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APRIL 2022

The War in Ukraine

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APRIL 2022 • VOLUME 149 • NUMBER 4

SPRING BOOKS

COVER DESIGN
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COVER IMAGE
A mass grave on the outskirts of Mariupol, Ukraine, Wednesday, March 9, 2022
AP Photo/Evgeniy Maloletka

Commonweal

FOUNDED IN 1924

Commonweal [ISSN 0010-3330], a review of religion, politics, and culture, is published monthly, except for a single July-August issue, by the Commonweal Foundation, 475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 405, New York, NY 10115. Telephone: (212) 662-4200. Email: editors@commonwealmagazine.org. Fax: (212) 662-4183. POSTMASTER: send address changes to *Commonweal*, P.O. Box 348, Congers, NY 10920-0348.

LETTERS

Ukraine, Reconciliation, AI, Lyme Disease

MORAL AGENTS

I count myself as an admirer of Andrew Bacevich, but I find little merit in his suggestion that the West and Russia could ever have made Ukraine safely and permanently neutral in the way that they made Austria neutral after World War II ("A Mournful Legacy," March). Russia would never have honored any such commitment. Ukraine would have known as much and been prepared for just such a revanchist invasion as we now see underway. The former Soviet domains that joined NATO so eagerly did so, first, because they feared that what is now happening to Ukraine might at any time happen to them and, second, because they remembered all too well the unending brutality of Russian Communist oppression. Ukraine may be to Russia what Mexico is to the United States, although Canada is a much nearer analogy. But Ukraine is as plausibly Europe's backyard as it is Russia's front yard, and Europe, too, has nuclear weapons and a sphere of influence. And it is of practical as well as moral consequence that in this great game of what Bacevich calls, pointedly, moral realism, the countries being traded back and forth will always do their utmost to be players—moral agents—rather than mere passive tokens on the game board. George Kennan deserves full credit for prescience, but his was a realism achieved, on the whole, by prescinding from morality. If somehow Ukraine survives this Russian invasion as an independent nation and if it then sues for admission to NATO, what kind of moralism would deny its request?

Jack Miles
Santa Ana, Calif.

WHAT KIND OF 'LEADERSHIP'?

Andrew Bacevich correctly connects the Pentagon's and White House's current Ukraine war eagerness to the "brilliant" planners who took the United States to war in Vietnam sixty years ago. But he doesn't touch the main motivation: U.S. leaders believe that "containing" Russia is crucial to preserving world military domination. They have this strategic "fantasy" about global preeminence in the face of "rising powers" who are "revanchist" and "revisionist" and inevitably will challenge U.S. power. Bacevich does not mention this motivation, nor the hundreds of billions of dollars that go to the weapons industry every year. It is the myth of U.S. "global leadership" that must be examined closely and refuted.

John Cabral
Chicago, Ill.

REPENT AND BELIEVE

John Rodden's article "How the Irish Changed Penance" (February) is an interesting but incomplete portrayal of a more complex story. He emphasizes the abundance of mercy shown in the possibility of repeated absolutions, but he leaves out the concomitant development of "tariff penance," the practice of codifying in books called "penitentials" the exact amount of "penance" that each sin required before divine forgiveness. This ultimately led to the practice of paying others to do at least part of your penance for you so that absolution could come more quickly. This image of God as celestial bookkeeper hardly fits with an abundance of divine mercy.

He also ends the story too early. Starting in the late '80s and continuing into the 2000s, there was a movement in this country entitled Re-membering Church. Connected with the National Forum on the Catechumenate, it strove to turn the process of helping people who had "fallen away" to explore returning to the Church through a process similar to RCIA, one that was

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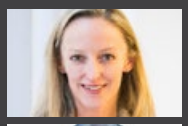

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LETTERS

communal, multi-dimensional, and with a liturgical component. Since the Order of Penitents seems to be as old as the Order of Catechumens, this movement was drawing upon our oldest roots without being bound simply to repeat the approach of antiquity. It also moved beyond the paradigm of confessor as judge and counselor to one in which the whole community was involved in the process of reconciliation, often mutual reconciliation. But like so many good things, this attempt passed away during the rise of Catholic "traditionalism."

Repentance is a core part of the Christian experience: after all, our founder's first message was "Repent and believe!" But labeling the sacrament that celebrates the return of the sinner as Penance makes us focus on the way and not the goal; labeling it Reconciliation names the goal instead.

Michael H. Marchal
Cincinnati, Ohio

DEFINITELY ARTIFICIAL

While I support any effort to hold our hubris-laden tech industry accountable and ask ethical questions of it, I noticed a couple of factual inaccuracies in John Slattery's review of Kate Crawford's book, *Atlas of AI* ("Neither Artificial Nor Intelligent," February). First, he references "nickel and now-empty lithium mines that are as non-renewable as coal." Lithium is recyclable. Most of it is used to make batteries, and plans to recycle it are quickly moving forward. Coal is burned. There is no sense in which it is true to say those two resources are equally non-renewable.

Second, he quotes, uncritically, Crawford's claim that AI is "neither artificial nor intelligent." Whether it's intelligent is beyond my ability to say, but it's certainly artificial. Slattery quotes Crawford: "Artificial Intelligence is both embodied and material, made from natural resources." All artifacts ever made are made from some natural resource. By that definition no object known to humanity is artificial. AI certainly did not arise from a naturally occurring organic substance in its natural state, but from heavily manipulated artifacts.

Matthew DeGoede
Seatac, Wash.

THE EXPERIMENTAL SPIRIT

Susan McWilliams Barndt provides a beautifully written and spot-on assessment of the devastating journey a person with chronic Lyme disease can experience ("The Evidence of Bugs Unseen," February). Douthat is a hero for speaking so openly about what he has been through and calling out the "arbiters of truth" for their lack of being able to look outside the box. Twenty years ago, our daughter, then sixteen years old, was told to get a psychiatric evaluation for her myriad symptoms, and I was discouraged to hear that Douthat was told the same thing. The dismissal of his symptoms by a healthcare professional made him rightfully wonder if it all could be in his head. Just think what that diagnosis would do to a sixteen-year-old girl with chronic Lyme disease, whose description of symptoms were totally dismissed by a respected healthcare institution. For years she lost trust in herself and what she knew to be real.

Our daughter has tried Rife treatments, Chinese medicine, naturopathic treatment, and more, and we continue to do what we can to support her journey to be pain-free. We have had no help from Western medicine and are grateful for those whom we have met who practice outside the closed-minded box of that institution. We too found out that we needed to "embrace the experimental spirit that chronic sickness seems to obviously require."

Julie Clark
Portland, Oreg.

Stopping Putin

In the January issue, before Russia invaded Ukraine, we noted in this space that Vladimir Putin "is an autocrat and a liar." Since then we've been reminded that he is also a war criminal, a man who destroys cities and slaughters civilians. If that much is clear, the outcome of the fighting remains uncertain—and the risk of dangerous escalation remains high. Reporters on the ground relay the latest updates and government officials release new statements, while on social media there are TikTok clips teaching Ukrainians how to repurpose Russian equipment, tweeted maps of troop movements and lines of attack, footage of tanks rolling down highways, and photos of civilians, including elderly women, preparing Molotov cocktails. Dramatic video updates from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, including an address to the U.S. Congress, have inspired people across the world and spurred calls for further involvement from NATO countries—including, alarmingly, the enforcement of a "no-fly zone."

It was the decision by Zelensky to stay and fight, and the surprising effectiveness of Ukrainian defenses, on which so much has hinged. The Ukrainians' genuine heroism has meant that Putin's initial plans for a swift victory have decisively failed. As military historian Edward Luttwak described it, "The once patient hunter turned reckless gambler persuaded himself…that Zelensky would promptly flee, that his government would then collapse as ministers rushed off to escape arrest, that the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Air Defense, long starved of funds in any case would dissolve, so that Russian forces would advance unopposed to quickly seize every city, with Kyiv's population obediently awaiting Russian rule." That, clearly, didn't happen, and Putin now faces a costly, prolonged struggle in Europe's second largest country by land mass. While Russian forces bombard Mariupol into near-oblivion, turning parts of the city into a "wasteland," they've failed to take any major city in Ukraine. So far more than 3 million people have fled the country, creating the largest European refugee crisis since World War II.

The prospect of Putin being stymied or even defeated has led the United States and its European allies to punish Russia with a barrage of sanctions, the most significant of which have been the unprecedented penalties levied against Russia's central bank. Their effects were immediate. The ruble plunged; the Russian stock market had to be closed. This could foment political unrest; it has already caused hardship. As Putin doubles and triples down on his reckless gambit, and the Ukrainian resistance continues to rally world opinion to their side, the anti-Putin coalition has grown more united.

But Ukraine's resolve and the collective response of NATO countries presents its own dilemma: How to maintain pressure on Putin and support for Ukraine while making sure the conflict does not envelop the rest of Europe? How to keep Putin from using Russia's nuclear weapons, as he has already threatened to do? It is reckless to indulge loose talk of enforcing no-fly zones or activating NATO forces. Such moves would draw the United States and other NATO countries into a direct conflict that could extend into other parts of Europe, and perhaps beyond.

One cannot with one breath say that Putin is an unstable megalomaniac, and with the next insist that he would never dare to start a nuclear war. There is no telling what a desperate Putin—his regime increasingly unpopular at home and his war next door developing into a quagmire—is capable of. The various causes of this war—Putin's imperial ambitions, or his mad resentment against the West; NATO expansion into Eastern Europe; the avarice of those, in Russia and elsewhere, who propped up Putin's regime for profit—can be debated later. Right now the priority should be to support Ukraine while also doing whatever we can to keep this conflict from becoming a world war. The United States and its partners must continue to view Putin's crimes with moral clarity while also emphasizing prudence and, if possible, diplomacy. His brutality doesn't excuse the rest of the world from working for peace. The options may all be unattractive, because they will inevitably involve concessions on both sides of a conflict for which only one side is responsible. If the Ukrainians are willing to make concessions—they've already offered neutrality—the United States and our European allies need to be willing to roll back sanctions in return for peace and security guarantees from Russia. If there are opportunities for de-escalation, we should seize them. If Putin is mad, there may be little the United States can do, but if he is merely cruel and vain, we should make use of his vanity to stop his cruelty—before it is too late, for Russia and Ukraine, or for the rest of us. ✡—*March 24, 2022*

'Texas Justice'

Melissa Lucio is scheduled to be executed on April 27, 2022. She is the first Latina woman to face the death penalty in Texas, but one of many people on death row whose guilt has been called into question. In Lucio's case, doubts abound. She was sentenced in 2008 after the death of her two-year-old daughter, Mariah, who suffered blunt-force trauma to the head that caused internal bleeding. Lucio has maintained her innocence for the past fourteen years, but a coerced "confession" after hours of relentless police interrogation, during which she was denied food and sleep, convinced the jury.

At every turn, the case against Lucio was riddled with problems. The pathologist who categorized Mariah's death as a homicide cited extensive bruising on her body as evidence of abuse, but a forensic pathologist consulted during Lucio's appeal explained that one symptom of the head injury might have been a cerebral edema, which can lead to blood-clotting problems that cause extreme bruising from even minor contact. This seems like the much more likely explanation, given ample documentation from Child Protective Services over several years that Lucio, though not a perfect mother, was never physically abusive. The defense attorney originally assigned to Lucio's case, Peter Gilman, neglected to call any of Lucio's children to the witness stand, including the son who saw Mariah fall down a steep flight of external stairs and bang her head on the ground two days before her death. Nor did Gilman make use of the evidence provided by Melissa's eldest daughter, who admitted in an interview with a mitigation specialist that she "was the reason" for Mariah's fall. Instead, Gilman told the specialist not to disclose that information to anyone. Shortly after Lucio's conviction, Gilman took a job working for the district attorney's office. The DA himself was later indicted on several counts of corruption and bribery. At the time of Lucio's trial, he was about to run for reelection and was taking a special interest in cases that would make him look like a crusader against child abuse. Meanwhile, psychologists who argued that Lucio's own history of having been physically and sexually abused made her particularly susceptible to the aggressive psychological tactics of her police interrogators—thus rendering her confession invalid—were deemed "irrelevant" by the judge and prohibited from testifying.

In 2019, Texas's Fifth Circuit overturned Lucio's conviction, agreeing that she had not been granted a complete defense, but when the state of Texas appealed, the court reinstated the conviction. Lucio lost her last hope for appeal when the Supreme Court declined to hear her case. Her only chance now is intercession by Texas governor Greg Abbott, who has previously referred to the death penalty as "Texas justice." Faith-based and secular groups have both reached out to Abbott, pleading for him to reconsider the case. Lucio's bishop, Daniel Flores, wrote, "One tragedy is not somehow made better by killing someone else. Justice is not suddenly restored because another person dies."This is consistent with Pope Francis's clear stance on the death penalty as "inadmissable." The Church is opposed to capital punishment because it recognizes the human dignity of every person, even those who *do* commit horrific crimes. But a case like Melissa Lucio's reminds us that, in our deeply flawed criminal-justice system, the innocent may also be executed.

When her daughter died, Lucio was living well below the poverty line; she and her children were often cramped into tiny quarters, and were sometimes even homeless. "Texas justice" could have meant providing her with the resources she needed to care for her family. It should not mean ignoring or suppressing evidence in the rush to execute another poor person.

—Isabella Simon

Covid Funding

For nearly two years, lawmakers in both parties have unanimously approved emergency funding to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Whatever money was needed—for testing, treatment, and vaccines—was fully granted immediately and with no strings attached.

That all changed suddenly in mid-March, when Congress, bogged down largely by Republican objections, scuttled the $15 billion pandemic-aid package requested by the Biden administration. The result is that the country may be caught off-guard yet again when the next wave of Covid arrives. And yet again the burden will fall mainly on the poor, the elderly, and the immunocompromised. The federal government will no longer be able to reimburse doctors, hospitals, and other providers for testing and treating uninsured patients. Federal shipments of monoclonal antibody treatments, already significantly reduced, will be halted entirely by May. The development of variant-specific vaccines and boosters will also be suspended.

This reckless inaction couldn't come at a worse time. For all our fatigue, wishful thinking, and widespread relaxation of mask and vaccination requirements, the pandemic is not over. While it's true that cases, hospitalizations, and deaths throughout the United States are low and continue falling, China and Europe have seen new spikes caused by the highly transmissible BA.2 subvariant, also known as "stealth Omicron." Fortunately, in spite of its contagiousness, BA.2 appears mild. The rise in cases has not been followed by an increase in hospitalizations and deaths (except, inexplicably, in the United Kingdom, where both have gone up). It's now too late to prevent BA.2 from reaching our shores: the subvariant already accounts for more than 50 percent of

Covid cases in the Northeast, and 30 percent in the rest of the country. While officials remain optimistic about the efficacy of vaccines and do not anticipate major social or economic disruption, Dr. Anthony Fauci is warning of a coming "uptick" in cases and cautioning Americans to remain vigilant.

Most Americans now appear to be ready to "live with the virus" and move on with their lives, and that is understandable. But about a thousand Americans are still dying of Covid every day. It would be a mistake to ignore this reality, or to drop all precautions prematurely. The Biden administration's plan for pandemic preparedness is both sensible and affordable. The country needs the fourfold insurance policy it is proposing: increased testing capacity; accelerated, variant-specific vaccine development; wider availability of antiviral treatment options; and increased international aid for vaccines. Biden's plan also includes two other good ideas: bereavement relief for Americans who have lost loved ones during the pandemic, and more "test to treat" funding, which would provide immediate on-site medical care for those testing positive. There should be no hesitation about funding such initiatives, and no delay.

Unfortunately, many Republican lawmakers don't see it that way. Sen. John Thune has demanded that the money be appropriated from existing funds already earmarked for the states—a concession House Democrats have rightly refused. Sen. Roy Blunt has signaled greater openness to a deal, and the Democrats should take him up on it if they can. If Republicans are still serious about addressing the worst public-health crisis in a century, and not simply making Biden look bad, then Democrats will find the votes they need. If not, voters should remember the GOP's calculated indifference in November.

—Griffin Oleynick

KJB & the Court

The final report from the Presidential Commission of the Supreme Court of the United States arrived with little fanfare in December 2021. It came several weeks before Justice Stephen Breyer announced his retirement, which was followed in February by Joe Biden's nomination of Ketanji Brown Jackson to take his place. With Jackson's appointment Biden fulfills his campaign promise of naming a Black woman, the first ever, to the high court.

The creation of the commission, in April 2021, fulfilled another of Biden's promises: to study why the Supreme Court was "getting out of whack," as he had put it in a *60 Minutes* interview. It was not meant to make recommendations or endorse particular proposals, but only to examine and analyze "arguments...for and against reform," as Linda Greenhouse explains in the *New York Review of Books*. Some on the Left, justifiably angry at Mitch McConnell and the GOP for scuttling Merrick Garland's election-year nomination in 2016 and then hypocritically fast-tracking Amy Coney Barrett's in 2020, have dismissed the final report precisely because it doesn't call for expanding the court or other measures they advocate. Yet Samuel Moyn and Ryan Doerfler, writing in the *Atlantic*, judge the commission's work a success because ideas once considered on the fringe "have now moved to the center of Court discourse." Moyn himself, as a commission witness, stressed that the key issue is not that the court's "legitimacy" is at risk, as so many pundits and politicians have put it, but that the court "thwarts the democratic authority that alone justifies our political arrangements." Moyn does not think that adding a few seats to the court would have any meaningful impact. But if we're serious about reducing the power the court now has in determining so many aspects of American life, our elected leaders should consider some of the other reforms the report proposes, from limiting its jurisdiction to abolishing life tenure.

In the meantime, Jackson will join the court we currently have, and her appointment should be hailed for what it is. "Let me just acknowledge that this has never happened before," Sen. Cory Booker enthused as the confirmation hearings began. His emotion felt genuine and appropriate, a joyful contrast to the hostile, outlandish attacks mounted by committee Republicans, who used the hearings to misrepresent Jackson's record, relitigate previous confirmation battles, cast conservative white males as an oppressed minority, and sow panic over Democrats' "radical agenda." (During the hearings, the Republican National Committee posted an image of the nominee, with the initials "KJB" crossed out and replaced by "CRT," for critical race theory.) Jackson's merits are indisputable, and her résumé—Harvard Law School, Supreme Court clerk, federal judge—resembles those of other justices. Unlike other justices, she has also worked extensively on behalf of the poor and the powerless. Her experience as a public defender and as an advocate for prisoners at Guantánamo Bay is not a liability but rather a clinching argument in her favor—evidence of her compassion and her commitment to basic Constitutional rights.

Jackson's appointment does nothing to change the Supreme Court's ideological makeup—conservative judges will still hold a six-to-three majority—though it does give the court another Protestant. (Neil Gorsuch was raised Catholic but is now an Episcopalian.) "Ketanji Onyika," as she told the committee, is an African name meaning "lovely one," bestowed on her by parents exemplifying the values so many conservatives profess to treasure—heritage, hard work, family. She, too, exemplifies those values. If Justice Jackson is confirmed on a mostly party-line vote, as expected, it will say less about her than about Republican senators using a historic moment to make shameless appeals to their base.

—Dominic Preziosi

SUSAN BIGELOW REYNOLDS

Never Again, Again

Calls for world peace no longer interest us. They should.

On the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi in 1965, in the middle of a historic visit to New York City, Pope Paul VI ascended the rostrum before the United Nations General Assembly and summoned the world to peace. The visit came two and a half years after John XXIII's *Pacem in terris* refashioned the Catholic social and ethical lexicon, and two decades, almost to the day, after the 1945 establishment of the UN itself. The pope ended his address by invoking the refrain of mourning and determination that became a global mantra after the Holocaust and served as the UN's *raison d'être*: "Never again." Speaking, he declared, on behalf of both living and dead—the victims and survivors of war, the poor and disinherited, the youth who dream of a better world—the pope issued a solemn call for an end to armed conflict:

> Never again the one against the other! Never again! Nevermore!… It suffices to remember that the blood of millions, that numberless and unheard-of sufferings, useless slaughter and frightful ruin, are the sanction of the pact which unites you, with an oath that must change the future history of the world: No more war, never again war! Peace, it is peace which must guide the destinies of peoples and of all mankind!

The speech's tone was humble and determined, permeated by faith in the possibility of international goodwill and human progress. It bore the same sense of open-palmed, non-defensive solidarity with the world that, two months later, would suffuse *Gaudium et spes*, Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. Before the UN, Paul previewed a phrase he would later include in *Populorum progressio*, calling the Church an "expert on humanity" ready to offer its humane, integral vision of peace and dignity to a world laboring to make itself new.

Soon after the 1965 visit, Time-Life Books produced a special edition commemorating the whirlwind, day-long papal trip to New York. Among other things, the volume included an English-language transcript of the UN address, which appeared alongside *Life* magazine photos documenting armed conflicts unfolding around the world. Opposite the final page of text, a full-page, black-and-white image shows U.S. Marines trudging past a North Vietnamese man lying on his back, dead in the sand. His half-closed eyes gaze outward, his fingertips graze his abdomen; he wears shorts and a button-down shirt; he is barefoot.

The commemorative publication heralded Paul VI's visit to the UN as a "call to conscience." The juxtaposition of his elegant plea for world peace with images of intractable war was meant to evoke the urgency of this call. Seen through the eyes of history, however, it also suggests a tragic irony. At the top of the page, an italicized pull-quote declares, "*The hour has come for a halt.*" The Vietnam War would rage for another decade. In the end, it gave way not to peace but to desolation and generations of haunted dreams.

The summer after the pope came to the UN, British-American poet Denise Levertov completed "Life at War," which she composed in response to the Vietnam War. The poem laments war's numbing effect, the banality with which we—she writes in the first-person plural—have trained ourselves to regard images of death and dismemberment and innocent suffering, our resistance to the horror-response they ought to evoke in us, our willingness to mollify our consciences by entertaining the supposed necessity of the whole thing. "The disasters numb within us / caught in the chest, rolling / in the brain like pebbles," the poem begins. One can only imagine what Levertov, who died in 1997, would think of the modern newsfeed—or, more accurately, of the doomscroll reflex with which we imbibe images of war today.

Three stanzas in, she writes, "the same war / continues." Every war is the same war, Levertov seems to suggest. Interpreted primarily as a commentary on Americans' willingness to depersonalize overseas conflict, there's a temptation to read in these lines a cynical desperation: it's just one far-away horror after another. But Levertov's work rejects cynicism in the same way that Paul VI's UN plea for peace requires a level of earnestness that today feels inconceivable. I take Levertov to mean something different: every war is made, ultimately, from the same stuff. The monsters of war shapeshift here and there, like a rash that appears on the face, then the hands, then years later on the back—not three different rashes, as you had thought, but the same rash, fruit of the same subdermal virus, breaking out all over, receding from view but never gone.

It is wrenching to revisit Paul VI's UN address today, as Russian missiles rip through Ukrainian neighborhoods, flattening schools and theaters and maternity wards. Thousands are dying and millions are fleeing their homes in a war of aggression that feels catastrophically tailor-made to set off a domino effect of global conflict and, impossibly, to dredge up the same nuclear anxieties behind the nearly six-decade-old papal address. For Paul VI, and seemingly for Levertov, there is nothing that can be said of one war that cannot be said of every war. In this sense, Russia's bombing of a Mariupol maternity hospital on March 9 serves as an apt, nauseating metaphor for war itself. War reaches into the future to destroy a world not yet born. The only hope for humanity is peace.

But, however prescient as they were, Paul's words also feel like a space-age vestige of some past future, an artifact that belongs in the same aesthetic cat-

Pope Paul VI visits the United Nations, October 4, 1965.

KEYSTONE PRESS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

egory as Disneyland's Tomorrowland and Corita Kent lithographs and the UN headquarters. 1965 was hardly a simpler time: when, midway through the address, Paul refers to "those terrible weapons that modern science has given you"—weapons that "produce nightmares" even before they "produce victims and ruins"—he is calling to mind the acute possibility of global nuclear annihilation. Yet I am struck by how thoroughly we—Levertov's we—have lost the taste for world peace. We know too much and too little. Indeed, throughout decades of U.S. military involvement in the Middle East, Americans heard remarkably little about peace, even aspirationally. In a post-9/11 world, the other side of war was not peace but merely less-visible war, war that was drone-operated and remote and ignorable, where the sort of conscience-stirring images to which Levertov alludes are kept far away from the front page.

Russia's war on Ukraine has rendered such examinations of conscience inescapable. And because this is so, the times demand of us what, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, we might term a second naïveté about peace—a re-embrace of the thing that we once felt too wise and world-weary to allow ourselves to keep wanting. In stirring video addresses to his compatriots and world leaders, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky seems to be coaxing the world toward precisely that kind of embrace. Of course, his immediate aims are more concrete: *come to our assistance; look at the truth of what is happening here*. But behind these strategic demands lies a deeper, spiritual plea, one captured in the final lines of Levertov's poem:

> nothing we do has the quickness, the sureness,
> the deep intelligence living at peace would have.

The time is right to retrieve world peace from the punchlines of Miss America jokes and restore it, unabashedly, to its rightful place atop the wildest dreams and highest aspirations and most zealous prayers of humankind.

SUSAN BIGELOW REYNOLDS *is an assistant professor of Catholic Studies at Candler School of Theology at Emory University.*

Catechists attend Pope Francis's celebration of Mass marking Sunday of the Word of God at the Vatican, January 23, 2022.

CNS PHOTO/REMO CASILLI, REUTERS

RITA FERRONE

A Wonderful Complexity

What does instituting women in ministries really mean?

On the Sunday of the Word of God this year, Pope Francis solemnly instituted lectors and catechists. They were drawn from nations around the world. The pope gave to each of the lectors a book of the Scriptures, and to the catechists a cross. There were prayers, and he enjoined these servants of the word to bring the Gospel to the world through their ministry. None of this was truly extraordinary, however. What made the event historic was that, for the first time, the rite included women.

It was a long time coming. In 1965, a subcommittee of the Consilium (the body of scholars and churchmen who crafted many of the liturgical reforms after the Second Vatican Council) gathered to study what was then called "minor orders," including what we now call instituted lectors and acolytes. In Christian antiquity various people held these offices, but gradually they were restricted to seminarians on their way to being ordained to the priesthood. Over time, the priesthood assumed all the roles formerly held by a variety of ministers. The committee acknowledged the possibility of turning the page on this clericalization of ministry, but they did not discuss including women, out of deference to those bishops who believed that the minor orders were part of the sacrament of Holy Orders, rendering women ineligible.

Nevertheless, a door was opened by the Consilium's final report in 1967, which affirmed that the Church has considerable flexibility in reforming the offices below the level of deacon. The minor orders, although rooted in antiquity, can be reconfigured, they argued—some abolished, others added or adapted—to respond to the needs of the Church. The question of who receives them, and whether they are permanent or temporary, was not settled.

By the time of the council, everyone recognized that the Church's practice of minor orders had become incoherent. The history was venerable, but modern-day seminarians were deriving little benefit from being ordained into these roles. It was more or less a formality they went through, with the rites serving as stepping stones in a *cursus honorum* that led to priestly ordination—their real goal. They moved through the minor orders quickly, sometimes celebrating two at a time. Some found it embarrassing to receive deputation, in solemn ceremonies, for tasks other people carried out. The role of doorkeeper was, for example, already filled by sacristans and ushers. Altar boys performed the role of acolyte. The priest read the readings at Mass. To be an *actual* exorcist was an advanced and specialized role quite separate from the "order of exorcist" conferred on them, which really meant nothing. One of the principles of the reform was "truthfulness." By this canon, the minor orders were failing badly.

Pope St. Paul VI was interested in keeping the minor orders as a part of seminary formation. His focus was on renewing them and establishing a more coherent plan. Pastoral bishops saw this in a wider frame of reference, however, and had more ambitious goals. They wanted to simplify the preparation for priesthood and render it more realistic, but they also kept an eye on the horizon of lay ministry, which was a growing phenomenon. There was considerable interest, especially in mission dioceses, in strengthening lay ministries and finding ways to bless them. There were requests not only to institute women as lectors and acolytes, but also to consider instituting ministries of catechesis and various forms of pastoral service, which were already being filled successfully by women. There was also the question of allowing lay people to preach and conduct worship services in the absence of a priest. Some kind of blessing for music ministers, such as cantors, psalmists, and organists, was on the wish list too.

The topic of minor orders continued to be discussed among the various dicasteries of the Curia during the period immediately following the council, prompted at times by interventions from local churches and from the pope, but the conversation dragged on without resolution, at least in part because there were so many different discussions going on at the same time. It wasn't even clear where this topic belonged in the flow chart of the reform: Holy Orders? Baptism? Blessings? Clergy formation? Liturgy? Evangelization and mission? All of the above?

In 1972, Pope Paul VI issued his motu proprio, *Ministeria quaedam*, which put an end to the discussion. He suppressed the orders of doorkeeper, exorcist, and subdeacon. He changed the terminology of "minor orders" to "ministries" and defined the ministry of lector and acolyte as lay ministries. Following an obscure precedent set by the Council of Trent, he added that "ministries can be entrusted to the lay Christian faithful; accordingly, they do not have to be reserved to candidates for the sacrament of Orders" (MQ III). Nevertheless, he reserved the instituted lay ministries of lector and acolyte to males "according to the venerable tradition of the Church" (MQ VII).

It's important to recall that Paul VI did not attempt to prohibit women's participation in liturgical ministry. The third instruction on the right implementation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (*Liturgicae instaurationes*, 1970), which went out with his explicit approval, gave permission for women to read the pre-Gospel readings at Mass, as well as the general intercessions and any commentary designed to assist the assembly in understanding the rites. This instruction also permitted women to serve as leaders of song, organists, and ushers, and to organize processions and take up the collection. It noted that, with the permission of the bishop, designated lay leaders (for example, catechists), may conduct services of the word with Holy Communion from the reserved sacrament in cases where priests are not available to celebrate the Eucharist. It was, on the whole, an expansive endorsement for women. But it only went so far.

With his decisions on minor orders, Paul VI cleared away some of the confusion, but still ended up perpetuating the incoherent situation he inherited. The roles of lector and acolyte continued to be filled mostly by people who were not instituted. Seminarians continued to be instituted for roles in which they had no lasting interest or commitment. His motu proprio never got at the fundamental issue of "truthfulness."

The truth will out, however. The fact that women were doing the work did change the landscape of the Church's imagination over time. Although they were not instituted in these ministries, the prospect of instituting women someday never really died. At the Synod on the Word of God in 2008, the world's bishops, impressed by decades of women's service to the word, pressed the question. Proposition 17 read: "The synod fathers recognize and encourage the service of the laity in the transmission of the faith. Women, in particular, have an indispensable role on this point…they know how to arouse hearing of the Word and the personal relationship with God, and how to communicate the meaning of forgiveness and evangelical sharing. It's hoped that [the] ministry of lector can be opened also to women, so that their role as announcers of the Word may be recognized in the Christian community." The proposition passed with a vote of 191 in favor, 45 opposed, and 3 abstentions, but nothing was done. Pope Benedict's post-synodal exhortation didn't even mention it.

It came up again at the Amazon Synod in 2019. The working document for the synod was somewhat general, but the final document was sharp and specific on this point, showing that dialogue among those present, rather than weakening the case for women in the instituted ministries, had given it teeth:

> We ask that the Motu Proprio of St. Paul VI, *Ministeria quaedam* (1972) be revised, so that women who have been properly trained and prepared can receive the ministries of Lector and Acolyte, among others to be developed. In the new contexts of evangelization and pastoral ministry in the Amazon, where the majority of Catholic communities are led by

> women, we ask that an instituted ministry of "women community leadership" be created and recognized as part of meeting the changing demands of evangelization and care for communities. (Final document, no. 102).

