drive" to the visiting room at Angola after receiving a letter from Prisoner 95281, Joseph DeRocher (bass-baritone Ryan McKinny). Despite Joe's charisma ("It was good of you to come, Sister," he croons while lighting a cigarette) and his protestations of innocence ("My brother killed those two kids"), we know from a graphic film projected during the overture that he's guilty. Muscled and tattooed, often defiant and full of rage, Joe nevertheless admits that he's scared: "I'm frightened of what they're gonna do to me…that the humaneness of lethal injection is gonna hurt like fuckin' hell." His fear provides an opening and a point of connection for Sr. Helen, who shares his sense of abandonment: "Who will walk with me?… My journey is terrible, too," she laments. Outwardly, as Joe's spiritual adviser, she challenges him to admit his guilt, claiming that "the truth will set you free"; inwardly, she struggles to find the forgiveness she preaches and that her faith demands.

These are complex emotions, and van Hove's exceedingly spare staging gives Helen and Joe the literal space to work through them together. Van Hove is known for minimalism, but in *Dead Man Walking* he pushes the austerity even further, dispensing with almost all traces

Ryan McKinny and Joyce DiDonato in *Dead Man Walking*

KAREN ALMOND/MET OPERA

of realism, including bars and cuffs. The set, designed by Jan Versweyveld, is little more than an empty cube, its flat gray surfaces punctuated by a few narrow windows and sliding doors. (There's also a retractable hoop, which appears during a prison basketball game that quickly devolves into a brawl.) Though visually as unappealing as it gets, the set compellingly recreates the chilling emptiness—and the attendant psychological disorientation—of death row: "It's surreal, all of it," Prejean wrote. "My mind keeps casting for something to reassure itself…that this is all a bad dream."

Paradoxically, this barrenness enables DiDonato and McKinny to access a deeper, fuller level of intimacy on stage. In reality, Prejean had only ever visited Sonnier and Willie through bars and screens, while the men's hands remained shackled to their waists. But here Joe and Sr. Helen orbit each other in a kind of dance, sometimes drifting closer, sometimes pushing further apart, occasionally sitting next to each other on the floor. (A comic interlude in Act II shows the pair standing up and gyrating to the music of Elvis Presley.) Physical touch—impossible under the regulations of the actual Angola—here becomes integral to *Dead Man Walking*'s dramaturgy, and forms the core of its theology of mercy: "God's love and forgiveness are of precious little consolation / if we do not feel it for our fellow man…. Forgiveness is in the smallest gesture…the touch of a hand, a look, or a smile," explains Sr. Rose (soprano Latonia Moore), a member of Sr. Helen's religious community, who acts as both her foil and confidante.

These gestures often pack an uncanny emotional charge, as if DiDonato and McKinny aren't acting, but actually living a real experience of communion. Both have stated that working on previous productions of *Dead Man Walking* changed their lives: DiDonato volunteers in prison music programs (she helped stage a performance of the opera at New York's Sing Sing Correctional Facility, where inmates sang in the chorus), while in recent years McKinny befriended a death-row inmate, Terrence Andrus, first by writing letters and then visiting him regularly in a Texas prison. Following the Supreme Court's decline to hear his appeal, Andrus took his own life earlier this year. In a recent social-media post, McKinny explained that he asked the Met's costume department to design

a tattoo in the shape of a black rose, which he wears on the back of his hand during performances in memory of a poem Andrus had written.

Details like this would usually be imperceptible to operagoers, except that *Dead Man Walking* makes ample and effective use of live video (another distinctive van Hove device). Clad in all black, filmmakers regularly appear with the singers on stage; like a high-tech pair of opera glasses, their cameras feed detailed close-ups to a boxy screen that hovers above the set. In part, this evokes the voyeuristic exoticism and brutality of prison documentaries; but it also recalls the video art of figures like Bill Viola, in which the camera becomes an eye capable of penetrating the depths of the human psyche.

One particularly compelling example occurs at the opening of Act II. A split-screen video juxtaposes Sr. Helen's twitchy facial expressions as she sleeps fitfully on the left with the tension and pain in Joe's arms and eyes as he powers through a set of pushups on the right. It's a distressing dual image of confinement and separation, heightened by the relative proximity of the two actors on stage. Far more disturbing, though, is when Joe is at last strapped to the cruciform gurney. The scene unfolds in complete silence; Sr. Helen kneels as the camera zeroes in on the needle just before it is inserted by a "medical" team into Joe's arm. As in actual executions, the whole scene is chillingly choreographed. It's as if this killing—filmed right in front of us, with Joe's pained face projected above—is really taking place.

In some sense, *Dead Man Walking*, which ends with Joe's death at the hands of the state, follows the classic structure of operatic tragedy. Both protagonists are powerless to change Joe's fate, as indifferent official forces—there's the Church, represented by Fr. Grenville, who leads a hauntingly impersonal Our Father, and the State, depicted in the jovial figure of Warden Benton, whose officers chant pro-death-penalty platitudes like "an eye for an eye…the Bible demands it"—conspire to separate them. Nothing, not even the dignified pleading of Joe's mother (mezzo-soprano Susan Graham) can stop the inexorable march of the "death machine," which demands constant sacrifice. Musically, Heggie captures this in a devastating sextet sung by the families of Joe's victims: "You don't know what it's like," runs their reproach to Sr. Helen, whose stream of apologies is cut short by the parents' mechanical repetition of the last words they spoke to their children ("shut the door… fix your hair…clean your room"). In another classic operatic device, delivered at the end of Act I, Helen faints, unable to seize on any harmony amid a swirling storm of sound.

But *Dead Man Walking* is also, as DiDonato suggested at a recent talk at Fordham's Center on Religion and Culture, a "love story, one of the greatest in all of opera." It's actually multiple love stories: there's the unlikely friendship between Sr. Helen and Joe, of course, but also the love of Joe's mother for her son, and Sr. Helen's love for "my God…my Jesus." There is also God's love for Joe, experienced not just in the person of Sr. Helen, but in Joe's capacity to forgive himself and to ask forgiveness from the parents of his victims. Heggie's genius is to have composed a single, simple prayer, based on traditional American spirituals, in which all of these loves interact: "He will gather us around / all around / by and by / you and I / all around Him."

The hymn, which is also Sr. Helen's leitmotif, opens and closes *Dead Man Walking* and serves as a musical throughline. Depending on the scene, it's a teaching tool, defense mechanism, theological abstraction, or desperate petitionary prayer invoked by Sr. Helen whenever she feels uneasy. Only after Joe's execution does the song, voiced a cappella and through tears, truly become a form of *testimony*, both a firm declaration of hope ("He *will* gather us around") and evidence of an irreversible inner transformation ("you *and* I"). That transformation is rooted, above all else, in a comfort with paradox: Sr. Helen knows that yes, Joe really did commit those horrible crimes, and yes, those kids really aren't coming back. Not even Joe's death can erase their parents' grief. But also, and in some sense even more true, is the fact that Joe is a "son of God," worthy through the sheer fact of his existence of love, mercy, and redemption. The mystery does not need to be understood to be accepted and revered. The murderer, too, will be among those gathered "all around Him" in the end.

At the same Fordham talk, DiDonato said that she used to find the final aria nearly impossible to sing after the execution scene. Hearing her deliver it is the sonic equivalent of watching a person pick up a bus with her bare hands, lifting the emotional weight of the cast, orchestra, and thousands of spectators with the unamplified reverberations of her body. She channels a communal feeling with a force beyond words.

As DiDonato sang Sr. Helen's final aria on opening night, I doubted whether the star-studded, champagne-sipping gala audience had gotten it. Did Sr. Helen's unabashed love for God—and her practice of chastity, poverty, and obedience—really resonate? But as the curtain fell and the subsequent standing ovation wore on, I noticed crumpled tissues all over the floor. The crowd applauded even more wildly as Prejean herself, dressed in a simple black suit with a red and white scarf, walked out onto the stage. I had the sense that what was being celebrated wasn't necessarily her, or her book, or even the opera itself. It was the courage she'd had in leaving the relative comfort and safety of the convent to travel to those "spaces of suffering only God can know." For an evening, Heggie, DiDonato, and McKinny had taken us there, making us feel like we'd been changed, too.

GRIFFIN OLEYNICK *is an associate editor at* Commonweal.

LISTEN Hear an interview with Sr. Helen Prejean and bass-baritone Ryan McKinny on Episode 115 of the *Commonweal Podcast*. **commonwealmagazine.org/podcast**

Two Poems by David Lehman

CHAMPION

The crowd loves
the defeated champion.
Before the champion
lost, he never
had their love.
It took defeat
to bring them
to their feet
and cheer for
the fallen champion.

OH, SURE

Is there an old man out there who wonders
whether he has wasted his life? Oh, sure,
it's easy enough to persuade him
he hasn't lived in vain; he has dependents;
he has baggage; he has a legacy, whether fictive
or financial; he still believes the gods of chance
and the muse of poetry are the same Aphrodite
who tempted King David, lover of love and wine
and song, the shepherd boy who wrote the psalms.

