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LETTERS

A question about idolatry, finding acceptance in God

PROSTRATING?

I greatly appreciate Rita Ferrone's recent article about the Amazon Synod ("A Hermeneutic of Suspicion," December). It shed light on much of the Pachamama incident and helped balance the many negative comments and accusations of idolatry. However, one point I didn't see addressed in Ferrone's excellent article was the question of whether participants were prostrating themselves before the image, and if so, why this would be. Would it be possible to learn more about that aspect of the event?

Barbara Hosbach
Jackson, N.J.

RITA FERRONE REPLIES:

In the context of the service, the participants engaged in a circle dance. This included making gestures upward and outward; and, finally, they bowed down and together touched their foreheads to the ground in a gesture of humility before the God of all creation. These actions are consonant with worship of the Triune God. Yet some observers have obstinately insisted that the mementos and symbols of the Amazon in the center of the circle (rather than God himself) were the object of their worship. This is crude thinking and a calumny against these Amazonian Catholics, who profess the same creed that we do. If they were Hibernians singing the Breastplate of Saint Patrick ("Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ at my right, Christ at my left") would we accuse them of pantheism? If they were Eastern Orthodox kissing icons would we accuse them of worshipping images? No. Intentions matter. There is simply no indication that idolatry was intended here.

THE LITTLE ROOM

The history of gay people finding a way to live with dignity and integrity has been a difficult story of coming out, individually and collectively. We still need a second coming out on our behalf by heterosexual people who understand our spiritual truth and have the courage to speak out for us. I am grateful for Mollie Wilson O'Reilly's courage and support ("A Harmful Doctrine," January). I believe Christ will find us at peace with his will when this issue and a few others like it become irrelevant to the point of no longer needing to be addressed. I still hold hope there will be something more affirming to come from Pope Francis on this topic.

I am grateful for the title of Ms. O'Reilly's article, because the current teaching of the church is indeed a harmful doctrine that reinforces not just discrimination but a form of reductive dualistic thinking that is pervasively harmful. It does not bring peace. It does not protect the environment we call home from destruction. I believe that I would betray God by living a false life pretending not to be gay, causing spiritual and psychological damage to others and to myself.

I was moved by Ms. O'Reilly's comment about LGBTQ people so drawn to Christ's presence in the church that they look past all the dismissals and insults to fight for their place at the Eucharistic table. I was baptized by choice as a Southern Baptist at nine years of age. I identified strongly with the message of Christ, but I was also persecuted for who I was perceived to be long before I knew enough to identify myself as gay. In my twenties, I joined the Catholic Church and came out soon afterward,

John Tracy Ellis, 1986
Rosemary Haughton, 1987
Timothy O. Meara, 1988
Walter J. Ong, S.J., 1989
Sidney Callahan, 1990
John T. Noonan Jr, 1991
Louis Dupré, 1992
Monika K. Hellwig, 1993
Philip Gleason, 1994
J. Bryan Hehir, 1995
Charles Taylor, 1996
Gustavo Gutiérrez, 1997
Rev. David Tracy, 1998
Jill Ker Conway, 1999
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Mary Ann Glendon, 2001
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Peter and Margaret Steinfels, 2003
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David O'Brien, 2005
Cyprian Davis, O.S.B., 2006
David Hollenbach, S.J., 2008
Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J., 2009
Ron Hansen, 2010
Lamin O. Sanneh, 2011
Rev. Joseph Komonchak, Ph.D., 2012
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LETTERS

but I could not get past the integrity issues of being gay and trying to be Catholic, and I did not stay.

But last year, at the age of sixty-five, I visited Saint Joseph's Oratory in Montreal, Quebec, near where I now live. I entered the little room behind the altar and knelt to pray. I had never felt such a powerful, encompassing, affirming presence. At the time, I didn't know that "the little room" I had visited contained the Blessed Sacrament.

My experiences at Saint Joseph Oratory led me to start attending Mass at Paroisse Saint-Pierre-Apôtre in the Gay Village of Montreal. It is an inclusive parish that serves the gay community, unconditionally extending its welcome regardless of sexual orientation. The parish also acknowledges respect for the spiritual experiences of people's lives outside the church and is happy for them to bring the richness of their personal spiritual search to the community. I feel neither guilty nor resentful for the years I missed attending Mass (although I did discuss it at confession). I simply feel enormously grateful for being able to experience my spiritual connection in this manner, at this time, with these people.

Thomas Ray Stapleton
Candiac, Quebec

ROGUE PRESIDENCY

As Andrew Bacevich knows, I have a great deal of respect for his assessment of American foreign policy, and nowhere more than where American interventionism is concerned. His new Quincy Institute will no doubt be an important critical voice in foreign-policy discussion. His larger thesis about congressional dereliction regarding Presidents Bush and Obama, and now Trump, is certainly correct ("Beyond Impeachment," February). But I do not agree with his plague-on-both-their-houses condemnation. Pelosi is right that a line had to be drawn, and the Ukrainian "drug deal" (how often can we thank John Bolton for anything?) was the place to do it. We needed to go on record regarding this rogue presidency. Politically speaking, impeachment may well backfire—that's why I opposed it for the longest time. But no longer. Not often that I can say I'm proud of my political party. But I'm happy to own this one.

Michael Hollerich
University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minn.

GENDER AND CHRISTIAN BELIEF

Thank you for Eve Tushnet's beautifully written and challenging review of Andrea Long Chu's *Females* ("Is Everyone Female?" February). At a time in which one-third of young Americans identify as something other than completely heterosexual, we in the church need to think deeply about the meaning of gender in the context of Christian belief. Tushnet's assertion that the sacrificial lives of male Christian saints—and Christ himself—were in essence "female" is a wonderful place to begin.

Beth Barton Schweiger
Bellevue, Wash.

THE IRISH ROSE

In arguing that January 21, 1919, be marked as the pivotal day in Irish history, John Rodden and John P. Rossi ("From Ireland to Israel, and Beyond," October) never specify why. In fact, two events happened that day. The first session of an independent Irish parliament, Dáil Éireann, convened in Dublin, and two officers of the Royal Irish Constabulary were ambushed and killed by the IRA, the opening act in a bloody guerrilla war. The defining event in the formation of the modern Irish state, a stable, well-functioning democracy, might better be seen as the result of the election of December 14, 1918. The first held after the end of World War I, and the first in which women (over thirty) and working-class men were enfranchised, it was also the last pan-Irish parliamentary election involving all thirty-two counties. The results represented a victory of historic proportions for Sinn Féin, whose members refused to take their seats in Westminster. It was victory at the polls that set off the revolution, not the other way around.

Peter Quinn
Hastings-on-Hudson, N. Y.

Trump's Budget

President Donald Trump's $4.8 trillion budget proposal for fiscal year 2021 is a clear and damning statement of his administration's policy priorities. It would hamstring many federal agencies and sacrifice the basic necessities of countless Americans in order to spend even more money on the military and Trump's dubious vanity projects.

Contrary to the president's frequent promises not to touch widely popular entitlement programs, his budget would cut funds for Medicaid and Social Security disability insurance. It would also reduce spending on the Affordable Care Act. Together, these cuts would amount to $1 trillion less in federal spending on health care. Funding for food stamps would also be reduced and eligibility for the remaining benefits would be subject to stricter work requirements.

And those are just the safety-net programs. Other vital functions of the government would also be undermined. Trump's budget would eliminate a quarter of the Environmental Protection Agency's funding. The Department of Health and Human Services would also see cuts, which would squeeze the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control. Housing and Urban Development would lose 15 percent of its budget; and two of its popular programs, the Community Development Block Grant (which funds Meals on Wheels) and the HOME Investment Partnerships Program, would be shuttered. The budget directs the Department of the Interior to stop acquiring new land for conservation and to end welfare and loan programs meant to benefit Indian country. It also cuts funding for the Department of Education and eliminates some of its programs; less money would be set aside for subsidized student loans, and the Public Service Student Loan Forgiveness Program would be scrapped entirely. There would also be less money for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, forcing state and local agencies to shoulder more of the burden for disaster relief. On the international front, the budget proposes slashing funding for the State Department and USAID by 22 percent, and humanitarian aid for disaster relief and the care of refugees by a third.

Meanwhile, spending on the military would remain a top priority: $3.2 billion would be allocated to the development of a hypersonic weapon; there would be a 18.4 percent increase in funding for the National Nuclear Security Administration, so that it can develop a new nuclear weapon; $2 billion would be set aside for construction of Trump's border wall, while the Department of Homeland Security, which is in charge of Customs and Border Protection as well as Immigration and Customs Enforcement, would also see a marked increase in its budget. Trump's new Space Force would receive $15.4 billion, and NASA would be tasked with a mission to Mars.

The budget does take a few positive steps, such as an enormous spending increase for opioid-treatment and suicide-prevention programs at the Department for Veterans Affairs. But more often what the Trump administration touts as effective funding for social services—like a one-time grant to fund childcare initiatives—is designed merely to soften the blow of much larger cuts elsewhere.

The Trump administration promises that its budget will "put our nation on a fiscally sustainable course" by cutting "waste and fraud" in entitlements, social-service programs, and government agencies. The budget's stated goal is to reduce the deficit, but it would make permanent the tax cuts from the 2017 Tax Cut and Jobs Act, which primarily benefit corporations and the wealthy, and have already blown a hole in the federal government's balance sheet. Largely because of these tax cuts, the 2020 budget deficit is projected to be the largest since 2012.

Ultimately, of course, it is Congress that holds the national purse strings, and so there is no chance that this budget will pass in its current form. Trump's proposed budget is really a campaign document, and the contrast between Trump's spending priorities and those of his Democratic rivals could not be starker. As Democrats call for higher taxes on the wealthy to bring health insurance to more people, and to improve education, food security, public health, labor conditions, and infrastructure, a second Trump administration promises to gut social programs and to channel even more of the nation's wealth to the military-industrial complex. Trump's budget expresses an idea of American greatness that is both stingy and sclerotic. He is obsessed with superficial markers of national glory and supremacy—next-level nukes, missions to Mars, a big, beautiful wall—but he has no time for the less glamorous but more important functions of government. The real issue is not, and never was, "waste and fraud," or fiscal sustainability; it's whether we will have a government that serves and protects all Americans.

The New Travel Ban

Amid the din of the final days of Donald Trump's impeachment trial, his effort to keep America white almost failed to register. Announced in late January and set to take effect on February 22, the latest expansion of the administration's travel ban imposes severe immigration restrictions on six more countries—Myanmar, Kyrgyzstan, Eritrea, Sudan, Tanzania, and Nigeria—bringing the total number of banned nations to thirteen and affecting more than a quarter of a billion people in Africa alone.

That the president should seek to deny entry to the persecuted Rohingya, a Muslim minority in Myanmar, is hardly surprising, given his known hostility toward vulnerable religious minorities. But why target Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and a key U.S. trading partner? True, Nigeria is technically majority Muslim (51 percent), but it also has the world's sixth-largest Christian population (about 86.5 million people). The ban, which "blindsided" Nigeria's foreign minister on the eve of a planned diplomatic visit to Washington, also harms a sizable number of American citizens and permanent residents of Nigerian origin. Reports of confusion and anxiety have already emerged from cities like New York, where Nigerian-Americans have been forced to postpone weddings, cancel family reunions, and stop wage remittances.

Speaking to reporters on condition of anonymity, officials from the Department of Homeland Security defended the travel ban by arguing that Nigeria, along with the other countries, has failed to screen potential terrorists from entering the United States. Specifically, they allege that these countries have been too lax with passport control, information sharing, and risk assessment. But in that case, why has the administration banned only *permanent* immigration visas—whose applicants already undergo "extreme vetting"—while continuing to issue temporary tourist visas to citizens of those same countries? Couldn't potential terrorists simply avail themselves of tourist visas?

A more plausible explanation of the travel ban is racism. If Kamala Harris's assessment doesn't convince you that the ban is "rooted in anti-immigrant, white supremacist ideologies," you need only recall that Donald Trump declared at a January 2018 Oval Office meeting with lawmakers that Nigerians and other immigrants from "shithole countries," once settled in the United States, would never "go back to their huts."

The Trump administration has quietly ratcheted up its use of what Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, a policy analyst with the American Immigration Council, calls the "hidden weapons" of immigration law. Bolstered by a June 2018 Supreme Court ruling that upheld a revised version of Trump's original travel ban, and with no effective oversight from Congress, the administration has "pushed the boundaries of what's already on the books," exploiting loopholes and implementing policies that "go beyond what the law says." That's most obvious in the case of the Remain in Mexico policy, which is still in effect today.

It's now been three years since the original travel ban was issued, which was greeted with public outrage. Protesters massed at airports and state attorneys general filed lawsuits. The public's response to this latest iteration of the ban has been far more muted. But with Laotian refugees now being targeted for deportation in Wisconsin and heavily armed BORTAC forces being shifted away from the U.S.-Mexico border and deployed in "sanctuary" cities throughout the country, the need for forceful public resistance has never been clearer.

—Griffin Oleynick

The Coronavirus

From February 4 to February 19, the Diamond Princess cruise ship sat moored in the port of Yokohama, Japan, undergoing a two-week quarantine. Of the more than 3,600 people on board, 621 were diagnosed with COVID-19, a new type of coronavirus that spreads via sneezes and coughs and causes respiratory illness. Passengers had meals delivered to their cabins, and walked the decks a few moments a day, six feet apart, for fresh air. Some were allowed to disembark and serve their quarantine period on land. Protections for the crew weren't so generous; workers shared living quarters and bathrooms, and ate from buffets. With limited medical personnel and test kits, both passengers and crew members were given thermometers and told to monitor their own temperatures. As the world watched, the sick count ticked up; two people died. The liner became an emblem of the virus: a zone of limited movement, scarce resources, bureaucratic nightmares, and escalating contagion.

Coronavirus has now spread to twenty-seven countries, but 99 percent of the approximately 76,000 cases have been in China, where the disease originated (probably in a Wuhan meat market) and where it has killed more than 1,500 people. Cities in Hubei province have run short of hospital beds and medical supplies; doctors have used raincoats and trash bags for scrubs. Outraged citizens suspect the Chinese government might be more concerned with saving face than saving lives. When cases first surfaced in early December, Wuhan officials downplayed accounts of spreading infection, insisting the virus couldn't be transmitted between humans. President Xi Jinping avoided mentioning COVID-19 for two weeks after he found out about it.

The virus's economic cost is high: stalled tourism; interrupted supply chains; closed schools and factories. It's

no wonder China—which also initially underreported SARS in 2003—wanted the illness kept quiet. State news outlets have been instructed to focus on reporting relief-effort stories that reflect well on the regime. But citizen journalists have defied the official narrative by using their phones to broadcast images of overcrowded hospital corridors and a bus filled with body bags. In early January, a dissident doctor, Li Wenliang, was reprimanded by police for alerting med-school classmates to the virus; when he died on February 6, Chinese social media filled with candle emojis and free-speech hashtags. Those posts were removed by censors, but not before Dr. Li became a national hero.

Wuhan, a city of 11 million people, is now closed to air, ground, and water traffic. Citizens leaving home for supplies (each family can send out one person every three days) must wear masks, register with an official, and get their temperature taken. In Beijing, all residents returning to the capital from holiday travel must self-quarantine for the virus's two-week incubation period. In sum, China's lockdowns have affected over 760 million people. Mao-style social control has taken hold: squadrons of Party officials and volunteer busybodys; people denied entry to their apartment buildings; locations and temperatures logged on apps.

No one denies that travel restrictions are necessary to contain the virus. The World Health Organization has declared coronavirus a global-health emergency, justifying quarantines, evacuations, and travel restrictions, although such measures risk due-process violations and may impinge on individual rights. Quarantines can also discourage distrustful citizens from reporting symptoms, and keep needed supplies from getting into restricted zones. Scientists still don't know for sure how bad coronavirus could get. One epidemiologist estimated it could infect up to 60 percent of the world's population if it goes unchecked. African nations may be especially vulnerable. As the sickness spreads, China must prioritize accurate information and responsible containment—for the sake of both its own citizens and the rest of the world.

—Katherine Lucky

Primary Choices

If you read only the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, or watch cable news, you might not know that Bernie Sanders is the frontrunner for the Democratic presidential nomination. The well-heeled pundits, prominent columnists, and grifter consultants tapped to be talking heads mostly find Bernie distasteful and remain bewildered by his appeal. Thus, the hours of brain-poisoning television commentary that swings between trying to pretend he doesn't exist and trying to gin up hysteria—as when MSNBC's Chris Matthews recently suggested that Bernie might approve of public executions in Central Park. Anything to minimize the fact that Sanders received the most votes in Iowa and New Hampshire.

The deeper story of these early contests has been that the Bernie campaign, whose base tends to be younger voters and people of color, has ground out wins in states whose populations are older and more than 90 percent white. In the wake of those victories his campaign has surged. He's now earning just over 30 percent support in both NBC/Marist and ABC/*Washington Post* polls of registered Democratic voters nationwide, with no one else coming within 10 percent of his lead.

The other candidates clustered near the top of the Iowa results (Pete Buttigieg, Elizabeth Warren) and those from New Hampshire (Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar) don't have nearly as much money as the Sanders campaign. His war chest has come from millions of small-dollar donations, and allowed him to build a truly national campaign. It's not clear where a race-altering victory will come next for Buttigieg, Warren, or Klobuchar, not least because of their paltry support from black and Hispanic voters. If Biden manages to eke out a win in South Carolina, it will be against the backdrop of his campaign's precipitous decline.

Much of the political press has responded to this reality by inventing a ludicrous talking point: if you add up all the non-Bernie, non-Warren "moderate" votes, they constitute a majority, which means that Bernie is merely winning the support of a motivated but otherwise marginal faction. The problem with this argument should be obvious. It's absurd to think that every Biden or Buttigieg or Klobuchar voter has another moderate as his or her second choice. In fact, we know this is not true based on polls asking this very question, and Bernie's favorability ratings among Democrats are the highest of any candidate.

Perhaps this is why more than a few in the political establishment now seem willing to throw themselves into the waiting arms of Michael Bloomberg, the former New York City mayor and the ninth richest man in the United States. So far Bloomberg has spent a jaw-dropping $400 million on ads, over ten times more than Bernie. His wealth has allowed him to build a massive, lavishly appointed campaign organization, providing staff with generous salaries, three meals a day, and new iPhone 11s—while drawing potential voters to his campaign events with catered food and free booze. His riches also let him literally buy support, with endorsements and praise often coming from those who have benefited, directly or indirectly, from his largesse over the years. After sitting out the early states, he's banking on a strong performance on Super Tuesday, when over a third of assigned delegates are won or lost.

Though much could change, this all means Democratic voters could end up being faced with a clear choice: either back a multiracial coalition powered by workers and grassroots donations or accept that unfathomable wealth entitles you to rule. Let's hope they don't decide to replace one racist, sexist oligarch with another.

—Matthew Sitman

CATHLEEN KAVENY

The Fullness of Time

Encountering death as a daughter—and a theologian

In Giovanni di Paolo's *Paradise* (1445), groups of saints and angels embrace in the garden of Paradise. This picture formed the base of an altarpiece formerly in the church of San Domenico, Siena (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence).

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, ROGERS FUND, 1906

My mother died last summer—after a long illness, as the saying goes. Her mind was fierce, sharp, and politically engaged until the very end, though a noxious combination of physical troubles left her bedbound for the last seven years of her life. For most of that time, she was reasonably happy. She was the center of her world, which included family, friends, and conversation partners, whom she engaged in the flesh, over the phone, and even on the television screen. A political liberal and a progressive Catholic, she was an enthusiastic consumer of MSNBC—although she never quite got over the network's decision to let Keith Olbermann go in 2011. But her last few months were tough.

What I haven't been able to let go of is the vivid picture of my mother in the last stages of her physical decline. A snapshot of her slumped on the edge of the bed, small, weak, exhausted, grumpy, and gasping for air has seared my memory. Over the Christmas season, I tried to let that image fade, and to replace it with mental pictures of her during healthier and happier times. But that endeavor is more complicated than it first appears. Memory is relational and communal. My memories of her are inevitably bound up with associated memories of me and other family members. Finding memories that are kind to all of us is not easy.

For example, suppose I try to remember my mother in her late thirties. She was in full physical vigor. But I was in my early teens—a time no grown woman wants to dwell upon, including me. Early adolescence is miserable, and frequently makes a daughter's relationship with her mother strained and difficult. Well then, what about two decades later, when she was in her late fifties and early sixties?

We were more distant, because I was in the throes of launching my career, moving from New Haven to San Francisco to Boston to South Bend within a five-year period. After I finally moved back home to New England, my relationship with my mother got stronger, even as she herself got progressively weaker.

The puzzles of identity, relationship, memory, and embodiment may be too difficult to tackle in this life. I hope they will get resolved in the next one, which prompted me to consider the resources of the Christian tradition on life after death. Unfortunately, they raise more questions than they answer, in part because the Christian tradition is a sometimes uneasy amalgam of different strands of Greek philosophy and the Biblical tradition.

Many Christians have thought of heaven as a community of souls like angels, without bodies, focused totally on the beatific vision. Losing our earthly bodies, we will lose our individuality, and become one with God. Earthly things, including embodied relationships, are left behind. That's one way to go. It sidesteps the problem by dismissing the ultimate importance of embodiment.

According to the Apostle's Creed, however, Christians believe not only in a spiritual resurrection, but also in the resurrection of the flesh (*carnis resurrectionem*). That is a hopeful general principle. But its operational details remain remarkably hazy. What age will our bodies be when they're resurrected? Some have speculated that in Paradise, everyone will be thirty-three years old—when Jesus died and rose from the dead. I'm not so sure that's a good idea. For one thing, a homogenous community of thirty-three-year-olds sounds like a bad, eternal reboot of *Melrose Place*. Paradise can't be that sort of dull uniformity.

But there are deeper reasons. First, I have always doubted that everyone is their best, most authentic self at the age of thirty-three. I think different people may be most themselves at different physical ages. We often talk about children with "old souls." But I have also known one distinguished law professor who exuded the existential joy of a nine-year-old boy, and another highly responsible family man whose eyes glinted with the restless strength of a nineteen-year-old about to set off on a cross-country motorcycle trip.

Second, sometimes death deprives a family not simply of a person, but of an entire trajectory of a relationship. A mother who loses a one-year-old boy in a car accident does not only mourn the adult that he would have become; she mourns the baby, the toddler, the child, and the youth as well. She mourns their relationship and their mutual influence as mother and son. Wiping her tears away, as the angels in Paradise are promised to do, must mean giving her the opportunity to encounter her child in the full sweep of his life, not just when he is a grown man. Even the shared experience of decline can be mourned. If a young soldier is killed in battle, his widowed bride misses not only their current life as newlyweds, but also the opportunity to nurture their common life over the course of decades to come. She weeps over the lost blessing of growing old together.

Our bodies do not remain the same. They are constantly pushed forward by time, as they are conceived, born, develop, degenerate, and die. But Paradise is marked by eternity, not by time. Of course, if we think of eternity as a profound stillness totally *beyond* time and its vicissitudes, it offers no solution. Nor does it help to think of eternity as an endless string of time, like earthly life but far longer.

But what if we follow St. Augustine in thinking of eternity as the *fullness* of time—as including, honoring, and yet transcending the slivers of existence that time parcels out to us moment by moment? We might then think of our redeemed bodies almost like diamonds, simultaneously refracting different times of our lives as we turn in the light of God's love. In Paradise, it might be possible to be both a vigorous young mother and a wise but frail elder. Even more wondrously, it might be possible to be a turbulent thirteen-year-old and a responsible, middle-aged daughter.

MARGARET O'BRIEN STEINFELS

Is Europe Falling Apart?

The Continent's postwar settlement has kept the peace for seventy-five years. Can it survive the new nationalism?

Europe's post–World War II settlement, an arrangement that has sustained peace and prosperity for more than seventy years, is falling apart. Donald Trump's forays against NATO and European trade, the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union, turmoil in German politics, the rise of would-be autocrats in Eastern Europe, and much, much more call into question the future of Europe's postwar equilibrium.

First, a little history: "The desire to avoid a Second World War was perhaps the most understandable and universal wish in history." That is the opening sentence of Tim Bouverie's *Appeasement*, a brilliant new history of British diplomacy toward Germany in the lead-up to World War II. Ardent wishes notwithstanding, war came. It came because a fatuous British political class was willfully blind in its desperation to avoid conflict with Hitler.

By the end of that war, in 1945, the Allies were determined not to repeat the errors that followed World War I. This time Germany would be bombed, invaded, defeated, and on May 7, 1945, seventy-five years ago, forced to surrender unconditionally. Allied armies, including the USSR's, took control of Germany's government, economy, and population. Europe was a shattered continent.

Fortunately, there was a second chapter: Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, together with General George Marshall, understood that the United States could not revert to its isolationist policies. The harsh measures imposed in 1945 were ultimately mitigated by the Marshall Plan. U.S. economic assistance, plus French-German economic cooperation, the founding of NATO in 1949, and the founding of the European Union in 1957, set the continent on a new trajectory. Of course, the Cold War was a powerful impetus in furthering these developments, and when it ended in 1989, Eastern European countries were invited to share in the bounty. The United States had a critical role in this achievement.

West Berlin, 1949

In the year 2020, one must stress the word "had"—past tense. The Trump administration is recklessly undermining promises of economic prosperity and guarantees of mutual security that have joined the EU's twenty-seven members for decades. But there are also new tensions and quarrels among the Europeans themselves. And rather than tackling needed economic reforms, a growing number of nations are succumbing to the lure of populism and nationalism.

Brexit is the prime—but not the only—example. Poland and Hungary, who reap enormous economic benefits from the EU, nonetheless chafe at its regulatory and judicial standards. Italy and Greece, still recovering from the after-effects of the Great Recession, are neither productive nor constructive members. Germany, a stalwart EU member, stubbornly refuses to loosen the budgetary restraints that are inhibiting economic growth on the rest of the continent, and its tradition of coalition governments is splintering with the emergence of far-right politicians opposing de-Nazification and refusing responsibility for the Holocaust. EU candidate countries in the Balkans have been put on hold to await changes in admission rules. Turkey, which has been waiting to join the EU for many years, is now cozying up to Russia, which is busy undermining the independence of its neighbors, Ukraine and Belarus. In short, Europe is a cauldron on low boil.

Then there is NATO, the fulcrum of European security. Its seventieth-anniversary observances in December—moved from Washington to London to avoid Trump-trouble—were less a celebration than an occasion for sniping and sneering, ending with heads of other member states making fun of Trump behind his back. The president repeatedly criticizes the cost of U.S. participation in NATO, while President Emmanuel Macron declares NATO brain dead. In turn, President Erdoğan of Turkey says it's Macron who's brain dead. In the meantime, the Baltic nations hang suspended between their nemesis, Russia, and NATO's promise of mutual defense.

These antagonisms seem less a blip than the beginning of the end of a successful trans-Atlantic and European-wide alliance that has kept the peace for seventy-five years. A United States of Europe is far-fetched, but the EU and NATO are mechanisms for stability, prosperity, and security. Can these achievements survive the recent outbreaks of nationalism throughout Europe? Can they keep Europeans from each other's throats?

Americans born in the second half of the twentieth century of course have no memory of the death and destruction of its first half. As the United States suffers another bout of what Philip Roth called "indigenous American berserk," we must continue to hope that the twentieth century taught Europeans lessons they will not easily forget. But if they need a reminder, they might consult another brilliant work of history, Christopher Clark's detailed description of how Europe stumbled into war in 1914. The book is ominously titled *The Sleepwalkers*.

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PATRICK JORDAN

The Part He Played

Jerry Ryan, RIP

Jerry Ryan (1937–2020), Boston Irish and Lithuanian, died on January 23. He was eighty-two. The son of a policeman, he began writing for *Commonweal* in 1973. His first byline was Anonymous, as he was reporting firsthand on the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile. At the time, he was a member of the Little Brothers of Jesus (followers of Charles de Foucauld's hidden life of prayer among the poor). And while stationed in Chile, Jerry had been active in creating workers' cooperatives. Now a hunted man, he had to flee for his life. Jerry escaped to Argentina using a pseudonym, then flew to Washington D.C., where he reported firsthand information about the coup. He soon returned to Argentina, then moved to Bolivia, where he worked for seven years.

Jerry was first drawn to living in South America in 1960. At that time, he was working in the engine room of a Norwegian freighter. When it docked in torrid Guayaquil, Ecuador, Jerry encountered a human landscape of "screaming misery" (his words). That reality, he said, turned his life "upside down." He knew immediately where he wanted to spend his life. "I'd never really suspected that such misery existed," he recounted, "but once I had seen it, I had to be part of it."

Jerry once described the Little Brothers as "a geographically scattered group of self-starters." In keeping with their vocation of sharing the daily labor, life, and burdens of the poor, Jerry worked as a lumberjack, gravedigger, brick maker, grape picker, hospital hand, foundry worker, and later, after he left the Little Brothers and returned to Boston, for over thirty years as custodian and shop steward at the New England Aquarium. He had left the Brothers and married Nayda Madrid in Bolivia in 1978. When a series of coups rocked that country two years later, Jerry, his wife, and their young son, Steven, were forced to emigrate to the United States following the abduction and brutal murder of Steven's godfather, Fr. Luis Espinal, SJ (see "Artist, Activist, Martyr," *Commonweal*, August 14, 2015).

Over the decades, many of Jerry's adventures, reflections, and accounts appeared in these pages. A gifted writer and storyteller, his articles and Last Words could make you laugh out loud (see his description of digging graves on a muddy hillside in northern England in the pouring rain—"Real and Unimaginable: The Resurrection of the Body," May 5, 2017). Without exception, however, Jerry's articles led the reader to some profound consideration. (He had studied philosophy and theology with the Dominicans in France and been awarded highest honors.) His own approach came to mirror that of an old priest he had met in rural France in 1960, the curé of Sère-Lanso (see "Legacy of a Country Priest," October 7, 2011). That old priest, Jerry wrote, "talked about the things of God matter-of-factly, simply and naturally, as if this dimension of reality were obvious to everyone." Further, the curé's "peace, goodness, and detachment" helped Jerry simplify his own life and dispel "the false problems I was creating for myself."