The vote was overwhelmingly in favor: 160 in favor, 11 against.

Pope Francis, in his post-synodal exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, praises women for their generous service, but then uses the improbable success of such work as an argument to keep their aspirations in check. Like Pope Benedict, Pope Francis did not mention the instituted ministries in his exhortation. Oddly, he offered instead various cautions and warnings that reinforce the all-male priesthood (ordaining women to the priesthood was not advocated by the synod, but it seems to come up, like an uneasy conscience, every time Church officials consider any proposition to expand the access of women to ministries in the Church). Yet Francis did raise the question of *office* (publicly recognized duties) with respect to women:

> In a synodal Church, those women who in fact have a central part to play in Amazonian communities should have access to positions, including ecclesial services, that do not entail Holy Orders and that can better signify the role that is theirs. Here it should be noted that these services entail stability, public recognition and a commission from the bishop. This would also allow women to have a real and effective impact on the organization, the most important decisions and the direction of communities, while continuing to do so in a way that reflects their womanhood. (QA 103)

This echoes an earlier statement he made in the encyclical *The Joy of the Gospel*, which proposed a greater role for women in decision-making in the Church.

As it turns out, "stability, public recognition and a commission from the bishop" are precisely the conditions that were fulfilled when Pope Francis determined in 2021 that it would be both permissible and "opportune" to change Canon 230 § 1 to include women in the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte. This dissolved the reservation of *Ministeriam quaedam* and allowed women a place in the instituted ministries, just as the Amazon Synod requested. He opened this prospect not only for the Amazonian region but for the universal Church.

Francis followed this decision with another motu proprio establishing the ministry of catechist as an instituted ministry. This corresponds loosely to the request of the synod for establishing an official designation for "women's community leadership" (though it is also open to men) because the catechist is the de facto community leader in mission territories, and may be the sole official representative of the Church.

Now that this precedent has been established, however, new questions arise for which there are no easy or self-evident answers. What is the horizon of our expectations? How deep is our own commitment to "truthfulness" in the exercise of these ministries?

Let us be blunt here: the modes and models of the minor orders that we've inherited from the past were not substantially revised by the reforms of Paul VI. Yes, some minor orders were set aside, and others received new names, but underneath the nomenclature and sorting, little changed. The Church's experience with the instituted ministries has been restricted almost entirely to men who are on their way to ordination, while most of the work is done by somebody else. This model has never been subjected to a searching critique.

A look at what remains on the books concerning the instituted ministries prior to Francis's intervention shows a distinctly clerical bias. The norms are strict about order and privilege (if an instituted minister is present, the non-instituted minister must give way; those instituted must sit in the sanctuary, etc.), but silent on issues of collaboration and reciprocity. Francis's letter to Cardinal Luis Ladaria, the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in contrast, envisions a vibrant experience of reciprocal collaboration between the baptismal priesthood and the ministerial priesthood played out in the exercise of these instituted ministries. Francis has introduced the instituted ministries as a significant opportunity for women to enter into decision-making in the ecclesial community, further the work of evangelization, inspire the laity, affect the life of parishes, and shape their mission. Yet how all this will happen remains vague.

The rhetoric Francis uses to describe the foundations of such ministries ("the royal priesthood of Baptism") is robustly Christological, but our conception of what is going on continues to gravitate toward the merely functional. This is no doubt because lay liturgical ministries have developed in ways that reflect their ad hoc status. Right now, they are an extremely limited "plug and play" reality in our parishes. They presume no lateral relationships (catechists in the United States have peer organizations, but there is nothing comparable for lectors or acolytes). They carry within them no notion of public office. Nor do they lead to any structured participation in the counsels and decision-making of a local community. They enjoy no mandate from the bishop, and most people who exercise them have received only minimal training, formation, or education in liturgy. All that has to change, if instituted ministries are going to become a "real thing" in the Church and not mere window dressing.

We need more reflection on the intertwined yet different subjects of ministry, office, and the Christian participation in Christ's threefold *munera* (priest, prophet, and king) in the Church. Yet there is no guarantee that this will happen. The prolonged period during which our horizon of expectations was foreshortened to a level of basic functionality and "helping Father" could very well lead to a failure of theological imagination and courage as we face this new moment in history. The blank stares that the news has elicited ("Don't women already do these things?") show that, for many of us, we've arrived at this moment ill prepared.

It's important that we not pour the new wine of women's participation into the old wineskins of a failed clerical-

ist vision. In the clerical model, when an office is conferred, ministry is presumed to follow automatically. But if there is anything that the development of lay ecclesial ministry has taught us over the past decades, it is that genuine ministry doesn't work like that. It is a sharing of gifts in response to needs. There is an authentic reciprocity between the service of those who minister and the needs of those who are served. Priests and pastors know this from experience, just as lay people do, yet our system has for a long time lagged behind. Being dubbed "lector" doesn't confer on anyone the gift of reading the scriptures intelligently, passionately, or well. First, the gift must be discerned. Then the need must be acknowledged. (The proclamation of the word in liturgy is important; much is riding on this.) Only then does public office make sense. Questions of precedence and order are secondary to questions of charism and service. The credibility of the Church's ministry demands that we get this right.

The opening of instituted ministries to women will also begin really for the first time a reckoning with an ecclesiology that divides the Church too simply into clergy and laity. A multiplicity of different ministries, each formally recognized and empowered by the bishop, and all ordered toward communion, are being established. This complicates things, but it is a wonderful complexity. We are being invited into new modes of collaboration with one another in the great work of the Church. We cannot walk into this with our eyes closed, as if we are simply putting a new label on an already-existing set of roles and relations. It is a new moment. To borrow the expression of the distinguished scholar Cesare Giraudo, SJ, who wrote about the instituted ministries in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the inclusion of women in these ministries is "a milestone and a point of no return."

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POETRY

D., GARDENING

Christian Wiman

One form of matter completed by grief.
One psalm so utter its form is life.

One fire further than the one in which we've burned.
One world more than our wounds have earned.

One love so lavish it is not one.
She looks up, for a time entirely sun.

CHRISTIAN WIMAN'*s latest book is* Survival Is a Style.

HARRISON STETLER

Catholics for Zemmour

Letter from France

This April's presidential election in France was set to be a civilizational battle, a do-or-die, last-quarter fight for national identity and survival. But the Russian invasion of Ukraine has forced the media cycle to catch up, at least momentarily, with studies showing that most French people just don't care about the supposed threat of *wokisme*. Instead of American campus culture, a supposed rise in petty crime, or the number of police officers that a candidate plans to recruit, the French would rather hear about solutions for underfunded hospitals and schools, climate change, and the cost of living—a fact that has mostly been lost among the nexus of editorial boards, production studios, and communications teams who, until the outbreak of an actual war, had preferred the narrative of a culture war.

President Emmanuel Macron deserves at least part of the blame. Since taking office in 2017, he has presented himself as liberal democracy's dutiful rampart with one hand, while using the other to triangulate with a ferociously confident Right. The political crisis this has caused might be best captured by the earnest astonishment and disbelief on Marine Le Pen's face in February 2021 when Gérald Darmanin, the interior minister, accused her in a televised debate of being "soft" on Islam. It's difficult, though, to out-demagogue the far Right. One year later, Le Pen is part of a triumvirate challenging Macron from the Right, herself positioned somewhere between the more centrist-friendly

French far-right presidential candidate Éric Zemmour, right, holds Marion Marechal's hand as he arrives on stage during a campaign rally in Toulon, France, March 6, 2022.

AP PHOTO/JEAN-FRANCOIS BADIAS

Valérie Pécresse and the proto-fascist Éric Zemmour. Their collective strength—now stalled, it would seem, by international crisis—looms over an electoral cycle where it has become common to hear matter-of-fact references to a tide of Africans submerging Europa.

But craven opportunism on the part of Macron can explain only so much of what's happening. France's new Right is the result of one of the forgotten revolts that marked the country's grueling 2010s—forgotten, at least, by this American journalist, someone wistfully inclined to view his adopted country as the perennial homeland of 1789, *égalité*, and all that. To be a French conservative over the winter of 2012 and 2013, however, when hundreds of thousands of your like-minded citizens took to the streets for weeks of extended protests, was to witness the advent of a new politics.

The *Manif pour tous* ("protest for everyone") seemed to come out of nowhere. In November 2012, Socialist president François Hollande introduced a bill legalizing same-sex marriage, hoping for an easy victory with his progressive base after a series of retreats on fiscal austerity. What followed, however, was an upsurge of conservative organizing and mobilization, the likes of which France had not experienced for decades.

Between late 2012 and spring 2013, a different France—conspicuously wealthier, whiter, and more Christian than the rest of the country—stormed the streets of major cities. Bucking the assumption that mass-protest politics was the exclusive domain of left-wing social movements, as many as 1 million people reportedly attended the largest Parisian demonstrations in early 2013 according to organizers. Drawing out many cultural conservatives who felt ignored as the newly elected government embarked on a major reform of a key social institution, the marches also saw the revival of a dormant ecosystem of right-wing groups, from royalist clubs and integralist sects to old anti-abortion networks. The center-left establishment weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* tellingly confessed: "We thought they had ceased to exist, but really we just didn't see them."

Some of these protestors were from the generation of French Catholics who came of age spiritually and politically during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Many of them were especially galvanized by the former's 1997 Paris rendition of World Youth Day. Fifteen years later they now gathered in the same parks and public spaces to protest the gay-marriage law. "What founded the culture of Europe, the search for God and the availability to listen to him," Benedict XVI claimed during the conclusion to his 2008 speech before the Paris Collège des Bernardins, "still remains today the foundation of any true culture."

But the "eldest daughter of the Church" was now in crisis. The twenty-first century's moral minority was raised in observant households at a time when the country at large was undergoing a spectacular drop-off in all forms of Catholic observance. "The breakdown of practice, the collapse of baptism, rupture in the transmission of faith," *Le Figaro* journalist Jean Sévilla lamented in 2015. "This is a historic turning point whose significance we can barely measure as long as the majoritarian age groups were born while the French, even if they didn't have a direct relation with the Church or manifested a distinctive anticlericalism, had been raised in the Christian tradition: until the 1960s, 90% of the French were baptized."

Against this backdrop, the *Manif pour tous* exposed a very specific—and powerful—segment of the country's elite. Flocking to city centers from well-appointed suburbs and neighborhoods, like those in the western districts of Paris, the protest crowd mirrored the slow transformation of Catholic identity and practice into a cultural artifact for families on the right-side of the social divide. In contrast to the steady drop-off in rural and working-class regions, those practicing Catholicism were now proportionally wealthy, better educated, and closer to urban areas.

The *Manif pour tous*, in other words, was a slightly chicer Tea Party. Forget trucker hats; think Canada Goose in the winter months, sailor-striped crew necks and tired salmon trousers for early spring. Any list of the figures who emerged in 2013 is peppered by long-winded names: Ludivine de la Rochère, Guillaume de Prémare, Madeleine Bazin de Jessy. Nobility three hundred years ago, perhaps, they were now suburban professionals, middle managers, and small business owners for the most part, or their children. They had some money and property, but larger reserves of entitlement. This was an explosive brew for a class whose anxieties were compounded by the declining competitiveness of French capitalism.

The 2013 law eventually passed, of course. Few, even on the "right of the right," seriously consider trying to roll it back today. In the name of national unity, Le Pen's program calls for a "moratorium" on what the French call "societal" questions. Zemmour has likewise been evasive. "The *Manif pour tous*, above all bourgeois, failed because the lower classes didn't feel involved," he told a packed crowd in Versailles last October. "We need to find axes that unify these two social groups. The subjects that unite are identity in the broader sense and immigration."

But almost all the young conservatives I've spoken with recall being politicized that spring. Two young Zemmour activists I had lunch with a few weeks ago became active Catholics in the years that followed. One of them asked me, bemused, "Do you think I'm homophobic? I work up by the Porte de Clignancourt, you go up there and you'll see with all the Muslims what homophobia really is." Short of doing away with the law, they now train their crosshairs on what Éric Zemmour has termed the "LGBT lobby"—a decadent fifth column, supposedly hegemonic within the Parisian cultural elite, sapping the vigor of heterosexual Frenchmen.

Last summer, a major "bioethics" law passed parliament, liberalizing medically assisted pregnancies for lesbian couples and single women. Barring a few scattered actions lead by nostalgics for the heady days of 2013, the law

passed without a blip, a silence that cannot be chalked up to the politically muffling effects of the pandemic, or to a French Church embroiled in sex-abuse scandals. From time to time, a magazine will run a feature on a young gay adult who, as a child, was taken by their parents to the marches.

The problem is that the *Manif pour tous* was always about much more than gay marriage. In his 2014 book, *Le Mai 68 Conservateur*, the political scientist Gaël Brustier aptly equates the protests to a "conservative 68," a nationalist's riposte to the generation-minting left-wing uprising of the late 1960s. The *Manif pour tous*'s real significance, in other words, is to be found in the type of right-wing politics that it made possible, one that has only ballooned in influence and power since.

Ten years later, its offspring are omnipresent in conservative media and politics, making up the most identifiable faces of the Right's cocky young guard. On the conservative chain CNEWs, in the pages of *Le Figaro*, *Valeurs actuelles*, *L'Incorrect* and a handful of blogs, pundits like Eugénie Bastié, Alexandre Devecchio, or Charlotte D'Ornellas spar with progressive straw men. Their conservatism is "*décomplexé*," meaning literally "without complex," emancipated from the self-doubt imposed on the conservative mind since the 1960s and free to criticize the "great replacement" of white Europe.

Marion Maréchal, Marine Le Pen's 31-year-old niece, is in many respects the most representative figure of the *Manif pour tous* generation. Maréchal, as she is now known, split with her aunt's more populist *National Rally* partly from the desire to privilege culture-war traditionalism over her aunt's feints towards economic nationalism. She grew up in the wealthy western suburbs grouped around Versailles, the cultural counter-capital outside Paris that has long been home to a preserve of conservative cadres.

In November 2013, Madeleine Bazin de Jessy, Maréchal's childhood classmate at the traditionalist Catholic school *Institut Saint-Pie X*, co-founded *Sens commun*, the main pressure group that emerged after the marches. "Common sense" or "decency" is a value that these people claim to have revived from George Orwell. The interest group has since been rebranded with the franker name of *Mouvement conservateur*. Boasting a network of committed activists, it was instrumental in securing the nomination of conservative François Fillon as leader of the center-right *Républicains* in the 2017 presidential campaign.

In early December, however, the organization switched its affiliation from the established center-right to Éric Zemmour, France's most notorious far-right polemicist who is now running as an independent candidate for the presidency. Longtime darling of the *Manif pour tous* generation, Zemmour is banking on accomplishing one of the movement's long-hoped-for goals: a union of right-wing forces, transcending the division between the centrist, "republican" Right and Le Pen's pseudo-populists. Marion Maréchal recently endorsed Zemmour, capping off a series of high-profile conversions from the established right-wing parties to the polemist's new force, *Reconquest!*

The reshuffling behind Zemmour is all the more remarkable given that his campaign has stumbled badly in recent months. Marine Le Pen has reconsolidated her position at the front of the right-wing pack. In fact, Zemmour seems very much at peace with his shrunken position in the polls. In Cannes on January 22, he seemed to be looking beyond this election to invite Pécresse and Le Pen supporters and surrogates to eventually join what he termed the "great adventure of the recomposition" of French conservatism.

The *Manif pour tous* was the bridge to this alliance. Zemmour may not be the one to fully accomplish this shift, but in the long run I'd bet that its gravitational pull will finish things off. The bloated conservative wing of France's upper-middle class, its real drivers, now have the missing vocabulary to out-maneuver Marine Le Pen—the defense of civilizational identity while France is besieged on all sides, and a nationalist movement culture to reabsorb and tame the lower orders.

"Naïve" is how Paul Piccarreta described to me his encounter with the *Manif pour tous* crowd. This 32-year-old journalist hails from a working-class background in southern France, where he grew up in a family that converted to Christianity when he was a child. Reflexively inclined toward the Left, he studied at Paris's private *Institut Catholique*, which threw him into a milieu that he called "a caricature of the old bourgeoisie and aristocracy, working together to maintain itself. They know they're in decline, don't have as much wealth as they might like, but they do have the social capital and network to keep themselves at a high level."

In 2015 Piccarreta co-founded *Limite*, a review of "integral ecology." He rejects the common accusation that it was a *Manif pour tous* project. "My thinking was that we needed to create a publication that would provide people who participated in the *Manif pour tous* with a theoretical framework to think about what was really happening," he said. "For me, this mostly meant dealing with economic and ecological questions, thinking about the limits of laissez-faire and the environmental catastrophe." When *Limite* published a 2019 manifesto rejecting the homophobia and culture-war obsessions of the Catholic Right, co-founder Eugénie Bastié left the review. She is now "getting her revenge with Zemmour," he quipped.

"As I see it, Christianity really has a major potential to transform society," Piccarreta, who has supported left-populist Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the past, told me. "Many on the Left know that the Gospel can be an extremely powerful political tool. Right-wing Catholics don't cite it, they talk about other things, but rarely the Gospel itself. If you use it politically, you're not going to become an Éric Zemmour."

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ARTICLE

The War in Ukraine

John Connelly
James J. Sheehan
Piotr H. Kosicki
Andrew Bacevich

A priest prays by the ruins of a destroyed shopping center after shelling, in Kyiv, Ukraine, Monday, March 21, 2022.

AP PHOTO/EFREM LUKATSKY

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What makes Ukraine different

John Connelly

A woman reacts in front of a residential building damaged during the Ukrainian-Russian war in Volnovakha, in the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Donetsk, March 11, 2022.

CNS PHOTO/ALEXANDER ERMOCHENKO, REUTERS

From the start of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, analysts have been asking about comparable events from the past. Paul Massaro of the U.S. Helsinki Commission tweeted on February 26 that he was racking his brain "for a historical parallel to the courage and fighting spirit of the Ukrainians and coming up empty. How many peoples have ever stood their ground against an aggressor like this?" The Twitter world impatiently reeled off cases: Israel, Palestine, Finland, Poland, Croatia, the Kurdish women's defense. A few people asked if Massaro had ever read a history book. They might have thrown in Hungary or perhaps the Paris Commune.

Still, Massaro was not so much wrong as imprecise. The epochal character of Ukraine's self-defense came through in a tweet Massaro released a few hours later: it is about *democracy*. Russia's war on Ukraine is probably the most brazen attempt any power has ever made to violently subvert a functioning democratic order.

Consider an instructive parallel that Massaro and his readers neglect: Czechoslovakia. In September 1938, Britain, France, Germany and Italy met at Munich and agreed to cede Czechoslovakia's border regions to Germany, and from October 1 the Wehrmacht occupied this hilly defensive perimeter that we call the Sudetenland, with its mostly German population. Massaro and his readers do not mention Munich because Czechoslovakia did not fight. Rather, its leaders, refusing to "lead the nation into a slaughterhouse," gave orders for their highly professional and well-armed soldiers to pull out of the border zone without firing a shot.

Otherwise the two cases reveal a host of similarities. In both, dictatorial leaders of humbled behemoths—Germany's Hitler and Russia's Putin—sought to restore their countries' greatness by subduing weaker neighbors. Both claim that co-ethnics on the other side of the border face discrimination culminating in systematic violence. In Czechoslovakia the supposed victims were the Sudeten Germans; in Ukraine, Russian speakers concentrated in Ukraine's east.

Like Hitler eighty-five years ago, Putin falls back upon imperialist chauvinism, asserting that a smaller state has no right to exist. For Germans, Bohemia—today's Czech republic—"naturally" belonged to the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation, and the Czechs' "destiny" was to assimilate into the infinitely higher German civilization. Today, many Russians find Ukrainian independence absurd because Ukraine long belonged to Russia in some form, either Tsarist or Soviet. Traditionally, Ukraine was called "little Russia." During imprisonment a Russian officer told the Ukrainian activist Ihor Kozlovsky, "There are no nations. There are civilizations, and the Russian world is a civilization, and for anyone who had been part of it, it does not matter what you call it, a Tatar or a Ukrainian, *you don't exist.*"

Such condescension began producing outrage many generations ago. Before 1918, all Czechs and many Ukrainians lived in the liberal Habsburg monarchy, and their political elites demanded autonomy so that their cultures and traditions would be protected. After that monarchy's collapse, the victorious Allies promised to promote national self-determination across Eastern Europe, and suddenly new states began popping up: Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland. But further east, in the lands of Ukraine, numerous armies fought for territory, white and red, Polish and Ukrainian. In the end, Ukrainian armies were too weak to defend nascent statehood, and in 1921 Polish diplomats divided Ukraine and Belarus with Bolshevik counterparts in the Treaty of Riga.

As the diplomats and soldiers redrew Europe's borders, demobilized Austrian corporal Adolf Hitler began imagining how Germany should seek to change them. Ukraine, along with western Russia, featured prominently in his plans to attain "living space" for the German people. His destruction of Czechoslovakia on the eve of World War II was meant to clear a hurdle for a vast imperial program; a second hurdle fell in Septem-

ber 1939 when German armies joined with the Red Army to subdue Poland. In June 1941 Hitler finally struck at the Soviet Union with the largest military assault in history, and now all of Ukraine endured what the Nazis called "General Plan East": first, eradication of Jews, and then expulsion and murder of Slavic populations, in order to "prepare" space for German settlement extending beyond Moscow and into Crimea. From late 1942, the Red Army pushed German armies back upon Central Europe, and this plan never got beyond its initial stages. Still, the historian Norman Davies estimates it cost Ukraine some 10 million citizens, perhaps the highest casualty toll of any nation in Europe.

We don't have the historical perspective to assess Vladimir Putin's ultimate goals, but we do know that he shares with Hitler an imperial mindset. During the troop build-up on Ukraine's borders, Russian negotiators demanded assurance that it never join NATO, and that NATO pull forces out of former Soviet Bloc countries such as Poland. An article that briefly surfaced on the website of the RIA Novosti news agency, which was meant to appear after an easy victory in Ukraine, gives us an outline: "Little Russia" had now returned to its "natural position" as part of the Russian world. But will that be enough?

Russia is the largest state on earth, crossing eleven time zones, containing dozens of ethnicities and regions, but for Putin and his circle, it's still not big enough. Empires seek to grow, and thus incur security concerns in the expanding peripheries. This was true, for instance, of Britain and Russia in the nineteenth century, as they uneasily maneuvered toward each other north of India. In talks held in the 1990s, when Russia's economic and political fortunes plunged to a nadir, Russian representatives still insisted to their U.S. counterparts that Russia deserves a sphere of influence, or buffer zone to its west, a share in the sovereignty of other states for its own eternally threatened security. This demand was not made by other post-Soviet states.

For Putin, as for Hitler, the quest for security against an almost metaphysically dangerous foe, has become a phantom, impossible to subdue because it lives in the dictator's mind. By April 1945, Hitler's regime had all but annihilated the Jewry of Europe, yet thoughts of this enemy tormented him as he composed his last testament, committing Germans to eternal vigilance against the "destroyer of nations." The unvanquishable ghost that haunts Vladimir Putin is the West, a source of unspeakable evils: fascism, Nazism, and, most recently, drug addiction. Cluster bombing and other brutalities—like all violence—grows out of fear, in this case that a society Putin cannot control is emerging south of his border, one that shows humane alternatives to a police state.

This fear of the uncontrollable grows out of Putin's biography. The regime he served when entering the KGB in 1975 had crushed a pro-democracy movement in Czechoslovakia a few years earlier, claiming its security had been threatened. But what had really bothered Brezhnev in 1968 was not security. Czechoslovakia was not a bridge for a NATO attack on the USSR. Rather—and this obsession was constant in Soviet meetings with Czech and Slovak reformers—it was freedom of expression, something Dubcek and his comrades had introduced in the spring. When the tanks rolled into Prague in August, it was to compel Czechoslovak communists to reintroduce censorship. This, above all, seems to be what Putin wants in Ukraine: to muzzle a population. But unlike Czechs and Slovaks of 1968, Ukrainians now have more than three decades of practice in basic civic rights and freedoms. And they are not only armed but, thanks to earlier Russian incursions, skilled in defending themselves.

Now we get to what is really unusual about Ukraine's fight for survival. Ukraine is far from perfect. Like all democracies, public discourse is unbridled and the policies and opinions that emerge can offend. There are no Nazis, but there's a tiny far Right, as well as a huge political center and a welter of other parties, including some with a pro-Russian bent. All operate freely.

Recall those other nations that Massaro's critics said stood up to an aggressor. None was a democracy the way Ukraine is. That is also true of Czechoslovakia in 1938. It was the most tolerant and law-abiding state in the region, the lone formal democracy, but it carried a foundational flaw. When mostly Czech elites created this state in 1918–19, they froze out Germans and Hungarians, and almost half the inhabitants of Czechoslovakia did not feel this was their state because they had no say in its constitution.

Contrast this with Ukraine. In 1991, after the Soviet Union disintegrated, 84.2 percent of the population voted in a referendum on independence; of those, 92.3 percent voted in favor. Few states in Europe can claim such overwhelming legitimacy from their origin point. This state has had its missteps in regard to non-Ukrainian speakers, for example a language law implemented last year that forces Russian speaking children to switch to Ukrainian instruction after the fourth grade. Ukrainian and Russian are close but distinct, and the measure has caused disgruntlement even among those whose first language is Ukrainian. Putin, like Hitler toward the Sudeten Germans, poses as a savior—even, as we have seen, employing the word "genocide"—and has used the grievances about culture to justify military intervention.

Maybe it's with images of Hitler feted as a hero in the Sudetenland that Putin sent his draftees into Ukraine. The closest they came to receiving flowers was the macabre offer one Russian-speaking Ukrainian woman made to a heavily armed infantryman: sunflower seeds. Take these seeds and put them in your pocket, she said, so that at least flowers will grow when you die. She and other Russian speakers have greater cultural rights than those who live in Russia proper, where utterances that diverge from the regime's orthodoxy can earn you a beat-

The images from Ukraine overwhelm the emotions but produce clarity in the mind. Modern politics leaves us with a choice: dictatorship or liberal democracy.

ing by thugs, a dose of poison, a lengthy prison sentence, or all three. Similarly, Germans in 1930s Czechoslovakia had far greater cultural rights than co-nationals in the dictatorship across the border. Thomas Mann and many other German intellectuals sought refuge in Prague. The difference is that Russian speakers in Ukraine appreciate this freedom and are dying for it, whereas over 80 percent of Sudeten Germans supported Hitler.

Today we think of Britain's Chamberlain and France's Daladier as the guilty parties for Czechoslovakia's destruction, but the United States was not blameless. In a visit to Communist Prague in 1981, I was surprised to find a street named after George Washington not far from the train station. Until 1948, the station itself had been called Woodrow Wilson Station. Czechoslovakia was largely our creation. President Wilson admired and trusted the Czechoslovak leader Tomáš G. Masaryk and put the full force of his moral and political conviction behind the new state. Yet Americans have had a short attention span in global politics, and soon after leaving Europe in 1919 Washington's diplomats forgot about the new and fragile state, and of course were absent at Munich.

Over the decades, the United States has pushed Wilson's agenda of national self-determination, sometimes with success (Germany and Japan), but often with enormous investments and grievous failures (Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan). But in Ukraine we never had to push democracy: the Ukrainians have found it themselves. Today citizens from all ages, cultures, ethnicities, and language groups are sacrificing everything, including their lives, for the commonweal. Out of fears of escalation, the United States now keeps its distance; and aside from sanctions and limited military assistance, we watch.

Across the timeline of history Ukraine's accomplishment is indeed rare, and accounts for Massaro's sense of wonder. How many times have people showed such courage in the jaws of tyranny? One thinks of the Warsaw uprisings of 1943 and 1944, Hungary's revolution of 1956, the Prague Spring of 1968, Poland's Solidarity in 1980, and later the decade in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa as well as the "people power" in the Philippines and China. Yet what stands out in Ukraine is that it already possesses the precious democratic order that the activists and martyrs elsewhere fought to secure. So yes, this is a struggle against tyranny; more than any other case one can think of, it's also democracy fighting for its life.

We see teenagers and women line up for weapons, villagers with umbrellas confronting tanks, a popular comedic actor channeling the language of decency. The images overwhelm the emotions but produce clarity in the mind. Modern politics leaves us with a choice: dictatorship or liberal democracy. Does one favor strongman cliques that corrupt and intimidate, that bribe security forces to keep citizens muzzled, and at most tolerate sham elections? Or does one favor regimes where rulers step down after lost elections, where judiciary and law enforcement are independent? Police can beat people all over the world, but does one want a system where the police can be put on trial, or one where even to ask such a thing is to risk a more severe beating?

Our day resembles March 1939, the second act to the Munich crisis. Petulant Hitler was enraged at "peace in our time." He had thirsted for war in the fall, for the violent destruction of Czechoslovakia, the binding in blood of German elites to his person. On March 15, his patience ran out and he summoned Czech president Hacha to Berlin. Either hand over the rest of Bohemia or Prague would be flattened. Germany's brazen seizure of the Czech capital that morning, where ethnic Germans were a small minority, restored backbone to the French and British public, who now overwhelmingly supported guarantees for Poland's security when Hitler vented his wrath further eastward.

Similarly, democracy has been awakening and stretching its arms across Europe. Right and Left in Poland not only talk to each other but travel to Ukraine to cooperate in aiding refugees. The obsession of Germany's liberals over balanced budgets and of its environmentalists over nuclear energy have suddenly receded as the Bundestag reimagines German defense and energy policy. Tiny Denmark and Luxembourg send weapons and the squares of cities from Lisbon to Warsaw fill with people carrying yellow and blue banners. Meanwhile, the far Right, the friends of Trump and Putin, who respect neither rule of law nor free elections—the Salvinis, Le Pens, Orbáns, and Tucker Carlsons—issue weak statements of displeasure. Their friend in Moscow has betrayed their cause by overreaching, embarrassed them with his petulance, and perhaps stopped them in their tracks.

But why should the last word go to these unsavory figures. It's far too early to tell, but perhaps Ukraine is showing how a nation fighting for its life can also redefine nationhood in a region scarred by ethnic extremism. Culture and history matter, but the nation led by a Jewish Russian speaker includes people of many backgrounds, not determined by descent, and united in their struggle to ensure that rule by the people, for the people, and of the people does not perish.

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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky makes a statement in Kyiv, February 25, 2022, after Russia launched a massive military operation against Ukraine.

CNS PHOTO/UKRAINIAN PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SERVICE HANDOUT VIA REUTERS

A new Europe?

James J. Sheehan

"States make war, and vice versa." The American sociologist Charles Tilly's famous remark is a pretty accurate summary of modern political history if we recognize that different kinds of states make different kinds of wars, and vice versa. What kind of European state is the war in Ukraine likely to make?

To understand this question we must remember how, after 1945, a new kind of war made a new kind of European state. At first, the global contest between the Soviet Union and the United States encouraged European states—including longtime neutrals such as Norway, Belgium, and the Netherlands—to rearm and join an anti-Soviet alliance. But gradually, the European stalemate between the superpowers, based on weapons with the capacity to destroy the continent, created an international environment in which the possibility of war drifted to the margins of most Europeans' political imagination. People still worried about the perils of a nuclear Armageddon, but they were no longer concerned about a conflict between, for example, France and Germany, states that had fought each other three times between 1870 and 1945. The Cold War created what we can call civilian states in Europe: the size and effectiveness of European armies declined, borders were no longer defended, and the problem of "security" acquired an economic and social rather than a military significance. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the western half of Germany. Once the most important example of Tilly's maxim about war making, Germany gradually became an exemplary civilian state.