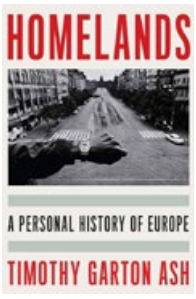
DAVID LEHMAN *is the editor of the* Oxford Book of American Poetry, *the general editor of the* Best American Poetry *anthology series, and the author of such recent books as* One Hundred Autobiographies: A Memoir *and* Playlist: A Poem. *He writes a monthly column on movies for the* American Scholar.

Timothy Garton Ash delivers the President's Lecture at Central European University, 2017.

'Now Comes the Reckoning'

WILLIAM COLLINS DONAHUE

It is a window and a mirror. Through it, we observe the growth of the European Union from its humble beginnings in 1952 as the six-member European Coal and Steel Community to the sprawling twenty-seven-member EU with its own currency and virtually without internal borders. Despite significant setbacks and challenges—autocratic Hungary, marginally democratic Poland, and Brexit—the EU is nevertheless an astounding, if fragile, success story. Both in terms of population and GDP, and despite the loss of Britain, it rivals the size and scope of the economies of both the United States and China. That is the panorama provided by Timothy Garton Ash's beautiful new book, *Homelands: A Personal History of Europe*. But when the light changes just a bit, the book becomes a mirror, reflecting an increasingly unflattering image of the United States.



HOMELANDS
A Personal History of Europe
TIMOTHY GARTON ASH
Yale University Press
$28 | 384 pp.

Garton Ash is fully aware of the key role played by the United States in promoting the EU's success. He tells that story particularly well with respect to German unification in 1989–90, where he is remarkably gracious both to Margaret Thatcher (who, after leaving office, became a pronounced Euroskeptic) and to Ronald Reagan. "Do we want the European Union to succeed?" he recalls George W. Bush asking as they stood together on the Truman balcony of the White House. The president insists he was kidding, but Garton Ash takes him quite seriously and earnestly affirms the importance of Europe to the United States.

But when the United States shows up in this narrative, it is more often as an antagonist—at best an erratic actor—than

DANIEL VEGEL/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

as a benefactor. While this is a bit of a distortion when one takes a longer view of the postwar period—the roughly seventy-five years since World War Two that Garton Ash treats here—it constitutes a bracing European critique that Americans should take seriously. The great divide in the post-Wall period is traceable to the disagreement over the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the war that not only drove a wedge between Europe and the United States, but one that divided Europe against itself. This led Donald Rumsfeld, famously, to dismiss "old Europe," by which he meant the European countries that refused to join the "coalition of the willing" against Iraq. Garton Ash doesn't seem to know—or doesn't register the fact—that most Americans appeared not to grasp Rumsfeld's distinction. For them—for us?—Europe itself was just "old," less relevant, which frankly was not far from the Bush administration's fundamental view.

In Germany, Europe's economic powerhouse, the break with the United States went deeper. In campaign speeches of the time, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (now infamous for cozying up to Putin and serving on the board of the Russian Gazprom) painted the divide not in terms of a policy disagreement with a cherished ally, but rather as a fundamental rejection of the "American way of life" that leaves so many destitute, marginalized, and without health care. This is not a view that one hears at state dinners or in official pronouncements, but it is a deep and indelible vein that exists cheek by jowl with Europeans' equally authentic fascination with American culture and politics.

The real divide, one that appears intermittently throughout this study, is traceable to Donald Trump. For some reason not fully articulated (perhaps Garton Ash thought that would necessitate another book), it shows up in the oddest of places. In explaining the five wars of Yugoslav succession during the 1990s, which he does with great economy and virtuosity, Garton Ash writes, "West Europeans and North Americans would often say 'it couldn't happen here.' But after the storming of the Capitol in Washington on 6 January 2021 by Americans who were convinced that Donald Trump had won the presidential election, are we so absolutely sure?" Later, in the context of Brexit (also an admirably sovereign, even-handed account), Garton Ash summarizes the danger to democracy in this way: "But the threat was less severe than in Hungary, Poland or the United States. There was no British equivalent of the 6 January 2021 mob invasion of the Capitol in Washington." What great company to be part of—grouped with the two least democratic countries in the EU, one actually fully autocratic. American readers should understand this as serious analysis, not polemic or hyperbole.

Though he follows European politics up to the present, with special attention to the last several years of war in Ukraine, there is no mention of Joe Biden's repair work with NATO and the EU during the same period. This, I surmise, is due to a broader European anxiety about America's future. Trump sowed lasting distrust, which may account for Garton Ash's final, melancholic musings: "Europeans must hope that the United States recovers as it did after Watergate and Vietnam, but we will not be able to rely on it as much as we could, for the most part, in the post-war and post-Wall periods." We should take a moment to drink this in, to digest the enduring wariness about the U.S. commitment to Europe and to democracy.

But we needn't fully agree with the analysis, because one cannot, for the foreseeable future at least, imagine a Europe without the United States. Garton Ash rightly observes that "most European countries took a handsome 'peace dividend' after the end of the Cold War, cut their defence spending to below NATO's target of two per cent of GDP, [and] ran down their supplies of weapons." But to the chagrin of many progressives, the United States never did, and ended up "carrying" European allies—in many cases indirectly subsidizing their relatively generous welfare states. Despite French efforts to found a credible European military force and Germany's recent commitment to dramatically increased defense spending, the EU still has nothing that could rival or replace NATO. The way in which NATO undergirds the EU, and has done so since its inception, receives no serious attention here. If we find, when we look back on that long postwar journey, just a single set of "footprints in the sand," it is surely because NATO, and the United States as its lead member, was carrying the EU.

But there is much more. Garton Ash rightly, and I think brilliantly, decrees the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 to constitute the true "end" of both the post-war and the post-Wall periods. That which was deeply feared in 1989–91 but surprisingly did not occur—a violent attempt to keep the Soviet/Russian empire from crumbling—finally came to pass with the invasion of Ukraine. Quoting Wolf Biermann, he writes "Now, thirty years later, comes the reckoning." It is quite true that this brought about the German "Zeitenwende," the watershed moment in which the EU's strongest member finally embraced—or at least began to accept—its peacekeeping role in Europe. It also occasioned impressive European concerted action, giving concrete expression to its aspirational motto *in varietate concordia*. And none of this would have been possible, of course, without Ukrainians' remarkable bravery and determination. But left unmentioned is that no country's support of Ukraine comes anywhere near that of the United States. This support has ensured that the post-war and post-Wall periods end not with doom and uncontested Russian domination, but with hope for a Europe that may yet fully include Ukraine in its key bodies. For all its faults, the United States remains the *sine qua non* of European unity and the bedrock upon which the grand EU edifice stands. And that is why Europeans look with such anxiety to the 2024 U.S. elections.

He is the Forrest Gump of Europe, except smart.

Now, it might fairly be objected, this is a book about Europe; must we make it, once again, all about the United States? Garton Ash's principal readership is, after all, European. Fair enough. But the Yale University Press edition—published simultaneously with the one from British Penguin Random House—marks it as a book meant also for American and other readers worldwide. And Garton Ash is well aware of Europeans' indissoluble connection to America. "National politics," he astutely observes, "is theatre, and nowhere more so than in Washington. Europeans follow the soap opera of American politics more closely than they do our supposedly all-European politics in Brussels, let alone the national politics of other European countries. In fact, America remains one of the few things that all Europeans have in common." What he doesn't say, however, is how lastingly unsettling this "soap opera" is. In fact, this lighthearted formulation effectively trivializes what is in fact an existential fear: that Trump—who is facing unprecedented federal charges for defrauding U.S. citizens of their right to vote, yet riding high in opinion polls—may in fact return to tear down the house of Europe that has been cobbled together with such effort and determination in the years since the Second World War.

No one is better positioned to give this fascinating account of Europe than Garton Ash, who appears to have been almost everywhere and in contact with virtually every one of the book's protagonists. As a young man he sat in on the trial of the Red Army Faction terrorists in Germany; he was friend and confidant to Lech Wałęsa (acting at times illegally as a courier for Solidarity); he advised Thatcher, Reagan, George W. Bush; interviewed Gorbachev and Honecker; met secretly (and at some personal peril) with Václav Havel; dined with Pope John Paul II; got to know Helmut Schmidt, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and even Vladimir Kryuchkov; chatted with Tony Blair about Brexit; attended the exclusive Davos conclave, and knew Viktor Orbán "when he was a fiery twenty-five-year-old student leader" of an anti-Communist group. Fluent in French, German, and Polish, Garton Ash has, in addition, a "newspaper reading knowledge" of Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Czech, and Slovak. In chapter after chapter he turns up not only as a shrewd observer but quite often as a participant. He is the Forrest Gump of Europe, except smart. He combines advocacy, activism, and intervention with intellectual rigor, reflecting thoughtfully on the occasional tensions between these two roles. And he is a gifted stylist. Only the late Peter Gay comes close in concision and memorable formulations, many of which are ripe for quotation. This is a book that will live on, in line with the intentions of the wistful, elegiac tone of the final chapter, "Delphi." This prophetic chapter, in which reminiscence blends seamlessly into musings on the future, reads in part as if written from the grave.