Jerry had a profound sense of the Body of Christ, and his own obscure place in it. He suffered a period of alcoholism, after which his compassion for others only deepened. Many years later—after breaking a hip and a wrist at the age of seventy-seven, effectively ending his thirty-three-year shift at the aquarium—Jerry learned anew God's care. This time it was rendered through countless acts of kindness from family, friends, coworkers, and even strangers (see, "One of the Least," February 20, 2015). For Jerry, all this was a manifestation of the Trinity's enveloping compassion, for humanity and all creation.

Jerry Ryan in 2013, Porto, Portugal

COURTESY OF NAYDA RYAN

As his *Commonweal* articles demonstrated, Jerry Ryan was a profound and versatile theological thinker. *Versatile* because of his openness to the ways and truths of others and—most pointedly—of the Holy Spirit; *profound* because he never shied away from the most haunting and daunting of mysteries: God's existence and presence, the Trinity, death, and humankind's sin and redemption. Amazingly, he did this with a straightforward grace and beauty that never settled for the formulaic or merely theoretical. He achieved it through plain language that emanated from his experience.

When Dorothy Day died in 1980, Jerry attended her funeral Mass. Later, he told of seeing sparks dance around her coffin at the Gospel ("The Fear of God," September 12, 2014). At his own funeral Mass, his son read from one of Jerry's *Commonweal* pieces, "Fireworks" (July 5, 2019), because, he said, it conveyed his father's voice. It is the story of a young piccolo player who couldn't see her own tremendous contribution to the fabulous orchestrated fireworks demonstration Jerry had just witnessed over Boston harbor. Jerry tried to reassure the young instrumentalist of her singular, necessary role: "We must play our part without (yet) knowing its whole significance," he said. For Jerry himself, that significance is now fully—and no doubt joyously—revealed.

PATRICK JORDAN *is a former member of the* Commonweal *staff.*

POETRY

GLOBUS CRUCIGER

John Martone

Outside the cinder block screen
past fig tree and laurel shade

hydrangeas turn whiter
than handkerchiefs and blouses on the line

than azaleas and snowdrops
snowballs

and farther back whiter
than memory's blanc—

orb in the royal infant's hand—

mother's flower and now
in wet summer bluer

than her madonna
violet as wounds

wine-dark globular
galaxies hurtle away

rubbing her forehead
that translucent crown
as she sits at the kitchen table.

JOHN MARTONE *is the author of several books of poetry, including* so long *and* Storage Case, *and the editor of* Spiritual Necessity: Selected Poems of Frank Samperi. *His new volume of translations,* Giovanni Pascoli: O Little One and Selected Poems *will appear in December from Laertes Books.*

MICHAEL W. HIGGINS

Shattering the Illusion

The Canadian church's long-delayed reckoning with sex abuse

It was early December of last year when I heard an extraordinary interview with a Canadian bishop on CBC Radio One, Canada's premier English-speaking public broadcaster. Extraordinary because it was thirty minutes long; extraordinary because it was on *Sunday Edition*, a coveted spot on the award-winning network's flagship news roundup; and extraordinary most of all because it was a Canadian bishop being interviewed on the subject of clerical sex abuse in a way that was vigorously interrogatory without being adversarial.

Most importantly, the bishop, Thomas Dowd, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Montreal, was non-defensive, persuasively contrite, uncharacteristically spin-free and transparent in his responses, and genuinely warm and nonjudgmental in his pastoral approach.

Dowd was on air because of the controversy surrounding the allegations, trial, and sentencing of Brian Boucher, a priest-abuser of long standing. Dowd had listened to Boucher's accusers, believed them, advocated on their behalf, and daily attended Boucher's trial in order to be with them, the survivors.

It was clear we had crossed a national threshold: a Canadian bishop talking on a secular network about clerical sex abuse in a manner that was as credible as it was humble. And none too soon.

Throughout 2019 the Canadian Catholic Church was rocked by a series of disclosures and investigations that reopened the wounds of clerical sex abuse. In addition to the Boucher trial in Montreal, TVOntario, the provincial public-television broadcaster, aired *Prey*, a documentary on Basilian priest Hod Marshall, the serial abuser of seventeen minors over a teaching span of thirty-two years in three Ontario cities—Sudbury, Windsor, and Toronto. Oversight by the Congregation of St. Basil was deficient, the legal strategies bereft of a Gospel-inspired justice, the end result demoralizing for all. Marshall confessed prior to his death in 2014 at ninety-two, but the legal wrangling continued without a satisfying resolution. Hence, the scorching effect of the documentary.

Meanwhile, in an unrelated development, the Basilian Archbishop of Vancouver, Michael Miller, past president of the University of St. Thomas in Houston, empowered a review committee to publish the names of nine of thir-

COURTESY OF TVONTARIO

A still from *Prey*, Matt Gallagher's 2019 documentary about priest Hod Marshall, who serially abused seventeen Ontario minors over thirty-two years

ty-six abusers in the archdiocese over the past seventy years. Because of legal challenges, Miller is currently unable to release the entire list but his intention is to do so. Public patience is at a premium, however. Such an episcopal initiative is unprecedented in Canada, although not in other national jurisdictions. What Miller did was to underscore the disturbing reality of episcopal mishandling of the clerical sex-abuse file, the failure to have a country-wide strategy of redress, the shameful paucity of data on the national scene, and the lack of resources and effective consulting. Unlike the Catholic Church of England and Wales with its Nolan and Cumberlege Reports, in Ireland with its Ryan and Murphy Reports, and in the United States with its John Jay College of Criminal Justice Report, the Catholic Church in Canada has no broad review encompassing all the regions of the country and all the statistics essential for an effective response to a pan-national crisis.

This is not to say that the church leadership has been unresponsive. The Winter Commission, established by Alphonsus Penney, the Archbishop of St. John's in Newfoundland and Labrador, investigated the abuses in 1989–1990 associated with the scandal-ridden Mount Cashel Orphanage under the sponsorship of the Irish Christian Brothers, and as a result of its work he tendered his resignation. Concurrent with the Winter Commission was the Hughes Inquiry, a Royal Commission created by the government that provided a stark indictment of ecclesiastical negligence and the catastrophic collapse of appropriate oversight. Although Penney was not required to step down, his authority was profoundly compromised; in subsequent years, well into his retirement, he would be roundly criticized for his failure to handle Fr. James Hickey, the notorious pedophile and popular church spokesperson for the 1984 papal visit to Newfoundland.

In 1992, out of the ruins of the Mount Cashel disaster, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) published a collection of materials for diocesan and parish discussion, "Breach of Trust, Breach of Faith," and a detailed report, *From Pain to Hope*, containing some fifty recommendations. It openly acknowledged the abuse that had flourished precisely in the absence of serious protocols or even pastoral expectations of accountability.

In 2010, Cardinal Thomas C. Collins of the Archdiocese of Toronto, the premier Anglophone prelate in the country, put in place a tightened regime of rules of conduct and reporting. Then, in 2018, the bishops would return with a significant revision of *From Pain to Hope* titled *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse: A Call to the Catholic Faithful in Canada for Healing, Reconciliation and Transformation*. Individual dioceses issued their own guidelines and procedures to ensure appropriate vigilance. All contributed to the illusion that somehow the Canadian church had escaped the crisis that had consumed other churches in the Catholic communion.

And it was an illusion. The church's response to any new charge or lawsuit has been piecemeal. The diocese or religious congregation or order implicated is under legal obligation to react, but national standards, national oversight, and national data are all still missing.

The feisty and prophetic nun, bioethicist, and pediatrician Nuala Kenny of Halifax has for years insisted on the need for heightened awareness around the sex-abuse crisis. In her role as a frequent advisor to the CCCB, Kenny has warned that the procedures that the church has in place are insufficient to stop abuse, and that the church's refusal to deal adequately with the threat is a continuing scandal in itself. In her 2019 book *Still Unhealed: Treating the Pathology in the Clergy Sex Abuse Crisis*, she writes, "As a physician trained to respond rapidly to illness and risk of harm, the denial and delay in leadership response has both baffled and angered me. My heart aches over the often vicious disagreement regarding the accurate and comprehensive diagnosis and treatment of the root causes of this crisis."

Convinced of the systemic problems—the deeper pathology—Kenny is tenacious in her advocacy for greater transparency and radical reforms in church structures. One of the reforms that could be instituted immediately: the education of future priests. But little has changed on this front, in spite of Kenny's arguments and the recommendations of the 1992 report. Today, very few women teach in seminaries. Bishops prefer to spend money renovating classical seminaries—St. Peter's in London, Ontario, is a case in point—and to maintain the status quo at these institutions. St. Augustine's Seminary in Toronto, the largest English-speaking seminary in Canada, is a redoubt of clerical isolationism and theological conservatism.

And while the bishops navigate around the still-perilous decline of priests in the parochial presbyterate—clustering of parishes, frantic recruitment of foreign priests, increased use of minimally educated permanent deacons—instances of sex abuse continue to surface.

The public attention accorded the Boucher trial in Montreal was merely a precursor of what was to come in the rest of 2019. A petition before the House of Commons in Ottawa initiated by an abuse survivor in the Diocese of St. Catharines in Ontario called on the federal government to establish an inquiry into the church's handling of abusive priests. The petition emerged around the time of the creation of a new national body, Advocates for Clergy Trauma Survivors in Canada, which has called for lists of abuser clerics, living and dead, from the local ordinaries. This more aggressive approach by survivors was largely inspired by initiatives in the United States, where state attorneys-general are increasingly aggressive in demanding full diocesan disclosure and the elimination of statutes of limitation.

The Canadian church has come a long way from the time when damage control was the dominant pastoral modus operandi. When Thomas Rosica, founder and then-CEO of Salt + Light Catholic Television Network, moved to suppress the publication of *Suffer the*

The entire Canadian church, wearied and demoralized by what novelist Leo Furey calls the "sadness sickness," is desperate to exorcise the demon of abuse once and for all.

Children unto Me: An Open Inquiry into the Clerical Sex Abuse Crisis, a work that the lawyer and broadcast journalist Peter Kavanagh and I wrote in 2010, the publisher rightly refused. Rosica's reasoning: it would "disturb the bishops." Such an attitude was not atypical, reflecting an abiding concern about institutional reputation, already sundered by media exposure.

If episcopal documents and statistical studies were in short supply, investigative journalists and creative artists were active in bringing the persistent problem to light. With *Unholy Orders: Tragedy at Mount Cashel*, Michael Harris did for Canada what Jason Berry did for the United States with *Lead Us Not into Temptation: Priests and the Sexual Abuse of Children*. Film documentarian John N. Smith shocked the nation with his visceral docudrama *The Boys of St. Vincent*; the multi-award-winning novelist Linden MacIntyre's *The Bishop's Man* presciently illustrated the spiritual quandaries of the Diocese of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, just prior to the national trauma occasioned by the arrest of its bishop, Raymond Lahey, for possession of child porn. Perhaps most moving was the film *Fall* by Terrance Odette, a story in which repressed memory, psycho-sexual immaturity, and aching loneliness combine to upend the life of a priest in Niagara Falls.

Of course, far more still needs to be done. In December 2019, Eric Oland, the Provincial of the Jesuits of Canada, announced that the order will release a list of abusers in the coming year following a detailed audit, disclose the full costs of out-of-court settlements, and actively and publicly promote the healing of victims. Jesuits in the American Midwest had already moved in that direction, and the decision by the Jesuit Pope Francis to lift the pontifical secret to ensure uncompromised and direct cooperation with civil authorities on issues of abuse and cover-up indicates that a sense of urgency has taken hold.

Many church leaders in Canada now seem determined to be proactive rather than defensive. Undoubtedly, the bishops recognize that they no longer control the narrative: survivors are emboldened by their American peers and are pushing not just for remedial action but also for radical reform, while provincial and federal attorneys-general and politicians seem compelled to take action. Hence, the initiatives by Miller of Vancouver and Oland of the Jesuits. They are in the vanguard. More are to come. Meanwhile, St. Paul University in Ottawa, a pontifical university, has launched the Centre for Safeguarding Minors and Vulnerable Persons, diocesan officials across the country are reviewing their policies, and Nuala Kenny continues her unstoppable crusade for right judgment supported by action. Canadian theologian Catherine Clifford cautions, "If the shepherds of the church really want to earn back the trust of the faithful and restore credibility with the wider community…regular audits and systems of reporting must become a permanent feature of Catholic diocesan life—as they are in all public institutions and corporations today." The entire Canadian church, wearied and demoralized by what novelist Leo Furey calls the "sadness sickness," is desperate to exorcise the demon of abuse once and for all—to, in the words of Provincial Oland, allow people of faith to work for our common world without having to carry "this yoke over our shoulders." Amen.

MICHAEL W. HIGGINS *is Distinguished Professor of Catholic Thought at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut, a Senior Fellow of Massey College at the University of Toronto, and a biographer of Merton, Nouwen, and Vanier.*

JOHN P. SLATTERY

Evolution & Racism

How embracing science has strengthened the church's commitment to equality

In twenty-first-century America, science has become so politicized that to speak openly of "supporting science" likely marks you as a Democrat. Today, 97 percent of climate scientists agree that climate change has been caused by human beings, while major scientific organizations work openly against social evils like racism, misogyny, and poverty. But despite its recent record, science has not always aligned so well with modern values of equality and the common good. The history of science includes not only racial hierarchies, but also Western cultural supremacy, the militarization of scientific knowledge, and the subordination of scientific research to corporate profits.

In the mid-nineteenth century, racist ideas pervaded the scientific, philosophical, and religious worlds. Atheists and religious alike owned enslaved people, as did prominent scientists, politicians, and philosophers. While political revolutions raged in Europe, the industrial revolution brought remarkable advances in technology and wealth, largely on the backs of the enslaved. It was into this social context that Charles Darwin introduced his theory of "evolution by means of natural selection" in 1859. At the time of publication, most scholars still believed in the immediate creation of all human life by God or by Nature. Some, like Darwin, believed that all humans were one species, an idea called monogenism. Others, like David Hume, Louis Agassiz, and Josiah Nott, believed that humans were created as multiple species with different levels of intelligence, a theory called polygenism. While most abolitionists were monogenists and most pro-slavery advocates were polygenists, there were exceptions. Plenty of people who believed in monogenism (including many abolitionists) held that white Europeans carried the ideal form of humanity, and a few who believed in polygenism were in fact abolitionists themselves, arguing that the different human species were all equal. In the final line of *Origin of Species*, Darwin himself hammered the first nail in the coffin of polygenistic science with a lofty vision of universal common ancestry:

> There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.

Despite some inaccuracies and fierce opposition, Darwin's blend of novel hypotheses, expansive taxonomic work, and good rhetoric transformed the scientific world within a few decades. By the late-nineteenth century, only a few supporters of polygenism remained, but the philosophical, theological, and scientific racism that had made polygenism so popular was soon drawing people to a new cause: eugenics.

"Eugenics" (Greek for "well bred") was named in 1883 by Darwin's cousin Francis Galton, the creator of the IQ test. Galton gained widespread support for eugenics by arguing, theologically, that eugenics was a proper application of the Gospel parable of the talents, while also arguing, culturally, that Darwin's idea of natural selection helped explain why white European men had conquered the world and were therefore the most advanced examples of humanity. This intermingling of racism, science, philosophy, theology, and politics laid a terrible groundwork for mainstream scientific thought in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. For Galton and most of the educated elite, the program of eugenics would allow humans to do intentionally what nature does randomly: favoring the most biologically capable, the "fittest," and gradually ridding the world of the unfit. Between 1883 and 1939—the year World War II began—eugenic philosophies, theologies, and laws spread like wildfire.

Before the rise of Nazi Germany, the most potent application of eugenics was in the United States, whose ruling class held tightly to racism, xenophobia, and cultural progressivism. Eugenics in the United States included campaigns to encourage the reproduction of the fittest human specimens, celebrations of the fittest babies, and efforts to determine, via Galton's IQ test and other measures, the "most fit humans." But it also included forced-sterilization and anti-miscegenation laws, forced birth control, forced abortions, concentration camps, and unethical scientific experiments on black and other nonwhite communities.

Beyond the United States, eugenics played into the hands of powerful people with sinister agendas. In Canada and Mexico, anti-indigenous biases determined the nature of most eugenic laws. In South Africa, Tanzania, Namibia, Kenya, Rwanda, and Burundi, anti-black and anti-indigenous racism motivated both sterilization and anti-miscegenation laws, as well as death camps. In most of Europe, as well as Russia, China, Iran, Australia, and New Zealand, the eugenics movement channeled long-established hostility to Jews, Africans, indigenous peoples, women, and immigrants.

An illustration by American physician J. C. Nott of geologist Louis Agassiz's theory that each region of the world is populated by separately created sets of species, both animal and human. The idea of multiple, separately created races was used to justify slavery and other forms of subjugation.

In all these countries, including the United States, people with disabilities and the poor were among the first to be sterilized, silenced, or killed. Thousands of scientific experiments were performed on people against their wills, and countless laws inspired by eugenics were passed in the name of scientific progress. The genocidal actions of Nazi Germany and all German-controlled countries were uniquely horrific in their implementation of eugenic ideas, but Hitler's program was largely inspired by the language and laws of the American eugenics movement.

While eugenics spread so quickly because of its standing as an accepted application of a scientific theory, it's important to remember that Christians played a large role in the dissemination of eugenics. Galton and many others used explicitly theological language to argue for eugenics from the beginning. As Christine Rosen writes in *Preaching Eugenics*, "one of the largest standing committees of the American Eugenics Society [in the first three decades of the twentieth century] was the Committee on Cooperation with Clergymen." In fact, clergy of many religious traditions joined in the cause, writing, preaching, and lecturing widely in support of eugenics.

Anti-modernist Catholics were one notable exception to this. Together with fundamentalist Protestants, most Catholics opposed both evolution and eugenics. Eugenics was largely supported by moderate and liberal Christians who embraced science because they believed it was on the side of social progress. The same people who supported some variety of eugenics often championed progressive political causes. Such figures included Helen Keller, Winston Churchill, Teddy Roosevelt, and (as I've previously argued here) Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Some eugenics supporters believed all *peoples* (though not necessarily all people) were equal (e.g., W.E.B. DuBois), but most believed that those of non-European descent were all inferior to whites.

In short, if you accepted Darwin's evolutionary theory in the early twentieth century, you probably also supported eugenics. Pro-science progressives embraced both, while conservatives, including the Vatican, rejected both. Very few rejected one but not the other.

Things changed quickly after the war. Public support of eugenics plummeted after Nazi Germany's crimes were revealed. While many scientists continued to argue against the equality of all humans—protesting en masse, for example, against the 1950 UNESCO statement on human rights—the tide of public opinion had turned. At the same time, the Catholic Church's position on evolution was beginning to change. Pius XII's *Humani generis* (1950) opened the church to discussion of evolutionary theory; a decade later Vatican II opened the church to modern science in general. *Gaudium et spes* balanced both the theological and the scientific pursuits of truth through the doctrine, declared at the Fifth Lateran Council and reaffirmed at the First Vatican Council, that "truth cannot contradict truth":

> Therefore if methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord

> with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith, for earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God. Indeed whoever labors to penetrate the secrets of reality with a humble and steady mind, even though he is unaware of the fact, is nevertheless being led by the hand of God, who holds all things in existence, and gives them their identity. Consequently, we cannot but deplore certain habits of mind, which are sometimes found too among Christians, which do not sufficiently attend to the rightful independence of science and which, from the arguments and controversies they spark, lead many minds to conclude that faith and science are mutually opposed (Gaudium et spes, 36).

Thus, in the latter half of the twentieth century, Roman Catholicism became the first and largest Christian community to hold together a progressive acceptance of science with an insistence on universal human equality and dignity, from conception until natural death.

In the half-century since Vatican II, evolutionary science has continued to develop and is now the basis for several scientific disciplines. One of these, the science of genetics, has confirmed the thesis that all humans alive today are part of a single species. The 2001 publication of the human genome noted that "any two individuals are more than 99.9 percent identical in sequence, which means that all the glorious differences among individuals in our species that can be attributed to genes falls in a mere 0.1 percent of the sequence." Of this 0.1 percent, a 2004 study showed that "87.6 percent of the total modern human genetic diversity is accounted for by the differences between individuals" of a single population, and "only 9.2 percent between continents." In view of these findings, the authors of the study "see no reason to assume that 'races' represent any units of relevance for understanding human genetic history."

It should be a point of pride among Catholics that the church came to accept evolutionary theory after decades of rejecting the idea. This change put the church in a better position to offer scientists moral guidance. It has also allowed the church to produce theologians who are comfortable with science and scientists who are comfortable with theology. Meanwhile, other Christian communities—and Evangelicals in particular—have continued to struggle with hostility toward science.

It is possible, of course, to oppose racism without subscribing to, or knowing anything about, the theory of evolution. Many holy women and men saw the theological necessity for the abolition of slavery long before the Human Genome Project. But the fact that modern science continues to affirm not only the common ancestry of humanity but also the evolutionary interconnectedness of all life offers significant support to contemporary theological arguments against racial hierarchies. The church may not *need* modern genetics to make its case for human equality, but good theology has always been responsive to the discoveries of the natural sciences. It's worth noting that the church wavered far more on the equal dignity of all human beings *before* it began to accept evolutionary theory in the 1950s than it has since. The nearly universal scientific consensus both that all human beings share a common ancestry and that 99.9 percent of their DNA is the same has helped the twenty-first-century church develop a robust ethic of universal human dignity—and begin building an ethic of the dignity of all life on earth.

JOHN P. SLATTERY *is the author of* Faith and Science at Notre Dame: John Zahm, Evolution, and the Catholic Church *(Notre Dame Press). He is a senior program associate with the Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion Program of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.*

STEVEN KNEPPER

From Problem to Mystery

How Gabriel Marcel's wartime experiences shaped his philosophy

Late in the summer of 1914, before the Western Front settled into its long stalemate, the French army suffered staggering losses at the Battle of the Frontiers and the First Battle of the Marne. Desperate inquiries flooded the Red Cross information service in Paris. Its newly arrived director was a twenty-four-year-old philosopher and playwright, Gabriel Marcel. His job was to track down information about soldiers missing at the front and then relay it to inquirers. In his autobiography, Marcel wrote of this daunting task: "For me it was a question, as much as possible, of taking every particular case that was handed to us by an anguished mother, wife, fiancée, or sister and of gathering the necessary evidence that would allow me to shed light upon the disappearance of a soldier." Marcel worked with the information service for only a short time, but in a way he spent the rest of his life responding to those anguished inquirers, trying to do justice to their loves and losses.

Marcel would later become a prominent figure in the French literary scene, the "Christian existentialist" (a label he disliked) who sparred with Jean-Paul Sartre. Marcel's Paris flat, where he regularly hosted Friday night salons, would become an intellectual hotspot. His work would influence writers and philosophers on both sides of the Atlantic: Emmanuel Mounier, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricœur, Iris Murdoch, Walker Percy, Flannery O'Connor, Henry Bugbee. His philosophical writings would also find a large popular audience despite their wandering style. As Murdoch wrote in a review, Marcel's "argument rambles around in an impressionistic manner, and he tends to let one special concept lead us on into another one, without either having been sufficiently defined by the examples." Yet Murdoch also pointed to passages and concepts of great "revelatory power." She was drawn to Marcel's reflections on openness and self-enclosure, on mysteries and problems, on being and having, reflections that were shaped by Marcel's time in the information service.

The service required Marcel to operate on two levels. On one level, the missing soldier was a "problem" that was solved when Marcel discovered the soldier's status. To solve this problem, Marcel developed a "catalogue of the mind" based on field reports. The missing soldier became a variable in a formula derived from catalogue data. On another level, though, Marcel's position entailed personal encounters. Whenever Marcel told parents their son was dead, it was painfully clear that the soldier was not a variable but a singular human being. Marcel had not solved the problem of the missing soldier for the parents. Even if his news brought an element of closure, the loss remained a "mystery" that would last for the rest of their lives.

The distinction between problem and mystery is central to Marcel's philosophy. A problem is something external to us. It can be solved with the proper, generalizable technique. A mystery, on the other hand, is something from which we cannot extricate ourselves. Marcel called a mystery a "problem which encroaches upon its own data." It has roots in the depths of our being, but it also reaches beyond us. There is no general technique for addressing a mystery. It can only be lived out with a wisdom responsive to the particulars of the situation and the people involved. Birth, love, and death are central mysteries for Marcel. The death of a child involves a parent in all three.

Marcel realized that he could have dealt only in techniques and problems at the information service, that he could have converted "the war into an abstract schema." He could have acted as a functionary whose sole duty was to research and report information. This might have buffered him from the sorrow of the inquirers, but it would have also contributed to the dehumanizing effects of the war. This is why he tried to "welcome these people who came to me in a rather personal and human way such that they wouldn't feel as though they were having to deal with some official at a desk or a window." Marcel came to see "every index card" as "a heart-rending personal appeal."

But those index cards also represented the danger of bureaucratic reductionism to Marcel, and this would become a major concern of his later writings. Marcel decried the horrific "techniques of degradation" deployed in the concentration camps and the Gulag. He feared that we had more broadly entered an age of "problematic" humanity, where people were treated as "cases" and saw themselves in turn as amalgamations of "functions." He worried about a tendency throughout late modern culture, from the magazine stand to the doctor's office to the halls of power, to reduce mysteries to problems: love reduced to a reproductive drive, death reduced to a mere biological endpoint. Marcel thought people in love or confronted by the death of a loved one may recognize the inadequacy of this, but they may also have lost the language to express mysteries or the wisdom to navigate them.

In Marcel's view, philosophy should respond to this predicament by illuminating the richness of human life and human relationships, by helping

people open themselves to this richness. He held that humans are thoroughly relational, that the "we are" is a better departure point for philosophy than the "I think." But he also acknowledged that there are better and worse kinds of relationality. We can take a stance of "having" toward others, treating them as a means to our ends. This can take the form of overt subjugation or exploitation, but it can also be subtle. We can become self-enclosed by egotism, for instance, or we can be habituated into relationships of having through commodification and consumerism.

Marcel held that healthy interactions and relationships transcend the world of having and enter the world of "being." They are marked by "communion." Marcel saw his contemporary Martin Buber, who stressed the importance of the "I-Thou" relationship, as a kindred spirit in these regards. Marcel argued that we should cultivate a radical openness to others—what he called *disponibilité* (roughly "availability" in English). He claimed that healthy relationships with family members, spouses, friends, and neighbors involve a "creative fidelity" based on such openness. This fidelity involves continual attunement and responsiveness. Marcel distinguished it from mere constancy, which can be grudging perseverance in a static, stale relationship. Here Marcel was influenced by Charles Péguy, the idiosyncratic Catholic poet and thinker who died at the Marne.

Marcel claimed that we have an "ontological need" for communion with others and that many modern ills result from this need going unmet. On this point, Marcel disagreed sharply with the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness*. For Sartre, the relationship with the other was usually agonistic if not overtly antagonistic. Marcel acknowledged that there was much truth in Sartre's deft analyses of how the other makes limiting claims and projects limiting roles that we can adopt in "bad faith." Indeed, Marcel's own plays are full of characters who consciously or unconsciously manipulate others for self-serving ends. Still, Marcel was wary of how Sartre—and modern philosophy more broadly—gave priority to conflict. Marcel recognized Sartre's skill at uncovering hypocrisy and hidden motives, but warned that such suspicion easily hypertrophies so that love and gratitude become mere ciphers for desire and ingratiation.

INTERFOTO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Gabriel Marcel

Marcel's philosophy reflects a sensibility that is deeply Christian. His account of *disponibilité* echoes the injunction to love one's neighbor, the biblical wisdom that one must lose oneself to find oneself. He offered compelling philosophical accounts of the theological virtues—faith, hope, and love. His dynamic, creative fidelity marks not only healthy relationships between people but also the healthy life of faith. Marcel developed an influential account of hope during the Nazi occupation of World War II. He argued that hope exceeds the hope for particular outcomes. It is a sort of existential *disponibilité* that does not fatalistically close down possibilities. He claimed that love is the "essential ontological datum" and that it points the way to God.

Still, Marcel did not convert to Catholicism until the age of forty, and he always hoped that his philosophy would speak to believers and unbelievers alike. His father was agnostic, and Marcel did not grow up in a religious household. Yet religion interested him from a young age. Marcel converted in 1929 after the novelist François Mauriac wrote him a letter noting his proximity to Catholicism and asking him why he had not joined the church. Marcel was friends with Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson, but his conversion did not draw him to Thomism. He instead provided a different set of philosophical resources to the Catholic personalism that developed in early-twentieth-century France.

Today, Marcel is best known as an existentialist, and one of the central existentialist concerns is the confrontation with death. Marcel was less concerned with one's own death, though, than with the death of the loved one. He noted some affinities between his own philosophy and Martin Heidegger's, for instance, but he also claimed that Heidegger's emphasis on "being-toward-death" "minimizes the importance of the death of the other, the death of the loved person." Marcel warned that this could lead to "existential solipsism."

The childhood loss of Marcel's mother was crucial in this regard, as was the loss of his wife Jacqueline in 1947. The inquirers at the information service were important as well. In Marcel's unfinished play *The Unfathomable*, written immediately after the First World War, characters respond to a missing soldier's possible death in markedly different ways. Edith, the soldier's sister-in-law, worked in an information service like Marcel. She has learned that her brother-in-law has indeed died. She maintains a sort of creative fidelity to him beyond death, though, a fidelity that counters despair. A priest friend, unsettled by the close relationship that had formed between Edith and her brother-in-law, tells her that she should not try to think about him but only pray for him. Edith responds, "When I think of him in a certain way—with tenderness, with recollection—there wells up in me something like a richer, deeper life in which I know he participates. This life is not I, nor is it he; it is both of us." Marcel called this scene "one of the most significant that I have written." For Marcel, such fidelity is not only about remembering a lost loved one in a certain way. It is about a love that truly transcends death, one in which it is still possible, at least some of the time, to feel the deceased loved one as an accompanying presence. Is this a real presence? Marcel called this a "crucial question the difficulty of which one should not underestimate." But he claimed that the question of the loved one's presence lies beyond a narrowly conceived objectivity. It is more a matter of faith, hope, and love.