The peaceful end of the European Cold War—a nonviolent political transformation without historical precedent—seemed to underscore the attractive power of civilian states. Above all, the peaceful unification of the two postwar German states was the most dramatic example of Europeans' ability to avoid military conflict. Unlike its predecessor in 1871, the new Germany was not made by war (and vice versa).

The one major exception to the nonviolent postwar order was the painful dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, which produced a series of conflicts both within and between its successor states. As terrible as these conflicts were for those involved, their impact on the European order was limited. In large part because they were still distracted by the end of the Cold War (and the first Iraq war), outsiders did not become involved in Yugoslavia until, after a number of delays and missteps, a fragile settlement brokered by a group of states led by the United States was imposed on the belligerents.

It is within the context of postwar Europe's society of civilian states that the significance of the Russian invasion of Ukraine must be measured. A nation of 44 million, with the second largest territory in Europe after Russia, Ukraine occupies a geopolitical fault line that has been the site of ethnic and international violence for centuries. More important, the extent and intensity of the war, involving the world's second largest nuclear power, are unlike anything Europe has experienced since 1945. Finally, Russia's stated objective is not, as in Georgia and the Crimea, the creation of a separate enclave, but the destruction of the Ukrainian government and perhaps of Ukraine as a state. When Vladimir Putin declared on February 24 that he aimed "to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine, as well as to bring to trial those who perpetrated

bloody crimes," he was declaring a total war that left little room for a compromise peace and offered the Ukrainian regime no incentive to surrender.

In thinking about how this war will shape the character of European states, we should remember the French political philosopher Raymond Aron's wise remark that what usually matters most is not *why* wars begin but *how* they are fought, what Aron called "the battle in and for itself." How deeply this conflict will affect Europe's domestic and international institutions, therefore, will largely depend on how long this battle lasts, the extent of the destruction it causes, and which side, and under what condition, prevails. As I write these lines in mid-March, these questions remain open. The longer that remains the case, the less likely it is that the answers will be positive—for Ukraine, for Russia, and for the rest of Europe.

At the moment, the European response to the Russian invasion has been remarkably unified and positive. The European Union, both the creation and expression of postwar civilian states, responded to the Russian invasion with uncharacteristic alacrity and energy. In addition to providing humanitarian aid and supporting punitive sanctions, the EU, for the first time in its history, promised to finance and organize the transfer of lethal weapons to Ukrainian combatants. At a summit of European heads of state held at Versailles on March 10 through 11, these actions were reaffirmed and several leaders, including President Macron of France and Chancellor Scholz of Germany, declared that a new era of cooperation and collective action had begun. It sometimes happens that a vivid representation of alternatives reveals an institution's virtues that are otherwise easy to take for granted; this may be the reaction of Europe's civilian states to the return of war.

Even more striking has been the response of NATO. There is, we should note at the outset, nothing like NATO in the history of international organizations. Most alliances are temporary and often fragile arrangements; NATO will celebrate its seventy-third birthday on April 4. Most alliances are created for a specific purpose and dissolve once that has (or has not) been achieved; NATO survived the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of its main antagonist. Most alliances shrink; NATO has grown from its original twelve founding members to a group of thirty. It is not surprising that over its long history, NATO has often been divided, most recently by disagreements with American actions in the Middle East and by the ill-concealed hostility of the Trump administration. More important, as we might expect from an alliance dominated by civilian states, the military dimensions of NATO have faded. By 2022, only one-third of its member states have met the modest budgetary goals for defense spending set in 2006. Repeated efforts to standardize equipment and create multinational units have not been successful.

Seen in the light of its recent history, NATO's reaction to the Russian invasion has been extraordinary. Acting immediately, the alliance provided critically important weapon systems—especially anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles—to Ukraine. Moreover, NATO response forces have, for the first time, been activated and deployed in areas that might be the target for future Russian attacks. The size of these units is small, but they are large enough to provide a trip wire guaranteeing that NATO would fulfill its collective commitment in Article Five, which promises that the alliance will respond to an attack on any one of its members "by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force." A summit of NATO heads of state held on February 25 reaffirmed this commitment. At the same time, Finland and Sweden, both traditionally neutral states, are now taking part in the alliance's consultations on the crisis. Neither state is likely to join NATO anytime soon, but their decision to cooperate with the alliance represents a conspicuous isolation of Russia on the continent, as well as a vote of confidence in NATO's significance.

While international organizations like the EU and NATO can encourage and coordinate Europeans' response to the Ukrainian crisis, the fundamental direction and lasting significance of this response will be determined within individual states, which are still the most powerful pieces on the European chessboard. Behind the current European consensus is a vast set of differences created by geography, history, and resources. It is obvious, for example, that Ireland, traditionally neutral and without effective military power, views the war differently than Poland, which has already reacted by increasing military spending and is edging toward more direct engagement on Ukraine's behalf. The longer the war lasts and the higher the price for European action, the more likely it is that these differences will come to the surface.

Among the European states none is more significant than Germany, whose location, resources, and international standing make it the natural leader (or potential spoiler) of any European project. In addition to being an exemplary civilian state, Germany has a distinctive relationship with Russia. Since the 1970s, German foreign policy rested on what was called "Ostpolitik," which sought influence through accommodation, hoping to procure Russian cooperation on political issues by establishing deep economic connections. In many ways, German unification in 1989–90 was the outcome—and the validation—of this policy. Under rather different auspices, Ostpolitik continued after the collapse of the Soviet Union, sustained by Germany's increasing dependence on Russian fuel exports and other economic ties.

Even as an increasing number of Russian troops were deployed along Ukraine's frontiers, the decades-long momentum of Ostpolitik continued to shape German policy. When other European states began supplying Ukraine with weapons, Germany promised five thousand helmets—a move that was widely ridiculed. All this changed on Sunday, February 27, when Chancellor Scholz delivered what will probably be the most important speech of his long

political career. The Russian attack on Ukraine, Scholz told a special session of the German parliament, "marks a watershed in the history of our continent." He went on to make clear Germany's commitment to Ukraine, its willingness to supply weapons and support sanctions. (But not, as became clear on March 7, to ban all Russian gas and oil imports.)

Scholz also used the current crisis as the occasion to announce a new approach to German security policy: he promised to increase military spending to the 2 percent of GDP level set by NATO and to allocate the equivalent of two years' military budget to make badly needed improvements in weapons and training. To transform a deeply embedded civilian culture will require more than a single speech or even a substantial reallocation of resources, but together with the other dramatic events of the past few weeks, Scholz's change of direction is of great significance. We will have to see if the German public is ready and willing to pay for effective armed forces and, if necessary, to support putting them in harm's way. Nevertheless, for the first time in half a century, Germany's commitment to being a civilian state is open to question.

As the war in Ukraine continues without an end in sight, I am reminded of Hannah Arendt's comment that "the practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world." Let us hope and pray that in the present case her grim assessment is wrong. But even if it is possible to avoid or at least contain a metastasis of international violence, we must recognize that in February 2022 the Ukrainian war seems to have brought Europe's postwar era to an end. What kind of European states will emerge is by no means clear, but there is good reason to believe that a new chapter in the long, turbulent history of the relationship between states and war has begun.

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Putin's apocalyptic goals

Piotr H. Kosicki

Chernobyl, the site of the most infamous civilian nuclear disaster in history, has been occupied by invading troops, disconnected from the power grid, and set on a path to a potentially massive radiation leak. What could possibly motivate this disastrous course of action by Russian combatants in Ukraine? If we ask why Vladimir Putin's forces have shelled oil reservoirs in major urban centers, attacked humanitarian and refugee escape corridors, targeted maternity hospitals, and captured Europe's largest operational nuclear power plant amidst heavy bombardment, the answer would be the same. Putin has shown himself to be a war criminal and a mass murderer, but that is not explanation

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, November 4, 2019

CNS PHOTO/SHAMIL ZHUMATOV, REUTERS POOL

enough for why he would *intentionally* pursue nuclear, ecological, and civilian damage. Putin is not crazy; in his own mind, he is both a realist and a bringer of apocalypse.

For this reason, it is a mistake to think of the Russian invasion of Ukraine purely as the launching point of a new Cold War. Of course, the war has been very hot from the beginning: witness the cluster bombs dropped on Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv; witness Germany's moves to arm on a scale not seen since World War II. But the starting point of any conversation about the Russian invasion of 2022 is that its goals and rules are not at all those that guided the international order from 1945 to 1991.

The most important new rule is that apocalypse is now on the table as a serious option—and for Putin, it's not a dirty word. During the Cold War, pundits and politicians occasionally borrowed the imagery of fire, brimstone, and the Antichrist from the Book of Revelation, but few seriously believed that the key to establishing effective nuclear deterrents lay in making sense of 666 and the seven seals. (To be reminded why, one need only re-watch *Dr. Strangelove*.)

This is one of many ways in which the world of 2022 is different from the world of 1962, when Kennedy bested Khrushchev to defuse the Cuban missile crisis. Khrushchev didn't want to end the world; Putin just might. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is right that the Russian shelling of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant could have ended with "six Chernobyls"—and Putin would have embraced that outcome.

Scholars like Yale historian Timothy Snyder have been saying for years that Putin is a fascist leader of the global Right. In other words, like Adolf Hitler, Putin has a sense of world-historical mission. Indeed, Putin's self-styled mission is to *end* history as we have come to know it since the end of the Cold War. Almost prophetically, Snyder called Putin's a "politics of eternity." The Russian president does not need to end biological life on earth in order to stop history because he believes that he holds cards strong enough to achieve a permanent "peaceful conflict settlement" on his own terms. That may not mean wiping the country of Ukraine off Europe's map, but it does mean an end to Ukrainian sovereignty—and as firm a Russian grip on Ukraine as there now is on Belarus, where Putin was proud to see the democratic revolution of 2020–21 crushed with brutal efficiency.

To understand what comes next, we have to consider carefully that word, "peaceful," which Putin pronounced repeatedly even as he was announcing his plans for war in the now-infamous speech of February 24. Thinkers since Plato and St. Augustine have understood peace as but a fleeting dream, a pause between inevitable returns to a state of war, because conflict is intrinsic to the human condition. In the study of international relations this worldview is known as realism. It has a dark side, but during the Cold War it was realists who crafted the strategy known as mutually assured destruction. That strategy effectively kept the superpowers from annihilating each other and taking the world with them. This, in turn, made the post–Cold War order possible—Francis Fukuyama's "end of history," when the triumph of liberal democracy was supposed to foreclose future serious threats to peace. This vision of peace was itself an apocalypse—if we think not of the vivid battle scenes of the Book of Revelation, but instead of the kingdom of perpetual peace meant to follow the Last Judgment, bringing the Bible to a close.

From today's standpoint, this kind of thinking seems little more than an artifact of a bygone era. Angela Merkel famously implied in 2014 that Putin had parted ways with reason—a sentiment echoed by many heads of state in recent months, as the invasion of Ukraine came to seem more and more likely. But in fact, Putin is both a realist and a self-styled bringer of apocalypse. For Putin, the European security architecture long and proudly touted by the West itself marked Russia's apocalyptic defeat. Putin glorifies the Soviet Union's World War II victories and remains ashamed of the USSR's quiet implosion. Since coming to power, he has pursued a fairly consistent strategy of reasserting and rebuilding Russian strength in Chechnya and Georgia, and, via allied strongmen, in Belarus, Kazakhstan, and elsewhere across the post-Soviet space. This is what former U.S. ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul has called Putin's "hot peace."

After Putin's puppet Viktor Yanukovych fled the Ukrainian presidency

CNS PHOTO/VIACHESLAV RATYNSKYI, REUTERS

as a consequence of the Euromaidan revolution of 2013–14, Ukraine became destined in Putin's mind to be his last stand—his Har Megiddo, the Holy Land hilltop where good would fight its final battle with evil. Not for nothing did the mayor of Mariupol refer on March 10 to his now-destroyed city, where Russia had just airbombed a maternity ward, as "Armageddon."

Putin has found support for the affirmative pursuit of apocalypse in the Russian Orthodox Church, whose patriarch Kirill immediately came out in support of the invasion, and in a coterie of home-grown fascist thinkers. The most famous of these, Alexander Dugin, became the architect of Putin's campaign to boost the global fascist far-right. Dugin pushes the Kremlin toward understanding apocalypse not just as Russia's righteous triumph over Western liberal overreach, but as a literal end of time. He regularly invokes medieval prophets of the end-times, and these neo-medieval visions have undoubtedly had an impact on the Russian president. They color, for example, Putin's understanding of World War II, genocide, and the Holocaust—helping to explain the unexplainable, including how Putin can claim a project of "de-Nazifying" a country led by the grandson of a Holocaust survivor, Volodymyr Zelensky. And how his forces can bomb one of Europe's most significant Holocaust memorials, at the Babyn Yar site outside Kyiv, where almost 34,000 Jews were massacred over two days in 1941. Putin's message is quintessentially anti-Semitic: that Jews were in league with Nazis, and that the real victims were Russian. Anyone offering a different story—including the entire political leadership of sovereign Ukraine—needs to be "de-Nazified."

People in in Zhytomyr, Ukraine, practice throwing Molotov cocktails to defend the city as Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues, March 1, 2022.

To put it bluntly: Does Putin want to kill us all? Not necessarily. As Stanford scholar Alison McQueen tells us, "Apocalypticism can just as easily prompt political withdrawal and resignation." One needn't be crazy to be an apocalyptic thinker. Nuclear saber-rattling in Moscow and Russian war crimes in Kherson have a tactical significance, on the off-chance that the West might back down and let Putin have his way as a result.

Given the impressive unity the West has shown, with military provisions as with sanctions, this seems unlikely. But the longer the conflict continues, the more frail that unity will become. Beijing will make its own moves, and energy prices across Europe will explode to levels untenable at a time when the European Union has just taken on a post-COVID recovery plan eight times the cost of the Marshall Plan.

Getting the world out of this crisis *before* that unity falters starts with the need to take Putin's apocalypticism seriously, and to understand that it does not preclude serious calculations about power and strategy. Putin will not be satisfied as long as an independent, sovereign Ukraine exists to Russia's southwest, unless cracks start appearing elsewhere in his apocalyptic arsenal—say, the stability of a loyal Belarus, or in Central Asia. These are important strategic points where the West still has room to crank up the pressure. To be clear: it is difficult to imagine this ending as long as Putin remains in power, and nuclear apocalypse remains very much on the table. But before anything else happens, Putin needs to be called out as an apocalyptic figure in a voice that the Russian people at large can hear—via the Telegram app, shortwave radio, as well as the important homegrown tradition of underground samizdat printing. Whether Putin is alive or dead, the Russians alone can provide a way out of his apocalypse.

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The value of 'whataboutism'

Andrew Bacevich

Remember Afghanistan? Prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Afghanistan—or more specifically, the aftermath of America's failed twenty-year-long war there—was attracting intense scrutiny, both in the United States and elsewhere.

And rightly so. The victorious Taliban were reimposing their ultraconservative version of Islam, with women in particular subjected to its draconian restrictions. The Afghan economy was in shambles. Banks had closed. Food and medicine were in short supply. Afghans who had supported U.S. and coalition forces struggled desperately to flee.

To all of this, the media bore righteous witness. Implicit in the news reports coming out of Kabul and other parts of the country was an insistence that the United States could not simply walk away from Afghanistan—could not absolve itself of responsibility for what was occurring there following the final, humiliating departure of U.S. troops. Then came Vladimir Putin's reckless decision to undertake a war of choice in Ukraine. With that, Afghanistan disappeared from the headlines, its travails ignored or reclassified as possessing negligible salience.

We confront here one of the underappreciated paradoxes of the so-called Information Age. On the one hand, the typical laptop or cell phone provides almost instant access to a seemingly infinite universe of knowledge and commentary. On the other hand, at any particular moment, media gatekeepers choose to highlight a small handful of topics with everything else consigned to the margins. The "CNN effect," as it used to be called, has returned with a vengeance.

Typically, topics receiving attention are those that have occurred within the previous twenty-four hours. Meanwhile, those that occurred in the prior twenty-four days or twenty-four weeks—forget about months—are ignored or simply forgotten. The boundless availability of information thereby impedes actual understanding. It kills perspective.

As I write, the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022, having begun just over two weeks ago, continues to wreak havoc, with great quantities of blood spilled and no resolution anywhere in sight. We must hope that behind closed doors diplomats are identifying some "off-ramp" approach that will end the violence.

In the meantime, the bulletins out of Ukraine—however partial, skewed, and laced with propaganda—provide at least some sense of what is going on in the war zone. Anyone with access to the internet can literally spend their entire day—every day—keeping up with those bulletins, which contain innumerable truths, half-truths, and untruths.

In the aggregate, however, they offer this crucial reminder: among human endeavors, war is uniquely complex.

A woman pushes a cart with her belongings past buildings damaged in the separatist-controlled town of Volnovakha, Ukraine, March 15, 2022.

CNS PHOTO/ALEXANDER ERMOCHENKO, REUTERS

It resists mastery. As specific circumstances vary, so too does war's very nature. There exists no fixed, identifiable formula—theory, doctrine, arsenal, approach to leadership—that guarantees victory. As Clausewitz wrote some two centuries ago, war is a chameleon.

Russia was supposed to defeat Ukraine easily. After all, in recent years, Putin and his generals had expended exorbitant sums of money in reforming and modernizing Russian forces. That they would quickly overcome any Ukrainian resistance was a given. All the experts said so.

Not for the first time, events have proved the experts wrong. Put to the test, the Russian army has proven to be astonishingly inept. Sadly, Ukrainian noncombatants must now pay the price for that ineptitude as Russian forces give up even the pretense of using force in a controlled and purposeful way, choosing instead to rely on indiscriminate violence. That this reliance on unchecked brutality will enable them eventually to prevail is not only possible but perhaps even likely if the fighting continues long enough. In the meantime, in numbers far greater than those Putin and his generals once expected, thousands more Russian mothers will mourn their fallen sons.

In all of this, I submit, there is an important lesson for the United States. Learning that lesson requires connecting Russian folly in Ukraine with our own folly in Afghanistan. We too counted on our own mastery of modern war to make quick work of our adversaries and to deliver cheap and decisive victory, not only in Afghanistan but also in Iraq. Instead, in both instances, U.S. forces got a years-long dose of what Russia forces are experiencing now—and what the Russians themselves had experienced during their own Afghanistan War of the 1980s. Assuredly, the specifics differ, but the overarching similarities are impossible to miss.

The recently emerging enthusiasm in some quarters for getting tough on Russia—for example, by enacting a no-fly zone in Ukrainian airspace—suggests that more than a few Americans have learned nothing from our own recent, costly, and largely unsuccessful military endeavors. Their eagerness to try again, as evident in the ever-growing size of the Pentagon budget, is palpable. It is also disturbing. As in Putin's Kremlin, here in the United States the willingness to send someone else's son or daughter to put their lives on the line remains alive and well.

Russia's actions in Ukraine deserve unanimous condemnation. For Americans, perhaps too quickly given to self-forgiveness, condemnation alone will not suffice. Instead of using the Russo-Ukraine War as an excuse for shoving our own Afghanistan War down the memory hole, something more akin to repentance and reparation should be in order.

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‘No Schools, No Churches!’

Shannen Dee Williams

Black sisters and the fight for Black Catholic education

On Monday, April 5, 1971, representatives of Baltimore’s Black Catholic Lay Caucus traveled to the motherhouse of the Oblate Sisters of Providence (OSP) for an urgent meeting with Mother Mary of Good Counsel Baptiste. Distraught over the threatened closing of scores of Black Catholic schools across the nation, the caucus’s members aimed to develop a long-term solution with the sixty-four-year-old superior. They also sought to warn Baptiste of a duplicitous local campaign then underway. “Some priests have initiated long range plans to close black schools staffed by the Order,” the delegates charged. “In order to shift attention from their plans and motives they will attack and deliberately antagonize the Sisters in hope that the Order will withdraw. They will then place the blame for the school closings on the sisters.” The caucus warned that the assault would only “escalate and intensify,” and stressed the need for “strong black leadership” and unity among Black Catholics. They also called for rejection of the survival tactics many Black Catholics had long employed to remain in their Church. “The traditional Negro Catholic responses that ‘white is right’ must be replaced with an objective and analytical assessment of the role we, as blacks, have played in the perpetuation of the oppression of our people,” the delegates asserted. Although the representatives acknowledged the unique pressures that Black sisters faced from both “black and white Catholics” to “defend [either] the Church or their people,” they cautioned Baptiste against timidity. “We will hang together or we will hang separately,” the delegates warned.

The 1971 Black Catholic delegation to Vatican City

In the early 1970s, no issue was of greater concern to the African American Catholic community than the survival of the Black Catholic educational system. Before 1965, Church- and state-mandated school integration had closed or merged (with other schools) several long-standing southern Black Catholic schools, many of which were led by the Black sisterhoods. Although members of the Black laity and sisters often protested these closures, the lack of a national Black Catholic apparatus left impacted communities with few options. However, the crisis of the late 1960s threatened the Black Catholic educational system with extinction. Between 1968 and 1969 alone, 637 U.S. Catholic schools closed, with schools in inner cities whose student bodies had transformed from white to predominantly Black or all Black following the Great Migrations and white Catholic withdrawal hit especially hard. Because Catholic schools had historically been the primary vehicles for evangelization in Black communities, many observers viewed archdiocesan and diocesan decisions to close Black Catholic schools (almost always without consulting Black faculty or parents) as proof of a concerted Church effort to abandon African American communities. Some even understood it to be part of massive white Catholic resistance to the civil-rights movement and increasing demands for racial justice within the Church. As such, the nation's Black priests, sisters, and lay Catholics organized on local and national levels and fought back.

In a daring 1971 move, the leaders of the newly formed national Black Catholic religious and lay organizations, including Sr. M. Martin de Porres Grey, president of the National Black Sisters' Conference (NBSC), traveled to Vatican City to present their grievances to Pope Paul VI. During their meeting with Vatican secretary of state Giovanni Bennelli, second in power only to the pope, the delegates argued that the Catholic Church was "dying" in the Black community, citing enduring racism in the Church, the interconnected crises of Black vocation losses and Black Catholic school closings, and the pressing need for Black leadership. However, the meeting did not produce tangible results. Bennelli remained skeptical of the delegation's complaints, noting they were "in conflict with the reports from white American bishops." As a result, the Italian prelate advised the group to take a "slow and measured" approach to addressing their grievances. In interviews given upon her return to the United States, however, Grey demurred. "The reality of the black Catholic situation in America is and has been one of separatism created by the domin[ant] culture of the American Catholic Church," she declared. In addition to noting that Black Catholics had already demonstrated heroic patience with white Catholic racism, the NBSC president argued that the present crises demanded immediate action. "Within five years, most parochial schools in Black communities will be non-existent," Grey declared, adding, "It does not have to happen."

Like all sister leaders in 1971, the heads of the African American sisterhoods and the NBSC were knee-deep in an institutional crisis that few had predicted. After decades of steady exponential growth, the U.S. Church was in distress. In the previous five years, thousands of religious men and women had departed their congregations. Among sisters, the

COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL BLACK SISTERS' CONFERENCE

figures were especially stark. In 1966, the national sister population had reached an all-time high of 181,421. By 1971, that number had plummeted to fewer than 147,000, not including deaths. Equally distressing was the state of the U.S. Catholic educational system. Between 1965 and 1971, over 1,500 Catholic elementary and secondary schools closed, and thousands more were threatened with extinction. Northern cities already experiencing massive white Catholic suburbanization, such as Milwaukee, Saint Paul, Chicago, Detroit, and Denver, recorded enormous one-year drops in Catholic school enrollment and closed scores of parochial schools, including some of the region's oldest. Thus, as the 1970s began, most sister leaders, especially those whose congregations staffed Catholic schools, were faced with two herculean tasks: reversing the decline in their memberships and keeping their order's institutions viable.

For the nation's Black sisters, however, these crises were substantially more acute. Not only was the rate of African American departures from religious life double that of white departures, but Catholic schools in predominantly Black inner-city communities were more likely to face closure or merger than their white suburban counterparts. Most Black faithful had welcomed desegregation on principle. However, both Catholic and secular school desegregation had resulted in the closure of long-standing Black schools and the token integration of some Black students and a handful of Black teachers into previously all-white institutions. In many cases, Black parents voluntarily withdrew their children from Black Catholic schools to support government- and Church-mandated desegregation. However, thousands across the country, especially those skeptical of white-directed integration and wary of violent massive resistance to desegregation—remained committed to the survival of Black Catholic education, especially institutions led by Black nuns. In fact, many Black Catholic leaders of the 1970s viewed the dismantling of the Black Catholic educational system as part and parcel of the larger white Catholic backlash to the civil-rights gains of the 1950s and 1960s—something Black Catholic activists felt had to be contested and stopped.

Without Black Catholic religious and schools, many Black faithful reasoned that the Church would lose all credibility and cease to function effectively, if at all, in the African American community. Because Black Catholic schools had also played leading roles in the education of thousands of non-Catholic Black professionals, segments of the wider African American community also took notice and threw their support behind Black Catholic leaders struggling to preserve African American access to Catholic education. During the 1970s, Black sisters and their supporters employed a host of tactics, from strategic accommodation to direct-action protest, to keep surviving Black Catholic schools open. However, their efforts would be met with formidable resistance from forces bent on maintaining the racial status quo and evading the Church's moral responsibilities for equality and justice.

In 1965, the U.S. Catholic Church operated the largest private school system in the world. As early as the 1950s, though, a small contingent of Church officials questioned the wisdom of having expanded it so rapidly. Citing the common overcrowding of Catholic classrooms and the strain placed on teaching sisterhoods, a few clerics even argued that parish schools should begin limiting rather than increasing their enrollments. Otherwise, the quality of Catholic education would suffer. In 1956, Msgr. William McManus, the assistant director of the National Catholic Welfare Conference's Department of Education, surveyed twenty-eight archdiocesan and diocesan school systems and found them all strained beyond capacity, turning away hundreds of students annually. For McManus and others, the Church's goal to have every Catholic child in a Catholic school was simply unrealistic. Even with peak enrollments in 1965, the system educated only 47 percent of the Church's children.

Between 1965 and 1970, though, enrollments in U.S. Catholic primary and secondary schools dropped by over 21 percent, from 5.6 million to 4.4 million, and the number of schools declined from 13,1396 to 11,352. While demand for Catholic education remained relatively high, especially among African Americans and white Catholic suburbanites, declining numbers of sisters translated into higher tuition rates, since schools had to hire lay teachers to supplement depleted teaching staff. Unable and in many cases unwilling to pay the higher costs, thousands of middle- and working-class parents moved their children to public schools. This, combined with the steady white Catholic flight to suburban areas, where the parochial school system was much less developed, caused Catholic school enrollments to plummet. Between 1965 and 1968, elementary school enrollment alone dropped from 4.5 million to 3.9 million students. In response, archdioceses and dioceses across the country began closing hundreds of schools. No area of the country was exempt, but Catholic schools in inner-city and predominantly Black communities were hit especially hard.

New state laws banning federal aid to private education, on which many white Catholic schools depended, also drove the crisis. However, these factors alone do not adequately explain what happened with Black Catholic education. While white Catholic school enrollments plummeted between 1965 and 1970, African American enrollments increased. In 1965, for example, approximately 99,245 Black youths were enrolled in over 349 Catholic elementary and secondary schools. By 1970, Black enrollments reached an all-time high of 112,987, despite the increasing precarity of Black Catholic schools. Over the next five years, Black Catholic school enrollments would drop to 107,313, largely because of school closures and mergers, not declining Black support for Catholic education. A 1970 study by the National Office for Black Catholics highlighted that support, revealing that African American parents, regardless of class background, consistently paid higher Catholic tuition rates than white Americans of the same class, an average annual tuition of $400 per child, while their white

counterparts paid $160. The study also found that African American parents often paid more for one child's education than whites paid for five children, underscoring both how highly African Americans valued Catholic education and how unequal the Catholic school system was.

African American parents repeatedly demonstrated their dedication to Catholic education. That fact, and the insufficiency of other arguments to explain the crisis, suggest that it had an additional root: white Church leaders' long-standing, overtly racist opposition to substantial investment in Black Catholic education and evangelization.

While Black Catholic priests and sisters achieved a host of monumental firsts during the civil-rights era, meaningful integration and racial justice proved elusive. Archdiocesan and diocesan plans (generally devised by white clerical and lay leaders) to integrate the Church's institutions, particularly its schools, almost always demanded closing Black schools and resulted in the token entry of a handful of Black youth into previously all-white Catholic schools with nonintegrated faculties. Moreover, across the nation, white Catholics mounted powerful campaigns against racial integration with the direct and indirect support of many Church leaders, prompting many Black Catholics to question publicly the sincerity of white Catholic commitment to racial justice. During a "confrontation group" at the 1969 meeting of the National Black Sisters' Conference in Dayton, Ohio, for example, participants pointed out that twenty-seven white priests from the city had written a paper "opposing desegregation of the school in the south." Others noted that while members of the Episcopal hierarchy, other Protestant leaders, and some Catholic sisters and priests participated in the Selma protests of 1965, "the Roman Catholic Church in the form of its hierarchy neglected to commit itself during the freedom marches." Such clear examples of individual and institutional fidelity to racial segregation in the Church were searing. So, too, was the pernicious resentment that some white sisters increasingly directed at Black sister-educators who began amplifying long-standing African American complaints about the detrimental impact of white sisters' educational ministries in Black communities.

At the first meeting of the NBSC in Pittsburgh, the sisters' small group discussions drew specific attention to the cultural incompetence and general unfitness of many white sisters teaching in Black schools. These discussions also emphasized the need for all sister educators of Black children to be able to instill Black pride in their pupils. Speaking to a national group of white sisters ministering in the African American community at a Department of Educational Service conference in Chicago in 1969, a NBSC member explained how white-administered Catholic education often propagated white supremacy and enforced racial self-hatred in Black children. "You've done our children too much harm already with your stories of white angels and a white God," the sister declared. "And the devil's black isn't he, in the stories you've crammed down our children's throats?… I've heard you in and out of the convents, reassuring one another. 'The black children love the white nuns more than they do the black nuns.'… Because you've taught our children to love white and to hate black.… You've taught our children to love you and to hate themselves." Speaking at the same meeting, School Sister of St. Francis Daniel Marie Myles testified about her gut-wrenching experiences of racism while desegregating her order, which was perceived to be a champion of racial equality. Myles also documented how the white members of her order who taught Black children with her in Chicago condemned her membership in the NBSC and continued to exclude her in explicitly hateful ways. "We're rejected, resented and hated, and we [Black nuns] know it," Myles stated. While a few white sisters in attendance acknowledged their moral and educational failures in the Black community, one white nun told an observer, "Do you really think those black people in the ghetto could get along for one month or one week without our committed white sisters?" The persistence of such paternalistic and racist attitudes among white sisters ministering in Black communities left many Black Catholics wondering if staying in the Church was worth the cost. While many Black Catholics opted to leave, others vowed to stay and fight. This was especially true of those who believed that preserving and transforming Black Catholic educational institutions was the key to dismantling white supremacy.