It may be that his own star-studded biography predisposes him to believe in the great role of individuals in history, which is one of the themes of this book. His principal witnesses, perhaps predictably, are Gorbachev, Wałęsa, Havel, and Zelensky. But there are also less obvious candidates, like Günter Schabowski, the "bungling Politburo member" who on November 9, 1989, prematurely announced the opening of the German border and thus inaugurated the fall of the Wall.

Homelands is a synthetic, personal retrospective, not a work of original research driven by a single overarching thesis. Yet it is far more than a compendium of illustrative vignettes and well-told stories. In a series of compact, short chapters, and with a focus on the post-Wall period (that roughly corresponds with the author's adult life), it provides essential analytical overviews of all the salient events of European unity and division. If, for example, you seek a concise, reliable, and convincing account of NATO expansion—the issue currently being used by both the Far Right and Far Left to oppose the defense of Ukraine—look no further.

Garton Ash looks back on a lifetime of experiences, generously confessing errors of judgment but also reprising things he thinks he got right that now deserve reiteration. "Fool, me," he admits, for supporting a referendum on Brexit. In hindsight, he assesses his response to the *Charlie Hebdo* murders—he had advocated in editorials across the world for a republication of the offensive caricatures—as having "failed comprehensively."

He really blew it, he says, when he called the writer Ayaan Hirsi Ali a "slightly simplistic Enlightenment fundamentalist." This was his "first serious wrestling with the complex issues around the growing number of Muslims in Europe," and he deems it "the worst mistake of my life as a political writer…[the] one sentence I wish I had never written." Why, then, repeat it? It is not so much about retraction, it turns out, as justification. In explaining his grievous "error," Garton Ash actually reaffirms his fundamental point, namely, that a "frontal, atheist critique of Islam…[is] not the best way to win over European Muslims to accepting the values of a free European society, including free speech." He is as right today as he was then. Ditto his warning in a prominent *Foreign Affairs* article about the premature introduction of the euro as the single currency. If the language of self-deprecation is sometimes an elaborate "humble brag," one has to admit that *Homelands*, and the life of learning and advocacy that so richly informs it, is indeed something to brag about.

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Fr. Timothy Kesicki, SJ, speaks at a 2017 liturgy held to acknowledge and seek reconciliation for the 272.

OSV NEWS PHOTO/JACLYN LIPPELMANN, CATHOLIC STANDARD

Sold by the Jesuits

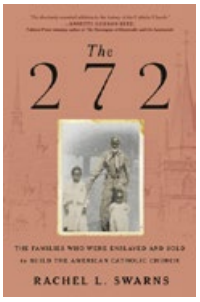
BY MARCIA CHATELAIN

In the early spring of 1860, E. M. Dudley of Livingston County, Kentucky, ran an ad in the local newspaper offering a "Two Hundred Dollars Reward" for the safe return of his "boy Manuel." The alert wasn't an appeal for the return of Dudley's child. Rather, he was hoping that someone would return the thirty-five-year-old man that Dudley enslaved.

When I teach students about the institution of slavery, I often linger on such notices that ask for assistance in the return of "our girl," an "uncle," or an "auntie" back to the slaveholding household where they toiled until the end of their lives, or until a financial opportunity sent them to another family system built upon the peculiar institution. Here, the language of kinship is an insidious way to soften the cruelest of relationships. But enslavers refused to use familial terms when it would have been accurate: to describe their children born out of sexual assault.

In *The 272: The Families Who Were Enslaved and Sold to Build the American Catholic Church*, journalist Rachel L. Swarns presents readers with stories of families—how they are constituted, destroyed, and reassembled. The title of the book refers to the 272 women, children, and men sold by Georgetown University's leadership in 1838. Swarns has chronicled the story of this sale in the pages of the *New York Times* and scholars have written extensively about it. It has drawn so much attention because of the poignancy of the history as well as the presence of the descendants of the 272 in the most recent public conversations about slavery, reparations, and the need for racial reckonings in the United States. Studying the era from the early days of the Jesuits in the United States to the Civil War, Swarns makes clear that the 1838 sale was just one of many moments in which the exploitation of enslaved people shaped and secured the future of the university and the Jesuit order. At the heart of the book are two families. Swarns introduces us to the people enslaved on the Jesuit-owned plantations in Southern Maryland; they gave birth to the Mahoney and the Queen lineages. Today, their descendants advocate on behalf of their ancestors and themselves. The other family we encounter is one forged by faith: the priests of the Jesuit order. This brotherhood of believers was tasked with establishing a Catholic presence in a newly formed nation and creating Catholic institutions of learning, and we briefly meet some of the Jesuits seeking to better understand their order's role in the ownership of, and trade in, human beings.

The book begins with the arrival of the Jesuits in Maryland in 1634, nearly a century after the founding of the Jesuits in 1540. "Nobody knew whether Catholicism would thrive or wither in the fledgling colony in those early years, but the first reports weren't promising," Swarns writes. Some priests returned to England before a full year had passed; yellow fever and other diseases swept through the community, and Protestant adversaries expelled Catholics from Maryland. Soon, the remaining proselytizing Jesuits would encounter Ann Joice, whose descendants the Jesuits enslaved. Joice arrived in Maryland as an indentured servant for Charles Calvert, the Catholic heir to the Maryland colony. Her captivity was not as strictly defined as the legal and social conditions that would shape the 272 enslaved people who came after her. Swarns explains how indentured servitude allowed for some malleability in the relationships among enslaved peoples and those who held them in service: "In the early decades following the Jesuits' arrival, Maryland had become a place where they could wrest some autonomy from employers and enslavers and savor a measure of independence and freedom." But that reality would eventually change, and



THE 272

The Families Who Were Enslaved and Sold to Build the American Catholic Church

RACHEL L. SWARNS
Random House
$28 | 352 pp.

Joice would feel it intimately. Despite her status as an indentured person, and Calvert's promise that she would be free after her service had been completed, Joice would encounter a society that had "dramatically curtailed the rights of Black people." The acceptance of Christ as one's savior no longer made a difference for one's prospects for freedom. With the arrival of more settlers and the cultivation of agricultural resources, enslaved people were increasingly vital to the emerging region, and flexible contracts were no longer honored. Joice's indenture papers were set on fire, and the ash was all that remained of "the only tangible evidence of her free status." Eventually, the theft of Joice's freedom moved from fact to subject of litigation to a family story faintly remembered.

Meanwhile, the Jesuits were able to survive attacks on their southern Maryland plantations during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 because of the enslaved people who served and protected them. In these moments of disorder and unrest, enslaved people hoped that their loyalty would garner protection, or that their flights from bondage would be successful. They were not so fortunate. Despite the advocacy of priests and laypeople who found slavery abhorrent, there was little redress for their captivity.

While the enslaved people who labored for the Jesuits at St. Inigoes and White Marsh plantations in Maryland adapted to the routines of life defined by their labor value, they were also on their own journeys to define themselves. Swarns pays attention to their deepening commitment to Catholicism and their building of community among family and friends. Meanwhile, the Jesuits in Georgetown were committing themselves to what the university founder John Carroll called "[t]he object nearest my heart…a college on this continent for the education of youth, which might at the same time be a Seminary for future Clergymen."

As her account moves from the Jesuit plantations of southern Maryland to the nation's capital, and as the Jesuits try to grow Georgetown and fulfill the mission of the university, Swarns reveals how the calcification of slavery enabled the strengthening of Jesuit higher education. The Jesuits had long debated the morality of slavery, engaged in sales of enslaved people, and ignored the Vatican's admonishment of American Catholic slaveholding by the time of the financial crisis of the late 1830s. Maintaining the college, discounting tuition to attract students, and supporting its Jesuit staff presented an endless set of stresses for the college's overseers. Jesuit and college leaders Thomas F. Mulledy and William McSherry, respectively, reasoned that among the most valuable assets that could enrich Georgetown were the people who toiled in the tobacco fields and cared for the Jesuits in rural areas. In arranging the sale of the 272, they betrayed their promises to not separate the families that had served the order for more than a century. In facilitating the sale of the enslaved people to plantations in Louisiana, they could not ensure families would be kept intact or that they would have what they needed to practice their Catholic faith.

Swarns attempts to illustrate the sheer fear and unyielding anxiety felt by the 272 as they were corralled on ships heading south. We learn a bit about how they re-established themselves on new plantations in Louisiana, battered and fractured but steadfast in their loyalty to their families—and for many, still faithful to the religion of their enslavers. Swarns tell us of Louisa, who consciously continued to choose Catholicism: "Louisa never forgot that Jesuit priests had sold her and her family. But her faith did not belong to those hard men. The prayers, the hymns, the rosary beads, the rituals of the faithful also belonged to her and to the throngs of Black Catholics who had settled in New Orleans."

From today's vantage point, a book that engages the ways that the Catholic Church capitalized on slavery can appear like an account that is simply spilling family secrets. Swarns helps us see that while slavery was a matter of business, politics, and religion in the antebellum nation, it was never outside of or unrelated to civil and spiritual matters.

The epilogue brings us to the recent past and to events that I witnessed as a faculty member at Georgetown, where I taught African American history for more than a decade. During that time, I was part of the first iteration of the University's Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation. Swarns introduces us to people like Jeremy Alexander, a Georgetown University employee and descendant of one of the 272, as he gains a greater understanding of the branches and roots of his family tree. She also captures a moment that I will never forget: the day in 2017 when Fr. Timothy Kesicki, president of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, traveled to Georgetown to offer a formal apology for the Jesuits' involvement in the system of slavery. After he delivered his apology in Georgetown's Gaston Hall, I scanned the room for reactions. His words were met with a range of emotions: skepticism, bewilderment, tears, and exhaustion.