Here another key difference between Marcel and Sartre emerges. Their approaches to God and the afterlife mirror their differences regarding the human other. For the atheist Sartre, God would negate human freedom. For Marcel, God is infinite love, to which we open ourselves not only in prayer and religious practice but also in communion with others. Far from limiting freedom, God offers the deepest freedom. Sartre's classic play *No Exit* imagines hell as three people stuck together forever. Marcel knew that we can make each other miserable, especially when we are self-absorbed and manipulative. His idea of hell would likely be an even more extreme *indisponibilité*—a self-enclosure like that of Dante's frozen Satan. In any case, he was more concerned with the hint of heaven experienced in love. "If there is in me an unshakeable certitude," he wrote, "it is that a world deserted by love can only be swallowed up in death. But it is also true that, where love persists, where it triumphs over whatever tends to degrade it, death cannot but be definitively vanquished." Marcel observed that hope for immortality is not necessarily selfish or life-denying. Often, it is hope for a departed love one rather than for oneself. Again, we might think of those anguished inquirers whose sons, siblings, friends, and lovers died in the war. Marcel claimed that the mystery of love, which seems to transcend our finitude in its intensity and reach, points toward consummation in a life to come.

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Three Poems by Bhisham Bherwani

LEGACY

Primed, a film of cream brushed into lather,
supple to thumb and to a five-edged Schick,
he arches for no pro barber his neck
to tame the bristles: his brother

knows that from the cheekbone to the temple
the dark patch is not birthmark, not there before
self-inflicted blows became feature.
I slide it aside, and glide blade down the stubble.

Once he was our father's spitting image,
papa who, younger then than I am now, stood
beside me when impatient for manhood
I raised to face a razor at sixteen. We've aged:

he's now our mother's father. Ghostly witnesses
coalesced, steam from the faucet rises.

LEGO

To break so vast a Heart
Required a Blow as vast –
No Zephyr felled this Cedar straight –
'Twas undeserved Blast –
(Dickinson)

From a green plate, one square foot and studded,
brick on Duplo brick a high-rise scaled
to a blue penthouse floor snapped on red.

Fog hid the city. Our lurid tower
arced, a totem in relief: outside
across the bay the skyline loomed a blur.

Above the lapping sea, the turning tide,
below advancing clouds, hung my reverie:
a partnership of builder brother barons,
two grizzled would-be architects and masons.

Plastic to concrete: I willed an alchemy
beyond our smiles beside it for the selfie
before the climbing breakers first tossed breeze,
then a leveling gust through the balcony.

LEGS

I walked along the Hudson River thinking
of autumn sundown, motion and stasis,
transport; across a mossy stream the cataract
we waded to, through mist
your arm outstretched to torrent, I for safety,
as once on a squally beach, pulling you back.
I thought of Dante stuck in the ninth circle;
of the sunlit clubhouse pool,

you, fearless of pits and plunges,
buoyed by papa, splashing and laughing
to the deep. It seemed bottomless and
far. That was then, but I can see
your legs still driving you from my shallow end.
Finish the lap, brother, return to me.

BHISHAM BHERWANI *is the author of three poetry books. His essays have appeared in the* American Poetry Review, *the* American Reader, Pleiades, Rain Taxi, *the* Yale Review, *and other places.*

Reading Buttigieg

James T. Kloppenberg

A former teacher's perspective

Buttigieg participates in a town hall in Waterloo, Iowa, September 22, 2019.

CHUCK KENNEDY / PETE FOR AMERICA

In 1972, I cast my first ballot in a presidential election, with pride and conviction, for George McGovern. To me and to many of his enthusiastic young supporters, McGovern embodied the once-vibrant progressive farm-labor tradition of the upper Midwest. His embrace of ideas championed by Eugene McCarthy and Bobby Kennedy four years earlier, his opposition to the war in Vietnam, and his support of proposals such as a guaranteed annual income and a dramatic increase in the estate tax endeared him to many student radicals—at least those who had not abandoned mainstream politics for other alternatives. McGovern of course was buried by Richard Nixon in one of the biggest landslides in U.S. history, winning less than 38 percent of the popular vote and losing the Electoral College 520 to 17. The bumper stickers that appeared when the Watergate scandal broke—"Don't blame me, I'm from Massachusetts"—provided comic relief at a moment when American democracy seemed to many on the left mired in muck.

Like many members of my generation, I have been unable to forget the lesson I learned in 1972. In the eleven subsequent presidential elections, I have worried that no candidate I could support with pride and conviction could be elected to national office. I was anxious that even Barack Obama, whom many of us left-leaning Democrats admired for his character and his intelligence as much as for his political skills, might have trouble balancing his commitments to deliberation and compromise with the steps required to advance the core ideals of American democracy, autonomy and equality. The same fears plague me now.

The contest for this year's Democratic Party presidential nomination began promisingly enough. A raft of able and experienced candidates, including Obama's vice president Joe Biden and U.S. senators Michael Bennet, Cory Booker, Kirsten Gillibrand, Kamala Harris, Amy Klobuchar, and Bernie Sanders, offered the prospect of a lively and unpredictable race for the nomination. Like many overeducated people toward the left end of the political spectrum, I consider Elizabeth Warren, from my own state of Massachusetts, one of the strongest candidates in my lifetime. My enthusiasm for her, predictably, makes me uneasy. Following the disaster of 2016, the Democratic Party came into this electoral cycle with a battle-tested first team and a deep bench of veterans. Surely one of them would emerge to unite the party and counter the forces that propelled the least qualified and most dishonest candidate in American history into the White House.

But it hasn't happened. Instead the race has remained inchoate. Even the *New York Times* editorial board couldn't decide: it endorsed both the more progressive Warren and the more moderate Klobuchar, an option that will not be available to any voters. Granted, American democracy is a mess. Sophisticated gerrymandering, a 24/7 news cycle in which echo chambers and confirmation bias undercut the very idea of nonpartisan fact-finding, the declining engagement of an increasingly cynical and poorly informed electorate, and the infusion of enormous amounts of invisible money into public life all endanger the lifeblood of popular government, the integrity of our electoral politics. The president's acquittal in his impeachment trial, despite overwhelming evidence demonstrating his corruption and obstruction of justice, shows how low the Republican Party has sunk into the swamp of hyper-partisanship.

Of course character assassination, misdirection, and simple skullduggery are as old as the 1790s, when party politics emerged in the new nation. Yet the depth, scope, and sheer number of President Trump's lies (already surpassing 16,000,

according to the *Washington Post*) is without precedent in U.S. history. So is the bewildering fidelity of the president's supporters, who seem to have become oddly immune to his deceit, self-dealing, vulgarity, and venality. All the Democratic frontrunners have scrambled to demonstrate that they can win the crucial states that Hillary Clinton lost in 2016—and to distance themselves from each other. So far, none has been able to separate herself or himself decisively from the pack. Instead, the big surprise has been the meteoric rise of a formerly unknown newcomer, Mayor Pete Buttigieg, who seemed to come out of nowhere.

Except that he did not. I have known Buttigieg since he was an undergraduate at Harvard. I taught Peter, as he was known then, in two classes during his senior year, 2003–2004. He was a frequent visitor to office hours, and seeing him two or three times a week during nine months meant that we became pretty well acquainted. We stayed in touch after he graduated. Although his transcript showed that I was one of the few Harvard professors to give him anything less than an A grade, he asked me to write one of the letters of recommendation for the Rhodes scholarship that took him to Oxford. A few years after he returned from England, I met with him, and with a couple dozen of his politically active peers, to talk about my book *Reading Obama* at a gathering he helped organize. When Buttigieg was elected mayor of South Bend, Indiana, and he returned to Cambridge for conferences at the Kennedy School of Government, we got together to discuss everything from the details of smart sewers and street paving to the intractable, perennial challenges of urban renewal and race relations in a once-prosperous city struggling with deindustrialization.

Since Buttigieg launched his campaign for the presidency last year, I have read or reread much of what he has written, at Harvard and since. Most notable is his excellent memoir *Shortest Way Home*, with its lyrical evocations of the Indiana landscape, its vivid account of military life in Afghanistan, its rollicking tales of campaign stops featuring Deep Fried Turkey Testicles and peanut-butter-and-bacon sandwiches dusted with powdered sugar, and its incisive analysis of the rewards and frustrations of life as mayor of a small city. I have spoken with a number of his friends, former classmates, and people active in his campaign. I had a very good meeting with him, after one of his recent fundraising events in Boston, about the experiences that have shaped his sensibility. I wanted to discuss with him the ideas that had mattered most to him, and to find out more about the relation between his religious faith and his political convictions. This article profiles the college student I got to know at Harvard and the budding political insurgent who, like many of his friends, was troubled by the acquiescence of the Democratic Party of Bill Clinton and after in the so-called Reagan Revolution of tax cuts and deregulation. I pay less attention to Buttigieg the savvy and agile presidential candidate. Because he has made himself available to countless audiences, readers with access to YouTube can view hundreds of videos of Mayor Pete giving stump speeches or participating in debates, doing television or radio interviews, and meeting in town halls with the curious and the skeptical, with adoring fans and hate-filled hecklers. Of the people I have spoken with who knew Peter twenty years ago, few expected he would be running for president in 2020. Fewer are surprised to see him performing so well.

Of the people I have spoken with who knew Peter twenty years ago, few expected he would be running for president in 2020. Fewer are surprised to see him performing so well.

Both of Buttigieg's parents taught at Notre Dame, so he grew up familiar with the strengths and the quirks of the academic world. Family friends say that as a boy Buttigieg was an articulate, pleasant conversationalist, as comfortable talking with grown-ups as playing with kids his own age. He excelled academically at St. Joseph High School in South Bend, graduating as senior class president and valedictorian. Along the way he wrote a prize-winning essay on Bernie Sanders, of all people, whom he admired for the courage of his unconventional socialist convictions and his willingness, at least at that stage of his career, to work with members of both major parties. The reward for that essay was a trip to Boston's John F. Kennedy Library, where Buttigieg was introduced to Sen. Ted Kennedy.

Having grown up in the shadow of Notre Dame's Golden Dome, Buttigieg was hardly overawed by the red-brick buildings of Harvard Yard or intimidated by Harvard's professors. His parents, who moved from New Mexico State to Notre Dame before he was born, made sure he was immersed in books and ideas. His father, Joe Buttigieg, an ebullient Maltese immigrant, studied Joyce and Gramsci and taught English literature. His mother, Anne Montgomery, a native of southern Indiana, taught linguistics and nurtured her son's fascination with languages. Given his family background, he entered Harvard just about as well prepared academically as classmates who had attended glossy prep schools.

Buttigieg never lacked confidence. After Ted Sorensen spoke at Harvard's Institute of Politics (IOP) during Buttigieg's freshman year, Buttigieg posed a challenging question to the man who

had served as JFK's chief speechwriter: If Kennedy had decided to bomb Cuba during the missile crisis, how would Sorensen have framed the speech necessary to explain that step? The topic of war became less abstract in Buttigieg's sophomore year, when the 9/11 attacks brought Americans together—briefly, as it turned out—and George W. Bush took the nation to war in Afghanistan. Two years later, on the pretext that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction—a pretext that, it was later revealed, the Bush administration knew to be false—the United States went to war in Iraq.

By that time Buttigieg was already so deeply immersed in politics on campus that his mother wondered if he was as committed to studying History and Literature, his declared concentration, as he was to the IOP. After Bush invaded Iraq, Buttigieg delivered a speech at a rally in front of Harvard's Science Center explaining why he thought Americans should oppose the war. That speech persuaded more than a few of his fellow students, including Zachary Liscow, now a professor at Yale Law School, who remembers being impressed by Buttigieg's sincerity as well as his eloquence. Like many of his fellow Harvard College Democrats, Buttigieg was troubled by the party's apparent willingness to go along with Republican initiatives in domestic and foreign policy. When Sen. Ted Kennedy spoke at the IOP in 2003, Buttigieg challenged him by asking whether the Democrats had essentially become Republicans-lite or still offered a distinctive alternative to tax cuts and foreign wars. Kennedy's evasive answer, coming as it did from one of the most progressive members of the party, could only have confirmed the premise of Buttigieg's question.

In his junior and senior year, Buttigieg became more visible at Harvard, both because of articles he wrote for the student newspaper, the *Crimson*, and because he emerged as one of the central figures in the IOP. Together with his friends Previn Warren, now an attorney in New York and legal counsel in Buttigieg's campaign, and Ganesh Sitaraman, a professor at Vanderbilt Law School, formerly counsel in Warren's Senate office, and now an adviser in her campaign, Buttigieg spearheaded a drive to increase student input into decision-making at the IOP. In his first, jointly written article for the *Crimson*, Buttigieg urged his fellow students to view not only community service but also political engagement as a valuable form of extracurricular activity. Buttigieg himself had worked briefly in a shelter for battered women during the summer after his freshman year. But as was happening elsewhere, a rift was opening at Harvard between students committed to such work, or to tutoring students or volunteering at homeless shelters, on the one hand, and those committed to political action on the other. In the *Crimson* article Buttigieg expressed alarm at how few young people were voting, working in campaigns, or participating in demonstrations. "In a nation where a lifetime of honorable work in direct service could be wiped out by a single stroke of poor policy from an elected official or legislature, the absence of our generation's voice from the political process is a hazardous reality for anyone committed to social progress, and a red flag for democracy itself."

That commitment brought Buttigieg to my classes in his senior year. The course he took in the fall semester, Social Thought in Modern America, was described by the *Crimson* as "the toughest humanities class at the College, combining soul-crushingly dense and difficult material with a will-breaking workload." In other words, it was a class for people like Pete, Previn Warren, their friend and fellow IOP stalwart Ilan Graff, and fifty-two other smart, intellectually ambitious students keen to study the relation between ideas and politics in post–Civil War U.S. history. Because the course involved a great deal of class discussion, and student demand exceeded the number of names I could learn—and I believe teachers should know their students—I limited enrollment. Instead of choosing the class by lottery, as many professors do in such circumstances, I preferred to decide who should enroll.

To inform my judgments, I required interested students to write an essay explaining why the course was important to their studies at Harvard and, if possible, to their plans afterward. I also required interested students to meet with me, after I had read their essays, to discuss their reasons in greater detail. Because the course involved three discussions a week—twice a week for half of the ninety-minute lecture meetings, and once in the smaller discussion sections run by graduate students—I wanted to know which students were willing to stay on top of the readings, write the required three essays, and prepare for midterm and final examinations that involved identifying passages from the readings as well as writing synthetic essays.

Tempting as it is to contest the *Crimson*'s characterization, the course was, and has remained, demanding. The readings in 2003, which averaged 250 pages a week, included works of philosophy, social and political theory, religion, literature, and cultural criticism. Writers included the usual suspects for a course in American intellectual history: William James, John Dewey, and W.E.B. Du Bois; William Graham Sumner, Edward Bellamy, and Louis Brandeis; Chief Joseph, Helen Hunt Jackson, and Black Elk; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Jane Addams; Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, and Walter Lippmann; Reinhold Niebuhr, John Courtney Murray, and Martin Luther King, Jr.; Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, and Malcolm X; Clement Greenberg, Allen Ginsburg, and Betty Friedan; Samuel Huntington, Daniel Bell, and Irving Kristol; Judith Butler, Robert Putnam, and Kwame Anthony Appiah; and others. Students wrote essays on topics such as the impact of science on post–Civil War culture; the role of ethnic diversity and racial differences in shaping twentieth-century American politics and ideas; varieties of American feminist thought; and the relation between pragmatist philosophy and democracy. In short, the course was not intended for those who, in the words of *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat (himself a survivor of the course), were looking to "skate through" Harvard.

Why did Buttigieg want to take such a course? He was busy enough that year. To the surprise of many, he had been elected to a time-consuming office, president of the IOP Stu-

dent Advisory Board. The position often goes to an openly ambitious political animal, of which Harvard has its share, rather than a fresh-faced, bookish, fledgling policy wonk such as Buttigieg. In his IOP post he faced the challenge of trying to implement the plans that he and his friends Previn Warren and Ganesh Sitaraman had proposed the year before. Buttigieg had committed to writing a column, "Liberal Art," every two weeks for the *Crimson*. He was in the midst of writing his senior thesis, a study of Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* and the enduring legacy—in Vietnam and, at least implicitly, in Iraq—of what the seventeenth-century New England Puritans had described as their "errand in the wilderness." He was also trying to figure out where his future lay.

He had already volunteered in the unsuccessful campaigns of Al Gore in 2000 and, two years later, those of Massachusetts gubernatorial candidate Robert Reich and Indiana congressional candidate Jill Thompson. But like many of his friends, Buttigieg was now looking for something beyond conventional, and increasingly tired, Democratic Party politics. The party needed to stand for something that could inspire commitment, something other than opposition to Reaganism. In the *Crimson* he observed how easy it was to criticize the bumbling, inarticulate Bush, but complained that none of the Democrats vying for the 2004 nomination had offered a "clearly articulated, positive vision for America." Party leaders needed instead to emphasize the "sense of justice and mutual responsibility" offended by Republican tax cuts, not merely vent their outrage at the Bush administration.

In the essay explaining his reasons for wanting to take Social Thought, Buttigieg wrote that he had wanted to take the course as a sophomore but had been advised to wait. He now expected the course to "anchor" his interests in both history and literature and to help provide a framework for his senior thesis. In light of his career path, the final sentences of his essay are intriguing. "The importance of understanding American social thought also extends beyond my education itself and into my future plans. I seek to work in politics, and I am increasingly aware that part of my motivation to do so is the feeling that present political practice is at odds with the best American intellectual tradition." While that awareness had "framed my thinking and arguments," he wrote, "I need to develop a broader and more sophisticated understanding of the American theories that shaped, and were informed by," our nation's history. "Knowing the intellectual context of familiar events in political history is essential," he concluded, "if I am to stand my ground convincingly and seriously in the political present." My notes from my first conversation with him confirm my initial response to his essay: here was a student ready to think hard about links between yesterday and today. On the campaign trail, when Buttigieg differentiates positive freedom, or the freedom *to* act in order to realize one's goals, from mere negative freedom, simple freedom *from* interference, he knows he is channeling the ideas of John Dewey.

Meeting with Buttigieg often through the semester, I was impressed by the depth of his commitment to politics. He was particularly interested in the ways in which progressive reform movements had been driven forward by people of deep religious faith. From the Social Gospel of the 1890s and 1900s through the New Deal and the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and '60s, many of the leaders and most of the foot soldiers had been inspired by their religious ideals. A central theme of the course was the rise—and perhaps, after 9/11, the fall—of what was frequently called "the culture of irony," the late twentieth century's postmodern skepticism about dogmas and distrust of eternal truths. In my lectures I emphasized the ways in which the founders of the American philosophy of pragmatism a century earlier had disclosed the contingency of ideas while continuing to embrace the ideals of democracy. The challenge of the twenty-first century, the challenge facing this generation of students, was to construct from the ashes left by the culture of irony, which seemed to disintegrate with the Twin Towers, their own democratic ideals.

That was the question that engaged Buttigieg more than any other. How could Americans unite politically when American culture was becoming increasingly polarized? Conservatives condemned ideas celebrated in university humanities departments. Radicals relished the triumph of perspectivalism over outdated forms of universalism, whether grounded in religious traditions or Enlightenment rationalism. How could that chasm be bridged?

Buttigieg was now looking for something beyond conventional Democratic politics. The party needed to stand for something that could inspire commitment, something other than opposition to Reaganism.

I knew Buttigieg had grown up in South Bend, and I knew his parents taught at Notre Dame. I do not remember whether we talked about Catholicism. None of the former Harvard students I have talked with in recent months remember him as being particularly religious while he was an undergraduate. His mother, although a practicing Catholic, was not particularly "churchy," as he put it to me in our recent conversation. His father was an atheist. Although Buttigieg was raised Catholic and educated

in a Catholic high school, by the time he left for college he was already questioning the church. He was still attracted to what he called the "social justice" dimension of Catholicism, the preferential option for the poor proclaimed by the Catholic bishops in 1971. That commitment had prompted him to join, and later become president of, the St. Joseph High School chapter of Amnesty International. But by the time he arrived at Harvard, the church's unyielding adherence to theological dogma and doctrines he considered outdated had begun to make him uneasy. At Harvard he drifted away. Occasionally Buttigieg attended services at Memorial Church, if only to hear the extraordinary sermons preached by high-church Episcopalian Peter Gomes, but he seems to have kept his changing religious views pretty much to himself.

Buttigieg's interest in reestablishing the link between religion and progressive politics, however, had grown stronger as a result of serving as a research assistant on two projects, one for pollster John Della Volpe and another for David King of the Kennedy School. He learned that Midwestern independents of his generation often took their political bearings from the religious traditions in which they were raised, as he had done himself. He was troubled that the Democratic Party had relinquished religion to America's conservative evangelicals. Not only was that a serious strategic error, but it also helped explain the party's lack of a positive, unifying direction. Although Buttigieg no longer considered himself Catholic, he remained "curious," to use his word, about varieties of theology and religious experience. He worried that the prospects for progressive political mobilization were dimmed by the lack of any orientation toward clear goals grounded on solid moral convictions.

Like his Harvard friends Warren and Sitaraman, as an undergraduate Buttigieg wanted to renew the early twentieth-century American progressives' dual commitments to ending corruption and revitalizing popular government. Conjuring up a positive moral vision, a new form for the shared religious commitments that had animated earlier champions of democracy, was the challenge facing his generation. To that end, Buttigieg also enrolled in another course of mine in the spring of his senior year, Democracy in Europe and America. At the time I was working on the book that became *Toward Democracy: The Struggle for Self-Rule in European and American Thought*, which has sparked controversy in part because of my emphasis on the role played by post-Reformation Christian ideals in the modern history of popular government. That was one of the central themes of my lectures. The readings in that class ranged even more broadly, from Thomas More, Montaigne, and the Puritans of England and New England through Locke and Rousseau, Jefferson and John Adams, Mary Wollstonecraft and Judith Sargent Murray, Kant and Burke, Madison and Tocqueville, Hegel and Marx, Grimké and Mill, Nietzsche and Jaurès, Weber and Dewey, and Schumpeter and Hayek, to works by more recent writers such as Fanon and Habermas. Although a number of undergraduates and graduate students, including Sitaraman, sat in on some of my lectures, Buttigieg was the only student that year to enroll in both courses. Either he was a glutton for punishment or he was genuinely committed to the study of politics and ideas.

Buttigieg as an undergraduate at Harvard

In his 2003–04 *Crimson* columns, as uneven as the work of most undergraduate writers, Buttigieg's running commentary on political developments eerily foreshadows our situation in 2019–20. He pointed out how Republicans since Newt Gingrich had shrewdly shanghaied the political vocabulary with terms such as "death tax" and "right to work" and how crucial "the power of imagery" was—the simplified, doctored, manufactured pictures, sound bites, and slogans fed to the public by visual and print media. After John Kerry had secured the Democratic nomination, Buttigieg observed that the Democrats so far had offered only "a complaint, not an argument." They needed instead a compelling positive program to unite the nation. He listed several examples, including ways to end our dependence on fossil fuels, a national-service program, and a single-payer health-care system. Simply maligning the Bush administration would not suffice.

In his final column before commencement, Buttigieg implored Harvard students to cultivate compassion, "the human capacity to feel another's suffering as one's own"; strength, which he defined not as throwing your weight around as an individual or a nation but as "finishing what you start"; and morality, not confined to the domain of marital fidelity, as it had been redefined since the Clinton scandals, but in the broader sphere of civic and public life, where con-

COURTESY OF THE BUTTIGIEG CAMPAIGN

cern with it—as with compassion and strength—had all but vanished as a result of the Reagan revolution and the culture of greed it had encouraged.

By the end of their senior year, I had gotten to know Buttigieg, Warren, and Sitaraman well enough to join them and a couple of their friends for beers at Charlie's, the IOP hangout across the street from Harvard's Kennedy School. I do not remember exactly what topics we discussed. I do remember thinking that these students, smart, articulate, deeply committed to democratic politics and searching for new ideas, gave me reasons not to despair. In May of 2004, the Democratic Party remained torn between its fading progressives, such as Howard Dean, and its moderates, such as the eventual nominee Kerry. Democrats seemed committed only, as Buttigieg had put it to Ted Kennedy, "to being for whatever the Republicans are for, only less." Given the party's lack of a clear direction, the dispiriting prospect of George W. Bush's reelection seemed a distinct possibility. Because I was impressed by these graduating seniors' passion for politics, it is likely that we talked about what Max Weber called "politics as a vocation." The very concept of a vocation, very much a part of growing up Catholic in the 1950s and '60s, had gone out of fashion. I like to resurrect it whenever I can. When Buttigieg himself came back to Harvard in 2016 to talk with graduating seniors, he urged them to worry less about the titles they would hold in twenty years than about the roles they wanted to play. By the time he graduated, he recalled, he had already become aware that "fulfillment and purpose would come through service to others."

After commencement, Buttigieg went to work for the presidential campaign of John Kerry, which gave him experience with four candidates in a row who came up short. Following a stint working in Washington, D.C., he packed up for Tunisia to continue his study of Arabic. When he decided to apply for a Rhodes scholarship, he asked me to write a letter of recommendation. Although surprised, I was happy to endorse his application even though, as I noted in the letter, his performance in my courses placed him only "in the middle of the pack." Instead I detailed his work outside the classroom. I noted that his immersion in the IOP and his column for the *Crimson*, valuable as they might have been, "represented a gamble" for anyone thinking about graduate school, and that such work "reflected the depth of his commitment to political action."

I concluded the letter with a judgment that still rings true to me. I will reproduce it here, at some length, precisely because it contrasts so strikingly with the numerous put-downs and dismissals that have accumulated in recent months, particularly from commentators on the left who consider Buttigieg a careerist not only too moderate in his politics but too slick for their taste:

Buttigieg points out that there is no formula for resolving the tradeoffs required in government. Data cannot yield answers to questions about who should suffer, and how much, when competing policies are debated.

> I admire his talent, his agility, and his devotion to public service. At a time when so many equally capable recent Harvard graduates are off feathering their own nests, Peter is doing the thankless work of political organizing, not because he expects a reward but because he believes it is important. Many would describe his choice as quixotic, but I respect it. Peter unquestionably has the capacity to excel at Oxford and afterwards. He thinks clearly and writes beautifully. Beyond his obvious talent, he has a backbone. It is his strength of character, the depth of his democratic convictions, that will make him a forceful presence in American public life.

Buttigieg followed a well-worn path of Rhodes Scholars at Oxford, studying Philosophy, Politics, and Economics. The tutorials in politics went smoothly enough, but the rigors of analytic logic, contemporary moral philosophy, and neoclassical economics taxed even his considerable brainpower. Of particular value, he told me recently, were his tutorials on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and moral philosophy more generally. He noted especially the impact of John Rawls's *Theory of Justice*. Rawls's concept of the "arbitrariness of fortune" resonated especially with Buttigieg, as it did for Rawls himself, due to personal experience. In Rawls's case it was the deaths of his two brothers from diseases they contracted from Rawls; in Buttigieg's case the contrast between the misfortune endured by one of his childhood friends and the exceedingly good fortune he had enjoyed throughout his life. He was also drawn to the ideas of the philosophers Bernard Williams and Thomas Nagel, whose concept of moral luck invites us to acknowledge the difficulty of assessing blame for actions over which individuals have no control.

Reading Robert Nozick's defense of libertarian principles, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, while studying economics illuminated for Buttigieg the reasons why conservatives trust the market and distrust government, a valuable lesson for anyone on the political left. As Buttigieg explains it in *Shortest Way Home*, his course of study at Oxford, which required him to "master the basics of supply and demand, utility, preferences,

auction theory, and market equilibrium," left him admiring "the theoretical elegance of the free market under perfect conditions," but it also allowed him to see how and why those perfect conditions "get skewed in the real world." In Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, he was trying to tie together theory and practice.

The other important development during his Oxford years was Buttigieg's return to religion. He told me he was put off by the intolerant "hard-edged atheism" he encountered at Oxford. He could not square such doctrinaire atheism, which he found as rigid as the dogmas of Catholicism that had repelled him, with his own experience. Whether it was the convincing arguments in the tradition of phenomenology, arguments made by Nagel and others (from William James onward) about how to make sense of the puzzling fact of one's own consciousness, or the equal impossibility of convincingly proving or disproving God's existence, Buttigieg came to realize that his own faith was more deeply rooted than he had thought. Attending Anglican services at Oxford convinced him that he was "liturgically conservative," for aesthetic as well as spiritual reasons, even as he remained convinced that the Gospel message enjoins us to attend to society's outcasts rather than celebrate or defend the wealthy and prosperous. His choice to affiliate with Anglicanism thus predated by a decade his coming out as gay. He returned to the United States in 2007 a Christian seeking a home. He found it with Fr. Brian Grantz of the Episcopal Cathedral of St. James in South Bend. Buttigieg has worshiped there ever since his return to his hometown after three years living in Chicago, working for McKinsey and Company.