In the late 1960s, public protests against the mass closings and mergers of Catholic schools in inner-city and predominantly Black communities erupted across the nation. From New Orleans to Chicago, Charleston to New York, and Cincinnati to Detroit, African American Catholics demanded that Catholic schools not only remain open and accessible but also become true sites of Black educational liberation. Activists accused white ecclesiastical authorities, priests, sisters, and school boards of deliberately abandoning their professed commitments to Black Catholic education and giving in to massive white (Catholic) resistance to civil rights and demands for racial equality. While many Black (and some white) observers charged that the closures and mergers resulted from anti-Black racism, ecclesiastical and school board officials (overwhelmingly white and male) dismissed such claims. They cited instead the declining number of teaching sisters, increased operating costs, and the large presence of Black Protestants in formerly white Catholic urban neighborhoods as the chief catalysts, especially in the inner city. However, ever-increasing African American Catholic school enrollments and the demonstrated willingness of African American parents to pay substantially higher tuition rates than their white and suburban counterparts belied claims that Black schools were no longer viable investments. Simultaneously, white Church leaders directed substantial resources to building a new educational system to accommodate white Catholic suburbanization, itself in part an effort to circumvent racial integration.

From the perspective of Black Catholic leaders, the decision to close inner-city and predominantly Black Catholic schools while steadily investing in suburban schools for richer

white Catholic families was tantamount to racial genocide. Black Catholic leaders took drastic measures to direct national and secular attention to the crisis. In Detroit, protesters led by NBSC member Sr. M. Shawn Copeland and National Black Catholic Lay Caucus president Joseph Dulin responded to the archdiocese's 1970 proposal to close 75 percent of its schools, including its only Black Catholic high school, St. Martin de Porres, by seizing the all-Black Visitation Catholic Church on the Sunday after Thanksgiving. Adopting the tactics of the civil-rights movement, the group sat in and blocked the church's entrance. "No schools, no churches!" the group proclaimed to reporters and the parishioners prevented from attending Visitation's three Sunday morning Masses. Because St. Martin de Porres High School had been established to correct the widespread exclusion of Black youth from most white Catholic schools in the archdiocese, protesters feared its closure would lead to "a systematic phasing out of Catholic education in the inner city."

Such dramatic actions in Detroit brought Cardinal John Dearden to the table with three hundred Black Catholic leaders and parents in early December 1970. However, the meeting only exacerbated the tensions between the protesters and the white-led archdiocese. The group charged Dearden with addressing them in a cold, dismissive manner and giving evasive answers to their questions and demands. The archdiocese maintained its decision was driven by the new state law banning public aid to private schools and pointed out that it "took up a special collection [that] year to aid 21 financially troubled inner city schools," which were three-fourths Black. The protesters argued that Church leaders who had unapologetically upheld segregation and exclusion could find the will to support Black Catholics in their "number one priority in the inner city...EDUCATION." "Blacks have demonstrated, picketed, protested, prayed, cried, and believed in the White racist Church in an unfruitful effort to become full human beings and total members of the Church," local Black sisters and lay leaders said in a statement. "This in itself is a failure on the part of the Church." Across the country, Black Catholics kept the pressure up.

Since their institutions were usually the first targeted for closure by white-led archdiocesan and diocesan councils in the early years of desegregation, the leaders of Black teaching sisterhoods had been the earliest to recognize and confront the crisis. As the progenitors of Black Catholic education, these orders had built an impressive and mostly accredited network of seventy-five elementary and secondary schools across the United States during Jim Crow. However, between 1954 and 1965 alone, five schools administered by the Oblate Sisters of Providence (OSP), including their St. Rita Academy in St. Louis, Missouri, and seven schools administered by the Sisters of the Holy Family (SSF) closed or merged. While the SSF opened three new educational ministries during that period, two of them in Los Angeles, in 1966 four SSF schools closed, and one in Klotzville, Louisiana, merged with another Black Catholic school, St. Augustine, in 1967.

Because Black nun principals were among the earliest to decry racism in archdiocesan and diocesan decisions to close or merge Black Catholic schools, they were also among the first to experience the white clerical backlash to Black demands for the survival of Black Catholic education. White priests began pressuring Black leadership councils to remove "militant" Black sisters from leadership positions in Catholic schools. Most often, the sisters targeted were NBSC members who emphasized Black pride among their students, joined local protests, and revised their curricula to incorporate and champion Black studies. In 1969, Fr. André Bouchard, the white rector at Saints Paul and Augustine Catholic Church in Washington D.C., penned a letter scolding OSP leader Mother Mary of Good Counsel Baptiste for assigning Sr. Majella Neal as the school's principal. Bouchard described Neal, a NBSC foundress, as "a woman who has no concern for the community or a willingness to understand it." While he admitted he was to blame for "a misunderstanding" at the beginning of their relationship, he nonetheless advised Baptiste "to advise and council [sic] Sister Mejella [sic] so that the experience [at Saints Paul and Augustine would] be a fruitful one both for the school and for this community."

Black-administered Catholic schools like Saints Paul and Augustine were often attached to Black parishes led by white priests who held racially derogatory views of Black people and opposed Black leadership. Historically, Black superiors had counseled their members to find ways to work with paternalistic and hostile white priests to ensure the survival of their schools. However, by 1969, even the most cautious of Black superiors refused to let blatant disrespect for their members by offending white priests go unchallenged.

Baptiste, for example, took exception to Bouchard's characterization of Neal and her commitment to the Black community. She wrote, "You mention that Sister Mary Majella has no concern for the community or a willingness to understand it. It would be interesting to know the basis for this statement considering the fact that she has been there hardly a month.... There are several sides to every question, Father, and unless we are totally involved it is very difficult to sift the fact from personal opinion." Moreover, instead of heeding Bouchard's demand to get Neal in line, Baptiste suggested Bouchard "assist [the OSP] by a real spirit of communication and support."

Despite Baptiste's efforts to assuage tensions, Bouchard and his successor, Fr. Leonard Hurley, continued to harass Neal, forcing her to transfer or risk termination in 1970. Such was also the case for Sr. Marilyn Hopewell, who was forced to transfer from her teaching position at the historically Black Holy Comforter Catholic School in Washington D.C., after several run-ins with a white teacher (formerly a brother) during the same academic year. After Hopewell's removal and the forced transfers of all five OSP members assigned to Saints Paul and Augustine for the 1969–70 academic year, Black lay Catholics in D.C. protested what they called "the politics of genocide being performed on...the Oblate Sisters

by the white hierarchy of Washington, D.C." Black parents cited the "persistent, sinister pressure…constantly exerted on the black women of the Oblate Order to 'keep them in their place' and to 'whip them into line.'" They also championed the commitment of Neal and Hopewell to the Black community, noting that "those who come under the most merciless attack are the faithful, loyal women who have the courage and stamina to defend the rights and interests of black children."

One month after members of Baltimore's Black Catholic Lay Caucus met with the OSP superior to express their concerns over the mistreatment of Black sister principals by white priests, the group held a sit-in at the Josephite headquarters in the city. Since the Josephites' arrival in the United States, many white members had undermined the leadership of Black Catholic women—especially those whose influence could not be usurped by white religious—in the African American educational apostolate. By 1971, though, many in the Black Catholic community were steadily fighting back. In addition to calling for the Josephites to "make black priests and brothers more visible in black communities," the protesters demanded the order implement an antiracist and Black awareness training program for all Josephites through the National Office for Black Catholics, support programs for "the development of real Black leadership," and create a diaconate program "relevant to Black people." This protest, combined with internal struggles within the Josephites, led to an all-out revolt against white and Black faculty members regarded as "insensitive, irrelevant, white paternalists or as black Uncle Toms." While some Josephite faculty members were transferred, the failure of the order's leaders to adopt an antiracist praxis prompted most of its Black seminarians and some white seminarians to defect from the order. Four Black ordained Josephites also resigned during the 1970s, leaving a significant void of Black clerical leadership when the Black community needed it most.

Black lay Catholics also directed significant attention to the increasing retreat of white sisters from inner-city and predominantly Black schools, believing their decisions were racially motivated. While the experiences of Black youth in the increasingly Black inner-city Catholic schools of the North, Midwest, and West were never free of racism and paternalism, many upwardly mobile African American parents still preferred the Catholic system over the public one. This became even more true as select schools led by white sisters began to incorporate Black-studies curricula and some orders stopped barring Black women and girls. However, when in the late 1960s and 1970s many white orders began closing their inner-city and predominantly Black schools and diverting resources to their increasingly suburban schools and academies for white Catholic families, Black Catholic parents protested.

In 1970, for example, Black Catholic parents supported by Fr. Edward McKenna, a white assistant pastor at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church on Chicago's West Side, publicly charged the Religious Sisters of Mercy with racism after the order unexpectedly announced that it would soon close the parish's elementary school. While the Mercy leadership in Chicago initially denied the charge in letters to the editors of the city's newspapers, the evidence and the fight to keep St. Thomas Aquinas open over the next two years revealed that anti-Black racism was indeed the chief driving factor. In a letter to the editor of the *News Journal* in Chicago, Fr. Michael Rochford, a pastor at Resurrection parish, not only outlined that "the Sisters of Mercy have not been open to, or attracted black vocations" but also pointed out that the order had withdrawn "from neighborhoods when they turned black." Regarding St. Thomas Aquinas, Rochford noted that "some white schools announced as withdrawal schools have made a 'deal' to keep the Sisters." He also noted that at the white sisters' initial meeting with Black Catholic parents, they "admitted…that they could not get their Sisters to teach at black schools," and that this was "the real reason" behind the proposed closure. While there were notable cases of white sisters taking public stands against racism in white Catholic schools and unnecessary withdrawals from inner-city schools in the 1970s, white congregations by and large made minimal commitments to preserving Catholic schools in inner-city communities at a moment when Black parents regularly proved to be their most passionate champions. In one highly publicized exception from 1971, ten Immaculate Heart of Mary sisters assigned to the all-white St. Raymond School in Detroit resigned in protest after the white parish council admitted that they did not want the school to close chiefly because it might lead to a decline in local property values, forcing people to leave and letting "undesirables…move in."

Although Black congregations remained firmly committed to the survival of Black Catholic education, their institutions' financial vulnerability and their own legacy of strategic accommodation to white racism placed Black leadership councils in increasingly precarious positions. Faced with strident white opposition to Black self-determination and clerical pressure to clamp down on outspoken Black sisters, some Black superiors soon proved unwilling to support militant and creative struggles to preserve Black Catholic education. However, individual Black sisters kept up the pressure. Working within Black Catholic organizations and in alliance with white-led sister organizations opposed to white flight, Black sisters rallied to keep remaining inner-city and Black Catholic schools open by any means necessary. And as the 1970s continued to unfold, this increasingly meant advocating for community control.

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The Exquisitist

Paul J. Griffiths

Shirley Hazzard's stories show all that aesthetic sensibility can do—and all it can't.

Shirley Hazzard's writing has been for me a constant source of pleasure since I discovered it in 2003. That was late: by then she had been publishing for over forty years, and I regret not having had her literary companionship earlier. Since then, I've read, I think, everything she published—three novels, one novella, thirty or so short stories, a brief memoir, two books about the United Nations, a collection of essays in homage to the Italian city of Naples, some occasional writings—and have found her a precise and astringent purveyor of beauty and observer of the human condition.

Hazzard died in 2016 at eighty-five, with a minor but real literary reputation that has grown since then. Shortly after her death a volume of her uncollected essays, *We Need Silence to Find Out What We Think*, was published by Columbia University Press; and in 2020 her *Collected Stories* was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Her two principal novels, *The Transit of Venus* (1980) and *The Great Fire* (2003), have been continuously in print since they were published, and she has enthusiastic acolytes among some of today's better-known young writers. She was a *New Yorker* writer (most of her stories were published there, beginning in 1961), won awards for the two major novels, was interviewed by the *Paris Review* for their "Art of Fiction" series in 2005, and rated respectful obituaries, sometimes tending toward the enthusiastic, in all the major newspapers.

Shirley Hazzard, 2004

JUSTIN WILLIAMS/SHUTTERSTOCK

But she never captured the zeitgeist. She wouldn't have wanted to. Her own literary enthusiasms—the Italian poet, philologist, and encyclopedist Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837) first among them—weren't of her moment. She wrote, as far as I can tell, as all good writers do, principally to please herself and to show the world as she saw it. Her vision is cosmopolitan, precise, infused with poetry, sensitive to the beauty evident in squalor and decay as much as in well-wrought urns, and laced with desire and disappointment, which for her are inseparably intertwined. It is also a vision contemptuous of, and revolted by, what she sees as the unloveliness, crudity, and lack of depth in the mass-produced goods and lives of late modernity.

Hazzard is also a pagan writer. She may have been baptized—she writes that she grew up "a perfunctory Anglican"—and she certainly knew more than most about Christian tropes, images, understandings, and monuments. You can't write as she did about Renaissance art and romantic poetry without seeing a long way into Christianity. But she doesn't see the world as Christians do, as sin-damaged and grace-threaded, seeking and finding its repair outside its boundaries, requiring prostration and abnegation. Hazzard's longings are for the touch of the flesh, the rhythm of the sentence, the evening of the holiday, to use the title of one of Leopardi's poems (*La sera del dì di festa*), which she took as the title of her one novella—not for the holy day itself, but for its dwindling into dusk. And certainly not for God. Never that.

Reading her, then, is both a delight and a difficulty for a Catholic. Because of her literary virtues, her eye for the world and her ear for prose rhythm, she is instructive and arresting. But the sensibility through which her observation is filtered, and the world she makes and shows in her writing, are both soaked in nostalgia for the lost beauties of a pagan past and the inevitable insufficiencies of the passions of the present, ecstatic though they may occasionally be. Reading her often brings to my mind A. C. Swinburne, a poet not unlike Leopardi in tone: "Laurel is green for a season, and love is sweet for a day; / But love grows bitter with treason, and laurel outlives not May." Which is of course true, but not the whole truth. Leopardi's version of this attitude is to

address "ancient, omnipotent nature," and to say to her that she made him for suffering and denies him hope: "Your eyes should shine only when weeping" (*Non brillin gli occhi tuoi se non di pianto*), she says to him. This is the sensibility that mourns before monumental ruins and burnishes its sensitivity to beauty's particularities in order to show their transience; it is Shelley's vision of Ozymandias; it is, in short, romantic—or, better, Romantic. Hazzard belongs to it, and she shares with it a tendency toward contempt for the crudities of people and things whose pleasures are not nuanced and whose lives are unflavored by poetry. Christianity, a religion of proles and peasants with almost unremittingly bad taste, a kitsch-religion (this is praise), finds no significant place in such a world. For me, that is the principal difficulty of reading Hazzard. That I delight in her so much, and am so like her in taste, may be evidence that I am a bad Catholic.

Hazzard writes powerfully as a disappointed lover. I don't mean of people: she seems to have had a long and happy marriage to Francis Steegmuller, to whom many of the books she published during her lifetime are dedicated, including *The Great Fire*, which came out almost a decade after he died. The dedication of that book is accompanied by Louis Aragon's anguished lines "*Parce que j'ai voulu te redire Je t'aime / Et que ce mot fait mal quand il est dit sans toi*" (Because I wanted to tell you again that I love you / And these words are painful when said without you.) No, I mean a disappointed lover of an institution, an obscure object of desire called the United Nations. Hazzard worked there for a decade or so, the decade of her twenties, partly in Italy and partly in New York City, and she wrote about it extensively afterward.

One of her volumes of stories, *People in Glass Houses* (1967), shows people at work in what is clearly the UN, and the writing in that volume is the closest Hazzard ever got to satire. The UN of these stories is almost a character, an octopus-like strangler of aspiration, talent, energy, and hope. More directly, and very instructively, Hazzard wrote a number of essays about the UN, and two full-length books: *Defeat of an Ideal* (1973) and *Countenance of Truth* (1990). The books show a barely controlled fury at what Hazzard takes to be the unredeemable failure of the organization. The first deals largely with its founding and the derelictions of its first two secretaries-general, Trygve Lie and Dag Hammarskjöld. The second is mostly devoted to the scandal of the appointment of Kurt Waldheim, an unconfessed Nazi complicit in war crimes, as the UN's fourth secretary-general in 1972, and his holding of that office until 1981.

Hazzard identifies the point and purpose of the UN with clarity, and roots its coming to be not merely in the pragmatism of politicians and sovereign states but in the hopes of the world's peoples following the slaughters of World War II. In *Defeat of an Ideal*, she writes that "the peoples of the world have never fully renounced the expectation that deliberations in United Nations councils would render, as was implicit in the Organization's founding, something more than an airing of national intransigencies"—that is, the avoidance of war and the mitigation of other transnational disasters. In *Countenance of Truth* she writes, "The capital function for which the United Nations had been created—the prevention of hostilities around the world—had, from the time of Hammarskjöld's death, in September, 1961, lapsed as an active concept at the U.N., replaced by a claim that the organization's usefulness lay...in providing a forum for face-saving rhetoric in the wake of decisions taken elsewhere." "Elsewhere," of course, means the corridors of power in Washington and Moscow.

That "capital function" was never, in Hazzard's view, recovered, and became unrecoverable after Waldheim. In its founding, particularly because of the location of its headquarters in New York and its agreement to permit the FBI to vet proposed appointees during the McCarthy era, the UN was subservient to the United States. It later became, especially under Waldheim, subservient to the USSR. And throughout its first forty years, Hazzard shows, it was never more than a timid creature, subject to the theatrics and whims of its powerful members, "a place where governments might—without abating their transgressions—go to church." It failed in Vietnam, it failed in Biafra, it failed in Bangladesh: it did little other than fail. And the passion with which Hazzard tells the story of that failure—with rich and thorough documentation and apt quotations from Flaubert, Eliot, Auden, Dickens, Leopardi, Trollope, and others—shows how important to her the story was.

Why was it so important? Perhaps because of Hazzard's cosmopolitanism. She was born in Australia, dislocated by the war in her teens to Hong Kong, New Zealand, and London, moved as a young woman to Italy and then to the United States, and as an adult divided her time almost equally between Italy (Naples and the island of Capri) and New York, with occasional residence in France. She eventually became a U.S. citizen in 1970, but her comments in interviews and essays about the matter suggest that national identity was never, for her, more than a secondary good. She didn't like being called an Australian writer, or an American one. She writes often of her love for Italy, and especially for Naples, but that seems to have been a love not so much for a sovereign state as for a way of being in the world, and for a particular, layered past. She glories in the openness that cosmopolites have to languages and arts and cultures; and her passion for the ideals of the UN has at least an affinity with this. She would have liked, I think, a borderless world in which the world's beauties might be frictionlessly available to those who can appreciate them, and the UN might have been an ingredient in the birth of such a world. Her work there, mostly low-level (she was in her twenties, without the certification of a degree, and not yet a published writer), was the beginning of what might have been a love affair. But by the end of it she could see that her hoped-for lover could never give her what she'd wanted. Hence the passion, and the bitterness.

Not only would Driscoll have known no poetry; he'd have been proud of it. And people like that, in novels like Hazzard's, do the kind of monstrous things Driscoll is shown to do.

Hazzard, of course, is almost entirely correct about the UN, and is still worth reading on it, even though the events she analyzes are more than four decades in the past. Had she observed the series of UN-sponsored COP climate conferences, the twenty-sixth of which happened in Glasgow in November 2021, she would have amply confirmed her understanding of what the UN is and can do after the unredeemable compromises of its founding and early years. It is a toothless talk shop, subservient in all that matters to the interests of the sovereign states it is supposed to order and constrain, while they, in turn, are largely subservient to corporate interests. Here, at least, Catholic sensibilities and Hazzard's are at one, and she is a good instructor for us: the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity together require that there be transnational entities concerned with the common good that have real executive power. Hazzard saw this with clarity and wrote about it well. One of the ancillary pleasures of reading her on these matters is the liveliness of her comments on the stygian darkness of the style in which UN documents are written, and her sense, rare in those or any political circles, that the darkness matters—that it is a partial index of the failure of the institution.

Hazzard's work is threaded with quotations of poetry in several languages, and with frequent allusion. I'm able to identify only about half of her quotations without help, so I'm far from her ideal reader. She is, however, helpfully explicit about what she takes poetry to be and to do, and why it's important. In her early novel, *Bay of Noon* (1970), she writes of "the physical aspect of poetry that sends a shiver across the sight and skin." Perhaps she echoes here, even intentionally, A. E. Housman's 1933 description of what poetry does: "Experience has taught me, when I am shaving of a morning, to keep watch over my thoughts, because, if a line of poetry strays into my memory, my skin bristles so that the razor ceases to act." Those sensitive to poetry, formed by it and with a memory for it, are, for Hazzard, paradigmatic of those attuned to beauty. In her memoir, *Greene on Capri* (2000), her acquaintance with Graham Greene begins because, sitting in a café in the main square on the island of Capri, she overhears him reciting part of a poem by Robert Browning and is able to supply a line that he cannot recall. The line is "Or so very little longer" and the poem from which it comes is called "The Lost Mistress," which ends with the sadness but inevitability of parting: "I will hold your hand but as long as all may— / Or so very little longer." Hazzard would of course know that poem—its sentiments and its mood are hers—and it's little surprise that Greene did, too.

One way to recognize that a character in Hazzard's stories and novels interests her positively is by their precise and apposite use of lines from poems. Those shown to do this are the characters whose sensibilities are rightly attuned, and they're the ones Hazzard would like the reader to admire—and perhaps those she would herself have liked to have been, the instruments of her self-fashioning. By contrast, when a Hazzard character is insensitive to poetry, or, worse, condemns those who are moved by it, that is a sure sign of crassness, crudity, blindness to beauty, and, worst of all, absorption in the bland everydayness of late modernity. Those are Hazzard's villains.

In a memorable scene early in *The Great Fire*, Brigadier Barry Driscoll, an Australian in Japan just after the war's end, is presented as someone who reads only "real books rather than novels" and thinks opera a joke; he delights in being practical and getting things done. He is seen through the eyes of Aldred Leith, the novel's protagonist, a man of precise perception and poetic sensibility, to whom Driscoll seems repellent and dangerous, an apostle of ugliness. Driscoll delights in the buildings he's had put up, which to Leith's eye are without character and grotesquely maladapted to their setting. Shortly after they meet, Leith happens across Driscoll "shrieking into the face of the young Japanese who [was] his *maggiordomo*" about some minor offense against protocol. Driscoll is hysterical with rage, and he insults and threatens the Japanese man. Later Leith finds a body: the majordomo has committed suicide in the ritualized Japanese manner as his only honorable response to the dishonor he's been given. Not only would Driscoll have known no poetry; he'd have been proud of it. And people like that, in novels like Hazzard's, do the kind of monstrous things Driscoll is shown to do. They sow ugliness and destruction. In the same chapter, Leith is shown presenting a book of poetry to Driscoll's children. He will, later in the novel, come to love Driscoll's daughter, who at this stage is barely adolescent, and she him. That affair is the spine of the novel. (The love of a much older man for a young woman is an utterly standard theme in Hazzard's work, as it was in her life: Steegmuller was twenty-five years older than she.) An absence of poetry in Hazzard's characters always stunts, and sometimes even kills.

Such was her love for poetry that some of her prose is ekphrastically related to particular poems. That is, it describes or renders a particular poem in the medium of a short story, transfiguring the words and mood of one genre into those of another. The clearest example of this is her already-mentioned novella, *The Evening of the Holiday* (1966), with its epigraph from the Leopardi poem from which it also takes its title: "*Questo dì fu solenne: or da' trastulli / Prendi riposo*" ("This was a holy day: from its delights / Take your rest").

Leopardi's poem is saturated in romantic gloom. A man looks out over a still, moonlit night; he thinks of the woman he loves; he's sure that she doesn't know what a wound she's opened in his heart; he is, he thinks, condemned by nature to the tears of disappointed love; there is nothing left for him but to protest his fate and contemplate the inevitability of loss, as the glory of Rome herself is now lost (could any nineteenth-century Italian romantic avoid this thought?). Songs heard in the distance, passing on the road, gradually dying away into silence (how lovely in Italian: "*Lontanando morire a poco a poco*"), pierce the heart as does love.

The poem's central conceit, borrowed by Hazzard for her story, is that there has been a festal day—a holy day or holiday—on which love is, or seems, possible. But that day inevitably ends, and with it the love. The music dies: both the poem and the story end with that image. Holy days give way to work days, days for ordinary things, and those are days of routine, days without love. In Hazzard's story, a young half-English, half-Italian woman boards a train to finally leave her Italian lover behind, and as she does a military band strikes up on the train "until the train, gathering speed, made it impossible to play any longer." Those are the novella's last words, and they conclude a precisely observed and carefully understated story of love between a young woman visiting Italy and a considerably older man (that theme again). Hazzard's technique makes the story entirely convincing and entirely heart-rending. Both points of view are rendered, and she is able to show the progress of a day or of a moment's flirtation with very few words. The story's most intense moments, involving eros and its opposite, include the dropping and retrieval of a bracelet into the water of a fountain (a sleeve is rolled up), and the climbing of a ladder to look at the face of Mary on a decayed mural in a hay barn. And there are gorgeously aphoristic jewels: "At times she seemed to him (as women often did) like a piece of information he must acquire"; "He had had, like everyone else, an exceptionally unhappy childhood"; "Since his nostalgia for her was inevitable, he preferred to embark on it as soon as possible—even in her presence" (Proust would have approved).

Hazzard's story is better—truer, more beautiful—it seems to me, than Leopardi's poem, heretical as that will sound to his advocates. There is in the poem, as often in his work, a self-dramatizing self-pity. There is none of that in Hazzard herself, or in her characters. They are what they are, without dramatization; she shows what she shows without emphasis or overt lament. There is a love affair. Like all of them, it ends. The knowledge of that ending suffuses it, as always. It is enough to show that, virtuosically. Every love, like every marriage, ends with betrayal or withering or death. Hazzard sees this clearly. There is, short of the life of the world to come, no other possibility, and even there, Jesus says, marriages have no purchase. Catholics tend these days to romanticize sexual and married love in ways that the tradition calls into question, and close, careful reading of pagans who are attentive and clear-sighted about these matters can do us nothing but good.

Catholics, this Catholic anyway, can therefore celebrate and be instructed by some of what Hazzard does with poetry and poetical sensibility, and can admire the elegance and precision of her writing. There we find ourselves in a world of decay-laced beauty. Poetry is excellent as an instrument for sharpening our ability to see both the worm and the bud, and for showing both as they are. The doctrines of creation and the fall tell us that both the world and we are damaged, in need of repair, and incapable of seeing clearly either of those states of affairs; they also tell us that we are sometimes capable of making beautiful things. All this Hazzard sees and shows. But sometimes in her work—and perhaps this is her version of Leopardi's self-regard—poetic sensibility is used as a weapon, its presence signaling virtue, its absence vice. That cannot be endorsed. Virtue has other channels and other expressions than the finely tuned capacity to perceive and to make that she values so much. And that possibility doesn't interest her. She was, I think, mostly blind to it.

Hazzard's romanticism about literature is matched, perhaps exceeded, by her romanticism about place and time. These romanticisms are evident most clearly in her writing about Naples, found in both her fiction and her essays. For her, to live in Naples or on Capri was to live "among the scenes and sentiments of a humanism the New World could not provide"—and for Hazzard the New World is not only America but also Australia. There is a normative contrast here. Naples, because of its layered past, and because "the modern world of massed material power… has bypassed Naples for almost two hundred years now," has complexities and beauties unavailable in the modern world. There is sometimes in Hazzard a similar contrast between the past and the present: "The modern visitor to the past may yet embrace abroad what is déclassé at home—ripeness, grace, ceremony, repose, an acceptance of mortality." And space and time are brought together when, as often, Hazzard or her characters inveigh against the encroachment of the characterless new upon the layered and decayed beauties of the old: "New apartment blocks rise in thousands, ever higher on the Vesuvian cone, erected by developers who feel little need of appeasing San Gennaro [that is, the patron saint of Naples, who protects especially against eruptions of Vesuvius]…modern suburbs offend the sight."

All those quotations are from Hazzard's *The Ancient Shore: Dispatches from Naples* (2008), which collects some of her essays on that city, written over several decades. What the quotations say is, on the face of it, both harmful and confused. They show an unreflective contempt for the houses and possessions and modes of living of the proletariat—and perhaps of all the poor except for those whose poverty involves picturesque squalor. There is a remarkable moment in *The Evening of the Holiday* in which Hazzard's lovers visit a farmhouse owned by the man, in which his tenants, we might say his sharecroppers, live. Sophie, the woman, observes the

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picturesque poverty of the house, full of things "grooved and glossy with age," and then sees a "naked circle of fluorescent lighting" set into the ceiling and remarks that it is "the only truly new and truly sordid object in the room." This is a notation of contempt—leave the poor to themselves and what you'll get is sordid ugliness—and I shudder at it. Can Hazzard's love for Naples, and her indisputable capacity to show it to us, be separated from this nostalgia, this consigning of modernity and its proles to a wasteland?

Perhaps it can, but it's difficult. Hazzard is obviously right that the architectural, monumental, artistic, and literary past of Naples is more layered and complex than that of, say, South Bend, Indiana, or Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. She is right, too, that some people have cultivated refined sensibilities attuned to the intricacies of that past, and other pasts like it, and that it is such people (Leopardi, Keats, Flaubert) who can see what she sees and write as she writes. Acknowledging this fact implies no contempt. It need not be accompanied by the strong normative judgments—this is better than that; those who like that sort of thing are less good, less developed, less human, perhaps, than those who like this sort of thing (for example, that circle of fluorescent light)—that sometimes do accompany it in Hazzard. She could say that Naples is Naples, and show it to us with all the resources at her disposal, without also saying that it's a better place than Alice Springs. She could show us the estate at Recanati, Leopardi's home, as she lyrically does in her introduction to Iris Origo's biography of him, without implicitly—and all too often *explicitly*—contrasting it and its like with the featureless blandness of the modern. But to do that would be to say only that Naples is Naples and Alice Springs is Alice Springs, and I rather think that Hazzard wants more.

No Catholic can easily accept the more that she wants. We affirm beauty, of course; it is one of the transcendentals, convertible with goodness and love; it is what God is. But our hierarchies are not of sensitivity and elegance; they are of holiness. And there is little overlap, perhaps none of significance, between the hierarchical order of Hazzard's loves and those of Catholics. Our saints are crude, crazy, unsubtle; they'd prefer the ugly circle of fluorescent light to the aesthete's grooved glossinesses; and they'd have little time for Hazzard's burnishings of aesthetic sensibility. We cannot accept the elevation of what Leopardi or Hazzard or even Dante write over the crass martyrdom stories of the early Church or breathless accounts of healings at Lourdes.

Perhaps. Perhaps not, though. There is something that makes me uneasy about what I've just written, and in my response to Hazzard's gorgeous body of work. I'm moved by reading Hazzard in a way that little in the long Catholic tradition moves me. I resonate as she does, and in considerable part to the same kinds of literature to which she does. Should I simply feel convicted by that, as St. Jerome felt by his love of pagan literature? Perhaps there's a middle way here. Perhaps I can love Hazzard's capacity to see clearly and write precisely about what it is like to live and love as a human creature in a world such as this, while also lamenting the characteristic deformity of that capacity: a contempt for those who lack it. Perhaps it is possible, though difficult, to have the capacity without the contempt. If so, then I can love what is good in Hazzard's work without being derailed by what it lacks. I can remember, too, that someone of Hazzard's wit and learning is much more likely to be right about nearly everything than I am, and that should call into question a too-rapid critique of her work.