The responses to Kesicki's apology, as well as the various initiatives that address racial injustice and attend to the needs of communities populated by descendants in Louisiana, are as diverse and broad as any family. Like any family, the individuals who have found themselves through Georgetown's public engagement with its history of slavery have to contend with family lore and discoveries about those long dead, and many of them have embraced spending more time with the living. Each has their own view of justice for their ancestors, and while there can be no representative story of the complexities of slavery, there can still be the unending and pervasive desire to move and act, to seek reconciliation, and perhaps finally to heal.

MARCIA CHATELAIN *is the Presidential Penn Compact Professor of Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and the author of the Pulitzer Prize–winning book,* Franchise: The Golden Arches in Black America. *A graduate of Catholic primary and secondary schools, she makes her home in Washington D.C.*

The Brand Called You

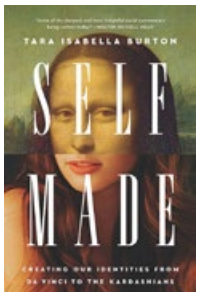
BRAD EAST

I am what I want, and I have the power within myself to make myself what I want to be, if only I find the will to activate this inner potential—or rather, to manifest this authentic identity. Such is the thesis under review in Tara Isabella Burton's new book, *Self-Made: Creating Our Identities from Da Vinci to the Kardashians*. The thesis is not a new one. It has a long history, which, in Burton's telling, begins around the fifteenth century. Though she finds its philosophical culmination in the eighteenth, with the Enlightenment, most of her story covers the past two hundred years: from bon ton and Beau Brummell to "the two most prominent self-creators of the past twenty years," Kim Kardashian and Donald Trump. Across Western Europe and the Anglophone world, self-creation as both a transcendent possibility and a moral imperative trickles down to ordinary people's lives and self-understanding, mutating in tandem with religious, economic, and technological changes. Since creation is traditionally the prerogative of deity, Burton's story is ultimately about "how we became gods."

Burton is a reliable chronicler. This book continues a theme explored in her 2020 work, *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World*. There she argued that rumors of religion's death in the West have been greatly exaggerated. The God of Abraham may be on life support, so to speak, but other gods are alive and well. We haven't refuted religion so much as "remixed" it. Postmodern spirituality is a potent cocktail of magic, money, and memes; a hybrid made possible by the internet, the dynamic power of capitalism, and the loss of authority once vested in religious institutions and their ordained leaders. America, at least, is not a land of atheists or even agnostics. It's full of witches, cosplayers, crystals, fangirls, Proud Boys, and Goop. Is SoulCycle a religion? What about wellness culture? The borders of religion turn out to be porous. Accordingly, Burton suggests we're misreading the signs of the times. We don't live in a secular age. The gods haven't vanished; they've migrated. Our age is as religious as any other. You just have to know where to look.

Strange Rites is a vital work of social criticism. Alongside Ross Douthat's *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics*, I regularly assign or recommend it to students and pastors wanting to understand the landscape of American religion today. (Teaching the book to a class of undergrads on a small Christian campus in west Texas, I once made the mistake of rolling my eyes at all the hexes and spells. In her final paper for the course, a student unapologetically informed me that she was a witch herself. Lesson learned.)

Self-Made presupposes the "remixed religion" of *Strange Rites*. Having "turned our backs on the idea of a creator-God, *out there*," Burton writes in the introduction, we have instead placed God *within us*—more specifically, within the numinous force of our own desires. Our obsession with self-creation is also an obsession with the idea that we have the power that we once believed God did: to remake ourselves and our realities, not in the image of God but in that of our own desires.



SELF-MADE

Creating Our Identities from Da Vinci to the Kardashians

TARA ISABELLA BURTON
PublicAffairs
$30 | 288 pp.

The rest of the book lays out how this happened: how desire displaced divinity, how authenticity became the ideal, and how artifice, in the service of profit, unites them all.

A single question frames Charles Taylor's magnum opus, *A Secular Age*. How did the nonexistence of God become thinkable—and atheism one permissible option among others—in the half-millennium spanning 1500 to

Tara Isabella Burton

ROSE CALLAHAN

2000? For Burton, the time frame is the same, but the question is different.

In the premodern West, the divine order was integrated with the social and political order: I am not my own, nor did I make myself; I am part of a larger whole, and both my identity and my purpose may be found in the role that God has bestowed on me through the various authorities that constitute my world. I am a firstborn son, baptized Christian, subject of the throne, peasant farmer, husband, father, and so on. My agency may be more or less operative in each of these interlocking roles, but they are all *given*. I can no more unbaptize myself than I can crown myself king. I may dream of travel or adventure, of joining a Crusade to the Holy Land, of marrying my true love, or perhaps of priestly missions to evangelize faraway lands. I'm human, after all. But I do not conceive of myself as an autonomous individual capable of fashioning myself into whatever I wish to be—much less possessing the right or duty to do so.

What, Burton asks, transformed that world into the present one? More than half of young people today aspire to be online "influencers," curating and monetizing a public persona. Call it the three A's: authenticity via autonomous artifice. The you that you manufacture online is the real you, so long as it's you who's doing it. And if what you want in return is money, who's to judge? It's your own desires that justify your actions in the first place. Yet a private identity is no identity at all; and if there must be witnesses, why not have them pay for the privilege? Self-creation is thus self-expression plus an audience. "We are CEOs of our own companies, Me Inc.," as one breathless prediction put it in 1997. One's "most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You." As usual, tech propaganda makes a boast of the nakedly dystopian.

In any case, Burton thinks it rash to blame Silicon Valley for this predicament. She's not eager to blame anyone, actually. She wants to understand it. So she outlines a genealogy, starting with "divine bastards." The term, which comes from the Renaissance, describes men whose genius requires explanation. What to make of people like Leonardo da Vinci? Answer: they are exceptions to the rule by dint of a certain special quality they were either born with or fashioned for themselves. The either/or is intentionally ambiguous: Is a genius just "born that way"? Is he specially chosen by God? Does he contain a potential he should be celebrated for actualizing? Or is he, in fact, "the author of his selfhood"—in a word, his own creator?

It is this fruitful ambiguity that Burton traces down through the centuries. On the one hand, we cannot help but ascribe to a Frederick Douglass or an Albert Einstein or an Aretha Franklin a *givenness*, and thus a gift, for which they cannot themselves be responsible. On the other, we praise them for identifying, developing, and deploying their unique gifts. "Rags to riches" and "the self-made man" are myths in the strictest terms. They define and govern our common social imaginary. We don't so much believe in them as take them for granted, like gravity.

This ambiguity never quite resolves itself. To be sure, it changes subtly over the centuries. Custom is a useful index—religious custom, certainly, but in particular, politics, clothing, and sex. The Enlightenment calls all of it into question, disenchanting custom without explicitly dethroning religion. The result is a whole cultural bundle: freedom from custom, ambivalence about church, sexual experimentation—these are often just different aspects of the same phenomenon. Think dandies like Brummell, queer icons like Oscar Wilde, or artists like Andy Warhol. Think also of Douglass, an ex-slave turned abolitionist and writer, and Benjamin Disraeli, a middle-class Jew eventually elected prime minister of the United Kingdom. These men didn't merely rise from obscurity; they invented themselves in the public eye. And they sold audiences, directly or indirectly, on the dream that they, too, could practice self-invention, either through sheer tenacity or through that ephemeral quality *it*.

The problem, Burton argues, is that *it* is a scarce resource. By definition, not everyone can be in vogue; not everyone can be invited to every party. Most self-creators relish the resulting inequality. Popularity means nothing if no one's unpopular. It's aristocracy by other means, in Burton's view; an "aristocracy of genius" or of "style," one defined not by birth or rank but by talent or merit or beauty or bon ton or *sprezzatura*. The self-creation club is exclusive; the question for any age, including ours, is not whether the club exists but what gets you in.

Burton has her doubts. Throughout her story she describes a "shadow side" to self-creation. First, it continually repristinates a social hierarchy. The problem is acute when the scarcity this hierarchy is built on is not just fame or selective soirees but actual material resources.

Second, the myth of self-creation shifts the blame to society's losers. A medieval peasant isn't morally culpable for her station in life, which was not chosen but assigned to her. If, however, someone born on the bottom rung remains there *solely through lack of a work ethic*, then the poor are like everyone else: they get what they deserve. If only you had a little more grit, says the influencer, you would have my life.

Third, Burton finds the coincidence of artifice and authenticity morally and theoretically suspect, not least since the glue binding them together is money. It may be true that neither demography nor biology is destiny. But much of who and what we are, both socially and biologically, is decided for us in advance. I did not choose to be born. I did not select my parents or siblings, sex or race, nation or language, mental aptitude or likely talents. Though I nursed a hope for it into my teens, I was never going to play professional basketball. Similarly, my crippling motion sickness ruled out a host of careers from the get-go. I'll never go to the moon. This is no injustice: I am not and never was a blank slate. I am not and never could be my own maker. It's

childish to pretend otherwise. Doing so online, with paid sponsorships populating my live-streamed "life," is worse than childish—both ridiculous and pitiable.