Nothing about Buttigieg's glittering résumé incenses his many critics on the left as much as his time with McKinsey, which is presented as obvious, irrefutable evidence that he is an unprincipled technocrat. In the forty years I have been teaching, I have known plenty of humanities or social-science students who decided—in at least one case on the advice of a respected parish priest—to explore the private sector in order to develop skills they could then put to use as they saw fit. In his memoir, Buttigieg explains he had been prepared for a career "in public service, inquiry, and the arts, not business. But I knew that I would have to understand business if I wanted to make myself useful in practice." Because he "felt ignorant about how the private sector really worked," McKinsey provided "a good training ground." A few students I've known have stuck with consulting after their first three years, but most have gone in other directions. Some now work for foundations, others in politics, the law, or other professions. One, whom I know particularly well, put his McKinsey experience to use by establishing a secondary school in a township outside Johannesburg. Although McKinsey plunged Buttigieg into unfamiliar worlds, including the mysteries of grocery pricing, "working not for a cause but a client" soon proved unsatisfying because, as he puts it bluntly in his memoir, "I didn't care."

Now that the details of Buttigieg's work with McKinsey have been released, the utter lack of authority he exercised and the unsurprisingly banal nature of his research projects has become apparent. As a result, the furor seems to have died down, at least for most people. Buttigieg volunteered in our conversation that one of the most valuable things he had learned from my classes was the contrast between Max Weber's account of instrumental rationality—the means-ends reasoning that was threatening to eclipse a focus on morality or tradition—and John Dewey's insistence on the value-laden nature of all decision making. At McKinsey Buttigieg learned the techniques of data analysis, an important tool for anyone in public life. But to dismiss him as a "whiz kid" akin to the best and brightest who took the United States into Vietnam is to misunderstand him. The young man who has written for twenty years about the folly of U.S. foreign crusades, about our unwitting walk into the "jaws of a trap" set for us by Al-Qaeda, about our "self-defeating" approach to terrorism, and about the need for the Democratic Party to offer a positive, social-democratic program knows the difference between means and ends. Buttigieg understands that it was precisely the Bush administration's blindness to that difference, and to what we should have learned from earlier episodes of adventurism, that has kept us mired in Afghanistan and Iraq for nineteen years and counting.

In one of the most powerful passages in *Shortest Way Home*, Buttigieg points out that there is no formula for resolving the tradeoffs required in government. Data cannot yield answers to questions about who should suffer, and how much, when competing policies are debated. Questions of efficiency must be weighed against considerations of mercy. Although Buttigieg concedes how tempting it is for officials to treat all issues as mere "technical problems," as Robert McNamara did in Vietnam, Buttigieg insists that it is a mistake. "Elected officials earn our keep by settling moral questions, ones where there is no way to make someone better off without making someone else worse off." William James observed that in any ethical dilemma, "some part of the ideal is butchered." It is rare for elected officials even to admit that problem, let alone call attention to it, as Buttigieg does in his account of the false promise of artificial intelligence to replace "the human function we call judgment."

The next time I encountered Buttigieg was in February 2010, when my book *Reading Obama* was in press. He and fellow Rhodes scholar Sabeel Rahman, another brilliant young law professor who is currently serving as president of the think tank Demos, together with Previn Warren, Ganesh Sitaraman, and about twenty other like-minded scholars and activists, invited me to a conference at Harvard Law School. They wanted to discuss Obama, and what he might mean for the future of the Democratic Party. It was not the first meeting of the group, nor was I the first guest to meet with them. In previous years they had welcomed, among others, the distinguished Harvard philosopher Michael Sandel, City Year founder Alan Khazei, and the young historian Angus Burgin, author of an outstanding book about the rise of the New Right, *The Great Persuasion*. I spent a fascinating morn-

ing with the group, explaining what I saw as the origins of Obama's devotion to deliberation and bipartisanship. Those commitments were already under fire from the left; many around the table were unpersuaded by my argument. Obama seemed to them just another too-pliant Democrat, unable, as all Democrats in their lifetimes had been, to escape the neoliberal framework Reagan bequeathed to the nation. That afternoon, polymath Roberto Unger, back at Harvard Law School after serving in the government of his native Brazil, presented a riveting indictment of Obama and the Democratic Party. Buttigieg, and most of those in attendance, greeted Unger's analysis with much greater enthusiasm.

Only a year later, having lost in his audacious bid to become Indiana State Treasurer in his first campaign for electoral office, Buttigieg became Mayor Pete. When he came back to Cambridge for meetings at the Kennedy School of Government, he was invigorated by the challenges he was wrestling with in South Bend. Formerly the home of powerhouses Studebaker and Bendix, as well as thriving businesses such as the Oliver Plow Company, the Folding Paper Box Company (the biggest in Indiana), and Birdsell Manufacturing, which proudly proclaimed itself the "largest makers of clover hullers in the world," the city had fallen on very hard times. Now pothole repairs and snow removal, redesigning traffic patterns and building bicycle paths, were among the urgent issues for Mayor Pete. If those problems presented fewer intellectual challenges than philosophical debates about how we should understand freedom, they were problems he could tackle using the technocratic tools obtained at McKinsey. He seemed engaged, even energized, by such work.

But of course there were deeper, more intractable problems than fixing sewers and controlling floods. Within days of his inauguration he faced the crisis that has dogged him ever since. South Bend's African American police chief was accused of tapping the phones of police officers. When the chief was under threat of indictment, Mayor Pete accepted his resignation. As he puts it in his memoir, in the circumstances "there was no good option," and he has paid a price for the decision he made. Buttigieg's major social initiative, rebuilding or restoring a thousand homes in a thousand days, received a lot of positive attention, but then it came under fire for failing to address the needs of the city's poorest residents. Businesses returned to South Bend's revived center, but they brought jobs for well-educated white-collar workers rather than the unemployed. All these criticisms are legitimate. Buttigieg has admitted that he made mistakes and did not accomplish everything he set out to do in his two terms as mayor. If he is to be held responsible for failing to solve the problems of race and poverty that have dogged the cities of America's industrial heartland for decades, he should also be given credit for what he did accomplish. But if, as one of his predecessors told him, serving as mayor was the best job he ever had, one cannot help but wonder why Buttigieg decided to leave.

Buttigieg's careful positioning of his campaign in the lane between the Warren/Sanders left and the Biden/Klobuchar center makes his critics wonder whether his commitment to equality and justice is as solid as his political instincts are shrewd.

While Buttigieg has attracted enough support among certain Democratic constituencies to win the Iowa caucus and finish a close second in the New Hampshire primary, he has also drawn sharp criticism from other candidates and their followers. Some of that criticism, as well as some of that support, seems to me based on misperceptions of who Buttigieg is and what he wants to do. In this article I have tried to show the depth of his commitment to policies considerably more progressive than those proposed by most Democratic candidates since George McGovern. He is the only candidate who has spoken frankly about the constraints imposed by the Reagan revolution, constraints both political and intellectual, that limited the horizons of the Clinton and Obama presidencies. He has said emphatically and repeatedly that he believes we have come to the end of that era and must return to the social-democratic ideals and policies put in place between the New Deal and the Reagan revolution, the years when the economy grew, inequality shrank, and a generation of Americans ascended into the middle class.

For that reason I would not draw quite as bright a line between him and, say, Elizabeth Warren as most commentators, and Warren herself, have tended to do. On most issues they agree more than they disagree. Buttigieg readily admits that one of his most ambitious ideas, his plan for expanding (not packing) the Supreme Court to address the problem of rampant partisanship in judicial appointments, comes from his Harvard friend—and Warren adviser—Ganesh Sitaraman. (He quipped to E. J. Dionne, and to me, that he was sorry to have "lost the Ganesh primary" to Warren.) Further illustrating their similarities, Warren has recently altered one of her most controversial plans, her call for the immediate implementation of Medicare for All rather than a gradual transition. That shift aligns her more closely with Buttigieg on this crucial issue. Differences do remain. Should public universities be free for everyone,

as Warren and Sanders argue, or is Buttigieg right that those with ample resources should pay their own way? Scholars have shown that means-tested programs have proved more politically vulnerable than universal programs, and that is an important consideration. But is it clear which of their plans is more egalitarian—or more politically viable?

Buttigieg is the first openly gay candidate for the presidential nomination of a major party in the United States. That fact seems to matter less to many voters than most people had expected. Yet there are clearly people who would not vote for him for just that reason; opposition to LBGTQ rights remains as persistent as racism. Buttigieg also supports protecting women's right to abortion, the Green New Deal, and increasing taxes on the wealthy to make possible expanded child care and other social programs. With such plans, Buttigieg might be expected to attract many young voters on the left. Yet he has been the target of sustained, often hyperbolic attacks, for a number of reasons.

Perhaps most obviously, Buttigieg represents a threat to the candidacies of Sanders and Warren, so it is no surprise that their loyalists have lashed out at him. He earned a degree *magna cum laude* from Harvard, a coveted First from Oxford, and worked at McKinsey, all of which can be perceived as making him an elitist incapable of understanding or attracting working-class voters. He volunteered to serve in the military in Afghanistan, so he can be caricatured as a hawk despite his persistent criticism of America's unwarranted and repeated interventions. He fired a black police chief and has not yet demonstrated that he can attract support from African Americans beyond South Bend. If, skeptics ask, he still believes in the social-democratic principles he has endorsed for two decades, why is he using the language of "free choice," long a conservative talking point, to distinguish his health care and college plans from those of Sanders and Warren? His careful positioning of his campaign in the lane between the Warren/Sanders left and the Biden/Klobuchar center makes his younger critics wonder whether his commitment to the ideals of equality and justice is as solid as his political instincts are shrewd. Given the strong field of Democratic candidates, many young leftists wonder why he chose not to remain in South Bend. If he is as committed to reenergizing public life at the local and state level as he says he is in *Shortest Way Home*, why not remain Mayor Pete, gain more experience, and then run for statewide or national office later? Finally, Buttigieg's refusal to participate in what he calls the "oppression sweepstakes" earns him the ire of those incensed by the persistence of racial and gender hierarchies and fiercely committed, sometimes above all, to identity politics.

Instead Buttigieg has emphasized his Midwestern roots and his empathy for white, small-town and rural voters, many of whom turned to the Tea Party, or perhaps voted for Trump even after having voted for Obama. He understands that the lives of millions of Americans, whites as well as people of color, have been upended in recent decades. They are justifiably fed up with both parties' empty promises. He calls for uniting Americans, as Obama did, rather than slicing the electorate into pieces that can be combined into a brittle coalition of particular interest groups with little or nothing in common. Unless Democrats can bring Americans together, he argues, they will be unable to regain control of local and state governments. Unless they can do that, winning the White House will make far less difference than our obsessive focus on it might suggest. While many Democrats seem to be looking down on frustrated rural and Rust Belt voters with "condescension bordering on contempt," Buttigieg remains convinced from his experience in South Bend that "bedrock Democratic values around economic fairness and racial inclusion could resonate very well in the industrial Midwest, but not if they were presented by messengers who looked down on working and lower-middle-class Americans."

As he has been saying since he was an undergraduate at Harvard, Buttigieg believes that the challenge facing Democrats is to engage with people across the nation, people with very different cultural values, by connecting the aspirations of our politics with "the richness of everyday life." Otherwise the party might be able to satisfy self-righteous coastal elites, but it will continue to fail to generate majorities in diverse communities across the nation. It is paradoxical that the sharpest criticism Buttigieg has received has come from just those coastal elites, particularly members of his generation and younger, while his greatest strength has come from older voters, many of whom are tired of the familiar contenders and ready to welcome this likeable newcomer. The divided perceptions of Buttigieg between younger and older left-leaning voters itself illustrates some of the mistrust and animosity that he has identified as one of the Democratic Party's deepest problems.

One of the striking features of Buttigieg's hundreds of campaign appearances has been their consistency. He does not appear to worry about tailoring his appeal to any particular group; his message has been the same wherever he goes. His consistent emphasis on bringing together different American voters around a common agenda does not depend on demonizing others. Instead, he lays out his own vision of a nation committed less to individual success and unregulated free enterprise than to the values of compassion, strength, and morality that he articulated almost two decades ago and continues to cherish. Residual dissatisfaction with Obama, the belief that he squandered the few opportunities he enjoyed by wasting too much time and energy on conciliation, also helps explain the uneasiness of many young people on the left when they hear Buttigieg use that language rather than Warren's or Sanders's calls to battle.

Buttigieg laughed when he admitted to me that he did not expect, when he declared his candidacy, to be the "the religion guy." His frequent invocations of his Christian faith strike me as sincere rather than strategic. When he discusses climate change, he talks about our duty to be stewards of God's creation. When he discusses immigration and poverty, he invokes the Beatitudes. When he discusses gender and sexuality, he

says his own orientation is not his choice but that of his creator. Everyone I have talked with agrees that nobody—by his own account even including Buttigieg himself—was aware he was gay until shortly before he came out during his campaign for reelection as mayor of South Bend. The cultural and legal changes that made his marriage as well as his reelection possible have been so rapid that we can forget he would have been ostracized at St. Joseph High School had he come out as a teenager in the 1990s. As far as I can tell, no one who knew him at Harvard or Oxford had any inkling of Buttigieg's orientation. I saw only one reference to the subject in his *Crimson* columns: "public morality includes acknowledging the humanity and rights of homosexuals, though peddlers of hate invoke it to do the opposite." Obama, Cory Booker, and Elizabeth Warren have also spoken frequently about the link between their Christian faith and their progressive politics, but no Democrat in recent decades has spoken about the connection more often, more forcefully, or in relation to as many particular issues as has Buttigieg.

The most durable goal of American democracy has always been the common good, not the rights of individuals or the good of particular segments of the population. Buttigieg shares that commitment. I find it odd that it infuriates so many Democrats, who do not share his belief in the possibility of constructing a shared public interest through democratic deliberation. Yet that ideal is deeply rooted in American history. When skeptics express their concern that a thirty-eight year old has the experience necessary for the presidency, I remind them that another champion of the idea of the common good, James Madison, was thirty-six years old in 1787, when he played a pivotal role at the Constitutional Convention and wrote his perennially influential essays in *The Federalist*. Youth does not necessarily mean immaturity, nor—as we see demonstrated every day by our president's tweets, taunts, tantrums, boasts, and recklessness—does good judgment necessarily come with age.

Despite his considerable strengths, Buttigieg is unlikely to be elected president in 2020. But we could—and possibly will—do worse. Whatever the outcome, Buttigieg has shown sufficient strength to suggest that he will be a figure to reckon with for decades to come. As he is fond of pointing out, he will not reach the age of the current president (or, one might add, some of his rivals for the Democratic nomination), until well after 2050. Buttigieg's intelligence, calm, quick wittedness, idealism, and hopefulness all remind me of Obama's most notable characteristics. Unfortunately, any Democrat elected president in 2020 will almost certainly face a House of Representatives as polarized as the one that stymied Obama throughout his two terms in office and a Senate as stubbornly partisan as the one that now protects Donald Trump from the consequences of his corruption. Like Obama, though, and unlike the most strident of his critics on the left, who see Buttigieg as nothing more than a moderate who lacks convictions, he understands that hatred and intransigence are not the cure for what ails American politics. They are the disease.

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Does Socialism Have a Future?

PETER STEINFELS

My Life as a Socialist

One day in my third year of college, my French teacher asked me to speak with her after class. I was surprised. My performance in her course had not seemed so wanting as to warrant a consultation. My surprise was even greater at her concern. "Peter," she asked, "are you a socialist?"

"Well, I suppose I am," I replied. Her disappointment was obvious. She was on a faculty group that nominated students for an honor society, and Dean X had blackballed me because of rumors that I was (can you imagine?) a socialist. Perhaps he had not yet recovered from the McCarthyism of a decade earlier. I assured her that I couldn't care less about the honor society and that my socialism was entirely peaceful and no obstacle to an appreciation of Molière and Jean Anouilh.

I was not officially a socialist, of course. That came in the 1970s, a decade later, when I was an early recruit to Michael Harrington's newly founded Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, which in 1982 evolved into the Democratic Socialists of America, a group then of modest size and influence, to put it generously, but currently resurgent behind the attractive persona, active Twitter presence, and disruptive politics of Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. I don't recall quitting DSA—maybe I'm listed somewhere as a non-dues paying laggard—but sometime well before Harrington's premature death in 1989, I simply faded away.

Socialism was not in my genes. It is true that in 1932, the struggling art student who would, about a decade later, become my father cast his first presidential vote for the Socialist Norman Thomas. But his father, a generally unsuccessful Jewish businessman, voted for Herbert Hoover. And my future maternal grandfather, a generally successful Irish-American businessman, voted for FDR. My future mother was too young to vote, although in Chicago that would not necessarily have stopped her.

By the time I reached the age of political reason, our family were basically New Deal Democrats. We were anti-Communist, fully sensible of Stalinism and the persecution of religion in the Soviet bloc, but at the same time very opposed to the redbaiting and blacklisting of the McCarthy years. Personally, I was a fierce defender of my private property, and

Michael Harrington speaking at the Congress of the Socialist International in Eastbourne, England, on June 18, 1969

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John D. Rockefeller would have approved of the way I squirreled away the dimes from my weekly allowance and the few bills that came tucked in birthday cards from relatives. My favorite comic-book hero was old Scrooge McDuck, Donald's miserly uncle, pictured gleefully diving and swimming in his mighty pool of moola. Any feelings of solidarity with the world's downtrodden did not extend much beyond vociferous protests against orders to vacuum the living room, rake the lawn, or dry the dishes.

My latent socialism awaited a growing awareness, at around age ten, that my self-employed father, who had dedicated his artistic talent to work in Catholic churches, was in economic and aesthetic competition with the plaster statues, conventional crucifixes, and other off-the-rack products of religious-goods houses. Suddenly I became a neo-medieval defender of the individual craftsman against capitalist mass production. My inner William Morris told me that work should be individual expression, not rote drudgery; it should be driven not by profit but by a calling. Such notions were in time nurtured by absorbing the family intake of the *Catholic Worker* and *Commonweal* (whose very name, I later learned, harks back to Morris). Those pages also reported labor conflicts more serious than ones surrounding my household chores, and portrayed hungry families who would be only too happy to eat the food I didn't like.

At some point I even took an adolescent delight in subscribing to the *Weekly People*, the Socialist Labor Party newspaper filled with pictures of full-bellied, cigar-smoking tycoons stomping on muscular but shackled workingmen. The illustrations were much more rousing than the Marxist ideology, which echoed the thought of an American socialist original, Daniel De Leon (1852–1914), and strove to remain simultaneously anti-capitalist, anti-Soviet, and revolutionary rather than reformist.

Marxist theory was of course unavoidable as the Sixties arrived. I drank in more than a little of it and have no regrets. Activists in the civil-rights and anti-war movements were searching for radical alternatives to what was then dismissed as "Cold War liberalism." During the highly fraught twelve months that I spent in Paris researching a doctoral dissertation and participating in anti-war demonstrations, I joined the weekly gatherings of a Marxist discussion group at the reborn Shakespeare & Company bookstore near the Seine. We were a curious mix of diehard believers, intellectual explorers like myself, and members of Trotskyist sects (or so it seemed) who had *noms de guerre* and sometimes disappeared for weeks at a time. We conducted a long march through volumes one and two of *Capital* before the barricades of May 1968 gave us other priorities. I am not sure whether it was our discussion group or the events of May '68 that explain why an American graduate student in history would later find an entry on me in French police files.

All this exposure to Marxism and revolutionary socialism had been preceded by several forms of vaccination. One was religious. On the one hand, I didn't need Marx to challenge the creed of capitalism; I had the prophets, the Beatitudes, Matthew 25, papal social encyclicals, and the activities of the Young Christian Students. On the other hand, not only had Marxist socialism often tended to present itself as a rival to religious faith, it had also tended to mimic many of the worst elements of religious dogmatism. Most frightfully, its Communist mutation had imprisoned and murdered millions of believers.

Then there was the light-hearted vaccination that my best undergraduate professor, a radical himself, had administered by assigning Dwight Macdonald's *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*. This was a collection of "essays in political criticism" by the anti-Stalinist and erstwhile Trotskyist intellectual gadfly who was an editor at the *Partisan Review* before publishing *Politics*, his own post-Marxist, anti-totalitarian journal, which counted Albert Camus and Simone Weil among its contributors.

Macdonald's "Introduction: Politics Past" sketched an unforgettable picture of left-wing sectarianism with groups incessantly splitting to maintain ideological purity. One could derive a kind of Macdonald's Law: as the groups grew smaller and smaller, their titles "generally made up in scope for any restriction of numbers." One group that he described did not actually bear so grandiose a name as "the International Revolutionary Labor League and Worldwide Socialist Workers Party," but it might as well have. Finally, he noted, it consisted only of its leader and his wife. "Then there was a divorce, and the advance-guard of the revolution was concentrated, like a bouillon cube, in the small person of [the leader], who sat for years at his secondhand desk…writing his party organ and cranking it out on the mimeograph machine." Mimeograph machines, Macdonald observed, "played the same part in the American revolutionary movement that machine guns did in the Russian…and many a faction-fight was decided by who seized control of them first."

What Macdonald skewered as child's play in the United States pointed to a darker story in Europe, where utopian visions and revolutionary zealotry had indeed been armed with guns and not mimeograph machines. It was a story dramatized by Orwell and Koestler and Victor Serge and many others, but also recounted in dry histories of socialist struggles over democracy, parliamentarianism, reform versus revolution, stages of history, and modern economics.

If my socialist sympathies survived my ever-deeper immersion in this tragic history (I was researching a dissertation on French left-wing intellectuals), it was also because my socialism was not a replacement but an extension of my very American political beliefs: checks and balances, fundamental rights, rule by deliberation and consent, and an egalitarian, democratic, and communal ethos. Workers should have a significant degree of shared control over their enterprises, working conditions, remuneration, output, and the necessary government decisions regarding the economy. They should feel a stake in the quality of their work and its social purpose. Necessary hierarchies of expertise and authority should not be reinforced by sharp differences of wealth, class, caste, ethnicity, gender, or culture. Like many other people, I had observed or experienced this kind of environment on a micro-level, whether in my father's self-employment or on the staff of *Commonweal* or, to a lesser but meaningful degree, in other intellectual and journalistic enterprises. The problem of course was how such environments could be "scaled up" to become the norms for a modern economy of huge corporations, assembly-line manufacturing, far-flung trade, split-second finance, and complex planning.

The next chapter in my life as a socialist, and no doubt the one most relevant today, began at the Hotel McAlpin at the corner of Broadway and 34th Street, right across from Macy's in Manhattan. In October 1973, about 250 delegates and an equal number of observers gathered there to mend what the

Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in Washington D.C. on June 24, 2019

BERNIE SANDERS CAMPAIGN

late Sixties and early Seventies had shattered. Youthful New Leftism had descended into countercultural exhibitionism, ideological extremism, and episodic violence. The hard-earned anti-Communism of the majority within Norman Thomas's venerable Socialist Party had curdled into die-hard support for the war in Vietnam. Middle-class idealism had foundered on George McGovern's disastrous 1972 presidential campaign. Led by Michael Harrington, the new group, modestly titled the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, committed itself both to looking beyond capitalism and to working within the Democratic Party. The assumption was that incremental measures to address fairly obvious economic and social injustices could lay the groundwork for a serious socialist movement.

I was drawn by Harrington's ties to *Commonweal* and the *Catholic Worker*. Harrington's 1963 book on poverty, *The Other America*, was widely credited with inspiring President Kennedy's war on poverty, thanks to a forty-page review in the *New Yorker* by Dwight Macdonald (just to complete the circle of associations). The book's title had actually been used for an earlier, somewhat different article that Harrington had published in *Commonweal*. I found Michael's exposition of a non-utopian, non-deterministic, democratic socialism persuasive, even if I never felt his need to demonstrate that it represented the "authentic" view of Marx. (I already had a Scripture, thank you, which had enough problems of its own.) I signed on to this "new combination of socialist theory and common-sense strategy," as I put it in my October 26, 1973, *Commonweal* report on the founding meeting. But I also wondered how easily outsiders could find their way into this subculture of socialist and labor radicalism.

Despite my unfamiliarity with "red-diaper babies" and all manner of ex-Trotskyist sects and their summer camps, or perhaps *because* of my unfamiliarity, I soon found myself a member of DSOC's governing committee, a small circle of remarkably dedicated, intelligent people. A budding Eugene Debs I was not. I have recently happened upon some of my notes from our meetings. A few cryptic phrases amid pages of doodles.

My recollection is that for every five minutes we spent on economics, politics, and socialist dialectics, we spent an hour discussing fundraising—and the not-unrelated politics, internal and external, of the labor movement. DSOC found friendly supporters in the upper echelons of the United Auto Workers, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Workers (AFSCME), the Service Employees, the Machinists, and several other unions. Our most successful project was uniting unions and middle-class liberal reformers into a coalition called Democratic Agenda. It had a major impact on the Democrats' 1976 party platform—which Jimmy Carter largely ignored once he was in office.

DSOC's priorities were to defend the anti-poverty, racial-equality, and Great Society programs then feeling the backlash from the Sixties, and to promote new initiatives in health care, housing, energy policy, and above all, labor rights and full employment. The first step toward workers' control, after all, was jobs.

DSOC's anti-Stalinist background left it with no sympathy for dictatorships of any sort, whether of the proletariat, national-liberation fronts, or anti-imperialist strongmen, each promising a new socialist variant. There was similar consensus on the failure of central-command economies. A democratically controlled economy had to be a decentralized one.

My own participation was not entirely limited to doodling. During the 1970s I made the case for democratic socialism on a number of campuses. I debated Michael Novak on democratic socialism versus democratic capitalism at Trinity Church in Washington's Georgetown. As someone then working in the emerging field of medical ethics, I did my best to broaden the field's focus from quandaries about the rights of individual patients and research subjects to "structural" questions about health-care funding and accessibility. My 1979 book on neoconservatism was informed by democratic-socialist and left-liberal responses to the critiques of government programs mounted by former left-wing intellectuals.

It would take a Five Year Plan to find and excavate the texts of my talks during those years. I wonder whether their retrieval would please or embarrass me. As far as I can recall, my point of departure was Harrington's—a conviction that crucial decisions about investment, production, employment, research, and financing were determined less and less by direct market competition and more and more by the self-interest and class predilections of the managers in boardrooms and executive suites. (At the time I did not recognize the pedigree of Harrington's theory in left-wing debates about Soviet bureaucratic collectivism that had ultimately filtered into works like *The Managerial Revolution* by ex-Communist, ex-Trotskyist James Burnham. I was simply persuaded by what I saw happening in the United States.) In sector after sector, oligopolies evaded price competition. Government officials, willingly or under pressure, provided corporate welfare in the form of subsidies and tax breaks and corporate safety nets in the form of bailouts and guarantees. Advertising created rather than responded to popular tastes and cultural values. Thanks to technology and economic interdependence, the important decisions were collective, and the important question was no longer whether they would be made by the "free" market but whether the decision-makers would or would not be democratically accountable.

That may have been an effective rebuttal to textbook free-market ideology, but did it really offer an alternative? If central planning, investment, and allocation were rejected, even democratically accountable decision-makers would still be working within markets of some sort, whether for consumer goods or capital expenditures. They would be responding to the price signals those markets provided and trying to survive in the competition for market shares.

Within DSOC, there was no agreement on exactly how this might work. Mondragon, the Catholic-inspired Basque federation of cooperatives, was mentioned frequently. Then

there was Sweden's Meidner Plan. By annually transferring a proportion of major corporations' profits into shares collectively held by employees, workers would eventually control the management of leading firms in every sector, but these firms would nonetheless continue to compete with one another. "Yardstick" corporations were another alternative to nationalizing whole industries. Not unlike the public option in health insurance, a publicly owned auto company or pharmaceutical manufacturer or a major bank would measure what the market really required and keep other firms from oligarchic mischief. Union pension funds, it was also argued, should leverage their considerable stock holdings for broader public purposes. There was interest in Germany's "co-determination," requiring elected representatives of workers on the boards of sizeable corporations, an idea recently embraced by Elizabeth Warren. All the ups and downs of European social-democratic parties and proposals were followed intently.

I collected a shelf of books on workers' control and market socialism and even managed to deface some of them with underlining. I repeatedly suggested to Harrington that DSOC needed an organized discussion of democratic socialism and markets. In fact, he took up the question more than I realized at the time. But DSOC did not.

Four decades later the growth in oligopoly and inequality confirms much of Harrington's analysis. The Great Recession revealed how integral government power was to the economy. The world is entwined in incredibly complex, computer-programed, split-second financial transactions and interdependent obligations—a turbocharged capitalism of international financial flows and balance sheets.

On the other hand, market forces must be credited with lifting hundreds of millions of people out of extreme poverty in developing nations—most dramatically, however, under China's centralized authoritarian regime. Of course climate change is a planetary background to everything else. And while the United States in particular has set new marks in approaching full employment, ever more sophisticated automation and the ambiguous powers of artificial intelligence have raised profound uncertainties about the future of work and compensation.

Currently the Democratic Socialists of America promotes "a vision of a humane international social order based both on democratic planning and market mechanisms to achieve equitable distribution of resources, meaningful work, a healthy environment, sustainable growth, gender and racial equality, and non-oppressive relationships." I hope they have made more progress in figuring out how that might work.

Over time my appreciation of the power of markets, for both good and ill, has grown. So has my appreciation of entrepreneurship, if only because I discovered how little of it I possess. Both still seem compatible with democratic socialism, but making the case requires more than condemning capitalism's manifest failures. There is a middle ground of a well-regulated capitalism and a generous welfare state, which is where in practice Bernie Sanders, calling himself a democratic socialist, and Elizabeth Warren, declaring herself "capitalist to her bones," seem to converge—as do, in varying degrees, most leading Democrats. Socialists argue this middle ground is ultimately unstable and precarious, doomed to be pushed right if not left. Perhaps.

My participation in DSOC was curtailed by my return to editorial responsibilities at *Commonweal* at the end of the 1970s. My loss of ardor was also abetted not by something specifically socialist but liberal—the hardening battle lines over abortion. Moral qualms on this subject, I learned, had best be kept to oneself.

I can't speak with any authority about today's democratic socialists. DSA now claims 50,000 members. The reason is simple: Bernie. "Bernie popularized the concept of democratic socialism," the editors of DSA's *Socialist Forum* explain, "and his call for a 'political revolution' against the billionaire class resonated with millions of Americans. Bernie, however, tended to employ these concepts as floating signifiers and neglected to fill them with much in the way of specific political content."