The point of the criticism remains a serious one, however, and the screw can be tightened. Hazzard takes the ability to make exquisitely beautiful things, and to contemplate the beautiful things others have made, to have ethical import. She thinks that those who can do such things tend to behave with compassion and sensitivity, to have and to show love, and that those who cannot tend to behave with self-centered blindness to what is around them, and to act violently. But self-fashioning that cultivates exquisite aesthetic sensibility has in fact no such power. The roots of violence and vice in us—even the Leopardis and Hazzards among us—strike too deep for that. To think otherwise is, to borrow a phrase of John Henry Newman's, to think it possible to quarry granite rock with razors. It can't be done. The task is beyond the competence of the tool. Sensitivity to the exquisite can, at most, permit those who have it to see and make fine distinctions, to be aware of subtle shades of motive and sensation, to resonate to art's delicacies of tone and rhythm. No bad thing, I suppose. But such skills have almost no purchase upon the gnarled and chthonic roots of violence struck deep in each of us. For those, other tools are needed, tools as blunt and forceful as what they attack.

It is a mark of good literature (a very Hazzardian locution) that it unsettles those who read it. Hazzard does that for me. She might do it for you, too, whether for the reasons I've identified in my case, or for others. If you've not read her before, I recommend that you start with *The Evening of the Holiday*. Move from there to the short story "Vittorio," and then to the novel *The Great Fire*. Should you get that far, you'll have become a devotee.

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Wachapreague

Rand Richards Cooper

Part II

The room next to Langen's had been his brother-in-law's man-cave. Langen had helped Liddie clean it out, leaving only books, framed nature photos Jason had taken over the years, and his worktable for making fishing lures—a colorful fly in mid-construction, left the day he died. One afternoon Langen found his sister immersed in Jason's leather-bound journal. "You know what he was doing?" she said. "Tracking wacko conspiracy theories. Remember Pizzagate? Jason was all over that one."

Langen had always regarded his brother-in-law as an enigma. A college dropout, he had amassed expertise in subjects from Norse mythology to birding to the history of computers. His politics were muckraking and lefty, and after 2020, Liddie said, he had started doing battle with internet trolls. "I was like, Jason, what if one of these wackos shows up here? He'd say, 'Let them try to fuck with a U.S. Marine.'"

Her husband had never ceased to amaze her, Liddie said. "Remember the painting trip I took to Glacier National Park? There was a lake, and the water was this amazing turquoise. I showed Jason my photos. 'Yeah,' he said. 'That's the glacial flour.' He went on and on about how glaciers grind up the earth, and the silt gets into the water and filters out different light wavelengths." She closed the journal. "He knew so much beautiful, useless stuff."

Jason had started out as a photojournalist, but gradually his work had waned, and the stay-at-home aspect of his existence had swollen. Langen had to smile, thinking about it. "He'd be in his element now," he said.

"I know, right?" Liddie said. "During Covid I told him, Jason, you are the only person in America who actually *likes* this."

Langen had often felt baffled by the longevity of his sister's marriage, given Jason's depression, his surly misanthropy, and his refusal to earn a living. The two had had their share of arguments—Langen would receive a furious email or weepy phone call from his sister—but in the end, her marriage had endured, even as his foundered. He and Miranda had divorced without drama. No betrayal or wrath, no explosion: it was as if a long-running TV show was ending, one they both had basically enjoyed, but that had gone on a season or two too long. *The friendliest divorce in history*, a friend had remarked. Langen hadn't known whether to feel relief or chagrin.

He was a bachelor now, with a romantic life of sorts. While he was no movie star, the bar for men was low; plenty of forty-year-old women crossed his path, and occasionally he availed himself. His wife had eventually remarried, but he remained single. Only once had he considered changing that. It centered on a college girlfriend, Casey, with whom he'd maintained sporadic contact over the years. With both of them divorced, he got in touch. A flurry of emails led to an invitation, and he spent a week at her house in Boulder. The visit hadn't been a success. What he recalled about Casey from Harvard was her ready enthusiasm for all things—sports, beer, sex. In the years since, her exuberance had acquired a focus. Along with being an outdoorswoman (snowshoeing, rock climbing), she was a vegan and an environmental activist. Langen marveled at her brashness. One afternoon they hiked up to a roadside lookout above Boulder. Two guys at the spot had left their car idling in the small parking lot, and Casey admonished them to turn their engine off.

"If that were Connecticut, they would have told you to go to hell," Langen had observed after the two complied.

Casey grinned. "That's why I live in Colorado."

Langen noted how assiduously Casey made the personal political: amassing carbon credits

to justify her rare airline flight; volunteering at a produce drop in a Denver food desert; joining Twitter storms against developers. Her manner had acquired a zealous, teacherly aspect he didn't recall from their college years. Langen stood bewildered before her fridge, crammed with carob, tofu, and agave, and sat dutifully as Casey poured additive-free organic wine and discoursed on zero-energy convection air conditioners. After sex, she subjected him to a relaxation procedure that involved touching strategic pressure points on his neck. *You're all tensed up*, she said, cheerfully; *let's work on that*! All in all, Langen felt vaguely reproached, and was relieved when the stay ended.

For several years after his divorce, especially after Miranda remarried, his daughters had urged him on, unexpected cheerleaders for matrimony. But gradually they stopped, and he'd been single for a decade by now. He had gotten used to it, almost without noticing. And then came the pandemics. Langen knew that global calamity could incite romance. It was like a perpetual world war, rife with uncertainty and urgency; you stood on a train platform, kissed someone, and never knew if you'd see them again. During Covid Langen had felt a stirring—a susceptibility, in a *Brief Encounter* kind of way. He was on the platform, the clock striking the hour, but no one came to meet him. The war had ended, the moment passed. Now it was happening all over again, only this time he felt nothing, the stirring was gone. He wasn't sure why.

HE AND HIS SISTER KEPT ABREAST OF PETEY THE kangaroo. "Petey sighting!" his sister would call out, searching online for updates. Petey, spotted outside a 7-Eleven near Sarasota. Petey at a lake, drinking. Petey hiding behind a palm tree in someone's yard. A painting joined the Noah's ark in Liddie's studio—a kangaroo wearing an expression of surprise, a clutch of dandelions sticking out of his mouth. "His head looks squished-in," Liddie said, doubtfully. "And I gave him person hands."

Sure enough, the hands were distinctly human, the fingers folded together in a devotional pose. "He's praying," Langen said. "Prayin' Pete."

"This kangaroo is my hero," his sister said.

The rest of the news didn't bear watching, but Langen watched anyway; after a lifetime of watching, he could not stop. The nation was out of blood and almost out of food. Riots and protesters, looters, mayhem that had spread from the usual places to the golden zip codes—the clerks and nannies, the cashiers, the car-washers and bathroom-cleaners and meal-deliverers and garden-tenders, all banded together in a motley army of insurrection. SERFDOM UNITE! read a sign someone managed to hang halfway up the Washington Monument. Packs of feral dogs roamed cities, and fantastic graffiti proliferated. Who were they, he wondered, this invisible nation of vandal painters? How did they decide on the meme du jour? Suddenly you would see it everywhere—the heart pierced by a lightning bolt, or the crying koala bear. Why a koala bear?

Amid it all, underneath and through it all, swirled the disease, pooling and spreading, invisible, viscous, vile. Langen could feel it advancing on them. Infections were spiking in Virginia Beach, an hour from his sister's house. In the village itself, a group of born-heres had set up a blockade along the entry road, trying to prevent the come-heres from getting to their vacation homes.

Liddie fumed. "Get. Us. A freaking. *Vaccine*!" She gathered her dogs and went to the shed to paint.

Out in LA, Chloe and Audrey were holed up with a second new dog, a German shepherd left by a friend who moved away; the pendulum of Langen's worry had swung to Serena. He hadn't heard from her in a week. Chloe sought to reassure him. "Dad, it's Serena, right? You know her and her walkabouts." His younger daughter over the years had had a history of courting farflung perils, from Africa to Tibet.

"Well, it's a little different this time," Langen said, gruffly.

"Do you think Serena is becoming a weirdo?" Chloe said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, the whole farmer-hunter-forester-renegade tough-chick thing. She's like Sarah Connor in those *Terminator* movies. She and Derrick, they're like survivalists."

"Let's hope they're good at it."

Derrick was his younger daughter's boyfriend; the two had met as forestry students in Bozeman. "As for you, Liddie tells me that dogs can be spreaders. She read it somewhere. Are you and Audrey keeping that bulldog puppy inside? And where was that new dog before you got him?"

"Dad. I honestly don't think we are going to get infected by our dog. Please. That's one thing you shouldn't worry about."

"Well, I'm your dad, so it's my job. It's more or less my only job." He squelched a rogue urge to chuckle. "If you talk to your sister, tell her to check in, pronto."

Antsy, he went out on his bike. At the edge of town he saw where the villagers had mounted their

roadblock—a fallen tree and splintered sawhorse pushed to the roadside. He came to the bend of the road and the poultry plant, and beyond it an old farmhouse with two rusted tractors posed out in front. The old farms existed now only as mementoes of themselves. As little girls, Chloe and Serena had frequented a place called Westmoor, the last remaining farm in Langen's suburb, preserved as an education center, where they had milked cows, fed rabbits and chickens. *How're my two farmer's daughters?* he would call out, pulling up in the car. He recalled how much he had loved being a father of young kids. Now it would be dread and dread only.

Lost in thought, he didn't see the squirrel dart out in front of him. The creature feinted one way, then reversed itself, a frenzied lunge that put it back in his path. In disbelief he ran over it, his tire making a gruesome crunch. Langen dismounted. The squirrel lay in the road, unequivocally dead. Always he had been able to count on the nimbleness of squirrels, their sense for survival and escape. Why not now?

Prodding with his sneaker, he managed to push the corpse to the roadside. He looked around. Pine trees, a meadow. Milky sunshine in a sky hazy from yet another massive forest fire out in California. And the squirrel he had killed. To his surprise, Langen experienced a clenched thickness in his throat. He was far from sentimental about squirrels. There was the notorious time when the girls were small, the family returning from Easter sunrise service, and Langen, driving, saw the gray bloody mess of a squirrel flattened on the road. *Look*, he'd said on an impulse, *the Easter bunny*, triggering an explosion of tears from his younger daughter and fury from Miranda.

He took out his phone. *Sorry about that whole Easter bunny thing way back when,* he texted Serena. *Not very nice of Dear Old Dad. Please call.* :)

He rode back through town. The place felt comatose. He passed the carnival ground, with its whitewashed vendor shacks. The summer carnival had been canceled three of the past four years, his sister had told him. Sports events, concerts, weddings: no place was safe when people were present.

After 2020, a market had sprung up in ultra-upper-end strongholds—islands and other remote locations bought up by über-wealthy preppers planning to survive a global holocaust. Langen had been approached by a broker advertising a "secure luxury retreat" in Tasmania, of all places. But the buy-in was above his pay grade. His career, it turned out, had been designed for luxury within the confines of civilization, not as an escape hatch from it. If things came to the worst, he'd be no better off than anyone, and worse than many: a sixty-something guy with no gun, no garden, and no skills.

He checked his phone. Serena had not answered his text, and he decided to call his ex-wife. No sooner had he typed in her number, however, than his signal evaporated. He rode down the block and held the phone above his head. When the new pandemic hit, Langen had taken the precaution of having his cell service augmented with a satellite backup, via a Texas-based company that deployed a flotilla of small, fractionated satellites. If he couldn't have a stronghold in Tasmania, at least he could have a pricey handheld to ensure continuous contact with his daughters. It was a state-of-the art personal communications system, it was costly, and it worked fine.

Until it didn't.

THE AIR WAS HOT WHEN HE CAME BACK, AND AS he mopped his brow his sister studied him. "Should I worry about you? If you get this, don't you have, you know—a co-thing?"

He reassured her: his heart was fine, he had a reptile's blood pressure. "And, technically speaking, to have a comorbidity you already have to be morbid."

Liddie winced. "Please do not die on my watch, Trevor. I could not take that."

Langen didn't feel like a dying man. But he hadn't felt like one two summers ago, either. For several weeks he'd experienced a vague pectoral discomfort; then, mowing the backyard, a surprising weakness, as if the lawnmower weighed two hundred pounds. A cardiologist put him on a treadmill for a stress test. It had hardly started when the man shut it down.

Minutes later Langen was in an ambulance.

For years his physician had urged him to deal with his cholesterol, his blood pressure, and he had always stalled. Now here he was. At the hospital, the cardiac interventionist explained what would come next, and remarkably soon, Langen was on the table, prepped and shrouded. He was chagrined to learn he would remain awake. "You'll be sedated but alert," the doctor said. "You can watch on the screen if you'd like."

"I'll pass," Langen replied from beneath the shroud. Whatever disinterested scientific curiosity a person needed in order to observe his own heart catheterization, he lacked it utterly.

"Bar's open!" said the jovial anesthesiologist, releasing the sedative into his bloodstream. "Tonight we're serving a cocktail of midazolam and fentanyl."

It began. Through the haze of the drug he could hear the doctor conferring with his assistant, and a hot, animal fear rose in him.

"Bartender," he said. "Another round, please." The cocktail flowed, and with gratifying speed Langen's fear subsided. He listened—he had no choice—as the procedure continued. It was as in every business interaction, the same intensification, always that push-comes-to-shove moment when the pleasantries have been dispensed with and the thing gets transacted. "Here we are," murmured the doctor. And: "Pretty tight in here." It sounded vaguely pornographic.

"Hit me again," Langen beseeched the anesthesiologist.

"Sorry," he heard the man say. "You're cut off."

When he surfaced in his hospital bed, the doctor gave him the news: a 90 percent occlusion of his LAD coronary artery, aka "the widowmaker." A stent had alleviated the blockage. "Your heart has not been damaged," the doctor told him. "You're lucky to have discovered this in time. Your situation can be very nicely managed."

Which is what he did. Following orders, he rode his bike, he purged his diet of mayonnaise and other culprits, cut back on meat, added copious infusions of veggies and fruit. Obediently, he took his daily pills—three in the morning, two at night. For several months he attended Cardiac Rehab class at the hospital, where he and a dozen others were hooked up to monitors to spend an hour exercising while being shown videos on Your Heart Healthy Lifestyle. Heart disease was the great democratic unifier: Langen's fellow inmates included lawyers like himself; overweight working guys; schoolteachers; lifelong smokers in agonies of withdrawal; the stray woman or two, fallen among thieves. For a while there was a raucous Jamaican named Orville, tattooed and reeking of pot. The class was overseen by a nurse Langen's age, whose Midwestern earnestness the class took as a challenge. They might launch into group treadmill karaoke, or provoke some new outlandishness from Orville, until finally the nurse had to restrain a grin. It was like being in eighth grade again.

Throughout it all, Langen missed his father. In his hospital bed after his procedure, as he tried not to think about the little balloon now lodged in his artery, Langen imagined the email he would have received from the old man, zinging him with gusto. *I'm glad you're OK, Tiger. However, I can't help noting that you have zero genetic predisposition to heart disease, which means your situation is entirely the result of your decadent, sybaritic, high-paid-lawyer lifestyle.*

He found it strange to have the private drama of his aging coincide with a global health calamity. Physically he felt fine, but his sense of wellbeing could vanish in an instant. *What if it happened now?* he thought, riding in the Virginia countryside; *what if it happened here?* Lying in bed, he'd feel a flutter in his chest and suddenly he was weak and sweaty, waiting for the dagger thrust his brother-in-law had suffered. He imagined it clearly: the tingling, the stabbing pain, his own amazement.

At his sister's house, his phone continued to malfunction, but the internet still intermittently worked. He emailed his ex-wife: *No phone here and Serena AWOL*. He scanned his newsfeed. The president had not been seen in two days; the stock market was closed down again; power outages were rampant.

"Why the hell can't I reach my daughter?" Langen said.

Liddie put a hand on his shoulder. "She'll be okay. She's so far from anything."

"Not far enough." He closed the laptop—firmly, as if it were a container holding everything that worried him. He felt rattled, seized and shaken, his emotions banging around weirdly inside him.

"I killed a squirrel before," he said. "Ran over it with my bike. I felt like I was going to cry. Over a squirrel."

"I wouldn't worry. With squirrels, there's always an understudy, you know?" His sister took the laptop. "Want some good news? The Petey GoFundMe is way up. They're gonna build him a habitat with a sound system in it. He likes swing."

Langen attempted a grin and failed. "I think I'll shower," he said.

He undressed in his room. It was 6:30 p.m.; in former times he would have been arriving home after a long day, and he could still feel a phantom limb of his old work life. It had been three years. Retiring at fifty-nine had never been the plan. But when his father died, something in him had evaporated, some mindless drive to accomplish; he already felt it draining away as he stood with his stepmother in the hospital in Albuquerque. Back in Connecticut and his office, he'd stare out the window at the western hills and imagine hiking in them; in Zoom meetings he would turn off his video and just sit there. His career was slipping away, and he let it go.

The bathroom had a small, grimy window that he looked out while showering. A berm protected his sister's yard from the flood plain beyond. It resembled an earthwork fortification, and Langen imagined armed men clambering over the top

into the yard. He envisioned how the worst-case scenario would play out. All the safeguards and backup systems, the double and triple redundancies that protected people from harm and need; one by one, these would shut down. Eventually he and his sister would fall ill, or someone would show up at the door with havoc in tow. It would be as with any empire. Sickness from within, barbarians at the gates. It was already underway.

After the shower, he returned to the living room to find Liddie on the couch with her dogs, listening to the Talking Heads. His gloom had not lifted. A quick check of his email showed nothing from Miranda or Serena.

"I need a drink," he announced. On the shelf, Jason's single malt was down to two fingers. Langen held the bottle up.

"It's all yours," his sister said, and he drank off the Scotch in one burning gulp. As he did, the music abruptly stopped. Liddie reached over and flicked a light switch on the wall back and forth.

"Oh, great," she said. "Just what we needed."

They fired up the generator for Liddie to make dinner. As they ate, Langen couldn't shake his anxiety about his daughters. He thought about fear, how it waxed and waned like the contagion itself. "There must be a literary term for that," he remarked. "For something that's reality and a metaphor for reality at the same time. Miranda would know."

His sister was gazing at him earnestly. "Can I ask something? I always wondered what happened between you two. We don't have to get into it if you don't want to."

Langen gestured noncommittally. "The girls were gone, we both had our careers. We didn't need anything from each other anymore. Separating just kind of happened." He made a derisive noise. "I sound like a defendant. 'Your Honor, it just happened.'"

They opened their last bottle of wine. Miranda had made a mistake in marrying him, Langen reflected. He had been dishonest, had presented himself under false pretenses, as someone avid for ideas. His wife, for her part, had begun by loving literature and languages—always reading, fluent in Italian and French—and had moved into ever-hazier realms of abstraction, places that offered Langen no handholds. He thought about Miranda's no-longer-new husband, a professor like her, conversant in everything, writing incomprehensible essays about German philosophers.

"She's better off now," he said to Liddie. "I honestly believe that."

"I really liked Miranda. I always thought she was good for you. And for the record, I think you were good for her. You brought her back to earth." A wan look crossed his sister's face. "I think I was good for Jason. He needed me. Is that bad—you know, if what you really miss most about someone is how much they needed you?"

"I don't think it's bad."

She sighed. "We didn't have sex anymore. Sorry, TMI. But did that happen with you two? Did you stop?"

"No, we didn't stop," he said. "But it got very… polite. Sort of like, I don't know, going to the barber or something."

His sister laughed and sniffled. "Jason was always kind of an animal in bed. Just a big happy bear. But then he got depressed and gained all that weight, and we started keeping our bodies to ourselves."

Too soon, the wine was done. From her patchwork shoulder bag, his sister fished out a small box and removed two orange lozenges. THC gummies, she told him. "I get them for my fucked-up knee. For my *osteoarthritis*."

"Auntie's little helper," Langen said.

"And now, I'm going to medicate and go paint by candlelight. Join me?"

The gummies were embossed with the image of a marijuana leaf. Langen took the two his sister offered. "Here's chewing with you, kid," he said.

They gathered candles and, with the dogs following, paraded across the yard and into the shed, where Langen lit the candles with a grill lighter. His sister stood before an easel, a photo of her hollyhocks taped to a second easel alongside. On a rectangular tray she squeezed dabs of paint, naming the colors: ultramarine, Prussian blue, Cadmium red.

Langen sat on a battered director's chair, the dogs at his feet, as his sister painted in the flickering light. Arm swooping, she traced stems, adorned them with blobs, and smeared the blobs into blooms. "I don't worry about making it realistic," she said. "You're trying to get the essence. The hollyhockness." She had slipped into teaching mode. "I think of hollyhocks as aliens from outer space. The way the flower comes out of these big seed pods. Okay, let's do a big, juicy one." The blooms burst off the canvas and seemed to float toward him, craning their necks, grinning. Langen suspected the THC was kicking in. "Honestly, Trev, coming out here is the one way I can keep my shit together," his sister said. "I find it incredibly relaxing."

But Langen felt the opposite. Beneath the booze and the pot, he felt his heart beating

through narrowed arteries, heard its thump and wash, insistent but also somehow lagging. From the shadows his sister's menagerie of cats and cows and birds stared at him.

One of Liddie's dogs growled, ears perking up. Langen peered in vain through the black void of the window. He felt a surge of paranoia.

"Excuse me," he said, pushing up from the chair. "I gotta pee."

Outside he stood still in the yard. Behind him sat the house, dark and empty, to his left the berm and the marshland beyond, and before him the shed where his sister painted, oblivious, illuminated by candlelight together with her canvas.

Langen cocked his head. He heard the May breeze, a restlessness in the bushes; something moving, something watching.

HE BOUGHT A GUN.

He'd seen the place out on Route 13, a brick bunker with iron-grated windows and a hand-painted rooftop sign, "GUNS." Telling his sister he was going in search of liquor, he drove over just before dinnertime.

The store was dark, the front door locked, but a pickup truck stood parked alongside, and Langen went around back. A bearded guy, maskless and in camouflage pants and a Lynyrd Skynyrd T-shirt, was smashing crates with a sledgehammer.

"I'm closed," he said, glancing at his watch. "You picking up?"

"I was hoping to buy something. You know, as a walk-in."

The man put the sledge aside. "So let's walk in."

They went through the back door, and the man slipped behind the counter. "Can you do me a favor?" Langen asked. "Would you be willing to put on a mask?"

The man looked at him closely. "I suppose I would be," he said, and produced one from his pocket. "Now," he said after he had pulled it on. "Are you a Virginia resident?"

"Connecticut," Langen said. "But my sister lives here."

"Connecticut," he said. "Funny state. You know you all have open carry in that little true-blue state of yours?"

"I do know that," Langen said. "I'm a lawyer. A retired lawyer."

"But the thing is, you don't have a *culture* of open carry." The man told about a friend of his who had gone into a Starbucks in Connecticut while carrying and had been chased out of the place. "People went off on him, hysterical. They didn't even know their own law." He made a scoffing sound. "What good is a right if no one exercises it?"

"I don't disagree," Langen said.

The man looked at him, sizing him up. "Have you used a firearm?"

Langen's experience with guns consisted of riflery in summer camp half a century ago and trap shooting with his daughters at a dude ranch in Wyoming.

"Minimally," he said.

"And I'm assuming that right now we are prioritizing personal protection and defense of your home and loved ones?"

Langen nodded. Around him were display cases filled with rifles, ammunition magazines, brass knuckles, hunting knives, and designer handguns—pistols etched with American flags, with Confederate flags, with coiled snakes, with the face of Donald Trump. On the countertop stood a stack of booklets titled, *Ready for Anything*. His eyes traveled to a small gun sporting an ornate, blue stone handle.

"Tiffany turquoise," said the man. "For the ladies." He chuckled darkly. "As for you, the Commonwealth of Virginia says that legally, since you are a non-resident, I am only allowed to sell you a long gun. For a handgun, assuming your sister is a resident, the simplest way would be for her to come and transact the purchase."

Langen pondered. "I'd rather not do that," he said.

"I said it was the simplest way, not the only way." The man's eyes narrowed, and Langen saw that beneath his mask he was grinning. From the case he removed a squarish, black handgun. "This is your Glock 17. Nine millimeter. Full-sized barrel, nice grip. Minimal recoil. No safety."

"No safety?"

"In a self-defense situation you might forget to disengage. You want to keep things simple." He removed the cartridge. "Double-stack magazine, seventeen rounds. Now, some people might consider this firearm boring, but to me it's ultra-reliable. This gun will never not work. Lowest out-of-service rate in my whole fleet."

The gun felt light in Langen's hand. "It doesn't feel like steel," he said.

"Polymer frame. Glock was a plastics guy. He made field knives for the Austrian army. Used an injection-molding machine for the handles and started experimenting." He took the gun back. "In the nineties, Glock's accountant hired a hitman to take him out. He was embezzling and wanted to cover it up. The hitman figured he'd bludgeon

Glock with a hammer. But Glock, who's seventy, takes the hammer and beats the guy senseless. The hitman was a French mercenary named Jacques Pecheur—that's French for Jack the Sinner. You cannot make this shit up!" He placed the gun on the counter with a box of bullets. "Sticker price on this firearm is $694, but I will give it to you for the special Virginia visitor price of $900, cash. The bullets are on the house."

Langen took an envelope from his pocket and removed ten crisp hundreds, placing them on the counter. He asked about a background check.

"We can do that." The man counted the bills and pushed one back. "Have you ever been convicted of, or are you currently under indictment for, a felony offense of any class, or a misdemeanor involving a domestic-violence incident, or been the object of a restraining order or substantial-risk order of any kind?"

"No," Langen said.

"Are you an unlawful user of any controlled substance, or have you ever been adjudicated legally incompetent, medically incapacitated or been discharged from the Armed Forces dishonorably?"

Langen shook his head.

"Congratulations. You are now part of the worldwide Glock family."

"Is that it?" Langen asked.

"Well, that's all you and I are gonna do, under the circumstances. What would you call that—a truncated version?" The man seemed pleased with himself. "Now normally you would be headed to a shooting range to familiarize yourself with the firearm. But I wouldn't worry too much. If I had to teach my grandmother to fire a weapon, this would be it." He grinned again. "No offense."

"That's okay," Langen said. "None taken." He looked at the gun, squared-off and angular, its grip featuring molded indentations where his fingers would go. The box of bullets, he saw now, was labeled "CRITICAL DEFENSE."

The man was studying him. "Let me tell you something. You see this room? This is a room full of 'what if?' 'What if?' is the only reason my business even exists. Now, this right here"—he patted the Glock—"this is your fallback, right? This is your answer to what-if." He gave Langen an earnest look. "Someone starts hurting people in your vicinity, you need to be able to hurt back. Now, sir, you have yourself a nice evening."

Outside, Langen put the gun and bullets in the glove compartment of his Audi, locked it, and drove onto Route 13. Next to the gun shop stood a café, long closed, a small frame house whose owners had adorned it with gingerbread trim in pink and lime, and a sign that read "Muffins 'n Stuff." Weeds had shot up, engulfing the handicapped ramp; the big front window was boarded up. Whole stretches of the roadway were cluttered with abandoned businesses, mom-and-pop operations that had barely made it through 2020, survived on life support in the interregnum, then quickly perished in the new emergency. Hair salons, dog groomers, restaurants, a fishmonger, a Christian bookstore, a financial advisor, the Little Ones daycare center, the Amigos Taqueria, and on and on. Langen shuddered to think of the ruined dreams he was passing, the ruined lives. He drove through a ghost town, empty and forlorn.

With his gun. His Glock.

He glanced at the glove box. It disturbed him to contemplate the weapon inside, all the harm coiled within it, ready to be sprung with the merest motion of his finger. He felt not only criminal, but radioactive. In his years practicing law, the closest he had gotten to a case involving weapons had been defending the insurer of a gun club where an accidental shooting had maimed a boy. Guns, gun people, gun crimes—it had never been his world. He thought about a criminal lawyer he knew in Hartford, a roguish character who'd been a cop before putting himself through law school, and whose days were spent at jail and court, his nights carousing with his friend the bondsman, his friend the parole officer, going to boxing matches at the casinos, hanging out in low-rent bars.

Now Langen remembered: alcohol. It was the reason he'd given his sister for heading out in the first place. He did a U-turn and drove back toward a place he had seen before, a combo gas station and liquor store, set in a roadside cul-de-sac. "NO GAS," a sign read, but the liquor store was open. A mammoth generator stood outside, humming away, and no fewer than seven cars and pickup trucks were in the lot. Langen put on his mask and went in to spend the hundred dollars left over from his shopping excursion. It daunted him to contemplate what businesses still thrived, amid all the ruin, and what essentials they purveyed. The booze to help you not think about what was coming. The gun, for when it finally arrived.

DRIVING BACK TO HIS SISTER'S HOUSE, HE approached the edge of town, the site of the roadblock days earlier. It was back. Orange barriers, vehicles, men in the road. One stepped forward, waving. He wore a holstered pistol. Two others cradled shotguns.

Langen slowed to a stop, put on his mask and cracked the window. The lead man approached, taking a long look at the Audi's license plate. He wore a black mask with a circle of stars around the Roman numeral III. A roll of flesh bulged out beneath.

"Evening," he said. "Our county has authorized a citizens' militia under the oversight of the Accomac Community Watch. May I ask where you're coming from?"

"The liquor store." Langen nodded toward the box on the passenger seat.

The man gave a cursory glance. "Sir, I see you have Connecticut tags. We're restricting entry to full-time residents only, so I'm going to ask you to turn around."

"I'm staying here, at my sister's. Where should I go?"

"Back where you came from, would be my suggestion."

He checked his phone. No signal. "I've been here almost two weeks," he said through the window slot. "I'm not sick and I have zero contact with the outside world. I think you guys should just let me get back to my sister's house."

"I'm not authorized to do that." The man shifted, settling into his position. Langen glanced over at his glove compartment, pictured the gun inside. Insanely, he imagined himself reaching for it, a shootout, flying glass and blood, mayhem, escape.

"Can I talk to your sheriff or one of his deputies?" he asked.

The man laughed beneath his mask and turned to his group. "Tyler! Come on over!" One of the shotgun-toting men approached. "This gentleman wants a deputy."

"I'm visiting my sister," Langen said to the second man. "Her husband was Jason Beddowes. He died, and I came down to help out." He gestured vaguely. "Look, I drove out an hour ago, and you guys weren't here. I'm just trying to get back."

"Well, that ain't happening," said the second man. "This is a lawful action by the citizens of this town."

"My sister is a citizen of this town." Langen felt his anger rising. "Whatever statute or decree you think you're operating under, there's no way it legally bars me from getting to my sister's house. I'm just telling you that. As an officer of the court."

"Now what court would that be, exactly?"

Langen restrained himself; he could only imagine the judge he'd have to deal with out here, if things came to that. "I really need to get through to my sister," he said.

The two men stepped back and conferred, as Langen made a forlorn backup plan. He would drive back along the main road and park. Take his gun and whisky, traipse through the woods, and hope no one shot him before he got to his sister's.

The first man returned to his window. "Was your brother-in-law Jason on Bay Street?" he asked. "Jason the U.S. Marine?"

Langen nodded, and the man signaled to the crew to move the barrier. "I'm sorry for your loss," he said, leaning down. He patted the roof of the Audi. "Nice vehicle. But use your sister's next time."