If this describes the Kardashian temptation, then Burton's fourth worry is the Trumpian corollary. Self-creation can be bent in a reactionary direction. Between chapters on social Darwinism and Hollywood, Burton discusses Friedrich Nietzsche and a host of twentieth-century strongmen, beginning with Gabriele D'Annunzio and Benito Mussolini. What they peddled, in her view, "was an experiential fantasy. It was the chance to feel like you were an Übermensch, whether or not you actually were one." Such men "all understood that what people wanted, more than anything, was to feel special, to feel that they, too, had joined nature's aristocracy, that they, too, had a life that mattered in a world where nothing else seemed to."

I think Burton is right about the dangers here, but wrong about the appeal. The reactionary figure doesn't promise his followers that they can become as great as he is. The promise, rather, is that they can bask in his glory while remaining exactly as they are. He promises them *vicarious* greatness. This is why reactionary and strongman politics is invariably religious in character. It either draws on preexisting piety—throne and altar united—or offers itself as a substitute. Hence its cult-like qualities. Burton's syncretistic account of postmodern faith fits hand in glove here. Fascism, whether the real article or the more recent LARPing variety, is not just another instance of self-making. It's a flailing, sometimes violent attempt to recover divine order by imposing social order. Inasmuch as it confuses the latter with the former, exalts a mortal man in place of Christ, and worships power above all else, fascism is a profoundly religious phenomenon. It's satanic.

Burton's book, though informed by scholarship (she received a doctorate in theology from Oxford), is a work of popular criticism. It's meant to distill, synthesize, and paint in broad brushstrokes, without offering easy answers. It succeeds. It's a whirlwind tour of hundreds of years of cultural history with a single through-line: How, exactly, did our most important job become "head marketer for the brand called You"?

The book ends with a whimper, rather than a bang. Burton says at the start that she aims to avoid offering one more "tragic narrative about cultural decline and the dangers of modernity," à la "Philip Rieff [and] Carl Trueman." She doesn't want to moralize, in other words. For my part, I could do with a bit more moralizing. Granted, simple declension stories are reductive: there is no Golden Age from which we've fallen and to which we might return if only we followed a certain political program. Burton's own ethical intuitions mostly sneak in through parenthetical asides. The book would have been even better if she had made these explicit.

As it stands, we're left with what is effectively one long train of cultural errors with little more than a proviso that we should not see it as such. We're offered neither a positive assessment of our self-divinizing moment nor a path forward through its challenges. *Must* I self-optimize, self-curate, and monetize my self as an online brand? Am I *bound* to manufacture the "real" me for followers whom I court through increasingly invasive access to my once-private life? Is OnlyFans—the popular website on which ordinary individuals provide paying subscribers "custom (and usually explicit) photographs and videos of themselves"—little more than the logic of our age taken to its natural conclusion? As Burton writes:

> Today, self-creation is no longer something some of us can do to set ourselves apart from the people we see as the masses, the crowd, or *la foule*. Instead, it has become something that all of us *must* do in order to maintain our financial and social position in a culture that sees reality as up for grabs, to garner the attention central to so much of our internet-driven economic system. Our identities, who we "really" are, have become what we choose and commodify. Reality is what we have made it. We have, at last, become gods.

I wouldn't hesitate to call this tragic if it were true. But it isn't. Consider the comprehensive scope of these claims. It may feel to some of us that "everyone," for example, is on Instagram. Only about 15 percent of the world is on the platform, however. That's a lot of people. Yet the truth is that most of the world is *not* on it. The same goes for other social media. Influencer culture may be ubiquitous in the sense that most people between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five are affected by it in some way. But that's a far cry from digitally mediated self-creation being a universal mandate.

Even for those of us on these apps, moreover, it's possible to opt out. You don't have to sell yourself on the internet. You really don't. I would have liked Burton to show us why the dismal story she tells isn't deterministic—why, for example, not every young woman is fated to sell her image on OnlyFans sooner or later.

Burton might have introduced some of these moral concerns with her early discussion of the Marquis de Sade. No one but a toddler or a sociopath actually believes that the mere fact that I want something means it is good for me, much less good in general. Yet today a certain kind of compulsory postmodern sadism is on the rise. It is systematically conquering institutions with few willing to stand in its way. Burton defines this anthropology in relation to de Sade: "A human being whose own desires, rather than those of an external authority, gave him the power to make himself the closest thing to a divinity in a godless world." How? Through "acts of transgression," achieving "originality" by means of "perversity." For "the only laws the self-made man lives by [are] his inner desires."

Such loaded descriptions whet the appetite for more argument. It's clear that we need the sequel to this sequel, by way of St. Augustine and Pascal. Diversion, desire, identity, and order: an agenda for an alternative modernity. Tara Isabella Burton, call your agent.

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The Scourge of Wage Suppression

JOSEPH A. MCCARTIN

In his latest book, *Hell to Pay*, the prolific public intellectual Michael Lind offers a compelling analysis of an urgent problem: too many American workers earn too little and lack the bargaining power to demand more. Workers, Lind argues, have been living through a decades-long suppression of wages that is exacerbating "a number of seemingly unrelated social pathologies, from delayed or failed marriage and non-marriage to the decline of civic associations and the rise of identity politics and political polarization." If we hope to ameliorate any of these problems, we must find a way to increase worker bargaining power.

That this argument comes from someone who cut his teeth in the Republican Party of Ronald Reagan, who did more to weaken worker bargaining power than any other president, will not surprise those familiar with the arc of Lind's career. A native Texan who did graduate work in international relations at Yale University before earning a law degree at the University of Texas, Lind took his first jobs at the Heritage Foundation and George H. W. Bush's State Department. During the Clinton era, he embarked on a journalistic career at Irving Kristol's *National Interest*, Andrew Sullivan's *New Republic*, and Tina Brown's *New Yorker*. He famously broke with most of his former associates in *Up from Conservatism: Why the Right is Wrong for America* (1996), skewering Republicans for waging cynical culture wars only to gain enough power to advance policies benefiting the wealthy few. In 1999, Lind added policy entrepreneurship to his résumé, cofounding the New America Foundation (now New America), where he advocated policies intended to make the U.S. economy more competitive. In recent years, he has taught at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Policy at the University of Texas–Austin.

HELL TO PAY
How the Suppression of Wages Is Destroying America

MICHAEL LIND
Portfolio
$29 | 240 pp.

Along the way, Lind published ten books on politics, policy, and history, the last of which, *The New Class War: Saving Democracy from the Managerial Elite* (2020), laid the foundation for *Hell to Pay*. In *The New Class War*, Lind argued that Western democracies faced an existential threat due to the shortsighted, self-serving mismanagement of their out-of-touch elites. Unless they forged a new class compromise that addressed the needs of workers, Lind warned, democracies would collapse and be replaced by caste-based societies ruled by either a technocratic "overclass" or the kind of populist authoritarians foreshadowed by Trumpism. In *Hell to Pay*, Lind continues this line of argument, insisting that increased worker bargaining power is a prerequisite for any democracy-sustaining class compromise.

Hell to Pay is suffused with a moral passion that makes it more than a policy brief. "No one who works full time should be poor," writes Lind. And as long as there are some goods and services such as health care "that should be available to all citizens regardless of ability to pay," then "the government should pay for them directly or indirectly." His palpable anger at policies that keep workers poor and deny them access to goods that every human deserves imparts propulsive power to his prose.

As befits someone with an apostate past, Lind is at his best when debunking the dogmas that dominate elite thinking. He makes quick work of human-capital theory's assertion that workers' wages simply reflect their skills or lack thereof. The powerful have "taken that theory to heart," he suggests, primarily because it "shifts responsibility for low wages from employers or government policies" to workers themselves. With equal verve, he demolishes employer claims of labor shortages (when they say they "can't find enough American workers what they really mean is they cannot find enough Americans willing to *work at the wages they prefer to pay*," he writes) and scolds higher education for abetting a debt-driven "credential arms race" in which the "master's degree is the new BA."

Unlike most economists, Lind takes seriously the disparity of power embedded in the relation between employer and

Union organizers, students, and supporters for a fifteen-dollar minimum wage march through Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 2016.

AP PHOTO/KEITH SRAKOCIC

employee. As Adam Smith famously observed, "In the long-run, the workman may be as necessary to his master as his master is to him; but the necessity is not so immediate." Lind's appreciation of the ways in which employers exploit that imbalance of necessity is a distinguishing feature of his analysis.

In recent decades, Lind demonstrates, employers have used their power to hold down wages through several mechanisms. These include "salary bands," tacit agreements through which multiple employers collude in establishing pay scales for similar jobs; no-poach agreements, in which employers refrain from hiring each other's workers at higher salaries; non-compete clauses, which currently prevent an estimated 18 percent of U.S. workers from seeking similar work from another employer; forced arbitration, in which more than half of non-union private-sector workers are required, as a condition of employment, to give up any right to sue their employer for wage theft or other abuses; and "gig work," through which employers outsource jobs to "independent contractors" who lack benefits.