"Floating signifiers" lacking "much in the way of specific political content." Well, that's one way of putting it. To what extent Bernie's air of self-righteous certitude and one-answer-fits-all-questions characterizes DSA today I can't say. Skimming DSA's website leaves the impression that promoting the Sanders version of Medicare for All has a much higher priority than defeating Donald Trump. DSA's August convention overwhelmingly voted to support Sanders for president and no one else if he failed to be nominated, although leaving the decision in that case to individual members. "More often than not," Harrington lamented in 1974, "American socialism saw liberalism as its immediate enemy, as the program for crumbs that kept people from demanding the whole lunch." Although Sanders himself has sometimes gallantly shunned personal attacks on rivals, his overall stance may have revived the socialist reflex to treat liberals as sellouts rather than allies.

If my French professor of long ago asked me for a thumbnail description of my current political stance, I would probably quote what Daniel Bell said of himself in the Preface to *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*: "a socialist in economics, a liberal in politics, and a conservative in culture." That's why in 2016 I welcomed Bernie's democratic-socialist challenge, not anticipating that it would become one of the many factors contributing to Hillary's defeat and Trump's election. I thought and still think that the United States needs a vibrant, thoughtful democratic-socialist presence. One able to define its socialism by what it is for and not simply what it is against. And one with a tragic sense of history, especially of socialism's history. Horrible things have been done in socialism's name by its totalitarian mutations. Even democratic socialism has chalked up tragically stupid errors. Risking the reelection of Donald Trump would add to that list.

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DAVID BENTLEY HART

Three Cheers for Socialism

Persons of a reflective bent all too often underestimate the enormous strength that truly abysmal ignorance can bring. Knowledge is power, of course, but—measured by a purely Darwinian calculus—too much knowledge can be a dangerous weakness. At the level of the social phenotype (so to speak), the qualities often most conducive to survival are prejudice, simplemindedness, blind loyalty, and a militant want of curiosity. These are the virtues that fortify us against doubt or fatal hesitation in moments of crisis. Subtlety and imagination, by contrast, often enfeeble the will; ambiguities dull the instincts. So while it is true that American political thought in the main encompasses a ludicrously minuscule range of live options and consists principally in slogans rather than ideas, this is not necessarily a defect. In a nation's struggle to endure and thrive, unthinking obduracy can be a precious advantage.

Even so, I think we occasionally take it all a little too far.

Not long ago, in an op-ed column for the *New York Times*, I observed that it is foolish to equate (as certain American political commentators frequently do) the sort of "democratic socialism" currently becoming fashionable in some quarters of this country with the totalitarian state ideologies of the twentieth century, whose chief accomplishments were ruined societies and mountains of corpses. For one thing, "socialism" is far from a univocal term, and much further from a uniform philosophy. I, for instance, have a deep affection for the tradition of British Christian socialism, which was shaped by such figures as F. D. Maurice (1805–1872), John Ruskin (1819–1900), Charles Kingsley (1819–1875), Thomas Hughes (1822–1896), F. J. Furnivall (1825–1910), William Morris (1834–1896), and R. H. Tawney (1880–1962), though I have also been influenced by such non-British social thinkers as Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944),

In the late modern world something like socialism is the only possible way of embodying Christian love in concrete political practices.

"The Monkey and the Whip," woodcut by Eric Gill

BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

Dorothy Day (1897–1980), and E. F. Schumacher (1911–1977). None of these espoused any kind of statist, technocratic, secular, authoritarian version of socialist economics, and none of them was what we today think of as "liberal." And yet their "socialist" leanings were unmistakable.

Moreover, just because a totalitarian regime happens to call itself socialist—or, for that matter, a republic, or a union of republics, or a people's republic, or a people's democratic republic—we are under no obligation to take it at its word. What we call "democratic socialism" in the United States is difficult to distinguish from the social-democratic traditions of post-war Western Europe, and there we find little evidence that a democracy becomes a dictatorship simply by providing such staples of basic social welfare as universal health care. At least, it is hard not to notice that the social-democratic governments of Europe have always gained power only by being voted into office, and have always relinquished it peacefully when voted out again. None of them has ever made war on free markets, even in attempting (often all too hesitantly) to impose prudent and ethically salutary regulations on business. Rather than gulags, death camps, secret police, arrests without warrant, summary executions, enormous propaganda machines, killing fields, and the like, their political achievements have been more in the line of the milk-allowances given to British children in the post-war years, various national health services, free eyeglasses and orthodonture for children, school lunches, public pensions for the elderly and the disabled, humane public housing, adequate unemployment insurance, sane labor protections, and so forth, all of which have been accomplished without irreparable harm to economies or treasuries.

I suppose a social-democratic state *could* begin to gravitate toward true authoritarianism, in the way that any political arrangement can lead to just about any other. The Third Reich, after all, was born out of a functioning parliamentary democracy. The 2016 U.S. election proved that, even in a long-established democratic republic, just about anyone or anything, no matter how preposterously foul, can achieve political power if enough citizens are sufficiently credulous, cowardly, and vicious. In just the past few years, we have seen bland American neoconservatism rapidly evolving into populist, racist, openly fascist, mystical nationalism. Anything is possible. But to this point, it seems fair to say, the Western European democracies—as well as the Oceanian states and Canada—have all acquitted themselves fairly well on the civil liberties and "rule of law" fronts. And surely no one would deny that, approve of them or not, eyeglasses and milk are not gulags and summary executions.

Or so you would think. Judging from some of the negative reactions to my *Times* column, there are a good many persons to whom this is not at all obvious. The most lunatic response I read came from some fellow whom some jurisdiction of the Orthodox Church has injudiciously consecrated as a priest. His attack on my column was published in a forum associated with the Acton Institute (a sort of toxic-waste site for the disposal of emotionally arrested and intellectually abridged reactionaries). For this fellow, there are no differences here worth noting: children's milk subsidies, concentration camps, modern Denmark and Canada, the USSR, the New Deal, the Cultural Revolution, public subsidies for healthcare or railroads, the execution of dissidents, Victorian Christian socialism, twentieth-century Soviet communism, present-day Venezuela, present-day Britain, industry partly governed by labor, industry wholly seized by the state—somehow, in his mind, it is all one and the same thing, a single historical phenomenon inexorably leading to the same mass graves. Any day now in Sweden, it seems, free dentistry will mutate into a secret state-police apparatus and a sprawling archipelago of reeducation camps.

Just as absurd in its way, though perhaps more morally distasteful, was a column by Tom Rogan in the *Washington Examiner* repeating certain fashionable neoliberal lies about European, Canadian, and Oceanian health care—long delays in triage, shortages, lack of choice among physicians, and so forth. I have received medical attention in any number of countries over the years and, while no nation's system is perfect, I can assure anyone curious on the matter that, if you are in real need of medical attention, in almost all cases you would be far better off in France, Canada, Germany, or Italy than you are here. Certainly we Americans—routinely running the gantlet of finding an "in-network" primary-care physician, securing an "establish-care" appointment (usually months away), waiting upon referrals and insurance approvals, choosing among expensive tests, and so on—endure "triage" processes of an especially byzantine complexity. Choice of health-care provision is far freer in most other countries, in fact, simply because insurance companies cannot limit one's decisions, while costs are either minimal or nonexistent, even though the care is as good or better. As it happens, the only economically advanced nation in the world today where someone is likely to be denied access to necessary care or affordable pharmaceuticals is the United States. Only here, for instance, can a poor person die for want of the money needed to buy insulin or undergo dialysis.

Americans are, of course, the most thoroughly and passively indoctrinated people on earth. They know next to nothing as a rule about their own history, or the histories of other nations, or the histories of the various social movements that have risen and fallen in the past, and they certainly know little or nothing of the complexities and contradictions comprised within words like "socialism" and "capitalism." Chiefly, what they have been trained not to know or even suspect is that, in many ways, they enjoy far fewer freedoms, and suffer under a more intrusive centralized state, than do the citizens of countries with more vigorous social-democratic institutions. This is at once the most comic and most tragic aspect of the excitable alarm that talk of social democracy or democratic

socialism can elicit on these shores. An enormous number of Americans have been persuaded to believe that they are freer in the abstract than, say, Germans or Danes precisely because they possess far fewer freedoms in the concrete. They are far more vulnerable to medical and financial crisis, far more likely to receive inadequate health coverage, far more prone to irreparable insolvency, far more unprotected against predatory creditors, far more subject to income inequality, and so forth, while effectively paying *more* in tax (when one figures in federal, state, local, and sales taxes, and then compounds those by all the expenditures that in this country, as almost nowhere else, their taxes do not cover). One might think that a people who once rebelled against the mightiest empire on earth on the principle of no taxation without representation would not meekly accept taxation without adequate government services. But we accept what we have become used to, I suppose. Even so, one has to ask, what state apparatus in the "free" world could be more powerful and tyrannical than the one that taxes its citizens while providing no substantial civic benefits in return, solely in order to enrich a piratically overinflated military-industrial complex and to ease the tax burdens of the immensely wealthy?

Our cruel, inefficient, and monstrously expensive health system makes this obvious. Nations that provide either single-payer healthcare (like the UK) or a well-administered public option (like Germany) do indeed tax their populations for the purpose. But this is hardly a gross imposition on their citizens. For one thing, they distribute tax liability far more equally across income brackets than we do. For another, they strictly regulate the prices providers may charge. The result is that the cost of health care in these countries is roughly half what it is here *per capita*, and the actual cost for individuals (especially those who are not extravagantly rich) is only a fraction of what we are expected to pay for the same services. The relative pittance most of us would be taxed to sustain a *real* public option or national health service would be—so long as our legislators were willing simultaneously to regulate pharmaceutical and other medical providers humanely and sensibly—as nothing compared to what we actually pay right now for the privilege of discovering, when the next shockingly unexpected medical bill arrives, that we still have far more to pay.

Consider: our insurance premiums already cost most of us more than we would be taxed for a health system like the one in Canada or in Sweden. Even if our employers pay most of the putative bill, this results in considerably lower real wages for us than our European counterparts receive. If we are so unlucky as to have to buy our coverage directly, the cost is invariably exorbitant while the benefits are meager and grudging. And at that point our financial liabilities have only just begun. Quite often, deductibles alone far exceed any debts the average European or Canadian or Australian need ever discharge for medical care. Then there are, for no particular reason, the copays we have to add to what we have already paid our insurers. Then there are the absurd prices our bought-and-sold political class permits pharmaceutical firms to charge and insurance companies only partly to cover. The price of insulin alone, for example, here as nowhere else in the civilized world, is a crime against humanity—one, in fact, that actually kills a substantial number of American diabetics each year. If we need to use the emergency room, and especially if we must call for an ambulance, the costs are almost unimaginably multiplied. Then, of course, when truly serious illnesses arrive, insurance companies deploy battalions of adjusters to deny us the very coverage we thought we were purchasing with our atrociously excessive premiums. These vigilant souls will do all they can to abbreviate our treatments, curtail our hospital stays, deny us as many therapies as possible, refuse approval of the newest therapies or drugs, or at least delay approval until (ideally) we have died. If we fall terminally ill, we will spend our last days fighting for every penny of coverage at each discrete stage of our illness. And then, in all likelihood, our families will go deeply into debt anyway. Of course, even all of this is true only if we are among those *fortunate* enough to have any coverage at all.

Is this freedom? From what, exactly? Certainly not from the state. The heavy hand of centralized government is no lighter—its proprietary power over its citizens is no smaller—here than anywhere else in the developed world. Quite the reverse. Certainly, where taxes are concerned, no government in the developed world is any more rapacious and no legal authority any more draconian. Here, moreover, no less than anywhere else, the state governs trade, makes war, passes laws, delivers mail, does all the most basic things the modern state does; but here also, to a greater degree than in any other advanced economy, the government raises its revenues for the express purpose of transferring as much wealth as possible from the working and middle classes to corporations and plutocrats. It really would be hard to imagine a democracy whose state wields greater power over the lives of average persons. To me, at least, it seems obvious that, where health care in particular is concerned, Americans are slaves thrice-bound: wholly at the mercy of a government that despoils them for the sake of the rich, as well as of employers from whom they will receive only such benefits as the law absolutely requires, as well as of insurance companies that can rob them of the care for which they have paid.

All this being true, the classical social democrat or democratic socialist might be forgiven for thinking that Americans are curiously deluded regarding their own supposed inalienable liberties. He or she might contend, at any rate, that a state that uses its power chiefly to dilute consumer and environmental protections in the interests of large corporations and private investors, while withholding even the most basic civil goods that taxpayers have a right to expect (such as a well-maintained infrastructure or decent public transport), is no smaller—and certainly no less invasive and dictatorial—than one that is actually obliged by the popular will and the social contract to deliver services in exchange for the taxes

it collects. He or she might think that a government whose engorged military budget is squandered on wasteful (because profitable) redundancy, but whose public services are minimal at best, presides over a far more controlled economy—and a far more coercive redistribution of wealth—than does a government forced to return public funds to its citizens in the forms of substantial civic benefits. He or she might even have the temerity to see social democracy, properly practiced, not as an enlargement of the state's prerogatives, but quite the opposite: a democratic seizure of power from both state and corporate entities, as well as a greater democratic control over public policy, taxation, production, and trade.

After all, though we often speak as if the centralized state and corporate "free" enterprise were antagonists, they are in fact mutually sustaining. Global capital depends upon the state's power, its diplomatic access to other nations and markets, the trade treaties it negotiates, and (if needed) its judicious deployments of terror. States depend upon capital for revenues, material goods, and political patronage. Without the support of an omnicompetent, vastly prosperous, orderly, and violent state, global corporate capitalism could not thrive. Without corporations, the modern state would lack the resources necessary to perpetuate its supremacy over every sphere of life. Over against the twin colossi of state and capital, a truly functioning form of social democracy might well be viewed as an incomplete but still benign devolution of sovereignty, away from capital to labor, away from the state to the public. It might even be seen as a feeble gesture toward a society based on some kind of real subsidiarity. At least, this scarcely seems an implausible view of the matter.

Whether that is achievable, however—or as achievable as it should be—I am not prepared to opine. In America, even democratic socialists often have only a very hazy notion of what the full spectrum of socialist thought has been in the past, and what it might be in the future. There is always the likelihood that much of the mainstream of American democratic socialism will ultimately turn into just another form of classically liberal social philosophy. I have, in an inconstant and largely flirtatious way, been a member of the Democratic Socialists of America over the years. I admit, however, that certain recent tendencies of the DSA make me suspect that, as time passes, it will look less and less like the kind of pro-labor, anti-capitalist organization it purports to be, and more and more like simply another incarnation of sanctimonious, ethically voluntarist, pro-choice American liberalism (with all its bourgeois narcissisms, morbid psychological fragilities, and lovingly cultivated neuroses), which I like no better than sanctimonious, ethically voluntarist, libertarian American conservatism (with all its bourgeois narcissisms, morbid psychological fragilities, and lovingly cultivated resentments). Just as we Americans have succeeded in turning "Christianity" into another name for a system of values almost totally

John Ruskin

antithetical to those of the Gospel, I have every confidence that we will find a way to turn "socialism" into just another name for late-modern liberal individualism. I still support most of the genuinely communitarian aims of the democratic-socialist movement. But, in the end, it is that tradition of Christian socialism mentioned above to which I remain loyal. And I do not know if it could now flourish here.

As I have already noted, that tradition was never, especially in the Anglophone world, a centralizing philosophy. It was friendly neither to the absolute state nor to ungoverned business. Neither was it even a form of political "leftism" (however one might define that term). It emanates from a time when the political leanings we think of as right or left, conservative or progressive, had not yet coalesced into anything like the present arrangement of ideological or class allegiances. At times, its tacit social vision could be positively quaint. Thomas Hughes seemed convinced that social amelioration could be achieved only by new generations of Christian gentlemen devoted to the common good out of, in part, a sense of *noblesse oblige*. The single most influential figure in the British tradition of Christian socialism (though he himself never settled on a single official term for his political and economic philosophy) was John Ruskin, who was a convinced Tory monarchist. As far as he was concerned, a principled Christian "communism"—by which he meant not state ownership of property, but a prior communal claim upon the goods of the earth and upon excess resources by those in need—was the only possible civilized and truly charitable alternative to modern

liberalism, whether fiscal or social. He opposed classical liberalism for the simple reason that he thought it created social injustices of a kind clearly contrary to the explicit dictates of Christian conscience.

Inasmuch as the two major political parties in America are both "liberal" in the classical sense—the one devoted a bit more to something like John Stuart Mill's economic philosophy, the other a bit more to something like his social philosophy, and neither of them to the communal ethics of Christian tradition—it is hard for most Americans to make sense of such views. Contrary to conventional wisdom, Christianity has never really taken deep root in America or had any success in forming American consciousness; in its place, we have invented a kind of Orphic mystery religion of personal liberation, fecundated and sustained by a cult of Mammon.

Even so, anyone familiar with the oldest and richest stream of real socialism in the Anglophone world understands that it was in large part a Romantic rebellion against modernity, a longing for a truly Christian understanding of community, an essentially nostalgic belief in the hierarchy of those subsidiary estates and institutions that naturally evolve out of religious, communal, and social life. At times, it proved susceptible to a mistily idealized view of the past—the Middle Ages especially—but it was essentially a Christian-humanist protest against the inhuman scale of both government and industry in the late modern age. It was not a rejection of free enterprise, but rather a critique of a system of enterprise that had destroyed the free guilds of late medieval Europe, disenfranchised individual craftsmen, produced a system of wage slavery, allowed the large-scale division of labor to disenfranchise workers, turned labor into a commodity to be traded or a natural resource to be exploited, accepted the gross superstition of the "iron law of wages," eliminated the common lands and goods once recognized as the universal patrimony of free citizens so as to make state and capital the sole proprietors of civic wealth, radically reduced legally recognized community usufructs, removed both the means and the profits of production from the possession of laborers and yielded them over to an investment class of owners, enlarged the central state and its power of taxation, displaced the center of society from the realm of the sacred to that of commercial consumption, and created a rapacious debt-and-credit system that is little more than the chronic legal spoilation of the poor by private lenders.

This kind of socialism proposed a use of civic wealth for common human ends precisely in order to restore the Christian order of values—the Christian law of love of neighbor and faith in God's charity—that modernity has displaced by its reliance instead on the forces of self-interest. In fact, it presumed the radical notion that charity is a more original and fertile impulse of the human soul than greed is. It was an attempt to preserve the best of the moral inheritance of Christian ethical beliefs in an age when Christian civilization had been—so the proponents of the movement believed—eclipsed by an ethos that prizes personal acquisition over communal love. It was, in short, a deeply Christian revolt against those tendencies of post-Christian modern liberal economics and social philosophy that tend toward the destruction of landscapes and cityscapes and inscapes, by reducing or subordinating everything to the impersonal mechanisms of production and consumption.

It should be obvious that certain moral ends can be accomplished only by a society as a whole, employing instruments of governance, distribution, and support that private citizens alone cannot command.

What remains of that tradition now I cannot say with any certainty. To some extent, it was always a dream of an impossible future sustained by fantasies of a nonexistent past. And some of its aspects, however well-intended—those overly rosy views of class distinction, for instance, or that gauzily gleaming pre-Raphaelite medievalism—are not worth preserving or reviving, except perhaps in radically qualified form. But I honestly cannot imagine how anyone who takes the teachings of Christ seriously, and who is willing to listen to those teachings with a good will and an open mind, can fail to see that in the late modern world something like such socialism is the only possible way of embodying Christian love in concrete political practices. I have heard American Christians claim (based on a distinction unknown in the New Testament) that Christ calls his followers only to acts of private largesse, not to support for public policies that provide for the common welfare. What they imagine Christ was doing in publicly denouncing the unjust economic and social practice of his day I cannot guess. But it should be obvious that certain moral ends can be accomplished only by a society as a whole, employing instruments of governance, distribution, and support that private citizens alone cannot command. We, as individuals, can often aid our brothers and sisters only by acting through collective social and political structures. I admit that the New Testament makes still more radical demands upon Christians (Matthew 5:42; 6:3; 6:19–20; Luke 6:24–25; 12:33; 14:33; 16:25; Acts 2:43–46; 4:32; 4:35), and I would certainly agree that it is just as bad to relinquish all one's moral responsibilities to the state as it is to promote policies that do not oblige human government to obey the laws of divine charity. I know that Christ in the Gospels calls his followers to a different kind of "politics" altogether—for want of a better term, the politics of the Kingdom. Of this, even the wisest, most compassionate, and most provident form of democratic socialism could never be anything more than a faint premonitory shadow.

Even so, a shadow is not nothing.

DAVID BENTLEY HART *is a frequent contributor to* Commonweal. *His most recent book is* That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation *(Yale University Press)*.

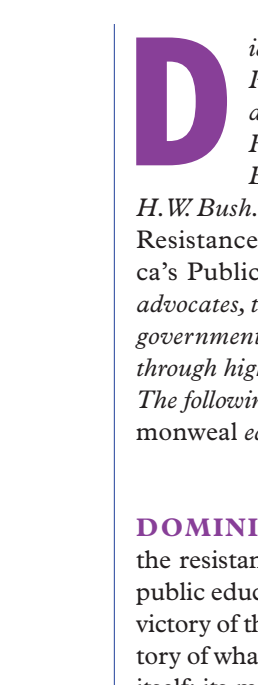
An interview with Diane Ravitch

Don't Call It Reform

Dominic Preziosi

LISTEN

Diane Ravitch discusses threats to the future of public education on Episode 25 of the Commonweal Podcast at **commonwealmagazine.org/podcast**



Diane Ravitch
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Diane Ravitch, founder and president of the Network for Public Education, is a research professor of education at New York University and a historian of education. From 1991 to 1993, she was Assistant Secretary of Education in the administration of President George H.W. Bush. Her new book is Slaying Goliath: The Passionate Resistance to Privatization and the Fight to Save America's Public Schools, *in which she details the work of parents, advocates, teachers, and others in opposing efforts by the federal government and private interests to remake public education through high-stakes testing, charter schools, and other initiatives. The following is an edited transcript of her interview with* Commonweal *editor Dominic Preziosi for the Commonweal Podcast.*

DOMINIC PREZIOSI: You contend in your book that the resistance to the reform-and-privatization movement in public education has succeeded. But before we talk about the victory of the resistance, maybe you could provide a quick history of what you criticize as the "so-called reform movement" itself: its major influencers, the role of philanthropic capital, and the people you identify disapprovingly as the "disruptors."

DIANE RAVITCH: Public education has always been a local and a state responsibility, and the federal government was there in the background providing support, but not telling people how to teach, what to teach, when to test, how to test, and so forth. That's changed in the past twenty years; there has been greater federal intrusion thanks to this narrative that "public schools are failing." We've been hearing this now since a report came out in 1983, during the Reagan administration, saying that public education was mediocre and there was a crisis. It turned out that report was wrong. Public education was not failing. If you look back from 1983 to the present, our society has been in crisis because of the widening inequality in income and wealth and a dramatic increase in poverty—child poverty in particular. We now have 40 percent to 50 percent of our children, according to official government statistics, living in some state of poverty.

This has a dramatic impact on the schools, particularly on test scores. So there was a movement that really got going in the mid-1980s. And then the big change was the passage of George W. Bush's "No Child Left Behind" plan, which said that we should test every child every year and give rewards to schools or recognition to schools where the scores went up, and punish schools, even to the extent of closing them, where scores went down. That program was then "enhanced" and made even worse by Barack Obama's "Race to the Top" program, and so we've been living with the effects of this high-stakes testing and the belief that privatization is a remedy for poor test performance.

The thing with standardized tests is that over the past twenty years we have invested literally billions of dollars in testing every child from third grade to eighth grade, and we have nothing to show for it. All this emphasis on standardized testing has enriched the testing corporations, but it has not produced any change in the relative standing of the states nor has it closed achievement gaps between the rich and the poor or between black and white kids or Asian and other kids.

Politicians have operated on the theory that the more you test kids, and the harder the tests are, the smarter the kids will get. And that turns out to be a ridiculous proposition. It's simply not true. So we've wasted a huge amount of money on testing, and it's corrupted the classroom. Many schools have deemphasized the teaching of history and civics and the arts. Many schools have dropped recess: there's no time for play because children have to prepare for the tests.

You also have some of the richest people in America, some of the leading billionaires, like Bill Gates, the Koch brothers, the DeVos family [of Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos], and many others who decided that since American education was broken, it was up to them to fix it. I could go on with the list of billionaires and corporations that, though none had any public-school experience, have decided they know how to fix American education. All of their ideas involve privatization and usually corporate takeovers of schools.

And what my book concludes is that after twenty years of this experimentation, it has been a disastrous failure. It has not achieved any of its promises.

DP: I think people generally understand what the reformers said they were trying to do in terms of parental choice and charters, standardizing on core measures, and emphasizing teacher accountability. But since you raise the idea of privatization, I wonder if you could draw the link between how this push for reform led to ideas like the monetization and privatization of public education. You mention in your book, for instance, the reformers using terms like "opportunities of scale" and "market penetration" in their approach to public education.

DR: Well, one of the problems that's arisen in the past twenty years is the shift of control and power from educators to businesspeople, and politicians have welcomed the entry of entrepreneurs. So there are many charter schools, for example, that are run by entrepreneurs. There are charter chains that are corporate-run, and though there may be an educator somewhere along the line, the owners and leaders of the chains are in many instances not educators. They're businessmen.

And so in the charter world you have incredible deals where property changes hands. The one corporation buys the property, leases that to another branch of the same corporation. A lot of self-dealing and conflict of interest. I've documented this all over the country: it's rampant in states like Florida, Arizona, Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana. And even though they say they're "not for profit," money is changing hands, and in some cases, the CEO is making $600,000 or $700,000.

There's also a debate about accountability. In California, in the spring of 2019, the biggest charter scandal in history occurred. Two entrepreneurs who had created a charter chain were indicted for the theft of $50 million. They were paying people in small districts to sign up kids or to put their names down as students in athletic programs for which they were getting reimbursed by the state, but there were no athletic programs, and no one knew because no one was checking. One of the problems in the charter sector is the lack of oversight, but charter advocates say they can only succeed if they have no regulation. And when there is no regulation, no oversight, and no accountability, they say, well, that's what gives them the freedom to innovate. In fact, that's what gives grifters the freedom to steal. And so you can't have it both ways. If you want government money, you have to have oversight. You have to have regulation. You have to be sure that the money is being spent the way it's supposed to be spent and not spent on the administrative overhead or going into the bank account of the person running the place.

DP: One of the most compelling sections of your book is when you talk about terms like "disruption" and "entrepreneurialism" and point out that you can't use these terms when it comes to public education. How can you measure "disruption" or apply a metric to engaging with a work of literature? How is it that the language of the reform movement seemed to seduce so many?

DR: I'm always hesitant to call them "reformers," and I draw the distinction between real reformers and these folks. They call these folks "reformers" because this is a poll-tested word. We all know that reform means good. In American history, the reformers were always the good guys. They were the ones who wanted to make things better. And so there's a long history in education that reformers want teachers to be paid more. They wanted desegregation. They wanted to get rid of the kind of backward ideas about dinosaurs riding around with people on their backs. They wanted to have modern education where professionals were well compensated.

But *these* reformers instead pushed for testing. Or for hiring young teachers who will stay for a year or two and then go away. They're really attacking the teaching profession as such. They despise unions. The folks who call themselves reformers really want to privatize public education, and that is why they use the term "disruption." I remember listening to the CEO of a major tech company say, "We disrupt our company every two years." And I thought, that's fine. You know, if that's what you want to do, go ahead and do it. And if it makes you better, do it, but please leave the children alone. Children and families don't want disruption. Schools don't need disruption. Schools need to have steadiness of purpose. They need to have very competent and experienced educators, and they need to have stability for the children.

DP: We've talked about what you identify as the failings of reform. Your book highlights the resistance movement. Could you say what ended up lighting the match for the resistance? Who are some of the forces and players? Was it the striking teachers we've seen over the past couple of years? Informed educators who are becoming more vocal? The army of bloggers like yourself who are proponents of public education?

DR: For me the turning point was two years ago in February 2018 when the West Virginia teachers walked out en masse. Every single teacher in the state—and this in a right-to-work state where teachers are not allowed to strike. Every single teacher walked out of their classroom and showed up at the state capital to demand not only higher pay, but better working conditions and better learning conditions. They also took a strong stand against charter schools. This was very inspiring, not only to me, but to people and teachers all over the country. And that lit a flame that went from West Virginia to Oklahoma to Arizona to Los Angeles. I don't think this is over. This will continue because teachers have now seen this, a picture of the power that they have when they unite, when they stand together for their demands.

The bloggers have given tremendous heart to the resistance. And what I did in this book was to single out people who either single-handedly or with a small number of allies made a huge difference.

DP: How long have you had your blog?

DR: I started my blog in 2012, after I had written a book about my very serious change of mind. I had worked on the conservative side for many years. I was an advocate of all the things that I now criticize. I worked in the administration of George H. W. Bush, and I supported high-stakes testing. I thought that it would lead to better outcomes. I supported charter schools and I knew all the people in the beginning who were on that side.

But I was never too sure about vouchers. I have to say I've always been a very strong supporter of Catholic schools, but I'm not in favor of vouchers, so I have interesting conversations with my many Catholic friends about my belief that Catholic school should be supported by private philanthropy. Since Melinda Gates [wife of Bill Gates] is a graduate of Catholic schools, I think they should set aside about $2 billion as a permanent endowment fund to keep Catholic education alive.

DP: I'm wondering if you might be able to speak to a couple other issues challenging public education. There's the issue of de facto segregation, for instance, where well-off communities and districts that are mostly white tend to dominate and perpetuate their control of what they identify as good schools. There are wealthy PTAs that are able to create what almost amounts to private schools within the public system. What can be done to keep public education both public and equal?