Back at home, carrying the box of booze into the living room, he found Liddie in tears. It was Helga, she said; Helga was sick. "I went over, and she wouldn't come out. She told me through the window. Last week she stopped at Claire's"—a Liars Club friend, bedridden with cancer—"and she and Claire's caretaker talked. But they stayed outside. With masks." His sister looked at him. "Will we get sick?"

He counted six days since their Helga dinner. "I feel okay," he said. "You?"

She made a futile gesture. "I feel like tearing my own head off. And Helga, what, does she just take her pills now and end it?"

"Hold on, hold on. She hasn't even been tested yet, right? One thing at a time." Langen needed to think. "Let me stash this liquor and go check the generator."

In his room he extracted the gun from the box, placed the bullets in the bedside table drawer, and stuffed the Glock beneath the mattress—the prince and the pea, he thought, grimly. Outside, in the yard, he checked the generator and the gas can. Both were low. Only a few service stations still had fuel; if necessary, they could drain their cars. He studied the vehicles in the drive, calculating the power stored up in them. Then he refueled the generator and turned it on.

Back in the living room he told his sister the plan to siphon gas. He wouldn't be using the Audi anyway, he said, and filled her in on the encounter at the roadblock and the connection to Jason. "Seems I got the guest patriot pass."

Liddie managed a tiny smile. "He hated those guys. They were always trying to get him to join in on their first-responder crap. He went once. 'Never again,' he said."

With the power running, Langen turned on his sister's laptop. The internet was back up, but not his email; nothing from Miranda or the girls. He took stock of his and his sister's current situation.

Their resources were dwindling. Liddie's freezer food was only good for as long as they kept the generator going. As for himself, he had three weeks of heart meds; after that, he was on his own.

"I got a gun," he said to his sister.

"You did? Where? When?"

"A place on Route 13. When I went out for the booze. I walked in and paid $900."

"And where is it now?"

"It's under my mattress. The bullets are in the nightstand."

She gaped at him.

"I don't intend to use it," he said. "But what if there's some kind of situation? We need to deal with 'what if'." He laughed, a strange, loose, skidding cackle. "Jesus. I just repeated verbatim the pep talk of some cracker in a Lynyrd Skynyrd T-shirt."

The haggard intensity on Liddie's face was new to him. "You know what I'm going to do, Trevor? I'm going to hug my dogs and miss my dead husband and drink my wine and eat my gummies until I'm unconscious. That's how I'm going to deal with 'what if'." She brandished the gummy pillbox. "Now could you please go into your little arsenal back there and get us some liquor?"

DRINKING FOR COURAGE—HE HAD DONE IT once before, back when Chloe was a toddler and began suffering seizures and other ominous symptoms. The culprit turned out to be a rare enzyme deficiency and was easily treatable, but Langen and his wife endured three agonizing weeks as their child went through endless rounds of diagnostics, with terrifying outcomes in play. Langen was stunned at how ill-prepared he was to face his daughter's vulnerability; none of the tools he'd acquired in his life proved remotely useful. Every day at 5 p.m. he began funneling whiskey into himself, trying to rescue himself from a dark dungeon in his psyche. "This is all I can do right now," he had said when Miranda raised an eyebrow. His drinking seemed like weakness, even to him.

And now here he was again. This time, at least, he had company. He sat back as Liddie readied their chemical helpmates on the coffee table. They chewed and sluiced, and soon Langen felt the onset of a merciful fuzziness.

"I keep thinking about the girls," he said. "I don't know what to do."

"I know you were always the Shield," his sister said. "But they have their own shields now, Trev. You don't have to do anything. You already did it."

He poured more Scotch and studied Liddie's face. He remembered her at thirteen, at fifteen, his older sister—Big Red, the tallest kid in the class, dreamy and awkward, always less strategic than he, ingenuous even, prone to displays of daughterly fealty, writing fulsome notes to their parents on their birthdays, *Mom, you are the GREATEST MOM EVER* :) :)*!!* How strange to see her transmogrified into someone supposedly elderly, like those bad makeup jobs in low-budget movies.

"Monday's Memorial Day," she said. "Jason died nine months ago this week."

"I know," Langen said. "I remember."

"I was like a zombie. And then this *thing* came and made it even worse. There's this period in December and early January, after the solstice, when sunset is already coming a little later every day, but sunrise is still coming later too. It's sort of meteorologically, you know—"

"Lopsided," Langen offered. "Asymmetrical."

"Yes. And every year I wait for the day when the sunrise finally starts coming earlier. But this year I was like, 'Don't.' I'd look out that east window and I'd think, 'No more light!'" Her breath caught. "I miss him so much, Trev. He was like you. He had a way of making everything make sense. I can't make anything make sense."

She produced a tissue and blew her nose loudly. "Do you remember Jason back in Boston, when he was driving that cab? He was so skinny then. And that hair."

Langen did remember: an impressive figure, in denim and John Lennon glasses, a ponytail halfway down his back; a Marine who had somehow become a hippie. "Didn't you meet him in his cab?" he asked. "Weren't you a fare?"

"I was. And how did you meet Miranda? I know it was in a café somewhere."

He told her the story: the crowded café in Porter Square, where they sat down together at the same table; a first date at the Gardner Museum; his sense of having met someone of consequence. "There's a Childe Hassam painting at the Gardner, 'New York Blizzard,' that has a figure with a big, black umbrella. We talked about it. I was just bloviating, you know, some totally disposable comment. And she very quietly said something about how black was a forbidden color to the Impressionists, and Hassam smuggled it in from an illustrator's toolkit, and this was his special transgressive genius. I remember that phrase, 'special transgressive genius.' I felt like a horse's ass. Here I am, with these three showoffy opinions of mine, and she's practically an art historian."

After the date Langen had taken her back to her apartment, in a beat-up three-family just off Porter Square, rented almost entirely to lesbians. He described the place for his sister. "Miranda was literally the only straight person there. You should have seen Dad's face when he and Mom stopped by."

"They would have been, what, about sixty? Was Mom already sick?"

"Not yet. She got her diagnosis in 1989. Just after Miranda and I got married." He recalled their mother's battle, five years of reprieves and setbacks, her last months playing out while Chloe was a toddler and Miranda pregnant again, a grim race between death and birth—his mother dying in early December, and Serena born three weeks later, on New Year's Day.

"I miss them," Liddie said. "I miss everyone." She sighed. "It's all so long ago. You know when I started high school? Six weeks after the moon landing. Nineteen sixty-*nine*, Trevor!"

We're history, Langen thought, *we're all history*. He shook his head. He was way too high, his thoughts spilling every which way, like quicksilver. He considered his daughters, poised at the start of adulthood, and himself at their age, the glimmering vista that had stretched before him. He had understood so very little of what he was looking at.

"What is it?" his sister said. "What are you thinking?"

"About being a lawyer my whole life. About how you get used to seeing people purely in terms of what they want—what they want, and how they're trying to get it. You know, the ulterior, the *quo animo*. 'With what intent.' It's pretty appalling."

She gave him a caring, flustered look. "Wanting things is important, isn't it?"

Langen nodded. "But then there's the person, you know, apart from any…strategy. The person who just is. I lost track of that person."

"Do you mean Miranda?"

"Yes. Miranda and everyone else. I just…lost track somehow." Trying to explain was like moving heavy trunks in a dark attic, and he stopped. His sister sat with an arm around either dog. The sun was long down, the window a rectangle of onyx. Langen felt floaty and disconnected, as if his mind was being operated by someone logged into his brain remotely. He thought about his gun, hidden beneath his mattress, waiting.

"A guy whose molestation lawsuit I got dismissed killed himself," he said. "He blew his head off on his front lawn."

"When? Recently?"

"Twenty years ago. The case was ten years before that."

"He molested somebody? And you got him off?"

"No, he was a boy at the time. The victim." As best he could, in his discombobulation, Langen laid out the lawsuit and his success in minimizing the award.

"You did your job," his sister said when he was through. "And this guy, he was on his own course. He had his own life story."

"You mean, I wasn't responsible. Not my problem. Let the master answer."

His sister gave him a quizzical look, and Langen again attempted to explain himself. "The attorney I beat in that case—the plaintiffs' lawyer. He's a guy my age, very flashy, quick on his feet. The media loves him, he's smart, he's quotable. I always loathed the guy. Honestly, I thought he was a travesty. But I don't know." He sighed.

"What is it?" his sister asked.

"These personal-injury guys, in their cowboy boots, doing their commercials, their whole phony I'm-on-your-side shtick. Well, they're actually pretty much all that people have. Normal people. Like your guy who skidded on the poultry effluvium and crashed. I wouldn't have been taking his case. The other guy would." He snorted. "Honestly, they're fucking heroes. I was a well-paid goon. The *shield*."

"You're being way too hard on yourself," said Liddie. "You thought you were doing the right thing."

"Yeah." Langen nodded. "That's it in a nutshell." He pictured the man who had killed himself, heading to the basement for his shotgun. "The guy who was molested, he had two daughters, Chloe and Serena's age. The daughters found him. It was a winter day and the lawn was covered with snow. Blank canvas. Talk about painting."

"Can we change the subject? You're twisting everything. You're just beating up on yourself." His sister reached for the laptop. "I'm going to check in with our favorite… oh *no*!" Her face contorted in alarm. "No no no! He's *dead*!"

Who, Langen thought, *the president?* But when his sister pushed the laptop aside, what he saw was a blurry photo of police cars under a black banner with the words PETEY RIP. He scanned the story. A truck driving at night on the Tamiami Trail; a rainstorm and limited visibility; a sudden impact.

On the couch his sister visibly shook. "It's like the world is ending," she said. "We're sitting here pretending it isn't, but it is."

"It's a kangaroo," Langen said.

"Every day I tell myself, 'Cheer up, Lydia, it

could be worse.' But what could be fucking worse than this? We're just sitting here *waiting.*" She stood. "I have to go to bed. I'm sorry." Dogs in tow, she disappeared into her room.

Alone, Langen slumped on the loveseat, letting his head loll back. He hadn't been this high in decades. He could feel the vessel of his body and feel the assorted substances coursing through it, the ones assigned by his physicians plus the ones he had tossed in himself, a volatile churn of chemicals, and in the middle of it all the antique organ of his heart, with its degraded pipes—the phantom of the opera, he thought, a damaged maniac hiding within him, banging out crazed melodies.

The room spun, and he secured it by anchoring his gaze on the far wall, crowded with works by artists his sister had traded with over the years. His thoughts tracked again to Boston, and to Miranda when he first met her, Miranda the soulful, Miranda the ethereal and pale. Subsequent years had made her browner and hardier, transforming her bit by bit into a slim outdoorsy woman, a walker. They had hiked and rambled together in beautiful places—Scotland, Big Sur, the Andes—and still he retained the view of her calves, seen from behind, surprisingly muscular, flexing metronomically in her slender legs. Even now, there remained physical things about her that he knew so well, they seemed more than mere attributes. Her chapped, strong gardener's hands. Her raised eyebrow as she brooded over a crossword puzzle. The supple way her lips molded themselves to foreign words, so that in speaking French she magically became French. Her shyness about her body. The first time they made love, she turned off the light and in the darkness next to him palpably trembled: *I'm not scared*, she said, annoyed with herself, *this just happens*, there in the tiny apartment near Porter Square with the bay window open and the unseen neighbor afflicted with what they didn't yet know to call Tourette's syndrome, his bellowing rant of "Larry? FUCKYOU, Larry!" waking Langen at 2 a.m. (*Oh*, Miranda said the next morning, *that's just the fuck-you guy.*) He flashed to a dozen years later, the last night of the century, the world about to disappear into a massive, global computer glitch, staff at his firm laboriously backing up everything in a last-minute frenzy, and he and Miranda set to head to a black-tie event in Manhattan until the panic rolling over the city canceled the event. The two of them had gone to a neighborhood party instead, in their fancy clothes, and danced and drank.

He took out his phone. It seemed to be functioning; the caprices bedeviling the system had relented, for the moment anyway. He keyed in his ex-wife's number and got the serene intonation of her voicemail, always that faint, ambiguous accent, burnished by years spent speaking other languages, her lone affectation.

"It's me," he said. "I'm still at Liddie's. I haven't been able to reach Serena." He groped for what else to say. "I was thinking about Y2K and how we ended up at that New Year's Eve party." Details tumbled back, the two of them dancing to "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" and raising a glass to Serena at the stroke of midnight—her sixth birthday, January 1, 2000. He tried to focus his memory of that night, all the apocalyptic angst stirred up over a mere coding anomaly. Had they really thought the world was ending over *that*? "Listen, I'm sorry, Andy. I'm sorry I wasn't…up to it. You know, to everything. To us. To you." He felt that sudden reflux of grief rising again. "I killed a squirrel the other day. On my bike. Please don't tell the girls about that. I don't want them to be—upset."

Hanging up, he called Serena. "Hey honey," he said after the beep. "I was just now remembering where your mother and I were the night you turned six. We were partying like it was 1999, you know?" He was trying to sound cheerful and failing badly. "Liddie and I have been clearing away Uncle Jason's stuff. I know Jason was kind of eccentric, but he lived a good life in his own way. He was honorable. It's crazy how you live your life and then there's just all these artifacts left over. We haul it to the convenience station and chuck it all in. There's a compactor. You press a red button…." His voice trailed off. He pictured his brother-in-law's belongings in the bin, the ram head of the compactor, inexorably mashing. "That's what they call the dump down here, a 'convenience station.' I guess it's supposed to be a convenience, unloading all your possessions. I never really thought about that until now. I've had a couple of Scotches. Anyway." He paused, attempting to reboot his thoughts. But he couldn't cope. He felt it rising again, the sadness; there was nothing he could think of telling her that wouldn't make him choke up.

"Call me," he said, and clicked off.

Putting his phone aside, he went out into the yard to turn off the generator, then lurched back to his room and sprawled on the bed. He had the sensation of watching himself from above, peering down on his own inert form, corpse-like in the dark, a gap in the curtains laying a thin shaft of moonlight across him, like a silver feather. Then he was back in himself, flailing among memories

piled around him like leaves: a restaurant in a gilded mansion in Lisbon, where tuxedoed servers brought him and Miranda steak on a silver platter; his mother's lively, errant piano playing, hands fluttering across the keyboard; a red-and-white bumper sticker that was plastered for years on their fridge, a relic of a birthday party, *Lordy Lordy, Terry Langen is 40*! A black-painted house in a neighboring town where he had told his girls that a werewolf lived, the Werewolf of Wethersfield. He and Liddie as kids, breakfasting at the hospital cafeteria, their father lifting Langen up to flick the switch on the doctor's board to activate his name, and the thrill of hearing him paged on the PA system, "Dr. Langen, Dr. Edward Langen." His mother on her hospice deathbed, delirious and rambling, The plane was taking off, she insisted, *But where are we going?*

Waiting for sleep, he thought again of his daughters. *Let them be safe*, he thought, *Let them get through this and be all right*. His heart pounded. He had neglected to take his nighttime pills. The lump in the mattress pressed against his hip. Delving, he retrieved the gun and placed it on the quilt beside him, bulky and featureless in the gray light.

"I'm sorry," he said aloud. "I'm sorry." His voice rising like smoke, rising and dwindling, dissipating until it was nothing.

HE WOKE JUST AFTER DAWN, STILL FULLY clothed, and rolled over, a crown of pain on his head. Next to him, not ten inches from his face, sat the Glock. To his relief, he discovered that he had not inserted the bullet cartridge. He stuffed the gun back under the mattress. The world had not ended.

In the bathroom he emptied his bladder in a halting trickle, then scooped out his morning trio of pills and swallowed them, along with the two he hadn't taken six hours ago. Somehow he had survived the night without his blood being thinned or his cholesterol restrained. A peek into his sister's doorway disclosed a snoring, blanketed mound. One of her dogs looked up, glanced at Langen, and went back to sleep.

Back in his room, he found his phone overflowing with texts and voicemails: the dam broken, pent-up communications spilling forth. He listened to a message from Miranda. "Trevor, are you alright? Serena is right here with me." *Hey there, Dad*! his daughter shouted in the background, *How's your hangover?* "We're okay, and Chloe and Audrey are, too," his ex-wife resumed, sounding unusually cheerful. "It's shortly before midnight on Saturday, and you are almost certainly unconscious by now. Take care of yourself, please, and enjoy tomorrow. It sounds like it might be a good day."

Did it? He consulted his newsfeed and discovered that things had happened during the hours of his oblivion. The president was not dead, after all. Indeed, a newsclip showed him at sunrise outside the White House, standing at a dais in the Rose Garden. SWISS-AMERICAN CONSORTIUM ANNOUNCES H5N11 VACCINE, read the chyron. WORLD BREATHES SIGH OF RELIEF.

In the village, a bell was ringing.

LEAVING HIS SISTER ASLEEP, HE CHANGED INTO his biking gear and went for a ride. The night's spree had left him feeling pallid and wormlike; he needed to undo the damage.

Following each health setback over the past decade, Langen had managed to reconstitute himself. It was getting harder. After his heart episode, he had redoubled his fitness effort, but the bike-riding together with the statin medication triggered leg cramps in the night, and the weightlifting caused chronic elbow tendonitis. Physically he had reached that point where solving one problem meant causing others. *We need to manage expectations*, he used to counsel clients when a case headed south. He hadn't expected, at his age, to be this far along in the managing-expectations phase of life.

The bells continued to clang. Langen rode down the stately bedraggled streets, golden-green sunlight pouring in from farmland beyond. The day would be warm. The hunkered-down somnolence in the village had given way to a stirring, and people were out in their yards. A teenage girl standing on a porch yelled *Woo-hooo*! as Langen rolled by. An elderly man sticking miniature American flags in his lawn waved to him.

He cycled out of the village and through woods and farmlands, fields of wheat fringed with purple wildflowers. Lines of a poem came to him, memorized in some long-ago English class, *The river's edge where I abide / With yellow jonquils by its side / And somewhere in its broad meander / Run roses wild and oleander.* Jonquil, oleander: Langen knew flowers but not their names, and names but not their flowers. How had he managed to make it to sixty-two in that manner? He had never paid attention.

He passed the poultry plant and its red barns, links in a vast global supply chain that had been falling apart for months. He was reminded again of Casey, in Boulder, and her zeal for sustainable and

local agriculture. Langen himself had never gotten on board. Yes, he could afford to spend $24 per pound for beef raised a half-hour from his house. But the rest of the world would keep needing the cheap chickens slaughtered in places like the one he was looking at now. Basic math dictated that if 98 percent of humanity was going to do something other than raise food, the 2 percent had to produce it on a stupefying scale. That machine had been created long ago, and Langen was a part of it, no matter the beef he bought. He had thrown his lot in with industrialization and diversification, with leisure time, surplus labor value, global travel, the NASDAQ, $200-million-dollar movies, wine flown in from France or Chile. And the giant red barns. Civilization was what it was. There was no going back.

And going forward? For years scientists had warned of mass extinctions. Whole species were vanishing; the past century's die-off equaled that of the hundred before. A domino effect spread from every loss. Decades ago, passenger pigeons had died off—and when they did, certain seeds became abundant, causing other populations to explode, like the mice that carried Lyme disease. So it was with the viruses springing up from bats and birds and monkeys, from pangolins and snakes and other obscure hosts brought to food markets or thrust into human contact via the destruction of forests and the encroachment of cities. Everything was connected; the world had the complexity of a million chess games. You didn't need a conspiracy in a weapons lab to account for mass calamities. Human heedlessness sufficed.

Each beautiful landscape Langen passed hid a panorama of abandonment and ruin. Empty stores and houses, boats rotting in the marsh; plantation landings, tidal creek gristmills and windmills, all gone; African American burial grounds, Confederate coastal sniper stands, the old hotels with their parties of drunken duck hunters, the fishing industry with its brawling surfmen and watermen, the ghosts of slaves who had worked tobacco and cotton plantations, and of the original Americans before them, the Accohannock and Machipongo who had given the town its name—all vanished, those who had brazenly done evil along with those who had mutely done good: the exploitation of land and of people, all the violence of the past plowed under, until all that remained was its poisonous residue, the Paris Green in the soil, the decay in the water, the migrant worker hounded and harassed. Langen cocked an ear, as if he might hear it, howling on the wind, the screams of the beaten and the dispossessed.

Back in town he rode past the carnival grounds and playground. During the first pandemic, governments had merely closed the playgrounds, but this time they had dismantled them: Langen saw metal stubs where a climbing platform had been, and basketball backboards shorn of hoops. Swings on a swing set had been wrapped around the overhead stanchion, each seat jammed against the post in a bulky wad of chain. They looked as if they had been strangled. A child's purple jacket was draped over the top of a nearby fence. Had it been there all these months, waiting?

He took out his phone. *Hangover being mitigated*, he texted his girls and Miranda. *Glad you are all safe and seeing some light at the end of our tunnel.*

He thought about all that had happened in the past five years, the damage inflicted on so many lives. The schools and colleges that had closed, the malls and movie houses overgrown with weeds. The refrigerated trucks parked permanently outside hospitals, morgues on wheels. All the formerly routine events that had become obsolete, concerts and marathons, dinners out, baseball games. Everything that everyone had gotten used to.

Back on his bike, he pedaled toward his sister's, watching swaths of gray tarmac disappear beneath his front tire. He remembered a hillside street in his childhood in Framingham, a mile from his family's house, which the town had experimentally paved with asphalt containing bits of recycled glass. At ten, headed home from Little League on his blue Schwinn ten-speed, Langen would detour four blocks out of his way just to take it, coasting down, mesmerized by the emeralds and garnets and diamonds glittering below—laughing for sheer exhilaration, as if he were headed for Oz.

Where had he gone wrong, he wondered now. Where had they all gone wrong?

HE RETURNED TO FIND HIS SISTER WAITING IN the yard. "Did you hear the news?" she called as he rode in. Behind her, Langen saw champagne flutes on the picnic table. "And guess what?—Helga tested negative. It's the middle of a plague, and all she had was a cold! Let's drink to the common cold!"

They sat down to enjoy mimosas and a coffee cake still warm from the oven. "I'm sorry about abandoning you last night," his sister said. "You got to bed okay?"

Langen nodded. "I don't remember all of it. It was…strange."

"You're telling me. Strange was the least of it," his sister said. Last year was beyond strange. But

soon they would be able to start living again, start planning again. She had spent the last hour plotting her first painting trip to Crater Lake. "There are two islands there, Phantom Ship and Wizard. I'm going to drive out, take a boat to Phantom Ship, and sit and paint for one whole day. And you can finally go home. You can stop having to think about, you know, shooting people." She laughed. "This is the first time since Jason died that I actually feel alive."

Langen pushed a facsimile of a smile onto his face. Taking out his phone, he checked his security cameras back home. It was raining in Connecticut. There was his patio with the stone wall he had built, the firepit and shed, everything in its place as he had left it. Life continued, in Connecticut and elsewhere; society would bury its dead and collect itself and soldier on. Until the next time. Because it would happen again. The collapse was already baked in, and what remained was a long dwindling. Dry faucets, no power to plug into: twice now they had had a taste of it. The next taste would be worse. Bones in a parched riverbed. A ring of fire in the sky. Whatever could be done to prevent it—to save them all—needed to have been done a long time ago.

Liddie looked at him. "You okay?"

"I'm played out." Langen put his phone down. "Maybe you can give me something to do. I need to be useful."

His sister gave him a look. "There's always the Caribbean House."

It was the one project she had put off: cleaning out the moldy, rickety shack behind the garage, its name residual from a long-ago paint job now visible only in chipped and peeling remnants of sunshine-yellow clapboards and turquoise trim. Peeking in, Langen had seen a jumble of boxes and equipment. "There's a gas grill back in there that Jason couldn't figure out how to put together," Liddie said. "I remember him swearing and swearing."

The Caribbean House had been Jason's dumping ground, but when Langen ventured in after breakfast, the first box he brought out contained more of their parents' mementos. Rooting through, his sister opened a wedding album to a photo of the newlyweds, climbing into an MG amid a shower of thrown rice. Something fell out of the book—a tattered cloth napkin, embroidered with a symbol, $(TL)^{2:}$. Ted Langen and Terry Lyle. The napkins had been a witty wedding present from their mother's older brother Rick, a math teacher. His sister chuckled. "Remember these? Can't you just hear Dad? 'The one funny thing in a life otherwise devoted to humorlessness.'"

Too Late, squared, Langen thought, and put the napkin aside; he wasn't up for another trip down memory lane. "I'm gonna keep unloading," he said. "Maybe I'll set up that grill for later."

He ducked beneath the low doorway into the dimness of the shed. A thick odor swirled around him, earthy and dank, crypt-like. Death, he knew, would not exactly be an end. Action did not cease when your heart stopped. You continued to oxidize and decay, ripening like a banana. The energy animating your body got rerouted, your genes living on eventually in grass and trees and insects and worms. The temporary arrangement of atoms that is you—that was you—dispersed and given a new order. A reorganization, nothing more.

If there was consolation in these thoughts, he couldn't find it. In the cluttered dimness he spied a croquet set, perched on a rusted dog crate, and just past it the pieces of the grill that had defeated his brother-in-law, along with a propane canister. "I'm bringing out the barbecue!" he shouted. Bending, he retrieved the canister, then stood.

It came out of nowhere, its force all the more stunning for its invisibility, a smiting whomp from above; he heard the noise—his own head, evidently—and his legs buckled and he staggered backward and plopped down on his ass, dropping the propane.

His sister rushed in. "Oh, Trev, ouch! Are you okay? That sounded bad."

Langen took stock. The canister sat next to him on its side, rocking idly on dusty floorboards. High above, he saw the low eave he had collided with.

"Can you get up?" His sister pulled a lawn chair over and led him to it like an invalid. "I'll get some ice for your head," she said, and hurried off.

Langen sat there, enveloped in a gauzy, wobbly sensation. In the shed he had blanked for a moment, yet he had also been outside himself, watching himself go down like a prizefighter. He squinted toward the trees at the end of the yard, swaying in the bright sun, gently, as if breathing. It was not unpleasant, this surge of weakness, his volition receding from him like water swirling down a drain. It felt, he thought, like letting go.

RAND RICHARDS COOPER *is a contributing editor to* Commonweal. *His fiction has appeared in* Harper's, GQ, Esquire, *the* Atlantic, *and many other magazines, as well as in* Best American Short Stories. *His novel,* The Last to Go, *was produced for television by ABC, and he has been a writer-in-residence at Amherst and Emerson colleges. The first part of "Wachapreague" appeared in the March issue of* Commonweal.

Escaping the Straitjacket

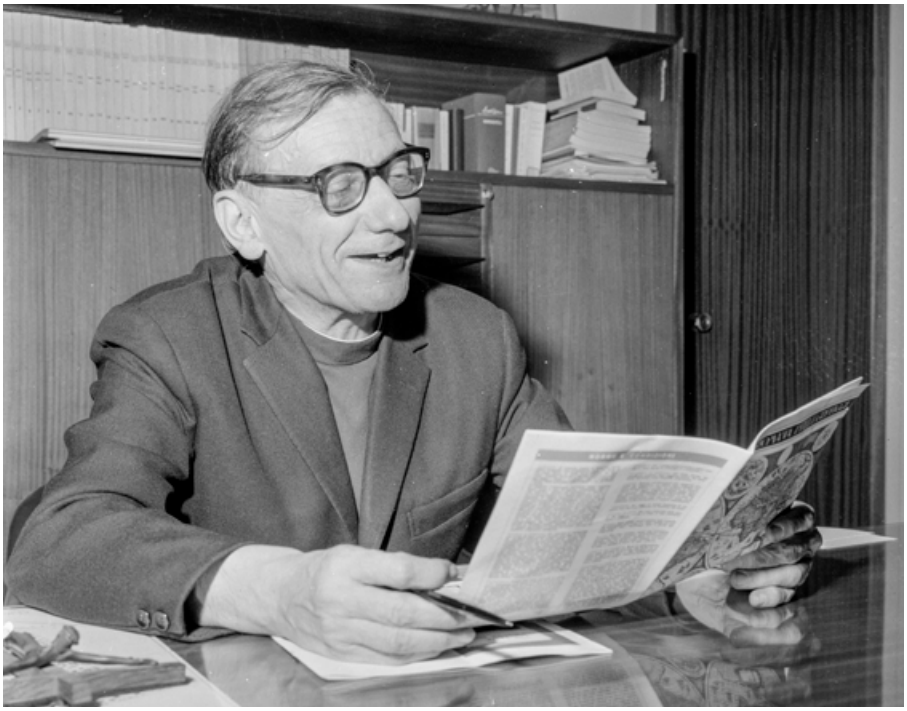
PETER STEINFELS

Nouvelle théologie is not exactly a household term, except perhaps in some *Commonweal*-reading households. A report on "new theological currents" in France first appeared in *L'Osservatore Romano* in 1942. "New" was not then a favorable adjective in theology, and the *nouvelle théologie* was soon under full-scale attack in Rome.

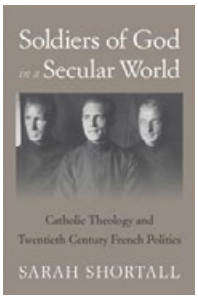
Associated with Jesuit scholars like Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou and Dominicans like Yves Congar and Marie-Dominique Chenu, the *nouvelle théologie* was condemned by the encyclical *Humani generis* in 1950 and further impugned a few years later by the Vatican's suppression of the French worker-priest movement. Despite these setbacks, the work of the *nouveaux théologiens* managed a subterranean survival, influencing German theologians like Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, the Belgian Edward Schillebeeckx, and the father of liberation theology Gustavo Gutiérrez. Ultimately it proved to be the chief theological wellspring of Vatican II.

It is this drama of innovation, condemnation, persistence, and vindication that sums up what many Catholics know about the *nouvelle théologie*, whether or not they recognize the term or what exactly it entailed. For Catholics advocating further changes in the Church, the drama has planted the hope of future acceptance and vindication. For Catholics embattled against the council or what has been wrought in its name, the lesson, ironically, is much the same.

Soldiers of God in a Secular World, subtitled "Catholic Theology and Twentieth-Century French Politics," superbly expands our knowledge of the *nouvelle théologie* and corrects this simple morality tale. The book describes a movement begun in exile and youthful rebellion, tested in clandestine anti-Nazi resistance, and shaken by political turmoil and ecclesiastical opprobrium before eventually remaking the face of the Catholic Church.



Père Jean Daniélou, 1969



SOLDIERS OF GOD IN A SECULAR WORLD
Catholic Theology and Twentieth-Century French Politics

SARAH SHORTALL
Harvard University Press
$49.95 | 352 pp.

At the center of Sarah Shortall's history is the heroic action, in 1941, of a group of Jesuits who launched the clandestine publication *Témoignage chrétien* warning France's Catholics against "losing your soul" to the pro-Nazi regime of Marshal Pétain's National Revolution. Reinforcing a web of other resistance activities, *Témoignage* campaigned relentlessly against the anti-Semitism, nationalism, and authoritarianism of the Vichy government and the Nazi occupation. This witness, Shortall writes, "was the logical extension of the theological work that de Lubac and his friends had been doing since the 1920s and 1930s"—work that began in exile and rebellion.

The exile was literal. Stung by Catholic monarchist opposition to France's Third Republic, then later outraged by right-wing Catholic militancy during the Dreyfus Affair, France's anti-clerical leaders banished the Jesuits and Dominicans, along with other religious orders, from the country. Young

KEYSTONE-FRANCE/CONTRIBUTOR/GETTY

Jesuits had to begin their journey to the priesthood on the Channel island of Jersey, Dominicans across the border in Belgium.