A strength of Lind's account is that it doesn't blame wage suppression solely on employers. Effective wage suppression requires government support. While outdated labor laws and the anti-union decisions of the Roberts Court have been undermining workers' bargaining power, Lind reminds us that the "anti-worker welfare state" plays an important role as well. The U.S. welfare state, he argues, "privatizes the benefits of cheap labor and socializes the costs." A prime illustration of this, he contends, is the Earned Income Tax Credit, through which taxpayers subsidize low-wage work at some of the country's largest employers. According to one 2013 study, 60 percent of public assistance to low-waged workers went to employees of just ten companies. A *pro*-worker welfare state, by contrast, would have robust social-insurance provisions that provide for workers when they are unemployed, retired, or when they leave paid employment to engage in the necessary work of caregiving. The failure of the United States to provide income replacement to new parents, Lind argues, is not only anti-family but anti-worker.

So, what is to be done? Lind's answer to this question is refreshingly clear: worker bargaining power must be enhanced by a combination of revived union organization and government action. This answer could potentially win Lind many allies. Unfortunately, his arguments in favor of specific remedies seem calculated to repel rather than to attract friends, a problem exacerbated by snide asides aimed at old foes like Paul Krugman, liberal icons like Barack Obama, and, of course, "performative woke leftism."

Consider his caricature of the union movement, which ought to be one of his strongest allies. Lind is plainly nostalgic for the "pure and simple" unionism of Samuel Gompers that "avoided political partisanship and focused narrowly

While the extent of immigrants' historical impact on wages is debatable, their centrality to any future labor revival is not.

on achieving a few objectives for workers and kept a safe distance between organized labor and political parties." He sees today's labor movement, by contrast, as one in which "dominant public sector unions" exert outsized influence over "vestigial private sector unions" in a movement "wholly subordinated to the Democratic Party." Lind draws an unfavorable contrast between the tough-minded Gompers and today's AFL-CIO president, Liz Shuler, whom he takes to task for objecting to the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision with a statement asserting that working women "must be able to control our own bodies—which has a direct impact on economic justice and the ability of working people to make a better life for themselves and their families." According to Lind, Shuler's statement told workers "whose views on abortion differ from those of the left wing of the Democratic Party" that they are "unwelcome in the AFL-CIO."

Such passages suggest that their author has studied unions hastily and from afar. Gompers, for example, was scarcely the narrowly focused nonpartisan that Lind paints. It was his 1906 "Labor's Bill of Grievances" that began labor's search for political alliances—a search that would lead to a courtship between the AFL and the Democrats that Gompers advanced through behind-the-scenes support for Woodrow Wilson in 1912 and public support for his reelection in 1916. It is also inaccurate to say that public-sector unions dominate labor today. There are still more private-sector than public-sector union members. (Indeed, Shuler herself hails from the "vestigial" building trades.) Nor does Shuler's position on reproductive rights constitute a litmus test for membership in the AFL-CIO. The movement's membership has never been in lockstep on any big social or political issue. And although Lind claims that a rising tide of working-class conservatism represents a reaction to what he derisively calls "the Great Awokening," the truth is that working-class conservatism is as old as the labor movement itself and was as much a force in Gompers's time as in ours.

Lind wishes for "a new and nonpartisan" labor movement. Yet labor's history—including the factors that led to its alliance with the Democrats—can't be wished away, nor can a new movement just be wished into being. To achieve the laudable goals to which Lind aspires would require joining hands with the actually existing movement, whose elected leaders he would apparently prefer to lecture on the dangers of woke-ism.

Alas, Lind's positions on labor law and immigration are no better suited to enlisting allies. He hopes that the "defeated and defective Wagner Act system is allowed to wither away," but he does not advocate—or even mention—labor's preferred reform, the Protect the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, or the promising ideas recently advanced by the Clean Slate project at Harvard Law School, which urged expanding the scope of collective bargaining to address common-good issues such as climate change. This would have "appalled and alarmed" Gompers, Lind claims. Instead, Lind proposes extending the nation's oldest and most restrictive collective-bargaining law, the 1926 Railway Labor Act (RLA), beyond its current scope in railways and airlines. He does so on the dubious theory that the RLA is more conducive to fostering sectoral bargaining (the Clean Slate project also supports sectoral bargaining). Lind's suggestion that the RLA's extension could promote meaningful sectoral bargaining is scarcely supported by its history. It failed to foster sectoral bargaining in the airline industry. On the railroads, meanwhile, it created sectoral bargaining without worker leverage. As the 2022 rail crisis reminded us, by making it virtually impossible to strike, the act has undermined unions' resistance to "precision scheduled railroading," a managerial technique that has eroded both labor and safety standards (see "Supplicant or Partner?," January 2023).

Finally, Lind insists that "it is intellectually dishonest to ignore the harm done" by massive legal and illegal immigration to American wage-earners "from farmworkers and janitors to professionals in the tech service." He cites numerous studies that suggest that immigration places downward pressure on American wages. To be sure, many of these studies are sound, as are Lind's critiques of the much-abused H-1B work-visa program. But his analysis lacks any sense that immigrants themselves can become a vital force in reviving worker bargaining power. Tellingly, he cites the example of immigrants' wage-depressing impact on the commercial cleaning workforce of Los Angeles in the 1980s while failing to mention that in the 1990s the same immigrants unionized through the Justice for Janitors campaign and have since made LA a union stronghold. While the extent of immigrants' historical impact on wages is debatable, their centrality to any future labor revival is not.

It's encouraging that a public intellectual of Michael Lind's prominence and talent has joined the battle against wage suppression. That scourge is every bit as threatening to our future as he claims. Hopefully, this will not be his last word on the subject. Before he writes again, though, he would be wise to talk with—rather than snipe at—the potential allies who might join his crusade to strengthen worker bargaining power. Doing so would help model the "transactional politics focused on the day-to-day concerns of typical working families" that he seeks.

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Holding His Pose

MARCUS HIJKOOP

The Italian novelist Domenico Starnone has long been rumored to be the writer behind the works of the best-selling, pseudonymous author Elena Ferrante. In 2005, the Italian literary critic Luigi Galella noted in *La Stampa* that there were marked thematic and lexical similarities between Starnone's Strega Prize–winning novel *Via Gemito* (2000) and Ferrante's debut novel *L'amore molesto* (1992), published in English as *Troubling Love* in 2006. Subsequent studies by Italian scholars have claimed to show through stylometric analysis that Starnone's style and Ferrante's style are often indistinguishable, down to the authors' word choices. But in 2016, the Italian journalist Claudio Gatti claimed to show through financial records that the author (or beneficiary) of Ferrante's books was in fact not Starnone, but Starnone's wife, the Italian translator Anita Raja.

Despite widespread condemnation of Gatti for his perceived violation of Raja's privacy, there was also, as Italian comparative literature scholar Elisa Sotgiu wrote in *Literary Hub* in 2021, a palpable sense of "relief" that the journalist claimed Ferrante was a woman, and not a man. Commentators in Italy and abroad had long bemoaned the alleged sexism of suggesting that a man had written Ferrante's books.

THE HOUSE ON VIA GEMITO

A Novel

DOMENICO STARNONE

Europa Editions

$27 | 480 pp.

Federico Starnone, *The Drinkers*, 1953

(Others countered that it was sexist to suggest that a man couldn't be capable of their perceptive analysis of female friendship and motherhood.) Sotgiu, for her part, concluded that with the available intertextual evidence it was "almost beyond doubt" that "Starnone, either alone or in partnership with his wife, sat down and typed the novels that were published under the name of Elena Ferrante." Whatever the case may be, it is now almost impossible to discuss Starnone without discussing the author of *My Brilliant Friend*.

The novel that first prompted the Starnone–Ferrante connection has, after two decades, finally been translated and released in English as *The House on Via Gemito*. While the novel was compared to Ferrante's debut back in 2005, it in fact anticipates her later four-part masterwork, the Neapolitan Novels (2011–2014), as well as her latest novel, released in English as *The Lying Life of Adults* (2020). Like those two works, *Via Gemito* is a coming-of-age story set in Naples during the previous century, and like the Neapolitan Novels, its narrator is a writer who shares its author's Christian name. But while the Neapolitan Novels were perhaps erroneously grouped with the autofiction boom of the 2010s (given what we have since learned about Ferrante's likely identity), there is greater reason to believe that *Via Gemito* is based on its author's personal experiences.

The subject of *Via Gemito* is less the house or apartment that the narrator Domenico, or Mimí, grew up in than the father who ruled over the home, Federico, or Federí, a railroad worker whose true ambition was to be a world-renowned painter. While not world-renowned, the author's real-world father, Federico Starnone, was a locally celebrated artist, and his painting *The Drinkers* (1953) is reproduced on the cover of *Via Gemito*. In the novel, first published two years after the painter's death, Federí is portrayed by his son as a self-aggrandizing and frustrated artist who took his thwarted ambition out on his family, particularly his wife Rosa, or Rusinè, whom Federí

both physically and verbally abuses in the book. Rosa is modeled and named after the author's mother, to whom *Via Gemito* is dedicated.