DR: I think it's going to be difficult, and it's difficult because there is not just residual racism, but outright racism, where people who have privilege don't want to give it up. It's a tough problem, but it is not insoluble. I think there are creative ways of rezoning districts. But it may involve state solutions. One of my fantasies is that when the Obama administration came up with "Race to the Top," instead of promising federal money for adopting the Common Core and agreeing to evaluate teachers by test scores, what if they said—or what if the next Secretary of Education were to say—here's $5 billion and we're going to have a national contest, and the money will go to the states that come up with the best plans for desegregation? It might involve rezoning and might involve different ways of approaching housing, but it will be one that we can actually do.

I think that if we want to have a better society, we're going to really have to address the issues of poverty and segregation head-on, and the longer we put it off, the more urgent it will become. We could do it now if there were the will to do it. But under the current administration, there is no will to advance integration. There's also no will to do anything about civil rights in general.

DP: Getting back to the title of your book: Is Goliath really dead?

DR: Goliath is dead for sure. There's not a single strategy or methodology that the reformers have promoted that has any record of success. So when you come in and say, we're going to reinvent public education and we have the answers, and then it turns out that all of your answers are wrong, it means that you are basically not even a Goliath. You're just a big empty-headed monster.

But the thing that's propping Goliath up is the vast amounts of money behind it. There's one other point I want to make because I think it's important. The attack on public education is not isolated. This is also part of an attack on everything that's public. People like Betsy DeVos, Charles Koch, Bill Gates, whether they mean well or not, what they're doing is very damaging to the public sector in general. Think of something better to do. I think that if they're as well-intended as I believe Bill Gates is, he can use his money to open health clinics in every impoverished community, because one of the reasons kids do poorly on tests is because they're in poor health and they don't see a doctor. The Walton family, which is the single biggest funder of charter schools, is worth $150 billion dollars, and they have 1 million low-wage workers. If they really wanted to help children, they could raise their 1 million workers' wages to $20 an hour. If parents have a steady job where they're paid $20 an hour, that would make a huge difference in terms of children's ability to do well in school. So there are things we can do and we don't have to wait generations to do them. But I think we have to persuade the billionaires to stop attacking the public sector.

RAND RICHARDS COOPER

Oscar Oversights

'Luce,' 'Uncut Gems,' 'Transit'

A post-Oscar cleanup yields a trio of films blithely swept aside by the Academy—all streamable, and all worth watching. If you needed proof that Oscar nominations are capricious and routinely neglect excellent films, here are three prime pieces of evidence.

First is Nigerian-American director Julius Onah's closely observed family drama, *Luce*. Fans of *Six Degrees of Separation* will note a basic similarity in the story of a charming young black man and his complicated interactions with a middle-aged liberal white couple—in this case, his adoptive parents, Peter and Amy Edgar, played by Tim Roth and Naomi Watts. Luce Edgar (Kelvin Harrison Jr.), a track star and straight-A high-school student, is the very definition of promising. But one teacher is on to his act, or at least thinks she is. Harriet Wilson (played with implacable solidity by Octavia Spencer, who deserved a Best Supporting Oscar nod) becomes alarmed when Luce turns in an essay on the writer Frantz Fanon that seems to glorify violence. Searching his locker on a pretext, she finds contraband in the form of a bag of high-octane fireworks, and alerts the Edgars.

Such minor transgressions normally would present mere scratches in the glossy surface of a kid like this. But Luce has a past. Gradually we piece it together, learning how Peter and Amy adopted him at age seven, from Eritrea, where he was one of the Lost Boys. We don't get the details—only that turning the traumatized African child into the gleaming all-American boy involved using therapists, tutors, and the whole panoply of resources at the disposal of a professional American couple. Onah's smart script portrays the real love the Edgars feel for their only child, even as it delivers a disquieting recognition: Luce is their son, yes, but also their project.

Mrs. Wilson's digging turns up potentially unsavory realities—a friend who is into drugs; a party at which Luce may have been implicated in an incident of sexual exploitation; a mysterious fire. Is Luce culpable? The film keeps us teetering, and at times Luce is presented in Jekyll-and-Hyde terms—now sweetly angelic, now addressing his teacher with vaguely ominous impertinence. The key to the movie lies in its point of view, which is essentially that of the parents; we are privy to their increasingly agonized conversations about Luce, including Peter's emerging ambivalence about having adopted him in the first place, and finally his bitter implication that doing so was a political vanity project for his wife. As for Luce himself, lacking any glimpse into his heart or mind, we are left to regard him from outside; the fact that he remains the unknowable other—to his white parents and to us—reinforces the picture of structural racism that is the film's underlying target, and that exists despite, or even within, the good intentions of white liberals like the Edgars. Didn't they, after all, adopt an African Lost Boy, and help him find himself? Piece by piece, Onah dismantles such complacent reassurances in this fascinating, quietly troubling movie.

While *Luce* depends on subtlety and ambiguity, *Uncut Gems* has all the subtlety of a punch in the face—plus numerous actual punches in the face. Josh and Benny Safdie's film immerses protagonist and viewer alike in an experience of sustained misery. The plot could hardly be simpler: Howard Ratner (Adam Sandler), a New York City diamond trader in deep to some very bad guys for gambling debts, attempts to bail himself out. Things go poorly, and then they go worse.

Martin Scorsese is listed as an executive producer, and you can see why he was attracted to this movie, with its nearly continuous explosion of male violence. There is dramatic tension, but it is the tension of unremitting entrapment; nothing changes in Howard or his world except that doom moves inexorably closer. A few forays into his life as a negligent husband and father—one scene portrays a family Passover seder—are mere gestures. *Uncut Gems* is about watching a man desperately attempting to stave off calamity, and dreading that he will not succeed.

It's interesting to ponder the challenges facing funny men who attempt serious dramatic roles. Sandler has a seemingly unshakeable comic reputation to shrug off, and he does it, interestingly, by maintaining a comic persona. In *Uncut Gems* he's smiling almost all the time—nervously, and into the very teeth of terror. He's joking while Rome burns, and he knows it. That ever-ready smile registers somewhere between a New York City brashness, a pitchman's tactical optimism—and, finally, pure desperation, a panic-driven grimace deployed to reassure others and himself. The Safdies have crafted a Scorsesean take on Arthur Miller; it's *Death of a Salesman* meets *Goodfellas*.

This is the kind of flawed movie that stays uncomfortably in your mind afterward. There's an underlying anti-humanism to *Uncut Gems*, a semi-covert tilt toward the absurd—not tonally, but existentially. The film's opening sequence takes place far from New York, deep in an African mine, where gaunt laborers discover a gem that eventually, transported halfway around the world, will figure in Howard's effort to

save himself. The scene nods at the famous prologue to *The Exorcist*, where the priest played by Max von Sydow, digging in an archaeological site in the Mideast, unearths a relic that portends the demonic nightmare to come. Here the unearthed object has the opposite valence, serving both as talisman and treasure in Howard's plan. But his hopes founder, and the Safdies mine the gem cinematically, as it were, for an unexpected visual sequence that takes us deep inside the molecular structure of gems and humans alike, in a phantasmagorical montage reminiscent of the surreal sequence in Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life*. This visual conceit couldn't be more remote from the gritty urban realism of the film itself, and the drastic shifting of gears startles, as if to remind us that the absorbing dramas we fixate on—whether in a movie, or in our actual lives—have less importance than we like to think, and that everything is mere material, subject to implacable processes of entropy. A cold wind of nihilism blows through the Safdie brothers' violent film, and leaves you feeling chilled to the bone.

German director Christian Petzold's *Transit* is a strange and gripping film about refugees in Nazi-occupied France that centers on a confusion of identity. In all respects but one (and it's a big one), Petzold follows the 1944 novel of the same title by Anna Seghers, a German Jew who fled the Nazis to Paris, then further to Marseilles, before escaping to Mexico. Her novel, set in Marseilles in 1942, recounts her experiences there, and the movie follows suit. In wartime Paris, with the Nazis about to occupy the city, a refugee named Georg (Franz Rogowski) is asked to deliver a letter to a writer, Franz Weidel. Arriving at the writer's apartment, he finds that Weidel has committed suicide—leaving behind some letters and a manuscript. Scooping it all up, Georg escapes to Marseilles, where he attempts to determine his own future while interacting with assorted other refugees: a family of North African immigrants whose young son Georg befriends; a doctor trying to get to Mexico; and Weidel's semi-estranged wife, who is unaware that he's dead.

Without telling the wife, Georg assumes the dead writer's identity—to facilitate an exit visa, but also, one senses, for more obscure reasons. Many of the story's pieces remain un-filled-in. Why is the seemingly nonpolitical Georg fleeing? What did he do? Is he a Jew? In the one big departure from the novel, Petzold takes these World War II events and transposes them onto contemporary Europe. This creates obvious problems. If we're in the France of today, are these the same Germans, the same Fascist party, somehow resurrected? Is Hitler out there somewhere? Why do we never see any Nazis? Why do the clothes look like the 1940s, but the vehicles like 2020? Some viewers are likely to get hung up on these incongruities, and one wonders why Petzold didn't just set his wartime drama historically, as in his last film, *Phoenix*.

My guess is that the heavy visual burden of Nazi symbology—the swastikas, the uniforms, Hitler himself—forms an encrustation of particularity that Petzold wished to do without, in order to proceed with less impediment to the more universal story: the plight of refugees. *Transit* acutely evokes the drifty, disorienting non-existence of the stateless: the agonized waiting; the caprices of bureaucratic whim; the abiding dread of being dismissed as a non-person. In Marseilles, fates are juxtaposed with cruel proximity. The fortunate sit eating in a café, while others are hauled away screaming by police. A woman who runs out of options suddenly leaps to her death from a scenic rampart. The city of refugees mixes hope and desperation; anxiety, boredom, and sudden explosions of despair; acts of quiet heroism and of crass betrayal. And the ubiquitous shame of watching others be taken away—and feeling mostly relief.

Profoundly gloomy, *Transit* contains moments of poignant beauty, as when Georg sings a childhood lullaby to a young boy named Driss, a song that his own mother—about whose fate we know nothing—once sang to him; it evokes a world of tenderness and security now utterly lost. It's surely no coincidence that Driss and his family, like so many refugees in today's Europe, have a North African background. Nominally backward-looking, *Transit* has its gaze set equally on our twenty-first-century crisis, using a historical trauma of statelessness to raise an ominous reminder. Something like this could happen again. In some respects, it already has.

Adam Sandler in *Uncut Gems*

COURTESY OF A24 FILMS

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

B. D. MCCLAY

Born Guilty

Francesco, the son of a rich merchant of Assisi and now a prisoner of war, is being led into captivity when he hears screaming behind him. The people who are not fortunate enough to have families to ransom them are being killed. We pass one of them, who is being flayed alive, just after seeing the masses of dead killed earlier. But this particular moment, when Francesco suddenly understands how arbitrarily he will remain alive as others die, marks the moment he begins his transformation into a figure we know: Francis of Assisi.

Francesco is a 1989 movie by the Italian director Liliana Cavani, who has filmed the story of St. Francis three times. (*Francesco* is her second attempt; the other two, to the best of my knowledge, have not been released in the United States.) When I watched *Francesco* I was unaware of its reputation, in some quarters, as worse-than-horrible, but I did find it an odd film. Its American release was cut from a running time of 150 minutes to a little over 130 minutes, which means the film makes less and less sense as it careens toward its end. Francis is portrayed as a sort of proto-Protestant figure in ways that are at odds with his submission to ecclesial authority. While St. Clare (here, "Chiara") also plays a role in the film and is usefully and totally unsexualized, she is the only woman to follow Francis, and the Poor Clares simply do not exist. It also feels like a much older movie than it is—a kind of throwback to the life-of-Christ biopic in its visuals and its strangely cast, conspicuously beautiful lead (Mickey Rourke, playing a very well-nourished and muscular Francis). But all of these flaws conceded, I still liked the movie. It's interested in holiness in a serious way.

Cavani's movies usually have this worse-than-bad reputation; she embraces a kind of total, transcendent tastelessness in her pursuit of what interests her. She is most famous for the spectacularly offensive 1974 movie *The Night Porter*, in which an SS officer (Max, played by Dirk Bogarde) and the concentration-camp victim he sexually abused (Lucia, played by Charlotte Rampling) are thrown together again after the war and begin an affair. In *The Night Porter*, a secret society of ex-Nazi officials put each other on trial by gathering all the evidence and witnesses they can find and systematically destroying them. They find this therapeutic and healing; not only do they experience no remorse, they are all trapped in reenactments of their pasts. Whatever they pretend they are achieving is actually accomplished between the two lovers, who in reuniting seem to find a way of genuinely reckoning with what he has done and what has been done to her. Thus, by the end of the movie, they are killed.

Much of Cavani's work is either unavailable in the United States or hard to find, but the three films of hers that I have seen—*Francesco*, *The Night Porter*, and *Ripley's Game*—are all interested in luck and morality, in brutality and justice, and in innocence as a prized but elusive quality. In *Ripley's Game*, a man who insults the international criminal Tom Ripley is manipulated by him into murdering a stranger for money. "Innocence," Ripley muses, setting the price at which he thinks the man will do it, "is expensive." Which brings us, in a roundabout way, back to *Francesco*.

If innocence is one of Cavani's interests, what makes her approach to it distinctive is that innocence is not a quality one has and then loses forever. *Francesco* is a story about acquiring innocence, which is indeed an expensive thing. For Francis, it requires not only stripping himself of money and possessions and exposing himself to public humiliation, but also inflicting emotional brutality on his father and mother, who are portrayed by Cavani as essentially good people who believe in generosity toward the poor but who are bewildered by their son's coldness toward them. The scene in which Francis strips himself of all his clothes to break any ties he has to his father was so sad that I had to switch the movie off and resume it another day.

Francesco doesn't judge. He simply knows that he must do this to go on living. However, in Cavani's movie, this is still not enough. He has to be further stripped. He rolls around naked in the snow in a highly uncomfortable scene in which he is either forcing himself into a position of maximal pain or actually trying to screw the landscape. He watches others follow his principles and then begin to quarrel with him and his ideas. After renouncing his family, he has to return to comfort his dying father. He sickens, weakens, is plagued by doubt, and then, finally, receives the stigmata and dies. It's only when he receives the stigmata that Francesco becomes innocent. As Clare says in the movie's closing lines: "I thought that love had made his body identical to the beloved's. And I asked myself if I would ever be capable of loving that much."

I followed *Francesco* with Alice Rohrwacher's 2011 movie *Corpo Celeste*, in which a young girl named Marta half-heartedly attends confirmation classes led by a well-meaning but not particularly helpful woman who cannot answer any questions that deviate even slightly from the curriculum. What, Marta wants to know, does the phrase "*Eli Eli lama sabachthani*" mean? No answers are forthcoming. Marta's own family is firmly working class and also does not have time to help her. The parish is struggling and the priest, while not a bad priest precisely, is corrupt in some refreshingly boring ways, campaigning for a politician and instructing his parishioners on how to vote in the hope of getting transferred to a healthier church.

I went into *Corpo Celeste* wondering if it would be a story of children's piety, of the sort where children take things more seriously or too seriously and provoke some kind of inconvenient response, or the child dies (as happens in, for instance, Flannery O'Connor's story "The River"). Instead,

Yle Vianello as Marta in *Corpo Celeste*

it was a lower-key and in some ways better story, one in which Marta is confronted less by adult hypocrisy than by the adult need to get on with it. But it also turned out to be an inversion of *Francesco*'s story in some interesting and unexpected ways.

Marta, like Clare, cuts off her hair to make herself unpresentable; unlike Clare, she does this to try to escape undergoing confirmation, which she is increasingly unsure she can do in good faith. While Cavani doesn't play up Francis's link to animals, aside from a scene in which one person after another tries and fails to slaughter a lamb, Marta ends up taking flight from confirmation when she witnesses some kittens being killed. She is marked throughout the movie by her refusal to eat fish.

And, like Francis, Marta ends up confronting God in a ruined church with a crucifix that is very much like the Sam Damiano cross. After she runs away from the church, first to save the kittens, then out of horror at their fate, her priest sees her wandering by the highway as he's on his way to pick up a crucifix from a rundown church in another town. It is there, talking with another priest, that she is told Jesus understood despair and was found to be laughable by those around him. When she brings this up with her own priest, as they drive back home with the crucifix strapped to the top of his car, he is so irritated that he jerks the steering wheel and the crucifix goes flying off into the ocean. In the movie this did not seem to be a joke at Christ's expense but rather a reproof directed at the priest, who cannibalizes decrepit churches rather than rebuilding them, and who, like almost all the adults in the movie, doesn't know how to guide Marta into a serious faith. But, of course, one's mileage may vary.

Corpo Celeste also feels like a movie about how innocence is expensive, in both a cynical sense and a true one. The various people in the movie who are simply doing the best they can need to feel that this is enough. The one adult who treats Marta seriously—the priest of the ruined church, from which they take the crucifix—is, not coincidentally, a failure. He can no longer tell himself that doing the best he could was doing enough. This cynical adult innocence is expensive because it comes at a high price—reality—which those who adopt it must carefully pretend isn't being paid. There is no indication in the movie that Marta is an exceptionally intelligent student whose questions a teacher couldn't possibly be expected to answer. None of the children in the confirmation class are being well served by it. The hope is that getting them over the line will be enough.

But there's a sense in which Marta's innocence, in asking real questions and needing real answers, is also expensive, in effort and time and self-knowledge, and that it really imposes a cost on adults, and that shepherding this innocence into a real adult innocence might be almost impossible for any group of adults to do. *Corpo Celeste* is not a movie about the loss of innocence, but it is a movie that documents how innocence gets lost. It carefully and subtly points out that true innocence is maintained only through encountering reality, not avoiding it. We don't know precisely why Marta refuses to eat fish, but we do see her first decline it after a conversation about refugees dying in the sea.

"Innocence" is a strange word. It invokes many things—purity, guiltlessness, stupidity, holiness—without corresponding to any of them. It is the way in which innocence is never quite the right word that makes it an interesting word to push against and to use. The fall-from-innocence narrative assumes that childhood is an Edenic state from which we decline, instead of childhood being a time in which we are capable of acting viciously but are also, for the most part, powerless. Stories of the loss of innocence, in which childhood simplicity is undone by sexual awakening and adult initiation, are another way of maintaining the cynical innocence of adulthood, in which living another way is always going to be impossible.

In a Christian context, innocence cannot be thought of as an irrevocable binary, had or lost forever; instead, we are all in some way born guilty and receive the possibility of innocence as a gift. And the restoration of innocence, for Christians, is very costly; it costs everything. But there is no Edenic state for anyone in a post-Eden world. Christianity believes in our fall but that is not the end of the matter.

Innocence, so rarely found in life, is also what is often invoked against people who are less-than, who are guilty of *something*, therefore given nothing. These already-guilty are lepers for *Francesco*, refugees for *Corpo Celeste*. What these movies suggest is that innocence can become a possibility only at the moment people understand that they are not innocent; that growth in innocence can only come the closer and closer one gets to harsh reality; that no one can be innocent unless they give themselves over totally to love. Perhaps there is no other way to do this than to embrace that most resisted Christian teaching: sell everything you have and give it all to the poor.

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FILM MOVEMENT

Nothing Left Worth Saving

PHIL KLAY

So this is Houellebecq. Revolting. I don't mean that as a criticism—or, at least, not entirely. Early on in *Serotonin*, my first foray into the work of the enfant terrible of the French literary scene, it became clear that revolting (and titillating) the reader was part of Michel Houellebecq's point. Modern Western man, living in an exhausted, secularized civilization in the third millennium, "one millennium too many in the way that boxers have one fight too many," looks out upon a world in which biological needs are satisfied and higher desires have withered. It is "a hell built by human beings at their convenience," as our ridiculously named narrator, Florent-Claude Labrouste, tells us. But does a tour of this particular hell make for a good novel?

The short answer is: no, it doesn't. *Serotonin* is boring, crude, sexist, shapeless, gross, troubling, and wrong. On the plus side, it's often brilliant, and I found it sparked more serious thinking than most of the books I've read in the past year. Perhaps you should read it too, and join me in hell.

In terms of plot, the novel is simple. Florent, a middle-aged agricultural engineer on an antidepressant that reduces his libido, sees two attractive young women, has feelings about the experience, and after finding his girlfriend has been cheating on him in an extravagant manner, leaves her and his apartment in an attempt to disappear from life and society. Then he begins reminiscing about old girlfriends, meets up with an old school buddy in the midst of a hopeless fight between farmers and the European Union, is diagnosed by a doctor as "dying of sorrow," and in general slowly moves closer and closer to suicide while discoursing on free trade, sex, man's biological nature, sex, women's genitalia, sex, local agriculture, sex, Christian civilization, sex, and sex. If this sounds dull, it is. There's also humor, often in the style of an internet troll. At one point Florent decries Paris as a "city infested with eco-friendly bourgeois.... Perhaps I was a bourgeois too but I wasn't eco-friendly; I drove a diesel 4x4—I mightn't have done much good in my life, but at least I contributed to the destruction of the planet." This line is quoted in most reviews I've seen of the book, and it's about as funny as things get. More often, the humor lies in things like Florent calling various people "queer" (we get "a rural Greek queer," "a Botticelli queer," and "just one more London queer").

SEROTONIN

MICHEL HOUELLEBECQ
TRANSLATED BY
SHAUN WHITESIDE
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
$13.99 | 320 pp.

More wearying than the jokes are the lifeless female characters, which is a serious problem in a novel where the hope of a solid romantic pairing is supposed to provide the "promise of happiness" that might alleviate our narrator's suffering. The cheating girlfriend is utterly ridiculous—not a person but a mixture of bottomless lust, status obsession, and materialism. Even Houellebecq's description of her genitalia beggars belief (unless he wants us to think she is a creature made not of flesh but of high-strength rubber). Then there's a pathetic failed actress, a perfect Dane, and the innocent Camille, whom the narrator cheated on and who he hopes might save him if he manages to somehow reunite with her. As with the cheating girlfriend, Houellebecq's descriptions of these women's bodies tend to be more memorable than his evocations of their characters.

The defense, such as it is, is that we're obviously not meant to take our narrator's judgments at face value. Indeed, of all the various targets of satire here, perhaps the greatest target is the modern fetish for believing that he who approaches life the most cynically is the most honest.

The narrator wields the tools of the modern, rationalist outlook to reduce every person, action, ethic, or form of community to its most deflating aspect, generally using the glib language of pop science or psychoanalysis. Thus, an existential crisis is reduced to "a more biological one: what was the point saving a defeated old male?" Prospective child murder is justified as "the first action of a male mammal when he conquers a

female." Proust and Thomas Mann are marshalled to deflate the entire history of Western culture into a failed attempt to channel brute sexual urges ("the end of *The Magic Mountain*…signified the final victory of animal attraction, the definitive end of all civilization and of all culture"). And most importantly, as signified by the title, the mind is reduced to chemicals in the brain.

This cynical knowingness, elevated here to a high pitch, quickly reaches absurdity. Reading, I was reminded of Wittgenstein's comment on the dangerous charm of Freud, who always stressed the strong prejudices against uncovering something nasty, but never admitted that "sometimes it is infinitely more *attractive* than it is repulsive…. Extraordinary scientific achievements have a way these days of being used for the destruction of human beings. *So hold on to your brains.*"

Florent, always looking for the *true*, and therefore *nasty*, explanation, always wielding his magnificent learning as a weapon against his fellow man, ultimately suggests this approach has less to do with uncovering the real than with flattering oneself with superior knowledge while actually being untethered to facts and uninterested in people. More than anything, it is this inability to see beyond the crudest explanation for pleasure, joy, and community, that is destroying the narrator. "There must have been something to her besides sex," he thinks of an ex-girlfriend currently on her own path of self-destruction, "or perhaps not—it was frightening to think maybe there had only been sex."

This is all set within a society depicted as a monstrous "machine for destroying love," a debased and instrumentalized neoliberal order that provides consumer goods at the cost of local culture and human connection. Some of Florent's critiques are similar to those one increasingly hears from right-wing protectionists in this country. (Houellebecq recently wrote an essay for *Harper's* praising Brexit and claiming Trump was "one of the best American presidents I've ever seen.") Spain is described as a country "engaged in a deadly process of increasing productivity," which had rid itself of low-skilled jobs and "condemned the majority of its population to mass unemployment." In Florent's career as an agronomist he'd spent years arguing for "reasonable protection measures," but at the end of the day found things "*always* toppled at the last minute towards the triumph of free trade, towards the race for higher productivity." This race toward higher productivity ruins the apricot producers of the Roussillon, the cheese farm-

Michel Houellebecq in Madrid, September 2019

ZUMA PRESS, INC. / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

His characters are pathetic, unhappy, gross, oversaturated with joyless sex, and so obviously in need not only of love but of grace.

ers of Normandy, and ultimately the one remaining friend of the narrator, a farmer from an aristocratic family named Aymeric. An idealist, Aymeric attempts to farm in the old style, an effort that almost puts a crack in the narrator's isolation. Spending time with Aymeric, even knowing that "in accounting terms" Aymeric was heading to ruin, he could listen to "the gentle mooing of the cows, the not entirely disagreeable smell of dung," and have, if not a sense of having a place in the world, a sense of at least "belonging to a kind of organic continuum, of animal regrouping."

But this organic continuum is dying out. Florent meets a union of local farmers organizing to fight devastating trade policies, and proceeds to explain, in the bloodless language of an economist, that their cause is hopeless, that the number of farmers needs to drop dramatically to match European standards, and that "what's happening in French agriculture right now is a huge social plan, the biggest social plan in operation…in which people disappear individually, in their corners, without ever providing a theme for a news item." While farmers futilely organize, or die slow deaths of despair, multinational conglomerates buy up small lots and move toward large-scale agribusiness.

One of the more horrific and affecting scenes in the book involves this modern alternative to Aymeric's "old style" farming. Florent describes a panicked phone call from his early days with Camille, when she was studying to be a veterinarian. She'd been sent, without warning or preparation, to a huge chicken farm for eggs, a place where "thousands of chickens tried to survive in sheds lit from above by powerful halogens…featherless and scrawny, their skin irritated and infested with red mites; they lived among the decomposing corpses of their fellows, and spent every second of their brief existence—a year at most—squawking with terror." Florent follows this vision of hell with what it enables, a Leclerc supermarket, the closest thing the modern order gets to paradise. This chain store is described as a place of "order and beauty…luxury, calm, and delight," where the narrator walks along endless shelves of foodstuffs "from every continent," brought by "mobilized logistics, the vast container vessels crossing uncertain seas," all to satisfy the consumer's every desire. Every physical desire, at least.

Meanwhile Florent is dying for a lack of love. "I needed love, and love in a very precise form," he says, before descending yet again into flamboyant crudeness. But though the fixation here is on profane love (often, the *most* profane) throughout the novel there are hints that perhaps the real issue is of love of a more sacred kind. The narrator tends to describe the few people for whom he has any shred of respect as "believers." He declares his alcoholic ex-girlfriend on a downward trajectory is beyond saving by all but "certain members of Christian sects…who give, or pretend to give, a warm welcome, as brothers in Christ, to the elderly, the disabled and the poor." It is suggested more than once that, for people in Florent's situation, the only two real choices are either spending time in a monastery or going to Thailand for sex tourism. Unfortunately for our Florent, the monasteries are all booked up, and, as his psychiatrist informs him, the sex tourism only works for "the kind of idiot it's easy to con," the kind who comes back stupidly rejuvenated and with restored belief in their manly vigor.

The choice, presented in its basest form, is between a brutal materialist embrace of the world and a monkish retreat into the sacred. No surprise, then, why Houellebecq is so popular with certain types of religious readers. He presents the image of a godless man in a secular society in a way most flattering to the believer. His characters are pathetic, unhappy, gross, oversaturated with joyless sex, and so obviously in need not only of love but of grace. And he aggressively denies any of the normal outlets for transcendence available to the nonbeliever. The natural world is repeatedly demeaned: "nature left to its own devices generally produces nothing but a shapeless and chaotic mess, made up of various plants, and is as a whole quite ugly." High art and culture fail to nourish the soul—as demonstrated by Florent's takes on Mann and Proust and avant-garde theater, and by the way his erudition is matched by his moral repulsiveness. Science offers only methods for carving away at the human. And politics—a popular area for providing a sense of meaning and community—appears as a futile arena in which at best well-meaning actors delude themselves into thinking they're more than flotsam in the broader, unchangeable currents of economic and cultural change. And though God, too, is described as an obvious mediocrity, given the state of His Creation, the end of the novel provides us with a not quite successful final chapter suggesting we do indeed have clear signs of the divinity, in "those surges of love that flow into our chests and take our breath away—those illuminations, those ecstasies, inexplicable if we consider our biological nature."

The end might not work as art, but Houellebecq does seem to be leading us to something like the right set of questions. Not simply "In what shall we believe?" but also "How shall we structure society such that a belief in what nourishes the human is possible?" In Houellebecq, secularism and, as Marx predicted, capitalism have taken all that once provided meaning and community and begun to dissolve it in an acid bath, leaving atomized individuals who believe themselves composed, individually, of nothing more than atoms. This picture of man, seemingly so rational, is also absurd, as is attested by the often comic efforts of materialists like Daniel Dennett and Michael Graziano to deal with the hard problem of consciousness by claiming it doesn't exist ("the silliest claim ever made," complained the philosopher Galen Strawson, next to which

"every known religious belief is only a little less sensible than the belief that grass is green.")