The rebellion was intellectual—and spiritual. Although isolated in their separate institutions, these seminarians were united in frustration with the neo-scholasticism that dominated their training. Hardened in post-Reformation and Enlightenment polemics, and now cemented in place by Rome's purge of "modernists," this neo-scholasticism was a derivative form of Thomism. In the eyes of these future theologians, it was ahistorical. Its almost Euclidean rationalism had no place for human subjectivity and the active inquiring mind. It was closed to religious experience and mystery. And it unwittingly reinforced the secularization it was meant to combat. The high wall of separation that neo-scholasticism erected between the natural realm of reason and the supernatural realm of grace may have been intended to protect the Church's prerogatives in matters of faith, but it did so at the cost of rendering Christian faith otherworldly, private, individualist, and increasingly evacuated from public life. In France, moreover, the sharp distinction between natural and supernatural was used to justify the pragmatic alliance of Catholics with the anti-parliamentary and anti-Semitic Action Française, headed by the Comtean nonbeliever Charles Maurras.

Breaking out of this neo-scholastic straitjacket meant engaging currents of modern philosophy, both nineteenth-century masters from Hegel to Kierkegaard and contemporary thinkers like Bergson, Blondel, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Georges Bataille, and Raymond Aron. Above all, breaking out meant delving into the earlier sources of Catholic tradition, particularly the Fathers of the Church in the case of Jesuits like de Lubac and Daniélou, and the original writings and historical context of Aquinas in the case of Dominicans like Chenu and Congar. This *ressourcement*, which eventually became the basis for the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II, revealed a Church more mystical, biblical, sacramental, and Eucharistic than juridical, institutional, and Aristotelian; more communal than hierarchical; more embedded in the flux of history than immutable; more engaged in the struggles of its times than standing in judgment over them.

It was this "new"—although in truth often old—theology that brought these theologians under suspicion in the 1950s but a decade later made them the braintrusters of Vatican II. But what did it have to do with politics?

For Shortall, the "key question" these "soldiers of God in a secular world" confronted was "not whether to embrace modernity but which aspects of the modern settlement were compatible with Catholic teaching. To what extent could Catholics work with secular institutions and ideologies to achieve their ends? Conversely, how could they articulate an explicitly Catholic vision of community and human life without excluding non-Catholics?"

Shortall, it must be said, is much more focused on the negative than the positive side of this challenge: avoiding compromise and corruption rather than articulating a vision and pursuing it effectively. That emphasis has a lot to do with the three episodes she highlights. The first one, the Catholic attraction to Action Française, was already half resolved before the *nouveaux théologiens* came into their own. Although Pope Pius XI had condemned Maurras and his movement in 1926–27, controversy about his action continued to roil French Catholicism. The second episode was the temptation of Catholics to welcome the Vichy regime's National Revolution as, in the phrase of Maurras, a "divine surprise" that finally routed their Third Republic adversaries. The third episode was the debate about whether to grasp the "outstretched hand" that the Communist party and Marxist intellectuals had periodically extended to left-wing Catholics since 1936 in the name of solidarity with the working-class and anti-capitalist revolution.

Shortall traces two distinct theological responses to these challenges, and in doing so enriches our understanding of the *nouvelle théologie*'s complexity. One response was patristic and eschatological in character, the other was Thomistic and incarnational. The former, associated with the Jesuits of *Témoignage*, measured Catholic political engagement against the eschatological horizon of divine judgment and human fulfillment in Christ's second coming. The latter response, associated with the Dominicans and especially their support for the postwar ministries to the unchurched like the worker-priest movement, stressed the incarnational presence of grace in human structures and milieus beyond the reach of the Church.

This is a division with important theological and political implications. Shortall is clearly a fan of Team Jesuit, the real protagonists of her book. The Dominican *nouveaux théologiens* are definitely the second string. Their incarnational emphasis was also compromised, as Shortall tells it, because, like Thomism itself, it came in several flavors, some of which were used in support of unsavory alliances, whether with Action Française, Vichy, or the Communist party.

Recounting this theological complexity is essential for understanding the *nouvelle théologie*. But Shortall is arguing a point beyond that. Only by including theology and theological categories in their scholarly toolkits can historians achieve a full understanding of French political and intellectual life—indeed, of modern Europe generally.

Reading *Soldiers of God* struck a strong personal note in me. On page six, I encountered, for the first time in decades, the name Yves de Montcheuil. In the summer of 1960, between my first and second years of college, I was working on trucks delivering wooden cases of 7 Up to supermarkets, snack shops, and mom-and-pop grocery stores in the Chicago area. During the commute to work and downtime on the trucks, I was reading Montcheuil's *A Guide to Social Action*, a staple of

The mettle of political theologies cannot be tested only in the fiery furnace of yes-or-no moral crises.

our Young Christian Students circle. Retrieved (miraculously!) from my shelves sixty-plus years and a half-dozen moves later, the booklet sits before me as I write, along with Montcheuil's slightly longer *For Men of Action*. In 1960 I was alert to John XXIII's announcement of a council, but I'm sure that I had never heard the word *ressourcement* or even eschatology. How exactly Montcheuil influenced my lifetime of trying to link faith and politics I cannot say exactly, but I have no doubt that he did. A close friend of de Lubac and a core member of the *Témoignage* resistance, Montcheuil is rarely mentioned among the *nouveaux théologiens* who influenced Vatican II. That is understandable. He was shot by the Gestapo in 1944.

Like any groundbreaking book, *Soldiers of God* stirs questions and the desire to know more. This is definitely a book about the *nouvelle théologie*, not the *nouveaux théologiens*. I longed to know more about these men beyond their common revolt against an outworn neo-scholasticism. What were their various temperaments and personal experiences? Stern or cheerful? Did they vote? Read detective stories? Love any movies? Fume at any politicians or at one another? Ever struggle with faith or prayer?

And though Shortall's subtitle alludes to "twentieth-century French politics," in fact it actually concentrates on French politics from about 1940 to the mid-1950s, with a brief flashback to the condemnation of Action Française. What, I wondered, had been the responses of these theologians to the political run-up to the stark moral crises of France's military defeat, Nazi occupation, Vichy collaboration, and post-war coalitions? What about the economic impact of the Depression, Hitler's shredding of the Versailles Treaty and Germany's reoccupation of the Rhineland, the 1934 anti-Republican riots in Paris, the Popular Front, Spanish Civil War, Munich, and France's military policy? I cannot believe that the *nouveaux théologiens* were lacking in reactions to such political challenges. What captured their attention? What did they read? Whom did they trust? How did these shape their eschatological or incarnational perspectives?

Shortall mentions two books that Gaston Fessard—the Jesuit author of the *cri de coeur*, "France, Beware of Losing Your Soul," that launched *Témoignage chrétien*—wrote about pre-war issues, such as pacifism, the Spanish Civil War, and the military threat of the Third Reich. A leading participant in the revival of Hegel in France as well as the spiritual director of Gabriel Marcel, Fessard is an intriguing figure who deserves more attention in English. Shortall sketches philosophical aspects of his work but not its prewar political conclusions.

The mettle of political theologies cannot be tested, it seems to me, only in the fiery furnace of yes-or-no moral crises. Those theological perspectives must also speak to the "ordinary" politics that Max Weber described as the "slow boring of hard boards"—all the concrete, complex, fact-laden, difficult, but seemingly less existential choices that determine whether those awful moments of moral crisis ever occur. Here I do not find Shortall's repeated references to a "counter-politics," as developed, for example, in the work of William Cavanaugh, either clear or helpful.

Shortall is no antiquarian. The questions she explores in fine detail "remain just as relevant today," she writes, "as they did in the 1940s." I strongly agree, and because I do, two features of the story she tells leave me dissatisfied. One is her treatment of liberalism. The other is her treatment of the secular. Thinking about both topics has advanced since the heyday of the *nouvelle théologie*; even the meaning of the terms has shifted, in some parts of the world more than in others.

Shortall mentions liberalism only occasionally. She takes as unproblematic the rejection of it by the *nouveaux théologiens* (as well as, in fact, by neo-scholastic reactionaries and by Thomist progressives like Maritain). She does not define the liberalism they had in mind. Was it primarily the individualism and self-seeking of "bourgeois man," the preeminent rights of private property, the disruption of community by the market's cash nexus, plus, perhaps, Enlightenment irreligion? Did it also include parliamentary democracy, freedoms of speech, press, and religion, regular elections, majority rule, minority rights, and judicial independence? Liberalism has always been a multi-dimensional, evolving tradition. Can its rejection be unproblematic for any theology claiming contemporary relevance?

In contrast to liberalism, Shortall frequently mentions the secular, secularism, and secularization. These words run from the book's title to its final sentences. Here too there is a frustrating lack of precision. A secular world is clearly a world in which the Church and Christianity no longer hold the controlling positions they once did. The *nouveaux théologiens* welcomed the change in some respects, deplored it in others. They did not appear to agree on what brought it about, though they all thought a defensive, stultifying neo-scholasticism had actually worsened the situation. Nor were they of one mind on what positions the Church and Christianity can aspire to in the changed world and by what means. Shortall is nonetheless convinced—and I tend to agree—that the *nouvelle théologie*, and especially its eschatological current, have much to teach us. But what? A lot depends on one's understanding of the "secular world."

Shortall is well versed in the recent literature challenging the assumption of old-fashioned secularization theory that modernity and the decline of religion always go hand in hand. The reality, these analyses demonstrate, is much more complex and variously

shaped by region, history, religion, and culture, but is nevertheless profound. Obviously, Shortall can rehearse only so much of this in a book about French theology, but given the importance of this theme in her story, I regret that she does not at least try to disentangle what might be meant by "secular," "secularization," and "secularism." These terms can encompass everything from government neutrality toward religion to the emergence of spheres of activity— such as science, economics, and psychology—largely governed by internal rules apart from religion to a polite label for atheism. All these modern developments come in different shades and flavors; all are vulnerable to critique. Shortall, unfortunately, uses the terms interchangeably and without explication.

When it comes to the contemporary political relevance of the *nouvelle théologie*, Shortall may be more impressed than I am with a few interlocutors in the left-wing academy who could be described as post-liberal or post-secular. She may also be more occupied with the drama of political resistance than the slog of political participation. But no one should imagine that she is not a subtle analyst. She often qualifies the binaries she sets up between eschatological and incarnational and between patristic and Thomist. She recognizes overlaps between the two camps and diversity within them. She acknowledges limitations in the eschatological theology she clearly favors.

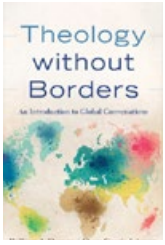
Soldiers of God in a Secular World is an outstanding book by a young and brilliant historian, well-launched into a career of integrating religion and theology into intellectual and political history. If this reviewer is left with some nagging questions, Shortall, should she so choose, has plenty of time to answer them.

PETER STEINFELS, *a former editor of* Commonweal *and religion writer for the* New York Times, *is a University Professor Emeritus at Fordham University and author of* A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America.

BOOKS IN BRIEF

OVERDUE
Reckoning with the Public Library
AMANDA OLIVER
Chicago Review Press
$28.99 | 224 pp.

Amanda Oliver's new book, *Overdue*, is a provocative crossover between a memoir and a research project, recounting Oliver's seven years working as a librarian in Washington D.C. and analyzing the history of the American public library. Oliver offers an on-the-ground view of how local libraries meet the social and physical needs of their communities, but she also grapples with the public-library system's history of racism and objectification. *Overdue* is ultimately a reckoning with the past in an attempt to dispel the romantic myth of the American public library in order to move toward a future where libraries are inclusive spaces for everyone—"repositories of language, literature, community care, and human growth."



THEOLOGY WITHOUT BORDERS
An Introduction to Global Conversations
WILLIAM A. DYRNESS AND OSCAR GARCÍA-JOHNSON
Baker Academic
$24 | 192 pp.

Christianity is a global religion with practitioners found throughout the world. Christians themselves are just as diverse as the countries and cultures they hail from. But despite this diversity, the study of theology in the United States operates from an almost entirely Western perspective, which often fails to take into account the distinctiveness found within a global faith. William A. Dyrness and Oscar García-Johnson explore this perspective in their book, *Theology without Borders: An Introduction to Global Conversations*. Rather than ignoring the colonialism that exists within Western theology, Dyrness and García-Johnson propose a "global theology" that takes into account not only the politics of location, but also the doctrines, institutions, and social practices that can inform day-to-day faith.

TIME IS A MOTHER
OCEAN VUONG
Penguin Press
$24 | 128 pp.

In each of the poems of Ocean Vuong's *Time is a Mother,* tenderness and violence exist side by side, sometimes in the same line ("to live like a bullet, to touch people with such intention"). It could not be otherwise in an elegy to his late mother, whose ghost fills pages that circle back to family, war, nature, loathing, and love. Throughout the collection, precise and delicate language builds layers of meaning, petals of a rose that "blooms back as my own / pink mouth," all the while playing with Vuong's relationship to the reader and the page: "I found a payphone in the heart of the poem & called you / collect to say all this."

Heads & Tales

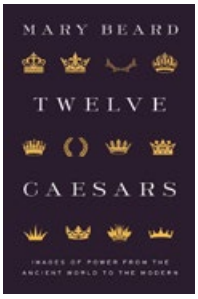
REGINA MUNCH

Returning to the United States from Beirut in 1837, Commodore Jesse D. Elliott brought with him some remarkable souvenirs: two marble sarcophagi. Elliott claimed that one had been the final resting place of the Roman emperor Alexander Severus, who reigned from 222 to 235 CE, and he offered it to President Andrew Jackson—a "patriot and hero," wrote Elliott—for Jackson's own use upon his death.

Jackson responded to Elliott's offer unequivocally: "I cannot consent that my mortal body shall be laid in a repository prepared for an Emperor or King—my republican feelings and principles forbid it—the simplicity of our system of government forbids it." Himself accused of behaving "like a Caesar"—that is, autocratically—by his political enemies, it would have been, in today's parlance, bad optics.

But Jackson need not have worried. Elliott based his claim of the sarcophagus's imperial lineage on a bad reading of an inscription and wishful thinking; it was almost certainly not Alexander Severus's tomb. After Jackson declined Elliott's offer, the sarcophagus was moved to the National Mall in Washington D.C. An informational placard introduced the artifact as "Tomb in Which Andrew Jackson REFUSED to be Buried," and the sarcophagus remained on the Mall until the 1980s.

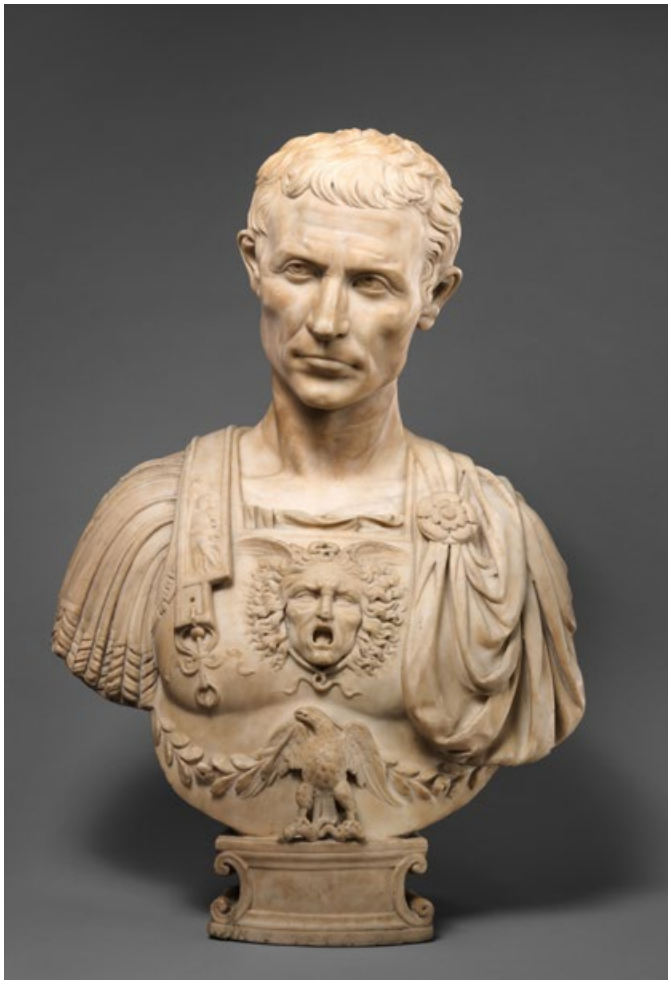
This is the tale with which the classicist Mary Beard begins her latest book, *Twelve Caesars*. Based on a series of lectures, it examines how Roman emperors have been depicted in Western art since the Renaissance, and asks why the images of emperors still carry so much meaning for us today. The idea of being buried—or not buried—in an imperial tomb "obviously *meant* something" to people like Elliott and Jackson. But what? And why have the images of ancient despots signified something—or anything—to people centuries and millennia later? "Over the last five hundred years or so," Beard writes, "emperors...have been recreated countless times in paint and tapestry, silver and ceramic, marble and bronze.... Caligula and Claudius continue to resonate across centuries and continents in a way that Charlemagne, Charles V or Henry VIII do not." Images of Roman emperors—usually, but not always, the set of "Twelve Caesars," described by the Roman writer Suetonius, who ruled right after the fall of the Republic—decorated the palaces, homes, and churches not just of the wealthy, but also of the middle classes. Beard writes that we often assume that these images are meant to reinforce



TWELVE CAESARS
Images of Power from the Ancient World to the Modern

MARY BEARD
Princeton University Press
$35 | 392 pp.

Andrea di Pietro di Marco Ferrucci, *Julius Caesar*, ca. 1512–14



BEQUEST OF BENJAMIN ALTMAN, 1913/THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

a connection with the ancient world, and that preserving this connection is a natural thing to do. But images of emperors, she writes,

> have been as much a cause of controversy as they have been bland status symbols. Far from being merely a harmless link with the classical past, they have also pointed to uncomfortable issues about politics and autocracy, culture and morality and, of course, conspiracy and assassination.

And then there are the questions of how we identify which images are "emperors" at all. Just as Elliott misidentified the sarcophagi, so too do we regularly mistake later representations for ancient sources, or "emperor-like" images for accurate depictions of how an ancient figure actually looked. "Such stories of discovery, misidentification, hope, disappointment, controversy, interpretation and reinterpretation are what this book is about," Beard writes.

She begins her study with depictions of Julius Caesar, who as Rome's first emperor helped turn the Republic into the Empire. Key to projecting his authority was a sustained campaign to put his image on coins throughout Roman lands. "Never before had portraits been used so concertedly to promote the visibility, omnipresence and power of a single person," writes Beard. It's still these coins, along with Suetonius's description of Caesar, that are the most reliable sources for determining whether an image is meant to be Julius Caesar.

But this can be more complicated than it seems. Caesar's immediate successors—known as the Julio-Claudian dynasty—sought to make themselves resemble Caesar as closely as possible on coins and statues. They took pains to emphasize continuity so as to legitimize their rule to the citizens of the empire. (It's worth remembering that only one of the Twelve Caesars succeeded his biological father, and that only one of their deaths was *not* suspected to be murder. Sometimes, continuity really was the coin of the realm.) These extremely similar depictions can make telling one emperor from another all but impossible. In her typically wry style, Beard observes, "It is hard to resist the conclusion that a perverse amount of scholarly energy has sometimes been devoted to drawing a fine line between subjects who were always intended to look the same."

Sometimes trying to determine which images are "really" Caesar involves comparing images to coins and making educated guesses—and Beard repeatedly emphasizes that we are not necessarily better at making these identifications than the scholars of centuries ago. Sometimes, an image believed by one generation to be a depiction of Julius Caesar is reclassified as an "unknown Roman" by another, or reidentified as a different emperor entirely. It gets even more complicated when trying to identify a "hybrid." A statue of one emperor could have been modified or recast as another to save marble, or the head of one emperor might end up on the body of another. Sometimes a forgery or a pastiche can be mistaken for the real thing. Beard offers the example of the "Green Caesar," a bust of a man made of green Egyptian stone that once belonged to Frederick II of Prussia. People have speculated for centuries about its connection to ancient Egypt. "Is it, as one writer has recently hoped on almost no evidence at all, the very statue that Cleopatra put up in honour of Caesar in Alexandria after his death? Is it perhaps no more than a portrait of 'one of Caesar's admirers from the Nile', aping the style of his hero? Or is it actually an eighteenth-century fake, but intended to pass for Caesar all along? Who knows?"

To some degree, Beard is less concerned with determining what images are "real" emperors—authentic images that depict an emperor's true likeness, or images intended by their creators to represent a specific emperor—than with studying the purpose of these images and their significance to "those of us who *look*." During the Renaissance, Beard writes, coins "were more than just the best evidence available for the appearance of Roman emperors; they provided a lens through which those rulers were repeatedly re-imagined and recreated in modern art." They were the most readily available images of emperors because of how common it was to see one, given that they were distributed throughout the empire, and for centuries onward had been unearthed and collected by ordinary people. They were incorporated into all kinds of items, including clothing, jewelry, architecture, and art. Such images were more than mere decoration, Beard argues. They could have a multitude of meanings—legitimizing (as Caesar's successors endeavored) the rule of a leader, or advertising wealth, or forging a visible link to the past.

Beard offers dozens of examples of such items, accompanied by beautiful color illustrations. One example is Hans Memling's *Portrait of a Man with a Roman Coin* (1471–74), whose subject holds up to the viewer a coin stamped with the image of Nero. Why does he brandish the image of one so infamous? "The faces of Roman emperors on coins served to validate the images of living sitters as well as the subjects of the past. Portraiture could be perceived not simply as a binary relationship between artist and subject, but as a triangulation between artist, subject and the image of the emperor—in coin." Another example Beard offers is a sixteenth-century chalice made in Nitra, Slovakia, which has eighteen coins with the images of Roman emperors set into the cup and stem. Beard writes that "if anyone should be tempted to assume that all this was 'just decoration', de-signified trinkets from a distant past or boasts of modern wealth, they should reflect on the experience of sipping communion wine out of a vessel that gave worshippers a close-up view of some of the greatest persecutors…in the history of the church." These images, in other words, were part of the "cultural currency" of the Renaissance. While Beard doesn't offer an overall answer to what these images tended to signify, she invites their study under these terms to overcome the assumption that such imagery is "too banal to be investigated."

One of *Twelve Caesars*'s most illuminating chapters is about images of emperors used subversively or satirically. In the nineteenth century, a favorite subject of art was the assassination of emperors. "Whether prompted by contemporary politics or not," Beard says, artists "regularly used imaginative re-creations of scenes of assassination to interrogate the imperial system itself, reflecting on the vulnerability of the ruler, and on where power really lay." Jean-Léon Gérôme's 1859 painting *The Death of Caesar*, a widely copied specimen, depicts the moments just after Julius Caesar's death. Caesar, a mere "blood-stained bundle," lies ingloriously in the corner of the painting while his assassins plot and scheme, already adapting to a world without the emperor: "Here Gérôme is reminding us of just how fleeting autocratic power is." Another painting, Lawrence Alma-Tadema's depiction of the death of Caligula and Claudius's assumption of the throne, shows a frightened Claudius hiding behind a curtain by a statue of Pompey with a bloody handprint. The suggestion: "violence and lawlessness... was *always* at the heart of the imperial regime," and any idea that emperors rule justly is an illusion.

Beard also examines the King's Staircase at Hampton Court—an unlikely place to find a critique of royal power—which shows a series of paintings of ancient rulers made fools by the Roman gods, who are forcing them to compete to be invited to a heavenly dinner party. "In one of the most ceremonial areas in this royal palace we are presented with an array of Roman emperors as laughable failures," Beard observes. Why? These images "were prompting a dialogue between…imperial power and the power of the modern king.... [T]hey maybe even provided a lens through which the modern monarch could face up to monarchy's discontents." In other words, heavy is the head that wears the crown. If artists like Gérôme and Alma-Tadema could sense the fragility of imperial power, it should be no surprise that royals themselves did too.

Beard's style of investigation is often just as interesting as some of her findings. "I have been by profession a classicist, historian, teacher, sceptic and occasional killjoy," she cracks in the introduction. As in her magnum opus, *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome*, Beard first emphasizes not what she knows but what *can't* be known—at least not unless more evidence comes to light. She takes visible pleasure in questioning the assumptions of the casual observer and the professional historian alike. "Are we sure we know that?" is her consistent refrain. It's a refreshing sort of intellectual humility—speaking confidently when an answer can be known, but also recognizing when caution is warranted.

Twelve Caesars also confirms Beard's fondness for the deep dive, as when she offers microhistories of some of these beautiful and fascinating objects. But these detailed examinations come at the expense of wider insights the reader can glean after her discussion of dozens of statues, portraits, coins, and tapestries. Why *did* images of Roman emperors come to mean so much to modern people, as she asks in the introduction? What messages *overall* does she think wealthy members of Renaissance society, or nineteenth-century artists, or even we today, intend to communicate by using images of emperors? Beard gives careful, unwavering attention to each individual object she considers and sometimes draws definite conclusions about them, but she is often hesitant to generalize about any larger answers, even tentatively. Sometimes maybe a little less caution is warranted.

Or maybe it's just that Beard understands the appeal of elusiveness, the way that ancient images and objects can tantalizingly withhold the secrets we want to pry from them. "Part of the dynamic fun of the images of the Caesars, part of the reason for their visual longevity, is that they are so hard to pin down," Beard concludes. "They are not a breed of iconographic fossils."

REGINA MUNCH *is an assistant editor at* Commonweal.

The Influence of Anxiety

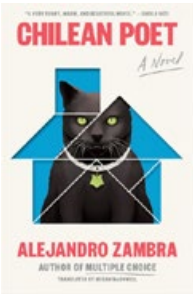
ADAM FLEMING PETTY

Chile, like Ireland, is a sparsely populated, geographically isolated country that produces a staggering number of poets. Two Chileans have won the Nobel Prize: Gabriela Mistral in 1945 and Pablo Neruda in 1971. Mistral's image appears on the country's currency; Neruda's homes form an integral branch of the Chilean tourism industry. Other celebrated poets include Nicanor Parra, who came from a family of performers and was regarded as something like a wizard; Enrique Lihn, a cosmopolitan figure who connected generations of poets; and Raúl Zurita, still living, who has had his poems scrawled in the sands of the Atacama Desert at enormous scale, a cross between concrete poetry and art installation. In a manner almost unthinkable for U.S. poets, their Chilean counterparts can and do achieve folk-hero status.

This reverence for poets drew me to Chile. Adrift in my twenties and eager to become a great poet myself, I moved to the country's capital, Santiago. To make a living, I taught English to students, businessmen, and naval officers. After class, I prowled the city's bookstores and cafés, buying volumes of Chilean poetry that I read with the aid of a Spanish-English dictionary. I didn't manage to become a great poet. But I did get to observe up close a new generation captivated by the romance of Chilean poetry, mostly thanks to a Chilean poet who left the country long ago, and who never wrote much poetry either.

At the time I was living in Chile in the mid-2000s, Roberto Bolaño, already famous in the Spanish-speaking world, was rising to international prominence. Bolaño was born in Chile, moved to Mexico with his family as an adolescent, and went on to lead a peripatetic life across the globe. He died in 2003 at only fifty years old, and immediately passed into legend. *The Savage Detectives*, the novel that first made him famous, was a loosely autobiographical tale about radical young poets in Mexico. But Bolaño wrote poetry before turning to fiction, and his fiction mythologized poets as outlaws, figures living on the edge of society in pursuit of beauty and truth. The next generation of Chilean writers couldn't help but see Bolaño's prominence as an opportunity to reach a wider, global readership.

No Chilean writer has navigated the contours of the post-Bolaño moment, its promises as well as its limits, as deftly as Alejandro Zambra. Like Bolaño, Zambra began as a poet before turning his talents to fiction. He too writes about writers, poets, and students of literature, shuffling through life with slim volumes of verse in their back pockets. But the mood of Zambra's work is wholly unlike Bolaño's, which is precisely what makes Zambra so interesting. Where as Bolaño's poets are outlaws, diving outside of polite society and into the churning waters of capital-H History, Zambra's poets are bystanders. They are reticent, even timid, fearful that the moment for greatness has passed them by, and that they must endure this sense of belatedness for the rest of their lives.



CHILEAN POET
A Novel

ALEJANDRO ZAMBRA
TRANS. MEGAN MCDOWELL
Viking
$27 | 368 pp.

The year 1973 was a decisive one for the twentieth century, and an especially dramatic one in Chile. Salvador Allende, the democratically elected socialist leader, was ousted and killed in a violent coup led by Augusto Pinochet, a right-wing military leader supported by the CIA. On September 11 of that year, La Moneda, the seat of the president located in downtown Santiago, was bombed by fighter jets. Pinochet would imprison thousands of citizens—including, so goes the legend, Bolaño, who had traveled back from Mexico to join in the struggle against the dictatorship and was arrested soon after arriving. But his jailer just happened to be a childhood friend, and he let Bolaño go after a week. A thrilling, dramatic story.

Zambra, however, was born in 1975. He grew up in the shadow of the dictatorship, and along with an entire generation of Chileans, came to know it intimately, while largely being unable to resist it in dramatic fashion. In 1991, Pinochet stepped down after losing a fair election, and the country made hesitant steps back toward democracy. As Zambra began to write, first poetry and then fiction, his work depicted characters who felt untested, who worried they didn't measure up to the lofty examples set by world-bestriding figures like Bolaño.

This fear of coming up short was precisely what always thrilled me about Zambra. *Bonsai*, his first novel, was a

slim work that portrayed a relationship, from first romance to eventual dissolution, in less than a hundred pages. The protagonist is a writer, but he's no savage detective. He goes to classes, takes an editing job, and lies to his girlfriend. I encountered the book in Chile, while I too was failing to become a great, world-historical literary figure. I even saw Zambra give a reading, and during the question-and-answer period, I asked him a question in such profoundly broken Spanish that he didn't understand me.

Chilean Poet, from its title onward, burrows deeper into such questions of literary inheritance and generational anxiety. Domestic relationships take center stage, as is generally the case in Zambra's work, but here he enlarges the scope of the story to span from the early nineties to the present day.

Gonzalo is a Santiago teenager from a lower-middle-class background. His girlfriend, Carla, is the daughter of a lawyer and belongs to the upper-middle-class. Their relationship consists of inside jokes and furtive embraces, but when they finally manage to consummate it, Carla loses interest. Not even Gonzalo's painfully earnest teenage poetry can bring her back. A decade later, Gonzalo and Carla meet again at a nightclub. They hit it off, and their relationship achieves a new level of depth and comfort. There is, however, one practical obstacle: Carla already has a son, Vicente.

Vicente is not Gonzalo's son, though Carla does have a bit of fun with him when she dangles the possibility that Vicente is the result of their teenage fling. It's clear that the math doesn't work out, though, and Carla knows precisely who the father is—a ne'er-do-well named Leon. Carla tells Gonzalo that she understands if he doesn't want to continue the relationship, but he warms to Vincente. He moves in with them and, even though he and Carla don't marry, he takes on the role of stepfather to Vicente with devotion and care. Such makeshift family structures are fairly common in Chile; individuals often distrust the institution of marriage without quite knowing what to replace it with. That makes sense, in a way: growing up in a dictatorship could make anyone skeptical of societal norms.