The novel is divided into three parts, which together form a triptych illustrating three pivotal periods from the narrator's life. In Part I, the adolescent Mimí serves as a ventriloquist for his middle-aged father, mimicking his patterns of speech and parroting his fanciful origin story, which Mimí was either absent from or too young to interpret maturely. Federí's language, like that of many of Elena's male relatives in the Neapolitan Novels, is of the neighborhood he grew up in, a dialect replete with obscenities and "ancient invectives passed down from generation to generation." In the English edition, translator Oonagh Stransky often reproduces Federí's colorful threats in their original dialect, but occasionally, she renders them in folksy Americanisms ("a gusher, a romper, a knuckle sandwich," to name a few that appear in quick succession). This can be distracting, especially when grounded in long lists of Italian street names that are almost Knausgårdian in their verisimilitude ("from Piazza di Spagna to Via del Babuino and down Via Margutta.").

By mimicking his father's conversational narration of past events, Mimí often presents scenes in summary rather than as action, undermining their drama and reducing them to melodrama. This is intentional: Federí is a fabulist, and when he recalls, for example, "his fateful departure for the Russian front and his miraculous return, safe and sound," the reader is made to understand that he never saw any action in Stalingrad. But, even if mocking, the narrator's mimicry is rarely supplemented by any commentary or retrospective analysis. After reporting on numerous occasions of Federí's fascist sympathies and his "nuanced admiration for Hitler's soldiers," the narrator offers only, "[m]aybe he just liked their uniforms better"—a missed opportunity to interrogate his father's moral and aesthetic sensibilities. In this way, the narrator in Part I resembles the young Giovanna of Ferrante's *The Lying Life of Adults*, who is similarly unable to challenge her father's beliefs and fabrications.

Thankfully, Part II is narrated by the adult Domenico, who, after his father's death, walks the streets of Naples like one of W. G. Sebald's *flâneurs*, trying to find in the city's archways and apartment entrances a skeleton key to understanding his father. He ends up in a crumbling municipal building, face-to-face with his father's "masterpiece," *The Drinkers*, which he posed for as a child. Confronted with his own reflection, the narrator is forced to reckon with his conflicted feelings for his father through the memory of posing for him. Very little happens in this drawn-out remembrance—Domenico's fragmented recollections are pieced together over 150 pages, a third of the book's overall length—but the scene is held together by the tension within the narrator, who tries desperately to hold his pose and not upset his father's lifework.

In the painting, the young Mimí pours water from a jug into the outstretched glass of a shirtless construction worker, who takes reprieve from the Neapolitan sun with three coworkers during their lunch break. As the adult narrator reflects, the scene resembles Édouard Manet's idyllic *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* ("The Luncheon on the Grass," 1863), elements of which Federí sought to transpose to a "squalid construction site." In this way, the narrator comes to see, his frustrated "railman-artist" father, who took pride in showing that he "could make money better and more nobly" than other members of his economic class, sought to make his everyday surroundings beautiful, sublime, sacred. In his father's words, he sought "to put chaos in order…and be the god that brings structure to the general shitshow of natural events."

Readers of the Neapolitan Novels will hear in Federí's pronouncements echoes of Elena (Lenù) and Raffaela (Lila), the narrator's "brilliant friend." Like Lila, Federí is bound by the Naples city limits, which represent his "geographical destiny," despite his best attempts to escape. Like the writer Lenù, Federí tries to "put chaos in order" through his art, his only chance of transcending the neighborhood. But, unlike Lenù at the end of the Neapolitan Novels, Federí doesn't arrive at the mature conclusion that the neighborhood, far from a hindrance, is in fact "essential to the success of [his] work," and that he shouldn't "dismiss it." This is his son Domenico's redemptive role.

Through his countervailing narrative, Domenico dispels the myth that his father was entirely self-made, and that his family and the neighborhood served only to hold him back from fulfilling his artistic ambitions. In Part III, the narrator reveals that while his father worked monomaniacally on *The Drinkers*—and while the narrator strained for hours on end to pose for him—his mother, Rusinè, was quietly falling ill. Throughout the novel, Rusinè tiptoes around her husband and his artwork, which occupies most of their apartment, laid out on its beds and floors. She is careful not to set off her husband, who is liable to explode with anger and strike her at the merest provocation. She only shakes her downcast head when he embellishes his past and complains of the countless betrayals he has suffered.

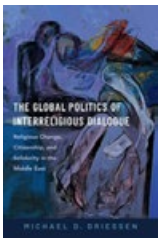
The adult narrator pays moving and guilt-stricken tribute to his mother. "I believed she suffered in agony for years," he writes, "and, for a long time, I carried—I still carry—the regret that I didn't realize it, that I had trained myself not to realize it." The narrator's father, too, appears to show some regret when, on her deathbed, he counts up "all the money he had earned by painting Parisian street scenes" and makes arrangements for his wife to have a private hospital room, at considerable personal expense. As Rusinè dies, Federí is surprisingly devoted to his wife, sleeping by her side and foregoing his artistic practice—his raison d'être—but there is little to suggest that the painter fully appreciates the sacrifice she made for him and his artwork.

Federí's outlook is perhaps best summed up in a phone conversation he has with his son a few years before his own death. "Everything passes, kid," Federí says. "So let's think about ourselves. At the very least, let's try and keep our name alive." The adult Domenico, still afraid to upset his father, keeps his sobering response to himself: "Papà, a name is nothing more than the sound of someone clearing their throat, a smear of ink." In this scene, we hear the father and son's conflicting views on authorship and artistic legacy: while the painter Federí is desperate to be remembered for his individual accomplishments, the writer Domenico approaches Ferrante's stated belief, from her 2022 essay collection *In the Margins*, that "what writing captures doesn't pass through the sieve of a singular I, solidly planted in everyday life, but is twenty people, that is…a hypersensitive plurality all concentrated in the hand provided with the pen."

Via Gemito may be a challenge to the myth of the singular, self-made artist in more ways than one. While Starnone's novel is a significant achievement, singled out for Italy's top literary prize, the conclusive answer to the Ferrante authorship question may one day provide evidence that collaboration can elevate art to still-higher levels of achievement—whether Starnone or Raja wrote the Ferrante books and the other served as their editor, or if indeed they sat down and wrote the books together. The demonstrated stylistic similarities between Starnone and Ferrante may also be explained by Raja's profession as a translator, a collaborative artistic profession if ever there was one, which leaves her well-placed to channel other people's voices. Whatever the case may be, the likely scenarios suggest that an author's books are products of all the writers he, she, or they have read throughout their life, perhaps especially (or hopefully) those that they hold dear.

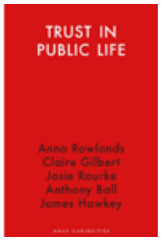
MARCUS HIJKOOP *is a writer and editor based in New York.*

BOOKS IN BRIEF



THE GLOBAL POLITICS OF INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
Religious Change, Citizenship, and Solidarity in the Middle East
MICHAEL D. DRIESSEN
Oxford University Press
$83 | 272 pp.

Governments care about religion again—at least, they see religious leaders and movements as important to collaborate with, manage, shut down, or co-opt. Michael D. Driessen's *The Global Politics of Interreligious Dialogue* explores how religion, theological belief, and state power function in the Muslim-majority world. Through studying several state-sponsored interreligious-dialogue initiatives in the Middle East involving Muslims, Christians, and other believers, Driessen catalogs the "ongoing renegotiation of religion and state in the region," which is "reshaping the ideals and authority that religious forces hold in state and society." How are religious groups responding to modernity and post-secularism? How is religious pluralism understood, particularly in Sunni Islam and Roman Catholicism? What concessions will authoritarian governments make to religious groups who demand democratic reforms? Driessen's unique research combines geopolitics, sociology, and theological studies to paint a full picture of public religious life in the countries he studies.



TRUST IN PUBLIC LIFE
ANNA ROWLANDS, CLAIRE GILBERT, JOSIE ROURKE, ANTHONY BALL, AND JAMES HAWKEY
Haus Curiosities
$17.95 | 70 pp.

We live in a time of unprecedented lack of trust in institutions, and though the contributors of these essays on the nature of trust in public life don't dispute that, they don't despair. Offering meaningful guidance and reflection on engendering trust, they stress the need for real encounters over abstract ideas, drawing from literature, philosophy, and spirituality to light the way. The contributions from Claire Gilbert and Anna Rowlands in particular provoke thought; the former draws on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* to stress the importance of self-knowledge, and the latter on Pope Francis's interpretation of the Good Samaritan in *Fratelli tutti* (among other things) to hail "the communion formed in reciprocal living." But every essay makes for absorbing reading, while collectively they sound a hopeful and forceful call to action.

LOVED AND MISSED
A Novel
SUSIE BOYT
New York Review Books
$17.95 | 208 pp.

At a crucial moment in Susie Boyt's masterful *Loved and Missed*, a character plainly states, "I would. Happily, not happily, because obviously this whole thing is sadder than fuck, but you know what I'm saying." The sentiment—at once profane and sincere, defiant and weary—speaks to the quiet genius of Boyt's novel, the English writer's seventh but the first to be published in the United States. Ruth is the mother of Eleanor, a young woman addicted to drugs. With no other choice, Ruth lives around Eleanor's addiction, until Eleanor gives birth to a daughter of her own, Lily. Ruth raises Lily, while Eleanor, a widow to the world, struggles in the margins, "shadowy and powerful; like any ghost worth its salt, she made you feel that you were the intruder." Indeed, the story is, at times, "sadder than fuck," but in this slim volume is also laughter and love and tenderness, a delicate, resonant hope amidst so much heartbreak and fear.