"Man is a being of reason," Houellebecq recently declared in an exchange with the conservative French journalist Geoffroy Lejeune, "but he is above all a being of flesh, and of emotion." All well and good. But then he added that the restoration of Catholicism to its former splendor—meaning twelfth-century Christians painstakingly constructing splendid Romanesque cathedrals—could repair our damaged civilization. And here we get to the danger, for the religious, of indulging too much in Houellebecq's flattering but fundamentally nostalgic worldview, in which no progression is possible and our only hope is in a return to a past that we can't quite believe in anymore. Such nostalgia, after all, is as much a sign of civilizational failure as any other moral monstrosity to which he draws our attention. And the movements that have periodically helped rejuvenate the church, from the revolutionary poverty and street preaching of the Franciscans to the highly intellectual missionary and educational ministry of the Jesuits, have been progressive reactions to their specific time, designed to move the church forward. Even the monasteries Houellebecq references are not really meant to be isolated spaces sealed off from the encroaching darkness. As expressed in the classic formulation of Étienne de Fougères—"the clergy pray for all, the knights defend all, the peasants labor for all"—they're part of a complementary order of society: not simply the "organic continuum" of Aymeric's farm but an organic and spiritual continuum binding society, in which all are implicated, true retreat is impossible, and a belief in grace entails a belief in the future, not the past.

So, by all means, read this novel. Just don't mistake Houellebecq for a prophet.

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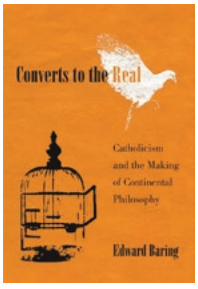
God of the Continental Philosophers

SARAH SHORTALL



CONVERTS TO THE REAL
Catholicism and the Making of Continental Philosophy

EDWARD BARING
Harvard University Press
$49.95 | 504 pp.

For some years now there's been a remarkable surge of interest in religion among European philosophers. We can see this in the raft of new works on St. Paul produced by philosophers who are very far from being orthodox Christians, such as Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, as well as in Jürgen Habermas's recent "turn" to religion, including his famous debate in 2004 with the future Pope Benedict XVI. From Michel Foucault's late interest in medieval confessional practices, to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's exploration of Franciscan spirituality, to the wide-ranging engagement with religious themes on the part of Giorgio Agamben and Jean-Luc Nancy, even the most strenuously secular of philosophers appear to have "found" religion.

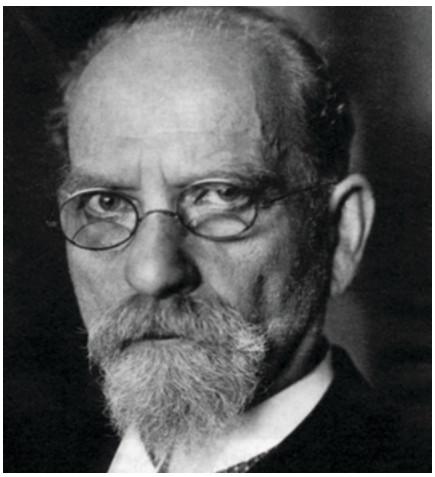
This religious turn in European philosophy might seem puzzling, but according to Edward Baring in *Converts to the Real*, it should not surprise us. That's because the tradition in which these philosophers work, known as continental philosophy (as opposed to the analytic tradition that dominates in the English-speaking world), was forged in important respects by Catholics in the early decades of the twentieth century. Before that, Baring tells us, European philosophers tended to be siloed in their own national traditions. It was their shared engagement with phenomenology—a careful study of the structures of human experience pioneered by Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Max Scheler—that gave birth to a truly *continental* philosophical tradition. And it did so largely thanks to Catholic philosophers, who transmitted these ideas from their German birthplace to France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, the Iberian Peninsula, and America. In fact, prior to World War II, 40 percent of all books on phenomenology in French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch were written by Catholics. With a few notable exceptions, such as Edith Stein and Gabriel Marcel,

they were by no means the most famous or most important of phenomenology's many interlocutors. But Baring argues that these Catholics were nevertheless the "single most important" factor in making phenomenology a truly continental philosophy.

How did this happen? Before phenomenology came into its own, the closest thing to a continental philosophy at the time was a Catholic one: neo-scholasticism. It flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century, after Leo XIII called for Catholic philosophers to return to the insights of Thomas Aquinas and medieval scholasticism. By 1914, thanks to the global reach of the Catholic Church, it had become "by any reasonable measure the largest and most influential philosophical movement in the world." While the church was engaged in a battle against the forces of "modernism" at the turn of the century, a small group of neo-scholastics sought to bridge the gulf between medieval and modern, Catholic and secular thought. These "progressive neo-scholastics," as Baring calls them, found their man in Edmund Husserl, who had himself studied with Franz Brentano, a priest steeped in the scholastic tradition. What attracted these Catholics to Husserl was his theory of intentionality—the notion that human consciousness is always consciousness "of" something. This appealed to Catholics because it appeared to open a way beyond the idealism of modern philosophy since Kant, which had threatened to undermine the possibility that human beings could possess an objective knowledge of realities outside the mind, including God.

Husserl's phenomenology seemed to offer a solution to this problem. His promise to return "to the things themselves" sounded to many Catholics like a vindication of medieval scholasticism, which stressed that human beings have the capacity to objectively know reality independent of the mind. This led some Catholics to dub phenomenology a "new scholasticism." By pointing "beyond" modern philosophy, they hoped that phenomenology could also serve as a path "back" to medieval thought, so that one might begin from the perspective of modern philosophy and end up somewhere closer to Thomas Aquinas. Husserl's phenomenology thus opened up the possibility that modern, secular philosophy could be converted to Catholicism.

But these Catholic philosophers were severely disappointed when, in 1913, Husserl's work took a much more pointed turn toward idealism. The result was a fierce debate, fought out within the transnational and multilingual networks of the Catholic Church, over whether phenomenology could be reconciled with Catholic philosophy. While phenomenology did serve as a conduit to religious faith and conversion for some philosophers, such as Edith Stein, Dietrich von Hildebrand, and Max Scheler, there were troubling indications that it could also have precisely the opposite effect. Martin Heidegger was a case in point. He initially approached phenomenology from the perspective of neo-scholasticism and was even a contender for the chair in Catholic philosophy at Freiburg in 1916. But by 1921, he was firmly in the atheist camp. In 1923, Max Scheler also broke with Catholicism.



Edmund Husserl

Phenomenology thus had mixed results as a conversion tool. And yet, as Baring demonstrates, this was precisely what ensured its widespread and lasting appeal. In the 1930s, critics of neo-scholasticism within the church used Husserl's idealist "betrayal" as a weapon against their fellow Catholics, and phenomenology became a tool for internal disputes between "progressive neo-scholastics," "strict Thomists" like Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson, and "Christian existentialists" such as Gabriel Marcel. In the process, the ideas of Husserl, Heidegger, and Scheler spread across Europe and came to the attention of mainstream philosophers. But just as Catholic critics of neo-scholasticism turned to phenomenology as a weapon against their intellectual rivals within the church, these secular philosophers were able to exploit the internal disputes within Catholic philosophy to dissociate phenomenology from religion altogether. Baring concludes that, "even though Catholic institutions helped transport phenomenological ideas around Europe, phenomenology could only reenter secular philosophy once it had left those institutions behind," as it did after 1945. Thus, Jean-Paul Sartre could get up and proclaim, in a famous speech at the Club Maintenant in October 1945, that the only authentic form of existentialism was an atheist existentialism. At this point, continental philosophy took on the secular character with which we still associate it today.

In other words, it was precisely because the fit between phenomenology and Catholic philosophy was never perfect that it could appeal to *both* Catholic and secular philosophers and convert people *to* as well as *from* Catholicism. That this was so is an indication of how porous the boundary between Catholic and secular philosophy was in the early decades of the twentieth century. Many of the leading lights of postwar European thought, including some of the fiercest critics of religion, first discovered phenomenology through the mediation of Catholic philosophers. Jean-Paul Sartre's reading of Heidegger, for instance, was greatly informed by the work of the neo-scholastic philosopher Alphonse de Waelhens, who wrote the first book on Heidegger's philosophy in French. Meanwhile, a generation of French philosophers was introduced

to phenomenology through the study circle that Gabriel Marcel hosted in the 1930s, whose participants included such luminaries as Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, and Paul Ricœur. Even Heidegger at one time entertained the idea of becoming a priest, long before he became the high-priest of atheist phenomenology. As a result of this constant traffic across the border between religious and secular thought, the themes at the heart of the Catholic engagement with phenomenology—questions of embodiment, transcendence, humanism, politics, and idealism—also bore their imprint on its secular inheritors. This does not mean that continental philosophy after 1945 was "secretly" Catholic, however, and Baring's goal is not to vindicate either the secular or the Catholic reading of phenomenology. Instead, his narrative shows how the same set of philosophical arguments could be used for a wide range of purposes, both religious and irreligious, depending on the context.

While he gets much right, Baring perhaps overstates the extent to which these sorts of interactions came to an end after the Second World War. Well into the postwar period, mainstream philosophers like Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Alexandre Kojève continued to elaborate their ideas in response to, and in conversation with, Catholic theologians and philosophers. In 1945, for instance, the Catholic journal *Dieu Vivant* published a debate between the ex-surrealist writer Georges Bataille and the theologian (and future Cardinal) Jean Daniélou, a debate attended by many of the leading lights of postwar French thought, from Sartre and Camus to Maurice Blanchot and Jean Hyppolite. And well into the 1970s and '80s, the Jesuit priest Michel de Certeau was able to move seamlessly among the worlds of psychoanalytic theory, poststructuralism, and Catholic theology. To argue, as Baring does, that phenomenology had to leave Catholicism behind in order to "fulfill its potential as a continental philosophy" and enter the mainstream is to ignore the many ways that continental philosophy engaged with religious questions throughout the twentieth century, and indeed continues to do so today.

Nevertheless, Baring has achieved something very significant. He has given us a snapshot of the remarkable internal diversity of Catholic thought in the early-twentieth century—something that is sadly missing from most intellectual histories of the period. He shows us the rich intellectual landscape forged by European Catholics in these years, one in which the differences between the various strands of Catholic thought were often as great as those between secular and Catholic philosophers or between those working in different countries. These factions grappled over questions about how we can know the world beyond the mind; about the relationship between reason and faith, philosophy and theology, God and human beings; and about whether Catholics could work with fascist or authoritarian regimes emerging across Europe in the 1920s and '30s. To answer these questions, they turned both to the resources of their millennia-old Catholic tradition, as well as to those of modern philosophy. Baring recovers this vibrant intellectual world and takes seriously the philosophical questions it posed in a way that remains all too rare among twentieth-century historians.

The other tremendous benefit of his work is to show how and why institutions matter for the history of ideas. The pivotal role Catholics were able to play in the rise and spread of phenomenology owes everything to the specific institutions these philosophers inhabited, beginning with the peculiarities of the university system in phenomenology's birthplace: Germany. Whereas Catholic philosophers elsewhere in Europe tended to be employed in confessional institutions such as seminaries or Catholic universities, state universities in Germany reserved some philosophy chairs for Catholics. As a result, there were many more opportunities for Catholic and mainstream philosophers to interact in Germany, which allowed Catholics to engage with the ideas of Husserl, Heidegger, and Scheler, and participate in the circles of acolytes they attracted. But these ideas might not have gained much traction beyond Germany if they had not had access to the self-consciously international and multilingual network of institutions and journals formed by neo-scholastic philosophers at a time when most philosophers were more interested in their own national conversations. This is not just a story of ideas, then, but a story of how ideas spread across the boundaries between national communities or between secular and Catholic thought, thanks to the particular institutions in which they take shape. Interestingly, the Vatican and church hierarchy play only a minor role in Baring's account—an indication of the way Catholic thought often develops independently of the centralized structures of the church hierarchy.

Given the highly specialized nature of Baring's subject, readers without a background in philosophy admittedly may struggle with some of the book's more technical discussions. There is much talk of epochés, "noetic-noematic correlations," and "transcendental reductions," which can understandably bewilder those uninitiated in the finer points of phenomenological analysis. But it is nevertheless a book that rewards close reading. Baring shows us the complex, multifaceted, and often unexpected interactions between Catholic and secular philosophy, which may well explain why continental philosophy finds itself constantly drawn back to religious questions. If we take Baring at his word, then, the recent "turn" to religion among continental philosophers should really be seen as a "return" to the origins of their tradition.

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Don't Blame Boomers

CONOR WILLIAMS

I plant a small forest of sunflowers in front of my house in Washington D.C. each year. It pulls me back to my childhood backyard in Michigan, and better yet, as spring folds into summer, it attracts all sorts of fauna: bees, butterflies, birds, and, in recent years, a growing crowd of babies.

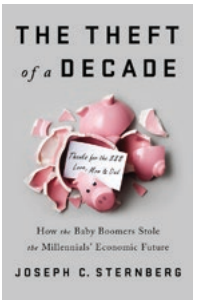
I spend a lot of time talking with the parents of this last group—about gardening, about the local schools, about other touchstones of urban family life. But after twelve years in D.C., I've noticed a few changes. Lately, it seems as if almost all of these parents are from the Midwest. (Sometimes I joke that they might rebrand my neighborhood D.C.'s "Little Heartland.") They are also wound much tighter. They're more worried about more parts of their children's lives.

So am I. As a young-ish father of three young children, I almost always wind up asking my neighbors: How are *you* piecing things together? Can you afford another kid? It can't possibly stay this hard, can it?

It's telling that these conversations happen even in D.C., where ambitious, anxious young workers flock because of its dynamic labor market. The American Dream still (mostly) exists here: work hard and you'll probably move up the ladder. But its bounty stands in stark relief against the trajectories of so many other communities. And even then, with all these Midwesterners chasing careers in the capital, the "cost of living"—the bleakest bit of jargon, if you reflect on it—relentlessly continues to escalate.

No wonder Millennials are cynical about the future and disaffected with American institutions. Social immobility and economic inequality are crushing young Americans. We're buried in student-loan debt, struggling to buy homes, and flailing through the life cycle. We're either struggling to find work in affordable heartland hometowns or chasing six-figure down payments for million-dollar mortgages in high-income cities. What happened to us? Why is it so much harder—so much more expensive—for young Americans to build a secure, sane life?

The progressive diagnosis—young families are suffering in the face of growing inequality in an unfair economy defined by regionalized access to economic opportunity—is both straightforward and well established. By contrast, conservatives have struggled to find a message—let alone an agenda—that meaningfully addresses these frustrations. Years of protecting the rich from higher tax responsibilities make it fiscally difficult for them to propose ambitious and substantive solutions to Americans' anxieties. But their problem isn't just a question of revenue: the right has run against government's ability to solve problems for so long that it can't credibly propose using the government to meet the public's needs. What is it to do?



THE THEFT OF A DECADE
How the Baby Boomers Stole the Millennials' Economic Future

JOSEPH C. STERNBERG
PublicAffairs
$28 | 288 pp.

Enter Joseph Sternberg's *The Theft of a Decade: How the Baby Boomers Stole the Millennials' Economic Future*. The subtitle says it all. According to Sternberg, if young families like mine have a narrower path to economic security than earlier generations did, well, it's our parents' fault. Specifically, when Boomers took political power (and hit their prime earning years) they engaged in a series of short-sighted reforms prioritizing the present over the future, "borrowing to fund just enough investment to deliver quick hits of economic growth."

In other words, *Theft of a Decade* provides conservatives with a brilliant pivot. Above all, it helps them subtly shift blame for problems like student-loan debt and high housing costs from the *rich* to the *old*. As a member of the *Wall Street Journal*'s editorial board and a self-styled "free-market conservative," Sternberg stresses that *Theft of a Decade* "is not an indictment of Wall Street or 'the finance industry,' or 'short-termism' among corporate managers, or excessive executive pay." In other words, while he's politically savvy about Millennial rage, he's eager to redirect it away from Wall Street rapacity.

This pivot hinges on how well Sternberg's generational-conflict framework explains past policy decisions and Millennials' present predicament. *Theft of a Decade* follows Boomers (Americans born between 1946 and 1964) from their arrival in a labor market transitioning away from the stability of the mid-twentieth-century economy up to their impending retirements. For much of the past four decades, Sternberg argues, Boomers have been trying to goose the economy through various policy tricks. In the 1980s, they cut taxes on capital gains and pushed deregulation, which produced, in Sternberg's telling, "a new boom in financial engineering: leveraged buy-outs, mergers and acquisitions, and other Gordon

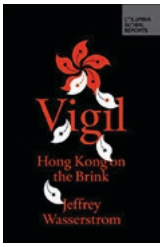
Gekko-like techniques." In the 1990s, Boomers eased federal rules around subsidizing mortgages to make it easier for their generational cohort to buy homes and "raised the cost of employing human beings" via new regulations like the Family and Medical Leave Act. When the Great Recession hit, they intervened to protect their home values by inflating the collapsing housing market with public funds. All this added to the burden their children will soon have to bear—higher deficit spending and more private and public debt.

It's a compelling story, and to Sternberg's credit, such an approach helps him go beyond the usual conservative talking points. Where many of his political fellow-travelers see a generation of frivolous, entitled whiners, he recognizes that Millennials have been dealt a pretty raw deal. He notes that, for Millennials, "the trend toward greater individual responsibility for saving makes it more obvious that we're falling behind." It's equal parts astonishing and encouraging to read a conservative writer describe shifting risk onto individuals as anything other than "liberating."

And yet, *Theft of a Decade* is not without problems. First, like any single-variable explanation of complex social, political, and economic issues, Sternberg's generational analysis obscures even as it enlightens. He misses basic intra-generational lifestyle diversity. Who is Sternberg's Millennial? Someone who, he writes, grew up admiring Thomas Friedman, Marc Andreessen, and loving the show *Home Improvement*. These dorky young kiddos, in his telling, get educated, work, need health care, and buy housing. That's a fair outline of a human life cycle. But it's not the whole picture for a generation whose oldest members are nearly forty years old. In *Theft of a Decade*, marriage is only lightly discussed and children hardly show up. That means their effects—slowed career trajectories, child-care costs, income diverted to save for kids' future college attendance, etc.—aren't part of his story.

Second, and similarly, Sternberg's approach ignores politically inconve-

BOOKS IN BRIEF

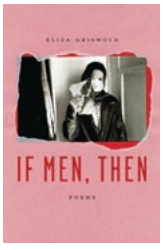


VIGIL: HONG KONG ON THE BRINK
JEFFREY WASSERSTROM
Columbia Global Reports
$15.99 | 120 pp.

"When the snow starts melting, it melts quickly." That's how Lord Chris Patten, the last British governor of Hong Kong, characterized the city's fast-withering freedom under Chinese Communist control. Beginning in the early 2000s and intensifying under the rule of Xi Jinping, China has been steadily and stealthily undermining the promise it made to the world back in 1984 to grant the Special Administrative Region a "high degree of autonomy." U.S. China expert Jeffrey Wasserstrom's *Vigil: Hong Kong on the Brink* is more than a succinct, richly researched history of the mass pro-democracy protests that began engulfing Hong Kong nearly a year ago. It's also a meditation on the meaning of borders—and a cogent reckoning with what happens as they begin to blur or disappear.

FRANCIS OF ASSISI
ENGELBERT GRAU, RAOUL MANSELLI, SERENA ROMANO
Paulist Press
$89.95 | 208 pp.

Can we ever be reminded enough about the legacy of St. Francis of Assisi? In this beautiful volume, the story of the blessed "Poverello" is retold through essays, prints, and photographs. Familiar frescoes of the barefoot friar, including the famous Giotto cycle, appear alongside images by lesser-known, though no less remarkable, artists. One is struck by the darkness, both visual and thematic, of the early Romanesque paintings that depict the saint's life. Francis is perhaps best remembered for light-hearted episodes, which include his preaching to the birds and befriending of the Wolf of Gubbio. But these ancient icons testify not only to Francis's joy, but also to his suffering; clothed in black, somber-faced, he gazes at us with pierced hands and feet.



IF MEN, THEN
ELIZA GRISWOLD
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
$24 | 96 pp.

"Teach us to align our will with what is," Eliza Griswold repeats in her new collection *If Men, Then*. Her poems do seek a kind of peace: the quieting of ambition ("the opposite of every behavior we've been rewarded for"), a "finer caliber of kindness," and "humor also known as grace." They are at the same time agitated and resistant. They speak of ISIS and Boko Haram, Guantanamo and Hezbollah, ancient slayings and rapes. They describe boats of refugees "giddy with surviving war elsewhere," unaware of trials ahead; a "father killed for his teeth"; apocalyptic "threads / of smoke rising on the horizon." Observed violence mixes with myths, fables, translations, and religious texts, giving the reader a sense of a troubled but vigorous mind examining the world, craving interpretation.

nient disagreements within generations. He counts the mistakes of the 1980s against Boomers because they were finally joining the ranks of voting adults. He counts the policy decisions of the 1990s against Boomers because Bill Clinton is a member of that generation. This allows him to blame "Boomers" of all stripes for years of disconnected policies that might be summarized as expanded benefits paired with tax cuts. Except, of course, that this hides much of what actually happened (and why). After all, early-career *Boomers* didn't launch a concerted, multi-year "Starve the Beast" approach to governance. *Conservatives* did.

In a 1980 *Wall Street Journal* column, prominent conservative intellectual Irving Kristol outlined the thinking largely responsible for the deficits that Sternberg hangs on Baby Boomers: "The neo-conservative is willing to leave those [fiscal] problems to be coped with by liberal interregnums. He wants to shape the future, and will leave it up to his opponents to tidy up afterwards." Deficit spending wasn't an approach chosen or preferred simply by "Boomers," but rather conservatives of all ages. Those choices now hamstring federal policymakers trying to smooth Millennials' paths.

In other words, much as Sternberg would like to reposition recent policy debates in generational terms, doing so offers an incomplete guide to the historical record and an unclear guide for future policies. For instance, Sternberg dings federal interventions to stabilize the housing market amid the global economic crisis of 2008–09 as "the effort to keep Boomers and Gen Xers in houses they couldn't afford." While that's true, it's also possible to describe those as key interventions that prevented the global economy from wholesale collapse—an outcome that would have been catastrophic for everyone from Boomers to Millennials to Generation Z. If, in the name of avoiding deficit spending and making housing more affordable, the government had allowed the housing market to continue its collapse during the Great Recession, there might well be a generation of evicted Boomers living in Millennials' crowded rental units.

Or, for another example, consider the Affordable Care Act. Sternberg largely presents it as another generational salvo, another instance of Boomers soaking Millennials with the fiscal consequences of more public entitlement spending. Except that the benefits of extending access to health insurance don't just benefit Boomers—as Sternberg only briefly notes near the end of the book, they're also good for early-career Millennials.

The analytical limits of *Theft of a Decade* hint at political limits for rewiring conservatism around generational conflict. A concrete anti-Boomer, pro-Millennial agenda is impossible to imagine in an era when Americans are best defined by their relationships to economic precarity, not their age. When conservatives try to repackage their agenda for young families, they invariably flounder. For instance, Rep. Ann Wagner (R-Mo.) and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fl.) recently proposed letting new parents pay for their own leave by borrowing from their Social Security benefits. It's an attempt to rebrand conservatives as being attentive to the economic strains facing young families—but by allowing Millennials to take on more risk, not through any kind of generational rebalancing.

This choice doesn't just reflect the degree to which conservatives rely on the votes of older Americans to retain power. It's also a sign that the various generationally "nefarious" policies that Sternberg holds against Boomers haven't actually left them fat, happy, and well-resourced as they near retirement.

Indeed, I've seen it in my sunflower patch, where Boomers increasingly follow toddlers through the garden. These grandparents have often moved into spare rooms or basements after things fell apart—jobs that left town, careers that ended prematurely, health emergencies that forced a move. The pressures of inequality—the concentration of economic power and vanishing opportunities—don't just apply to Millennials.

And yet, it's an Iron Law of Washington D.C. policy panels that major policy debates are only complete when they span the ideological spectrum. *Theft of a Decade* may very well earn Sternberg a coveted seat as the conservative voice on elite panels of Very Serious People discussing inequality, Millennials, homeownership, and so forth. And no Boomer will ever be able to take that from him.

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From Captive to Saint

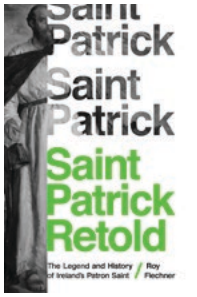
PETER QUINN

The governor of New York marked a recent St. Patrick's Day by announcing that the state police and local law enforcement would crack down on the combination of drinking and driving that placed it among "the deadliest holidays of the year." The governor's action served as a reminder of how St. Patrick's feast day has been hijacked by some as an excuse for public misbehavior. As the day has gone from an assertion of ethnic pride and religious identity to a version of Mardi Gras celebrated by people with no connection to Ireland, its deeper meanings have often been obscured.

The saint behind the holiday is the subject of Roy Flechner's book *Saint Patrick Retold*, a sober and scholarly stripping away of myth and fable in search of the flesh-and-blood Patrick. Flechner aims, as he puts it, "to humanize a personality who is often mystified by the distance of time and reverential deference." He makes no claims to a definitive portrait and warns that the evidence is too patchy and fragmentary for historians to "give us more than conjectures."

In his attempt to use the available facts to form as accurate a rendering as possible, Flechner recreates the social and religious context of the Romano-British twilight world where Patrick was born and grew up, and of the Ireland where he was enslaved and where he proselytized and died. However partial and speculative, Flechner's account of the saint and his times is rich and rewarding.

Patrick left two first-person narratives. The *Confessio* tells the story of his kidnapping and enslavement by Irish raiders, his religious awakening, escape from captivity, and return to Ireland on a divinely inspired mission. The "Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus" is a blistering denunciation of a British raider and his men. Nominally a Christian, Coroticus captured a group of Patrick's recently baptized converts and sold them to pagans.



SAINT PATRICK RETOLD
The Legend and History of Ireland's Patron Saint

ROY FLECHNER
Princeton University Press
$27.95 | 304 pp.

Both documents existed as copies in the eighth-century *Book of Armagh* and were forgotten until their rediscovery in the seventeenth century. In the interval, myths and folktales about Patrick proliferated. In one, Patrick was given a wife, Sheelah, who was also a saint. In another, his ancestors were counted among the Jews exiled by the Romans in 70 A.D. The story most closely associated with Patrick—his role as "saintly pest controller" in driving the snakes out of Ireland—was a medieval addition. The earliest account of Patrick using the three-leafed shamrock to teach about the Trinity dates to the 1680s.

Patrick writes in the *Confessio* that Calpornius, his father, was a deacon, and Potius, his grandfather, a priest. The Romano-British colony to which they belonged started with Caesar's invasion in 55 B.C. and took several decades to complete. Protected against the Celts to the north by Hadrian's wall, it grew into a stable, prosperous part of the empire. To the west, the Romans contemplated an invasion of Ireland, which one general said he could conquer with a single legion. The name they gave it, Hibernia (winter), expressed their lack of interest in acquiring a chilly, rainy island on the very edge of the world.

The accelerating erosion of the empire and fraying of its borders took a dramatic turn in 410 A.D. when the legions were withdrawn and the colony left to fend for itself. The casual inter-island trade across the Irish Sea, hinted at by an unearthed amphora with traces of wine and olive oil, gave way to increasingly destructive raids by Irish marauders intent on plunder and slaves. Sixteen at the time of his capture, Patrick recounts being taken along with "thousands of others." Alone, a captive slave in a foreign land, he was set the lonely task of tending flocks on a mountainside. After six years in bondage, during which he had a religious awakening, a voice in a dream told him he was going home. Shortly after, the voice announced, "Behold, your ship is ready."

Flechner mines Patrick's account of his capture and escape to suggest a

more complex version of events. In the "Letter to Coroticus," Patrick mentions that, as well as a deacon, his father held office as a decurion, a provincial official whose primary duty was collecting taxes. The honor of belonging to the local elite was mitigated by the requirement to make up revenue shortfalls, an obligation made increasingly onerous by the empire's decline. As a result, decurions began seeking to escape their official duties. The surest and quickest way was to join the clergy. For those who did, the major drawback was the requirement to surrender the bulk of their estates to an heir who would inherit their office.

It is possible, Flechner speculates, that Patrick's arrival in Ireland wasn't the result of a kidnapping but was intended to rescue him from the punishing burdens left him by his father's entry into holy orders. In Flechner's telling, "Patrick left Ireland rather conveniently before his coming of age and being appointed decurion. By leaving, he would have eschewed all civil responsibilities, lived as a wealthy man in Ireland…until finally, by feigning righteousness, he was able to return to Britain and seek to regain his property under the protection of the law." In his *Confessio*, Patrick admits being accused by those "who brought up against me after thirty years" an unspecified transgression committed "when I was young, before I overcame my weakness." He writes that "my defense was that I remained on in Ireland, and that not of my own choosing, until I almost perished." By emphasizing his presence in Ireland as involuntary, he seems to be refuting the charge he went of his own will.

Flechner admits that this version of events is speculative. It's also highly implausible. Patrick writes that he was taken with "thousands of others," none of whom came forward to refute his story. If escaping office was as simple as crossing the Irish Sea, it would seem likely that Ireland would have hosted a large number of decurions.

It was another dream that brought Patrick back to the land of his captivity. A messenger came from Ireland in a

vision "with so many letters they could not be counted." As Patrick read them, he heard "the voice of the Irish people" cry out "as if it were with one voice: 'We beg you, holy boy, to come and walk among us.' This touched my heart deeply, and I could not read any further. I woke up then. Thanks be to God, after many years the Lord granted them what they were calling for."

Patrick returned as a priest and bishop. (He doesn't say where his ordinations took place, but most likely in Gaul.) A vexing question for historians is the contemporaneous presence of a second Patrick. An entry in a fifth-century chronicle notes that Pope Celestine sent Palladius, "who was named Patricius with another name…as the first bishop of the Irish," a mission that ended in his martyrdom.

If papal envoy-and-martyr Palladius and vision-inspired Patrick (whose death, one biographer claimed, was at age 120) were different men, the title of "Apostle to Ireland" would be up for grabs. Flechner thinks it possible Palladius was "deliberately written out of history by the earliest hagiographers of Patrick." After reviewing the evidence, he concludes that the "least implausible" theory is that the hagiographers "conflated Palladius, who might have been known as Patricius Palladius, with Patrick, such [that] the two missionaries became one." It's not a case-closed judgment, but there will probably never be one.