Jongleurs of God

KATHLEEN BRADY

Modern technology seldom comes to mind in connection with Francis of Assisi, yet there is one device that he would have prized. A smartphone with a music app playing one track in an endless loop would have suited his purposes perfectly. Living in the thirteenth century, he encouraged his brothers to sing his favorite song without ceasing. He may have rejoiced, but they longed for a change in the playlist.

The lyrics that Francis insisted on hearing were ones he wrote: "The Canticle of the Sun." The incomparable hymn to God is regarded as one of the earliest poems in Italian literature. It remains influential today; Pope Francis took it as the inspiration for his encyclical *Laudato si'* on the care of the planet.

To Francis of Assisi, the canticle's words were a prayer. He was caught up in a God who had created such marvels as the sun that brought the day and the fire that illuminated the night. But it is possible that Francis wanted to hear the song endlessly simply because he was so proud of it. Francis may not have put it that way; if he had, this beautiful hymn might have met the same fate as a little vase he once made during Lent. One day while he was at prayer, he glimpsed the vase and admired its beauty. Suddenly, ashamed that his appreciation for what he had made had taken his mind away from the Lord, he threw the tiny object into the fire.

Francis often worked to squash pride in his own accomplishments and to offset others' admiration for him. When a poor woman asked him for alms, he handed her his cloak. Then, taking note of the crowd of admirers that was following him, he minimized his generosity by insisting, "Doing this makes me proud of myself." When he was ill, he had to wear a fur pelt under his tunic to keep himself warm, but Francis requested that it be sewn outside his garment to show that he was taking special care of himself and did not deserve credit for self-sacrifice.

Giotto di Bondone, *St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds*, 1295–1300

But "The Canticle of the Sun" was an exceptional situation. It emerged from a period of anguish and torment. In early 1225, Francis's sight was failing, he was physically weak, and

Francis acknowledged that zithers were used to promote vanity and desire, but he countered that this was an opportunity to turn them to the glory of God and the comfort of souls.

he was worried about the future of his order. Then he heard that Clare, whom he had persuaded years earlier to become the first woman to join his movement, was at the point of death. He had himself carried to her community at San Damiano a few miles outside Assisi, where he took up residence in a branch hut a few yards outside her window. Light soon became unbearable and animals, which had usually been a comfort, became his torturers. Mice overran his shelter, swarmed his table, and deprived him of peace at the very time he was among his closest friends. One night, as Francis endured his suffering, he heard a voice tell him to be at peace as if he were in heaven.

Enlightenment dispelled his woe. The next morning, the first line of his hymn of praise—"Most high, all-powerful, good Lord God"—came to him and he worked out the rest as his faithful secretary Brother Leo took down his words. Francis praised what had given him joy and never disappointed him: the sun, the moon, and the stars that had lit his way by night, and the earth that had sustained him—all the creation of God the Father. When a conflict arose between the mayor of Assisi and its bishop, Francis added a verse and had his expanded version sung to the adversaries. They wept, hugged, and promptly reconciled.

Francis had his companions sing his canticle with him over and over as he grew more enamored of it, and his friends more weary. As the days passed, the humble friar developed the single-mindedness of a proud artist determined that the world see his work, albeit in the service of God. Displaying a love of performance that had made him the master of revels in his youth, he devised a plan to spread "The Canticle of the Sun." He would send Brother Pacifico, who had once been a great troubadour, into the world with one of the finest preachers from among the Lesser Brothers. Pacifico would sing it, the other brother would give a homily, and finally the two men would invite everyone to join in Francis's song. Then they would exhort the crowd: "We are the jongleurs of God, and the only reward we want is to see you lead a truly penitent life."

Francis traveled to Rieti to have his eyes treated, and Pacifico joined Francis there. The former bard had renounced the worldly joy of his music and its lusty connotations to follow Francis. But now Francis was asking him to take up his instrument again. Surely Pacifico still longed for it as a thirsty man longs for drink, but he was afraid to indulge his great temptation. He tried to talk his way out of Francis's request. Francis acknowledged that zithers were used to promote vanity and desire, but he countered that this was an opportunity to turn them to the glory of God and the comfort of souls. Francis told him to obtain one from some respectable man so they could set "The Canticle of the Sun" to a worthy melody.

Pacifico protested that the people of Rieti knew of his past, and he was afraid that they would be shocked and disappointed to hear that he was returning to his old calling. Francis, a former merchant who would not have considered selling cloth to raise funds for the poor, finally accepted Pacifico's refusal.

The next night around midnight, as Francis lay sleepless, he heard a melody more exquisite than any he had heard before. Someone nearby was playing the zither. Francis listened, enthralled until the music faded as quickly as it had begun. At daybreak, Francis told Pacifico with some reproach, "When I asked you, you refused my request, but the Lord who comforts his friends when they are suffering consoled me." He declared that the Lord himself had played the zither for him, since Pacifico would not. Francis's followers in Rieti considered it a great miracle. But who knows? Perhaps Pacifico took up the zither again in the dead of night unseen by any but God.

Every day in the year or so that remained to Francis on earth, he sang or heard his canticle as an antidote to his own suffering, and he asked everyone around him to fill the air with it. When he lay dying, he called for it to be sung to enliven the somber mood of the vigil outside the bishop's palace. One brother counseled Francis to be more serious in the face of death, but Francis disagreed, insisting that he wanted everyone to have the pleasure of the song.

Finally, he composed new concluding verses:

> Praised be my Lord for Sister Death, from which no man escapes.
> Woe to him who dies in mortal sin.
> Blessed are those who die in Thy most holy will,
> for the second death shall have no power to do them harm.
> Praise ye and bless the Lord,
> and give thanks to Him and serve Him with great humility.

Francis told his loving companions that he did not want to see them weeping. Instead, he wanted them to sing his canticle. And so they did, as his soul made its way to heaven and his song into the world.

KATHLEEN BRADY *is the author of* Francis and Clare: The Struggles of the Saints of Assisi, *winner of a Catholic Media Association award in biography in 2022. Her previous subjects include Ida Tarbell and Lucille Ball.*

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PEBBLE

Brian Swann

Under clouds cold as
blue clay, light seeps into

milkweed so it speaks
monarchs, and the wind

sings stones with voices
from where there are none,

from even before there was
anything to give voice,

calling in that gull's shadow
angling in then gone

sumptuous as this pebble
balanced on my palm.

BRIAN SWANN *'s most recent poetry collection is* Imago *(Johns Hopkins University Press), and his latest fiction is* Huskanaw *(MadHat Press). He teaches at Cooper Union in New York City.*

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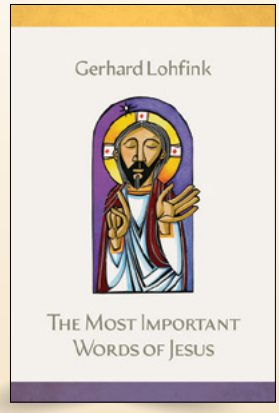

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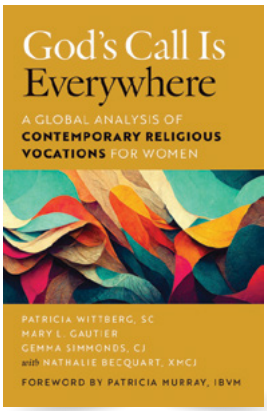

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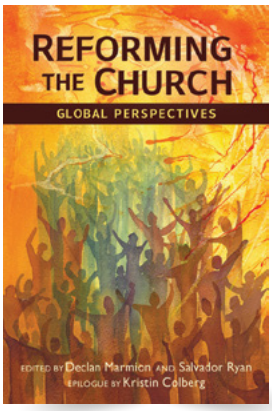

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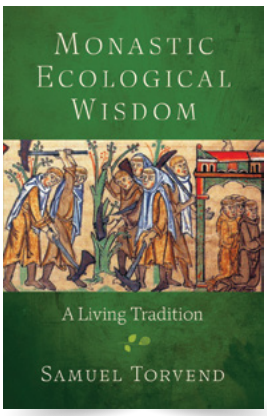

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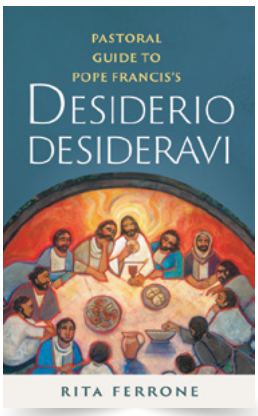

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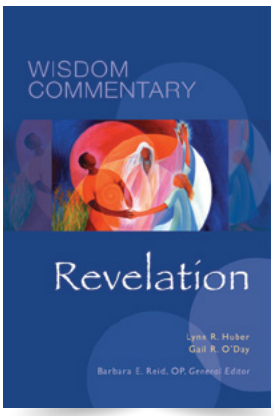

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