The monks who wrote down the story of Patrick pictured him as leading a frontal assault on Irish paganism. Among the most memorable incidents was his challenge to legendary high king Lóegaire mac Néill and his druids. In celebration of the pagan high holy day, no fire could be lit before the king ignited a pyre atop the royal hill of Tara. In observance of the Easter vigil, which fell on the same date, Patrick defiantly lit the Paschal fire before the king could carry out his sacred duty. When hauled before the king and threatened by the druids, Patrick caused their chief to be lifted in the air and dropped on his head, "cracking his skull and causing great panic among the pagan spectators."

Patrick makes no mention of druids or a royal confrontation in the *Confessio.* His account offers a more nuanced and cautious process of conversion. Unlike missionaries in the mode of St. Boniface, the eighth-century "Apostle to the Germans" who took an axe to the sacred oak of the pagans, Patrick didn't smash shrines or attempt to upend the social order. As part of the Romano-British elite, Patrick's family would have owned slaves, and it's clear that his experience of being a slave didn't turn him against the institution. When he denounced Coroticus's kidnapping of recent converts, his wrath was aimed at their sale to *pagans*, not at slavery—though when it came "to the heathen among whom I live," Patrick wrote, "I have always shown them trust."

Although he left untouched the "sacral nature of Irish kingship," he often found himself in peril and wasn't above paying for protection: "I gave rewards to the kings, as well as making payments to their sons who travel with me; notwithstanding which, they seized me with my companions, and that day most avidly desired to kill me." In contrast to Romanized Britain and Gaul, where dioceses were centered on towns and cities, Ireland was a patchwork of rural kingdoms. (Irish cities such as Dublin and Waterford were founded centuries later by the Vikings.) By adapting to the proprietorship of land

tightly held by families and their dependents, Patrick avoided any attempt to impose the structures in use on the continent. The result was a "proprietary church," in which bishops or abbots were family members and donated land stayed under their control.

Patrick was especially associated with Armagh, the seat of the Uí Néill, who used the connection to bolster their prestige. Along with the churches he established in Ireland, Patrick was also "among the earliest monastic founders." His monasticism observed the strict asceticism of eastern practice. The beehive huts still extant and the ruins on Skellig Michael, a granite splinter off Dingle, testify to the severity of the rule. Among the disciplines was self-imposed exile, which resulted in Irish monastic foundations across Europe and, according to legend, sent St. Brendan to America centuries before Columbus.

Though the proliferation of holy men and women led to Ireland's reputation as "the isle of saints and scholars," Patrick retained his primacy over popular saints like Brigit and Columba. Devotion to him spread across Europe, but he wasn't included in the breviary until 1632. With the Reformation and the triumph of the Protestant Ascendancy came confiscation of the cathedrals named for him in Armagh and Dublin. (Jonathan Swift served as the Anglican dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral from 1713 to 1745.) Despite attempts to make him the progenitor of a proto-Protestant church, Flechner observes, "Patrick's image continually changed in tandem with the political vicissitudes of Ireland and the oscillating fate of the Catholic majority under Protestant rule." In sum, Protestants took the churches, while Catholics kept the saint.

In the wake of the massive wave of famine immigrants, the St. Patrick's Day parade became an important demonstration of Irish-Catholic identity in the face of relentless nativist hostility.

According to Flechner, "the earliest recorded event that can be described as a Saint Patrick's Day parade" in Ireland was in Waterford, in 1903. The first parade in New York City was in 1766, by Irish troops in the British garrison. In the wake of the massive wave of famine immigrants, the parade became an important demonstration of Irish-Catholic identity in the face of relentless nativist hostility. Over the years, controversies have arisen, the most recent concerning the inclusion of a gay contingent, which was finally approved in 2015. New York's parade remains the world's largest and longest, drawing a million marchers and spectators to Fifth Avenue.

Saint Patrick Retold is the story of an age as well as a man. Flechner tackles the complexities, uncertainties, and guesses (educated and otherwise) around Patrick. His account of the culture in which Patrick was raised and the place in which he lived as captive and missionary is insightful, detailed, and enlightening. Respectful and, when necessary, skeptical, Flechner offers a portrait of Patrick that, however partial and tentative, is humbler and more human than the snake-banishing superhero of legend. It would be comforting, if highly improbable, to envision future St. Patrick's Days on which revelers cut back on raucous partying and spent time reading Flechner's search for Ireland's national saint. Spiritually as well as intellectually, it would be time well spent.

PETER QUINN, *a frequent contributor, is the author of* Dry Bones *and* Banished Children of Eve *(both from Overlook Press), among other books.*

Is There Still a West?

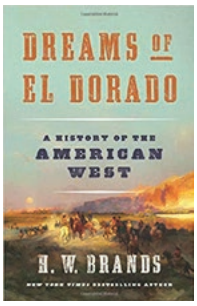
JARED LUCKY

Francisco Vázquez de Coronado wasn't the first to watch his dreams dissolve under a Western sky—and he wouldn't be the last. In the 1540s, the brutish and implacable Spanish explorer ranged all the way up to Kansas, losing men and money along the way. Only a few years earlier, the conquistador Hernán Cortés had beheld glimmering Aztec pyramids in Mexico, unsure "whether the things that we saw were not a dream." Little wonder that a whole generation of men like Coronado could believe stories of lands with silver bed pans, and a king, El Dorado, who robed himself in gold dust each morning only to wash it off at night.

First a Spanish friar, then a series of Indian guides pointed Coronado and his troops north to the golden cities of Cíbola: shimmering castles just out of reach. *Más allá*, his scouts were always telling him. Behind each mirage lay only cornfields and thatched huts—or worse, infinite plains and deserts that could engulf a man "as if he were traveling on the sea." Coronado returned to Mexico in disgrace, but not before garroting his guide.

For Texas folklorist and literary critic J. Frank Dobie, twentieth-century Southwesterners were still *Coronado's Children*—the title he gave to his 1930 collection of buried-treasure tales told in the borderlands. In a region of contradictions, filthy lucre could exist alongside sacred aspirations: "El Dorado was a man, a lake, a city, a country, a people, a name, a dream—a dream at once absurd and sublime—an allegory of every phantom that the high heart of man has ever pursued."

In a new popular history, historian H. W. Brands—professor at Dobie's old stomping ground, the University of Texas—embraces this protean metaphor. *Dreams of El Dorado: A History of the American West* makes only brief mention of Coronado since, as Brands puts it, "any work of history must have a beginning and an end," and his begins with the Louisiana Purchase. But the specter of Cíbola hangs on the horizon as Brands charts a course through the history of the western United States. Roughly chronological, the book's fifty-four short chapters cover most of the major figures and places: Lewis and Clark, the Alamo, the Gold Rush, the Oregon Trail, the Battle of Little Bighorn, the Transcontinental Railroad, the National Parks.



DREAMS OF EL DORADO
A History of the American West

H. W. BRANDS
Basic Books
$32 | 544 pp.

A truly literary history eludes most working historians. Their books are too often weighed down by specialist jargon, and they know that neglecting scholarly trappings—extensive footnotes, name-checking fellow historians—means risking professional irrelevance. It is nearly impossible to reach that most coveted literary destination: a serious argument delivered with a light touch.

In this, Brands is singularly successful. In addition to a sense of prose rhythm, he has a knack for the right phrase, which he puts to sometimes shocking effect. We learn, for example, of the "ghoulish tide of frozen flesh" that spewed down the Little Missouri River in the spring of 1887, after a brutal winter iced thousands of cattle. His mind's eye often enlivens a black-and-white era with flashes of color. After a long day on the Oregon Trail, "the last fires were banked, and the firefly glow of the pipes winked out."

But Brands may be at his best when he steps aside to reveal the poetry of his sources. The book quotes liberally from many of the richest Western memoirs and firsthand narratives, turning familiar historical characters into special correspondents. We hear directly from John Muir, awestruck by Yosemite's ponderosa pines "waving and singing in worship in windstorms." Chief Joseph reports the words of the Nez Pearce, as they defy General Oliver Howard's orders to move onto a reservation:

> "Are you the Great Spirit? Did you make the world? Did you make the sun? Did you make the rivers for us to drink? Did you make the grass to grow? Did you make all these things, that you talk to us as though we were boys? If you did, then you have the right to talk to us as you do."
> "You are an impudent fellow," Howard said. "I will put you in the guardhouse."

Brands makes a narrative choice to describe landmark events not just as

they happened but as they were experienced—by men and women, whites and blacks, Anglos and Hispanics, cowboys and Indians. This might seem an obvious approach in 2019. But there's nothing straightforward about synthesizing a region as vast and diverse as the American West—and all such attempts inevitably collide with the *bête noire* of American historians, Frederick Jackson Turner.

In 1893, while most U.S. historians looked eastward to European scholars, Turner insisted that the key to American history lay out West. Even in colonial times, the Westward-moving frontier had served as a "pressure valve," siphoning off rowdy young men with the promise of cheap land. As buffalo herds and Indian tribes gave way to white pioneers, Turner claimed, frontier independence fostered America's egalitarian values and democratic traditions. Turner was profoundly worried, in fact, about the results of the 1890 census: for the first time, population density in the West exceeded two persons per square mile, making it "settled." "The frontier has gone," he noted ominously, "and with its going has closed the first period of American history."

Turner and his students exerted a remarkable pull on the American imagination, but ultimately the "Frontier Thesis" stimulated so much research that it became a victim of its own success. Decades of study revealed that Western mines and cattle ranches were often just as exploitative and profit-pinching as Eastern factories. Business magnates dominated local politics, in hock to distant capitalists. Global demand for commodities like beef and beaver pelts spurred development more acutely than the individual initiative of hardy pioneers. Upon closer inspection, frontier communities hardly looked independent, egalitarian, or democratic—especially for indigenous peoples, Chinese immigrants, or black Americans. The dazzling historical unity promised by Turner—a frontier process that could assimilate colonial fur traders and California grape growers—had evaporated.

By the 1980s, Western historians were looking to do without the old frontier concept. They turned away from capstone events like the Alamo and toward the "lived experience" of groups that had been excluded from Turner's brand of history. The result was a more complete but less cohesive picture of the American West. Books on black cowboys, Mexican merchants, indigenous activists, and white suffragettes proliferated—but how could this diverse cast be brought back onto the same stage?

As historians searched for new organizing principles, the thirst for a better life appeared to be a persistent, even inescapable theme. Tribes spilling onto the plains in search of buffalo; forty-niners panning for gold; homesteaders hunting for their 160 acres. But the quest for resources was tinged with violence—nearly everyone in the West experienced fraud or expropriation as perpetrator, victim, or both. In the words of historian Patricia Limerick, the West was a "place undergoing conquest and never fully escaping its consequences." Of course those words could be applied to many places—a fact that the so-called New Western Historians were happy to concede. Where Turner saw a uniquely American process, they aspired to tease out universal themes of oppression and greed from whatever had happened in the territory that stretched from the Mississippi to the Pacific.

Brands owes more than a few debts to this sea change in Western scholarship. He retells events from multiple perspectives, highlighting ironic contradictions. Westerners vaunted their independence, but depended on federal power for security and development. Whites fought Indians—using Indian auxiliaries. People went West to get rich, but just as often lost everything. Above all Brands emphasizes "the simple but ineluctable theme of violence in the history of the American West: of humans killing one another in the struggle for control of Western resources."

Eager to shed the triumphalist, even racist overtones of the Frontier Thesis, Turner's critics have sometimes been too willing to abandon the symbolic power of the West to filmmakers and pulp novelists. Revisionists often avoid familiar episodes altogether; when they do cover a classic event, the result feels more like a takedown than a reappraisal. Brands avoids this trap. He recognizes that America's affinity for the West, while not uncomplicated, is itself a profound historical reality. "In the

Albert Bierstadt, *Emigrants Crossing the Plains* or *The Oregon Trail*, 1869

THE BUTLER INSTITUTE OF AMERICAN ART, GIFT OF JOSEPH G. BUTLER III, 1946

American mind, the West was not so much a place as a condition; it was the blank spot on the map on which grand dreams were projected," he writes.

Rather than simply debunking these dreams, the book demystifies them, while recapturing some of their human drama. Anyone who's ever paddled or hiked in the West, for example, will be gripped by Brands's treatment of John Wesley Powell. The Civil War veteran navigated the entire Grand Canyon with a fleet of wooden rowboats—despite having only one arm. Brands may not break much new ground, but he does retell some great stories that deserve to be remembered.

This elegant case for the continuing interest of Western history makes one of the book's other conclusions rather perplexing, however. "As the West passed from dream to reality," Brands writes, "it became more like the East, until nothing significant distinguished the one from the other." With the end of the "organized violence" of the Indian wars, the West, "in its historical sense, was no more." As Turner closed the Frontier, so Brands closes "the West" around the end of the nineteenth century.

This may seem plausible from Brands's perch in Austin—which has been radically transformed by development in recent years—but it hardly rings true in many of the places central to his book. The Air Force tests missiles in the same deserts where Coronado dragged his canons; Nevada ranchers trade bullets with federal agents over grazing rights; and Chief Joseph's descendants are still fighting to keep salmon fisheries guaranteed to them by treaty in 1863. The verdict of one old veteran of the Coronado expedition, recalling his comrades, may describe today's Westerners just as well: "Granted that they did not find the riches of which they had been told, they found a place in which to search for them."

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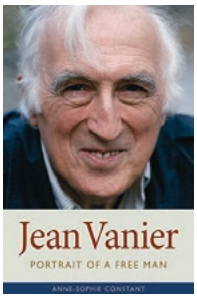
Hospitality & Holiness

MICHAEL J. BAXTER



JEAN VANIER: PORTRAIT OF A FREE MAN

ANNE-SOPHIE CONSTANT
TRANSLATED BY
ALLEN PAGE
Plough Publishing House
$17.89 | 162 pp.

When Jean Vanier died in May 2019, he left behind 153 L'Arche communities in 38 countries on five continents, comprising 10,000 members with and without "intellectual disabilities" (the L'Arche term). He also left behind "Faith and Light," an international movement, cofounded with Marie-Hélène Mathieu, to develop bonds of friendship among people with intellectual disabilities, their families, friends, and others drawn to help. He had given hundreds of speeches and retreats, authored thirty books, and received scores of awards, including the Paul VI Prize given by Pope John Paul II in 1997 and the Templeton Prize in 2015. In 2016 he was named Commander in the Legion of Honor—France's highest decoration.

All this was possible because Vanier was, as Anne-Sophie Constant indicates in the subtitle of her book, "a free man," a man "who knew how to become himself, who knew how to free himself from restraints and prejudices.... He knew how to free himself from this great current in which we all swim, because he knew how to listen to his own inner voice—the conscience, which Saint Thomas Aquinas tells us is not just the ability to distinguish between good and evil, but a force that pulls us toward liberty, justice, and light."

Constant's "portrait" is based on interviews with Vanier and on a careful reading of his books. It comes in seven chapters, organized chronologically. The first three deal with his life before L'Arche. His father Georges joined the Canadian military in the Great War, became a career officer after the war, and then a career diplomat, starting as Canadian representative to the League of Nations. He married Jean's mother Pauline in 1921. Jean, born in 1928, was the third of five children. In 1939, Georges Vanier was appointed Canadian ambassador to France and brought the family to Paris in April, a month before Germany invaded. They fled to England, made their

way to Montreal, and remained there the rest of their lives. The Vanier household was well-off, cultured, and oriented toward civic service. It was also very Catholic, providing Jean with the faith needed for what would be a circuitous path to his vocation.

At the age of fourteen, in 1942, Jean Vanier enrolled in the Royal Naval College in England. By the time he had graduated, the war was over, but he stayed on in the Navy and was promoted to lieutenant of Canada's only aircraft carrier. In spite of his success, "he felt an increasing pull toward something else." This impulse was cultivated by his religious practice and his reading of Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, and Catherine de Hueck Doherty, whose Friendship House in Harlem he visited in 1950 when his ship docked in New York. Soon after, Vanier resigned from the Navy and, at his mother's suggestion, joined Eau Vive (Living Water), a community of students in Soisy-sur-Seine, near Paris. There he met Fr. Thomas Philippe, OP, leader of the community of eighty young students from twenty countries. Philosophy, theology, the spiritual classics, daily Mass, gardening, silent prayer: Vanier drank it all in while receiving direction from Fr. Thomas. When the priest was suddenly transferred, Vanier was asked to lead the community but got caught between factions fighting for control and left in 1956. Eight years of wandering followed: a Cistercian monastery, a house in Normandy, a cottage at Fatima, a rental in the Swiss Alps, back to Paris to finish and defend his dissertation on Aristotle at the Institut Catholique, then to St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto to begin teaching in the fall of 1963. But at the end of that academic year, Vanier resigned his tenure-track position and returned to France.

What spurred Vanier to abandon this prestigious academic post? Constant explains that it was the people he met on two return trips to France that year. Over Christmas break, Vanier visited Fr. Thomas, then chaplain for thirty intellectually disabled men living in a chateau called Val Fleuri in the village of Trosly-Breuil. These people generated in Vanier "an attraction and repulsion," he recalled, "an attraction toward a mystery and a repulsion from the abnormal. But over and above that, what charmed me was their crying out for friendship. They all fluttered around me like bees. They touched me and asked, 'will you come back to see us?'" Vanier went back to France the next spring to visit psychiatric hospitals and care homes. Constant writes that he "was horrified by what he found: a world of neglect and misery, of violence and exclusion." He saw people in chains, confined behind metal gates. At one place he saw dozens of people in pajamas staring into a void. Everywhere he heard the plea: "Do you love me? Why have I been abandoned? Why am I not like my brothers and sisters who are married and who live in a house? Why am I here?" To these questions, the newly minted professor had no answer, Constant writes. "All his philosophy was silent."

Vanier moved to Trosly and bought a house. Soon he invited three disabled men with no families—Philippe, Raphael, and Danny—to move in with him. He had no plan, no large-scale vision, no charter. The learning curve for this kind of hospitality was steep. But the meals got prepared, the utilities got paid, routines took hold, volunteers appeared, donations came in. Nine months after the original house started, Vanier was given responsibility for the men at Val Fleuri, thus absorbing thirty-two more core members into the community. The common life was marked with a family atmosphere, yet Vanier set up a board of directors and recruited doctors and nurses to care for the core members, striking a balance between spontaneity and structure, personal friendship and professional medical care. This became a distinguishing feature of the L'Arche approach.

The original L'Arche community grew by leaps and bounds: 73 members by 1968, 112 in 1970, 126 in 1972. It became a community of communities with a central gathering space, later a farm that became a worship and retreat center. During these years, L'Arche communities were founded elsewhere in France, Canada, India, England, Haiti, Honduras, and Australia. Most years Vanier spent months on the road giving retreats for these communities, for the "Faith and Light" movement, for priests and young people in many countries. L'Arche communities multiplied in the decades to follow. Some start-ups were ecumenical, others were interreligious. It became a worldwide movement. As Constant tells it, this was largely due to Vanier's guidance. She gives numerous examples of how Vanier listened to people carefully and spoke to them personally. She attributes this to his deep desire to follow Jesus and bring Jesus to others.

At times, Constant puts Vanier on a pedestal and veers into the realm of hagiography. In the introduction, she admits that Vanier was apprehensive about her project for this reason. At the same time, she mentions the tensions and heartbreaks faced by Vanier in leading L'Arche. There was community life itself: demanding, exhausting, and, in L'Arche especially, chaotic. There was the temptation to overwork, to which Vanier succumbed—so much so that in 1976 he ended up in the hospital and learned, as he wrote in a letter to friends, the importance of patience and detachment. And then there was the revelation brought by several women in 2014 that Fr. Thomas, who died in 1993, had sexually exploited them in the context of shared prayer and spiritual direction. The news was "shocking and devastating for everyone, and a huge trauma for Jean Vanier." A canonical investigation validated the complaints in April 2015. Initially reacting with disbelief, Vanier "was overcome with a deep compassion for these abused women," which he expressed in a public letter—dated October 17, 2016—that condemned Fr. Thomas's actions. By then, L'Arche had established a group of psychiatrists to listen to further reports of abuse by Fr. Thomas. A Mass was held for victims

CNS PHOTO / ABRAMORAMA

in April 2017. Absorbing these revelations led Vanier "to undertake a harsh and difficult reinterpretation of their relationship." There are questions here that Constant does not pursue. Why did Vanier's reckoning take more than two years? What wisdom did Vanier have to share after his own personal process of sifting and judgment? These days, in these matters, his wisdom would likely be helpful.

Constant's book is conversational, meandering. It is not a biography of Vanier, nor a history of L'Arche. It is what it calls itself: a "portrait," painted in the written and spoken words of the subject, making no attempt to be impartial or critical. While this approach has shortcomings, it does provide insight into Vanier's intentions in founding L'Arche. He wanted to follow his heart, knowing that it would make him happy, as Aristotle understood happiness (the topic of his thesis), and lead him to God. This hope is poignantly expressed in the message Vanier sent to friends and coworkers shortly after his ninetieth birthday in January 2019. Diagnosed with thyroid cancer, living in a state of frailty, he wrote of his impending death, "I know that new weaknesses, new forms of poverty and new losses are awaiting me. It will be descent into what is essential, that which is hidden in me, deeper than all the parts of success and shadow inside me. That will be what is left when all the rest is gone. My naked person, a primal innocence which is awaiting its encounter with God." Jean Vanier died as this book was going to press, making it a timely tribute to a good and holy man.

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Everywhere Vanier heard the plea: "Do you love me? Why have I been abandoned?" To these questions, the newly minted professor had no answer.

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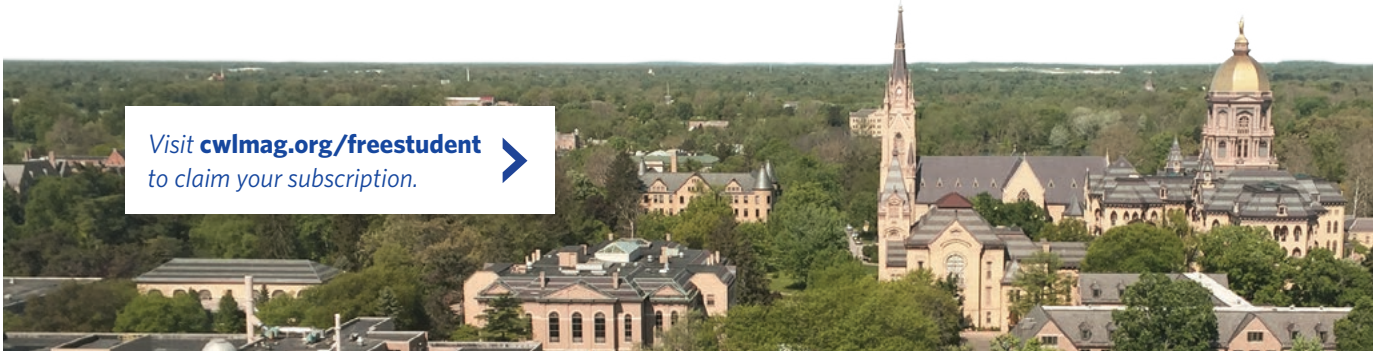

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A Second Death

JERRY RYAN

> I might imagine the dead waking, dazed into a shadowless light in which they know themselves altogether for the first time. It is a light that is merciless until they accept its mercy; by it, they are at once condemned and redeemed. It is Hell until it is Heaven. Seeing themselves in that light, if they are willing, they see how far they have failed the only justice of loving one another; it punishes them with their own judgment. And yet, in suffering the light's awful clarity, in seeing themselves within it, they see its forgiveness and its beauty and are consoled.
>
> —Wendell Berry, *A World Lost*

I turned eighty-two not long ago. According to popular mythology, with age comes wisdom. That might be true for some, but for me the years have brought forgetfulness and confusion. My silence is not the profound silence of an elder who has arrived, after a long life, at a sort of synthesis; it stems more from a fear of saying something really stupid about things I've forgotten or only vaguely remember.

Another aspect of aging is the realization that things are going to change radically for me pretty soon. I'm both curious about dying and afraid of all the uncertainty that surrounds it. That is why the above passage from one of Wendell Berry's novels, quoted last year in this magazine ("Reign of Love" by Eric Miller, January 4, 2019) hit home so hard. It seemed to me a very beautiful and coherent description of Purgatory—something we don't often talk about anymore.

One of the major difficulties we have in trying to imagine the afterlife is that it is outside of time as we know it—for time is linked to material change. We say that there is "no time" in God who is an Eternal Instant. The theologians tell us that the "spiritual time" of the disembodied soul is something beyond what we can imagine, since we can imagine time only as a succession of "states," with a before and after.

There are those who imagine we will all experience an instantaneous bodily resurrection at the moment of our deaths because, whatever the historical moment at which we die, there is no delay in our experience of this "spiritual time" between the moment of death and the Parousia. The judgment of each person would thus be integrated within the fulfillment of all things. All that was hidden would be revealed *all at once*, rather than one person at a time. The mystical links that bind us together with earlier and later generations would be part of this general revelation, all of us, our ancestors and our posterity, meeting in an eternal present in which we would discover both a crucifying truth and an ineffable mercy. This all-encompassing revelation would constitute the essential joy of the blessed.

But that would seem to leave something out. In the Apostle's Creed we proclaim that, after his death, Christ descended into Hell. For Urs von Balthasar, the disembodied soul of Christ continues to be united to the Word of God but no longer experiences this union during the "three days in the tomb." Hell is the place where there is neither faith nor hope nor love. This is sin in its essence, a "second death" in which we experience the absence of God and thus a meaninglessness without light. Here, too, all sense of time is lost, so that the Resurrection comes as an abrupt surprise.

If we are to follow Christ, we, in our turn, must go where he went. We must experience those dark corners and hidden horrors in our soul that we did not dare to explore and that God's mercy has until then kept in obscurity. Then we shall realize that when we acquiesced to evil in our choices, we ratified evil in itself. But it is also precisely when we enter into this abyss that we will find Jesus "trampling down death by death and upon those in the tombs bestowing life." For the "three days in the tomb" represent the victory of life over death by the entry of Life *into* death. Life destroys death from within. When we, following Jesus, enter into death, we will find him there. This is what Wendell Berry seems to mean when he says that we must descend into hell until it becomes heaven. We must accept the merciless light until it becomes mercy, be punished by our own enlightened judgment in order to receive a mercy beyond imagination. When St. Thomas, in his *Summa Theologica*, asks if it was fitting that Christ die on the cross, his first answer was that Jesus did so in order that we might not be afraid to die, to die even a horrendous death. All this, in the end, is a mystery where we can only babble, guess, hope—and, yes, fear a little too.

JERRY RYAN, *a frequent contributor to* Commonweal, *died on January 23. Requiescat in pace.*

At right: Albrecht Dürer, *Christ in Limbo (The Harrowing of Hell)*, 1510

COOPER HEWITT, SMITHSONIAN DESIGN MUSEUM, GIFT OF WILLIAM J. DONALD


1510

MATINS

Judy Brackett

I

Yesterday, birds found their way under the netting,
beaked off most of the strawberries.
The birds' gift—next summer more wild
strawberry plants scrambling over the back lot.
Small jewels tasting like stale crackers,
barely a hint of the piquant red-sugar
of the big beauties the birds have stolen.

II

5 o'clock, deep in sleep on the deck,
I'm awakened by birdsong—a chorus
of robins, tangers, Oregon juncos,
and tiny blue-feathered somethings—
warbling, trilling, twittering.
Not quite harmony.
Snatches of random tunes—
a snippet of "Little Liza Jane,"
now a bit of "Freight Train,"
now something like a hymn:
"May the Circle be Un-
broken,"
now a dueling din of chirrups,
tweedles, and tweets.

III

I rouse myself and pad through the damp grass
to the berry patch to pick a few leftovers
for breakfast before the choristers finish
their encore and beat me to them. This dewy
dawn light brings out truest colors—
leaves, strawberries, yellow-ribbon snake,
three small blue feathers.

IV

Pearly sky, morning star, wisp of waning moon.
I imagine the warblers' berry-colored repertoire
includes tunes about star, moon, and strawberries—
yesterday's and tomorrow's.

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

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Commonweal CONVERSATIONS

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2020

Kerry A. Robinson
Global Ambassador,
Leadership Roundtable

Amy R. Goldman
CEO and Chair,
GHR Foundation

This year we are proud to honor two leaders in Catholic philanthropy with our Catholic in the Public Square Award.

KERRY A. ROBINSON is the Global Ambassador of Leadership Roundtable, an organization of laity, religious, and clergy working together to promote best practices and accountability in the management of the Catholic church. She is also a member of the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities and FADICA (Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities).

Kerry has served as a trustee for many Catholic and philanthropic organizations, including the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, the Gregorian University Foundation, and the National Catholic AIDS Network. She is also a trustee of Saint Thomas More Center at Yale University, where, as director of development, she led a successful capital campaign that transformed the capabilities and facilities of Yale's campus ministry.

Kerry is a frequent writer and speaker on philanthropy, development, and faith. She is also author of the award-winning *Imagining Abundance: Fundraising, Philanthropy, and a Spiritual Call to Service.*

AMY R. GOLDMAN is CEO and Chair of GHR Foundation, a global philanthropy of service to people and their limitless potential for good.

Amy brings a background in diplomacy, governance, and investment to steer GHR's philanthropic approach and priorities. She is leading GHR to build bridges across ideas, sectors, and people; elevate powerful movements of faith and interfaith actors for sustainable development; implement systems change strategies across public, private, and faith sectors to keep children in families; promote effective leadership and new governance models for Catholic schools; and support and unlock significant funding from industry and government to prevent Alzheimer's Disease.

Amy serves on the board of Georgetown University and the University of St. Thomas, as well as Opus Holding, the Visitation School, Jesuit Refugee Service International Development Group, Mayo Clinic Leadership Council, and the Council on Foreign Relations.

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