Gonzalo makes a modest living by teaching poetry and literature classes. He still retains his youthful literary ambitions, though he does little to pursue them. In a burst of creativity, however, he composes an entire collection of poetry titled *Memorial Park*, naming it after the park near the house where he lives with Carla and Vicente. The book is published in a very limited run, and Gonzalo personally gives copies to his local bookstore, Metales Pesados. (A real place, by the way—I bought many books there myself.)

Alejandro Zambra

Just as things seem to be settling into place, Gonzalo makes a decision that upends the domestic life he and Carla have jerry-rigged together. Without telling Carla, he applies for a fellowship in New York City—and he gets it. He tries to convince her that it might be a good idea for the three of them to go there together, but Carla is angered that he kept it from her, and she feels manipulated when he springs the news on her all at once. As swiftly as their relationship resumed, it ends again.

That's the first half of the story. In the second half, Gonzalo recedes from the forefront, and Vicente steps forward to take his place. Inspired by the books Gonzalo left around the house, Vicente devotes himself to poetry with even more dedication than his would-be stepfather. He attends workshops, befriending fellow poets and immersing himself in the tendentious, tightly knit community of Chilean poets. He meets an American journalist named Pru, giving her the idea to write a piece about the country's many poets. The whole episode appears modeled on Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives*, where a chorus of friends and acquaintances give accounts of the author's fictional alter ego.

Thanks to Pru's introductions, Vicente lands a job at Metales Pesados. Scanning the shelves, he discovers—of course—*Memorial Park*. The book has sat there for years, unsold. But Vicente picks it up, reading Gonzalo's book over and over, especially one poem that's about Vicente himself. When Gonzalo, back from New York, walks into the bookstore, Vicente reestablishes their relationship. Vicente, Gonzalo has to admit, has become a better poet than he ever was. He was never quite a stepfather to Vicente, as he and Carla never married, but he was something better: a step-poet, giving Vicente a model to follow, and eventually surpass.

Lines of poetry on paper, rather than blood flowing through veins, connect Gonzalo to Vicente, and, it's implied, to all other Chilean poets, from the celebrated to the obscure. It's a moving image, especially for how it deftly folds in the sense of belatedness, of coming up short, that is woven throughout Zambra's work. And for all the book's Chilean specificity, it feels broad in its appeal, with the focus on literature and relationships recalling Ben Lerner crossed with Sally Rooney. At some point, everyone feels like they come up short. That's when you need your loved ones, poets or not, at your side.

ADAM FLEMING PETTY *is the author of a novella,* Followers. *His essays have appeared in the* Paris Review Daily, Electric Literature, Vulture, *and other outlets. He lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

RODRIGO JARDÓN

What Belongs to the Living

MELODY S. GEE

In each of the eight stories in Sindya Bhanoo's *Seeking Fortune Elsewhere*, someone is missing—a child, a parent, a sibling, a beloved elder, a family an ocean away. The missing are not always dead, but their absences, whether by tragedy, choice, or inertia, are still haunting. In this luminous and piercing debut collection, every story hinges on the longing created by an absent figure and the characters who try to fill the empty spaces in sometimes surprising ways.

The opening story, "Malliga Homes," which won a 2021 O. Henry Prize from *Granta*, is set in the southern Indian region of Tamil Nadu, at a luxury retirement home filled with residents whose children live abroad, including the widowed narrator. Her daughter and granddaughter have not visited in over two years, and her storytelling aches with abandonment. "The offspring of the rich are rich, and they do not seek their fortunes elsewhere. Like me, nearly every resident of Malliga Homes has lost sons and daughters to Foreign. That is the reason we live in a retirement-community-cum-old-age-home, rather than with our families." The narrator's daughter lives in Alpharetta, Georgia, a place she cannot bring herself to move to, even for family. Recalling a visit years ago with her husband, the narrator wonders, "What do you do with a big, empty house, full of rooms that you do not need? She never talks about this, but somewhere inside of her she must feel it. She is my daughter after all. Her house, with its vaulted ceilings and skylights, it was no better than Malliga Homes."

Her daughter is part of something larger that's missing: a family home and belonging. At Malliga Homes, residents are both a source of community and rivalry, ranking their children's jobs, adopted countries, and frequency of calls or visits. The food is served in vast dining halls where the narrator often sits alone, and she walks the manicured grounds after dinner, not toward anyone or any place, but to hit her fitness-tracker goal. Seeking one's fortune elsewhere has disrupted the intergenerational home, where:

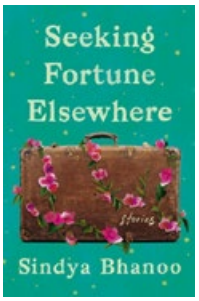
> the old should be with the young, the young with the old. That was how it was for generations: babies sleeping in the armpits of their grandmothers, children sitting atop the shoulders of their grandfathers. Everyone in the same crowded home.

Adding to the narrator's palpable disappointment and loneliness is the memory of how her late husband insisted they raise their daughter. "He spoiled her. The best school. The best tutors. The clothes she wanted. The books she liked. Let her go to the movies. Let her relax." It reads as though the narrator is balking at her husband's reasonable accommodations and displays of affection until she adds, "*No need to make her cook with you,* he would say. *Do not trouble her. Do not upset her. Let her be.*" There is a devastating tension between parental love that provides rich opportunity while refusing to impose obligations that could strengthen bonds. While I root for the daughter's independence, I also grieve for her mother's isolation, for all her vibrancy and vitality that must now be lived out in a polished and unfamiliar retirement home.

Bhanoo's prose is delicate, spare, and radiant with emotion. She captures a widow's regrets in "Malliga Homes" as precisely as a married woman's struggle for autonomy in "No. 16 Model House Road." Her stories are centered around characters as diverse in age and station as they are in their longings. In the story "His Holiness," a teenage girl resents her father's televangelist-style life coaching that takes him away for weeks

Sindya Bhanoo

BRIAN BIRZER



SEEKING FORTUNE ELSEWHERE

SINDYA BHANOO
Catapult
$26 | 240 pp.

How to live with what's missing is a question Bhanoo poses to each of her characters, and she lets them stumble toward their answers with tenderness and affection.

at a time, while the mother in "Buddymoon" confronts her estrangement from her two grown daughters, which she has tried to deny ever since she left them when they were young. And in "A Life in America," a story that reminded me of a real-life 2019 scandal at the University of Missouri-Kansas, a professor from India stubbornly contends that he has been helping graduate students from his home country, despite being accused of exploiting them for unpaid housework.

In the book's most eerie story, the narrator is a collective "we" made up of women who long ago attended the same grade school and bullied the same girl, Jaya. They speak as one organism, gossiping about Jaya's weight, her family dysfunctions, and her appearance with a predatory obsession. They collectively monitor her physical transformation and rise to fame, first as an actress, then a powerful politician, even as their own lives are diminished by envy, fantasy, and comparison. Defined first by the outcast they fear becoming and then by the adored celebrity they long to be, the girls grow into women whose attention and desires live beyond them, focused away from their own ordinary lives. Well into midlife, Jaya continues to haunt their imaginations. "It takes a decade, or maybe two, but eventually, you no longer wish to be her. You no longer want her to be you. You are happy being yourself, or resigned, or too afraid to be anyone but yourself." But by then, it is too late. "The time between childhood and old age passes quickly, leaving you feeling like your entire life is a double feature with no intermission."

How to live with what's missing is a question Bhanoo poses to each of her characters, and she lets them stumble toward their answers with tenderness and affection. In "Nature Exchange," a mother struggles not only to recover from but to live in and with her grief after losing her child. The mother, Veena, visits monuments put up at her son's grade school and keeps his account at a nature center active by presenting found objects for trade-in points, hoping to earn enough to finally afford his long-desired treasure. Her husband won't join her in either activity. He wants Veena to live by moving on, while she wants to make her grief visible, at one point even hiring an artist to paint her body. When Veena sees herself decorated, she says, "It's beautiful. I just wish I could see the beauty without the pain. Just for a moment." When the chance arises to give away her son's beloved nature collection, Veena is stricken. Where will her son *be* if she gives away his things? The question of how Veena can have her son and be his mother if she stops visiting the places that mattered most during his short life pierces those of us who struggle to keep what is gone alive somehow. The curator at the nature center tells Veena what she—what we all—need to hear: "Just because they aren't here anymore, it doesn't mean they don't exist." In the end, Veena does not find a way to shrink her grief to a manageable size. Instead, she fully embraces the question of what belongs to the dead, what to the living, and whether it's possible to still belong to each other.

Seeking Fortune Elsewhere is a companion in healing, a book that surfaces our longing and vulnerability. The stories in Bhanoo's collection articulate a vision of sorrow, regret, and reconciliation, one which asks us to share space with and welcome them in our lives.

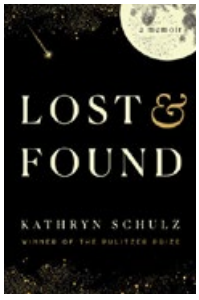
MELODY S. GEE *is a freelance writer and editor, and the author of* The Dead in Daylight *and* Each Crumbling House. *She lives in St. Louis, Missouri, with her husband and daughters.*

Ordinary Wonders

KATHERINE LUCKY

An extraordinary life deserves a memoir. Perhaps the author was raised in dire poverty or in a cult. Perhaps they experienced great success as an athlete, actress, politician, or musician. Perhaps they had an epiphany in the mountains, or survived a rare disease. If not, then they might justify the writing of a memoir by connecting their life to something of public importance. Maybe they lived through a war or a natural disaster. Or maybe their personal history helps tell the story of what it's like to belong to a particular race, religion, or nationality.

Lost & Found, Kathryn Schulz's new memoir, takes none of these approaches. It is instead about everyday occurrences. A woman loses her father when he is old and sick. A woman falls in love; she gets married. A woman moves into a new home and prepares for the birth of her child.



LOST & FOUND
A Memoir

KATHRYN SCHULZ
Random House
$27 | 256 pp.

Kathryn Schulz

CASEY CEP

Schulz, it must be said, is herself extraordinary. She's won a Pulitzer Prize! But this is not a memoir about her literary career. Her father's family died in Auschwitz. But this is not a memoir about the Holocaust. She is married to a woman, but this is not a memoir about her sexual identity. This is a memoir focused not on difference, but on similarity. Our sorrows and joys, our griefs and blisses, experiences not unique but shared: these things, too, are worthy of being written about.

There are many things we can lose—wallets, scarves, phone numbers, a pregnancy, a mind—and many things we can find—meteorites in a field, a rare book in a thrift shop, a vocation. What do these acts of disappearance and discovery, these "enormous and awkward" categories that "encompass, without distinction, the trivial and the consequential," have in common? What can acquisition and attrition tell us about being human?

As its title implies, these are the central questions of *Lost & Found*. Schulz answers them across disciplines, incorporating ideas from philosophy and psychology, literature and economics. Her sources are varied: Elizabeth Bishop, Socrates, and Dante; the finding of U-boats via mathematical equations; an archeological dig. Beyond these sources, she makes her own observations: "Losing things makes us feel lousy about ourselves." It also makes us feel small, "instructing us by correcting our sense of scale," revealing a world "enormous, complex, and mysterious." As for finding, Schulz argues that it has "intrinsic value," regardless of what is discovered. When our finds are especially extraordinary—a soulmate, for

There is beauty to be found in dying, Schulz concedes, a 'vein of silver in a dark cave a thousand feet underground.'

instance—we invoke destiny: "Confronted by a surprising find, we also feel ourselves confronted by the governing forces of the universe."

It's this sort of fatedness that Schulz experiences when she finds the woman who will become her wife, C., a woman who grew up picking crabs and stacking firewood on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, a Rhodes Scholar and a writer. And it is the "universal impermanence" of loss that she experiences with the death of her father—an absentminded lawyer, polyglot, and baseball fan, "part Socrates, part Tevye."

It's not easy to write about emotions like love and grief without being sappy. Nor to avoid that other extreme: writing at a false remove, using one's life only to make arguments. But Schulz's story of her great loss-and-find is somehow both deep and clear. She's honest, but not indulgent. She's smart, but not distant. She analyzes, but also identifies the places where reason falls short.

One of those places is her father's death. Isaac Schulz passed away in old age, after a good and mostly happy life. No tragedy there—and so Schulz is shocked that "something so sad could be the normal, necessary way of things." She believes that life is "made precious by virtue of being scarce." She's glad that her father is finally free from nerve pain, heart disease, and gout. But "way down in the core of selfhood," she acknowledges, "where emotion begins, it is impossible for me to offer death any more gratitude than that, or to pretend I don't wish that my father—my brilliant, funny, adoring, endearing father—were still alive, and would be alive forever." There is beauty to be found in dying, Schulz concedes, a "vein of silver in a dark cave a thousand feet underground." When her father stops breathing, her mother stands at his hospital bedside, cradling his head in her hands:

> A woman holding her dead husband, without trepidation, without denial, without any possibility of being cared for in return, just for the chance to be tender toward him one last time: it was the purest act of love I'd ever seen.

Still, "a cave is a cave." After her father's death, Schulz becomes ill, angry, bored, and clumsy. She goes out looking for him on long runs. But "never in all the time I spent searching did I find the slightest trace.... Being his daughter now is like holding one of those homemade tin-can telephones with no tin can on the other end of the string. His absence is total; where there was him, there is nothing." While we lose others to death, she realizes, the departed also lose themselves in a "breathtaking extinguishing of a consciousness.... Viewed up close, it is shocking, a whole universe flashing out of existence."

The pain is pain. The joy is joy. Schulz's first date with C. is indelible, "one of those rare moments, out of only a handful each of us gets in a lifetime, that remains imperishable in all its particulars." She is astonished, documenting each instance of late-night pancakes and books read side by side. "Love, like grief," she writes, "has the properties of a fluid: it flows everywhere, fills any container, saturates everything." Their first meeting comes to feel like the "single gold coin glinting up from the seafloor that leads to all the varied and immeasurable treasure of a Spanish galleon."

Sometimes *Lost & Found* loses momentum; its first two episodic chapters are overwhelmed by "undiluted emotion." A happy childhood. A great love. A terrible sadness. We get the lost; we get the found; but that ampersand linking them in the book's title doesn't quite come into focus.

That is, until the book's final section, "And." We often have mixed feelings, including "grief with gratitude, anger with boredom, happiness with irritation, frustration with amusement." Life is "crushing and restorative, busy and boring, awful and absurd and comic and uplifting," a "constant amalgamation of feeling." A wedding with wildflowers and cake also contains a thunderstorm—and an empty space in all of the family pictures. Looking forward, Schulz knows that C. will someday die; she knows that she will, too. The contrast between her atheism and C.'s Christian belief, she writes, has "never caused any of us real friction or fear." And yet, it's clear that a religious person might interpret the facts differently. C. might disagree that "the entire plan of the universe consists of losing," might not find that "the fundamental, unalterable nature of things" is disappearance and collapse.

This conclusion—all is loss—is a dark one. And yet Schulz doesn't seem content to leave it there. The conjunction "and" proves a helpful device, its "semantic versatility" speaking to our condition of "experiencing many things all at once," even when it comes to existential dread. Schulz puts her father's wedding ring on a chain, and gives the necklace to C. She sees the shadow that trails behind her happy marriage "growing longer later in the day." But now, something new: she is becoming a parent.

Life goes on, and on, and on, toward continuation and abundance. Schulz says it all will end—and yet, even as it slips through her fingers, she is still finding stories to write, birds to watch, and an entirely new person to love. "On the whole," she says, "I take the side of amazement."

KATHERINE LUCKY *is an editor at* Christianity Today.

TIRAMISU
(for Walt Whitman)

Stephen Rybicki

Snow falling:
I brought some home to her
Late yesterday
(Figment of my imagination)
she had a taste
Which I was asked to satiate
This extra-large piece of Italian dessert
she eats now in bed with an espresso
And summons me to come and see
how much they gave her—a generous helping—
My love a tiramisu in the lap of luxury
it makes me happy to see her so

I salivate myself like you, Walter
On a morning white and creamy like the topping
On a lady's finger—the freshly
Fallen snow
Flakes of cocoa and the taste of amaretto.

STEPHEN RYBICKI *is a poet and academic librarian on the faculty of Macomb Community College, and the author of the reference work,* Abbreviations: A Reverse Guide to Standard and Generally Accepted Abbreviated Forms. *He lives in Romeo, Michigan.*

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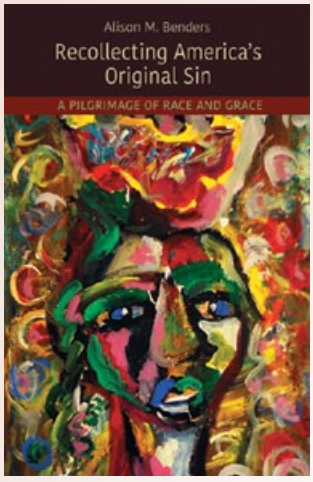

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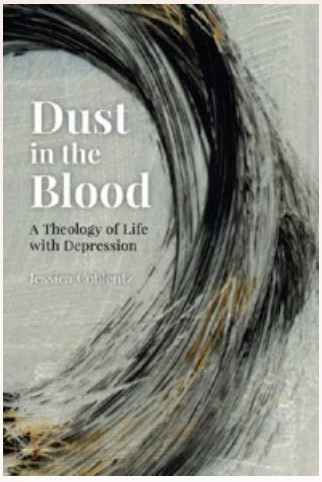

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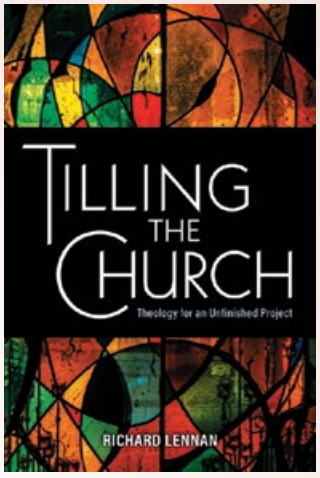

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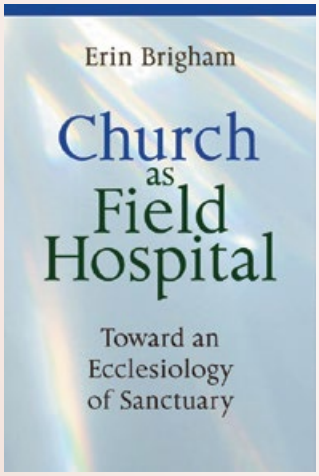

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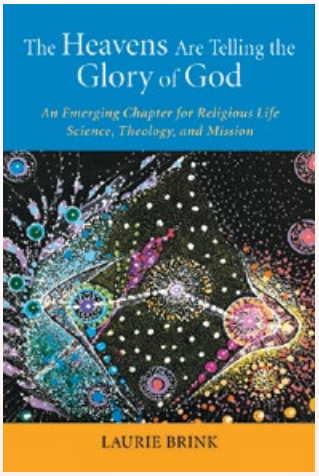

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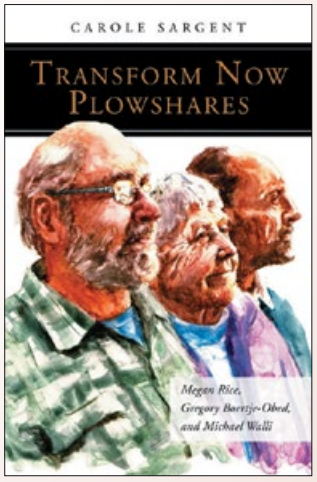

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VEGETABLES

Theodore Worozbyt

Picking
crookneck squash
I am sure

no mistake
is beyond me.
I am making

history in the green
exacting plenitude
of sphagnum and Voltaire.

I pick things up
that walk slowly.
Box

turtle, ironwood
beetle sunning
on granite.

No touching
the cabbage butter-
fly, clearly no touching

its blind white geometry
in a field
dense with cucumber leaves.

THEODORE WOROZBYT *is the author of* The Dauber Wings *(Dream Horse Press, 2006), winner of the American Poetry Journal Book Prize;* Letters of Transit, *winner of the 2007 Juniper Prize and published by UMass Press; and* Smaller Than Death, *winner of the 2015 Knut House Press Award. His work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in* Bennington Review, Po&sie, *and the* Southern Review.

LAUREN KANE

Pressure at the Seam

Stories of ministers in crisis

It is sometimes argued that every story has already been told, that all the narratives can be reduced to something we've heard before—star-crossed lovers, hubristic self-destruction, disillusionment with youthful ideals. For many, this is the draw of literature and film: the hope that through the embellishments of setting or character we might catch a glimpse of our own plot. Simple reiteration is undeniably a human impulse. We see it in folk tales, myths, and the Gospels.

We also see it in literary fiction. The twentieth-century novel has running through it a thick thread that is distinctly Christian, and one fiber of this thread is a particular kind of story retold in many books and films over the past century—that of a Church leader under pressure at the seam where the modern world and an ancient faith come together like two tectonic plates.

It would be wrong to suggest that any version of this story is an exact retelling of any other. Each reimagines and borrows from earlier versions. The overlaps can be as small and local as an echoed phrase, or as large and general as a character or a theme. But there are some reliable markers: a pastor failing to connect with his or her flock from the pulpit, struggling with lust, alcohol, depression, or bodily illness, and ultimately confronting a crisis of faith.

Among the most recent examples of this kind of story is Hanne Ørstavik's 2004 novel *The Pastor*, which was translated into English by Martin Aitken and published last year by Archipelago Books. Ørstavik's novel begins in the middle of the Eucharistic prayer at a church in a remote fishing village in northern Norway. Despite being a fairly new arrival, Liv, the pastor, is already disillusioned not only with the job but with herself. Her sense of uncertainty is due in part to how she came to her vocation, having abandoned a theology doctorate after the sudden death of an intimate friend, Kristiane. Liv's self-consciousness is potent: even as she administers the Eucharist to the members of her congregation,

Claude Laydu in *Diary of a Country Priest*

ALBUM/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

she recalls her embarrassment at the boredom she put them through during her first sermon, when she spoke for half an hour until people eventually started to get up and leave.

This scene is familiar: versions of it appear in Ingmar Bergman's 1963 film *Winter Light*, which begins with Pastor Tomas Ericsson looking out onto a nearly empty church, ready to perform the Eucharistic rites. Paul Schrader's 2017 film, *First Reformed*, opens the same way. Georges Bernanos's *The Diary of a Country Priest* begins with its title character reflecting that his parish is "like all the rest. They're all alike. Those of to-day," by which he means plagued by the "leprosy of boredom."

The plots of these books and films are driven by the pastor's interactions with his or her parishioners, and it is a given that one of the pastor's main duties is to quell the anxieties of the faithful by helping them confess their sins to God. But these stories are about a modern age in which the faithful have secular anxieties and approach their pastors not to confess their sins but to demand answers for their questions about a world from which God often feels absent. These pastors, themselves not immune from such doubt, are balanced on the cusp between hope and despair, and they struggle to keep their balance not with saintly equanimity, but with fumbling, strained humanity.

This fumbling is especially painful when the ordained protagonist is called upon to provide solace to the bereaved after a suicide, a plot point that becomes a through line for these narratives. In such moments, we sense that the pastors do not even believe their own empty words of comfort. In *Winter Light*, Ericsson, in an attempt to reassure a suicidal man, can do nothing but talk of his own doubt: "If there is no God, would it really make a difference?"

Hanne Ørstavik, 2019

AGENCE OPALE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

These pastors are balanced on the cusp between hope and despair, and they struggle to keep their balance not with saintly equanimity, but with fumbling, strained humanity.

The impenetrable solitude evoked by suicide is counterbalanced by a second challenge facing the pastor in the form of a looming societal evil. For Bergman, it's an ambient dread of the atomic bomb; for Bernanos, the past tragedy of World War I and the imminence of the second; for Schrader, climate change. For Ørstavik, it's the past and present oppression of the indigenous Sami people by settlers in the north of Norway.

Liv feels alienated not only from her parish but also from her past. As a university student, she gave up her studies in social economics because she was unable to find meaning in the subject, as "the variables in the economic models were trucks that drove this way and that, shifting their crates and pallets, great stacks that were wrapped up and sealed, meaning I couldn't see what was inside." There's no sense of her spiritual life before her conversion scene, which is brief and relatively quiet: caught in the rain while walking across campus, she stops for a moment and then heads straight to a lecture in the department of theology, an academic subject for which she admits she does not have a natural aptitude. Even now she has only this to say about why she chose it when she did: "The ground just caved in beneath me."

Her inner turmoil—insofar as the reader is allowed to glimpse it—has less to do with God than with the few people in her life: Nanna, a woman who lives in the pastor's residence, and her daughters, a teenager named Maja and a young girl named Lillen, who form a kind of adoptive family for Liv. As they grow closer to her, their own demons become apparent. Liv is haunted by her memories of Kristiane. There are no indications of any intimacy beyond friendship, but there was undeniably an intensity of feeling between them. The relationship (lasting just forty days—a detail rather too on the nose) shaped Liv's perception of herself as an intellectually driven person unable to connect with people emotionally. Kristiane, an exuberant empath, eventually took her own life, prompting Liv's departure north.

There is also a faceless character in the novel who persistently agitates Liv's consciousness. This particular region of Norway is home to the Sami, a community of Norwegians descended from aboriginal people. The Sami have been oppressed by the state's efforts to force them to assimilate and the Church's efforts to force them to convert. Liv's dissertation

Ethan Hawke in *First Reformed*

had drawn on the correspondence between a bishop and a pastor in the time leading up to and during the 1852 Kautokeino Rebellion, when the Sami people of the area staged a violent uprising after years of suffering physical abuse and disruptions to their community caused by the introduction of alcohol. Pages of this correspondence appear in italics between the novel's scenes, the pastor's cruel condescension rattling like hollow wind through the text.

Both of Liv's vocations, pastoring and scholarship, are logocentric in way that bothers her:

> I'd always found it silly, the idea that you can make things happen with words alone. There has to be something else, something more. Words need to encounter something other than words if they're to be meaningful, they have to emerge from something in life, something that comes from within, or at least from some other place, something that can lend them fullness and weight.

Both her sermons and her dissertation—and the letters on which her dissertation is based—are impotent words. They make nothing happen. Liv struggles to reconcile her profession of belief at church with the world as she experiences it.

But is Liv really a believer? Ørstavik carefully rations the reader's access to Liv's inner life in a way that makes this question hard to answer. After a frustrating conversation with Kristiane about her research, Liv thinks, "It was more the feeling that I was so alone with it, alone within it. Alone in something that was so important to me. That was the reason for my despair, I'd felt utterly alone. That was what she hadn't seen." But readers can only see what we are shown, and much of Kristiane's experience remains unavailable to us. Ørstavik, like Bergman, makes use of the Nordic landscape to set a frigid emotional tone. "The flat, open vista seemed to make everything so plain, but still felt like I couldn't get a hold on anything, as if I was so very far away." Ørstavik's writing can be like this vista: the untroubled glassy surface of the prose is deceptive; it does not provide a clear window through which to see into the heart or soul of Liv. The unrelenting cold of the novel's setting becomes a symbol of the barrage of tragedies that confront Liv in her ministry—among them the suicide of an adolescent girl. Liv's fumbling attempts to minister to the girl's parents are met with a clipped "We are not church people."

This doubt finds expression through art because there is no theology that can articulate with sufficient intimacy and nuance the sense of disillusionment these characters feel.

The Pastor's literary lineage can be traced back to the 1936 novel *The Diary of a Country Priest*. Near the beginning of that book, the young priest of the title, newly installed at a parish in a remote French village called Ambricourt, identifies the enemy of his vocation: boredom, which settles over everything "like a dust." He recognizes that boredom has always been a factor in humanity's dissatisfaction, but wonders if the condition has become more intense in his own time—an acrid apathy rising from the body of "Christianity in decay."

The young priest is sincere, if more than a little self-serious. He is thrown into relief by M. le Curé, an older priest painted in shades of Falstaff. M. le Curé enjoys telling his younger colleague about a time when priests lived comfortably and ate well. (The younger priest, meanwhile, is sustaining himself on rotgut wine and the occasional hunk of bread, the consequence of poor pay and a familial background of poverty.) But the decadence of priesthood past, M. le Curé argues—in the first of many long speeches recorded in the young priest's diary—was preferable to current poverty in that it provided a sense of vicarious comfort to those in the pews. And it's comfort above all, he argues, that a good parish priest provides to his flock. He does this through his daily ministry and through example, not just his preaching. "You don't expect the church to teach them joy in one wretched half-hour a week, do you? And even if they knew all the articles of the Council of Trent by heart, I doubt it would cheer them up very much."

But the younger priest isn't satisfied with comforting his parishioners; he also wants to educate them. He rides his bike from house to house, offering spiritual guidance (often to wearily tolerant listeners). He is able to bring a countess who had strayed from the Church back to her faith over the course of a long conversation, one of the novel's major set pieces. Yet, like Liv, he has his own doubts. He writes in his diary that he is aware "of an invisible presence which surely could not be God—rather a friend made in my image, although distinct from me, a separate entity." In his biography of Bernanos, Robert Speaight quotes a letter in which Bernanos says only that his priest "will have served God in exact proportion to his belief that he has served Him badly. His naïveté will win out in the end, and he will die peacefully of a cancer."

There are two doctors in Bernanos's novel. Near the beginning, the first commits suicide, and in doing so puts a crack in the priest's spiritual confidence; he begins to worry about loss of faith, while also deriding the whole concept of losing faith as "one of those sayings of *bourgeois* piety." Yet after the suicide, he admits, "In my soul nothing. God is silent." His fatal cancer is diagnosed by an anticlerical doctor who turns out to be an opium addict. However little solace faith may offer, science, represented by medicine, offers none.

Robert Bresson would adapt Bernanos's novel to film in 1951. In 1963, Ingmar Bergman made *Winter Light*, a film with many similarities to *The Diary of a Country Priest*. Bergman's Pastor Ericsson is a man made cruel by grief, and wracked by his own religious doubts. Bergman's plot is far sparer than Bernanos's or Ørstavik's; it occurs over a single day and follows one set of doomed parishioners—a pregnant woman and her husband, a man driven to suicide by his despair at the threat of nuclear war. What it means to take one's own life, and what might lead a person to do so, are questions in the background of all three of these works. The questions are never directly asked—much less answered—but the reader hears their thrum behind much of the dialogue.

Explicitly remarked upon are the worldly concerns that plague the lonely pastor and his flock, concerns that shift to align with the moment in which these books and movies were released. War's evil effects, rippling ever outward, are felt throughout *The Diary of a Country Priest*, which was written on the cusp of World War II. In *Winter Light*, it's the atomic bomb. Paul Schrader's *First Reformed* (which quotes directly from *The Diary* and borrows heavily from *Winter Light*) follows a minister and a churchgoer both radicalized by ecoterrorism. One of the protagonist's final conversations in *The Diary* is with a veteran of World War I, who savagely dresses Christendom down for ceding to modern politics and the attendant thirst for war, declaring, "You've secularized us. The first real secularization was that of the soldier. And it's some time ago now."

Like Bernanos's book, *The Pastor* suggests that science provides no satisfactory solution to our existential problems. The science that Liv is skeptical of is not medical but social. She has turned away from economics to study theology because the economic model of understanding human behavior seems to her too certain of itself. Ørstavik appears to share this skeptical view of the science, which cannot, for example, correct for the depth of the injustices the Sami people have been made to suffer. Unfortunately for Liv, however, theology also seems powerless to redeem those injustices. "Wasn't that what the Bible said? That they [the Sami] were equal unto others? Shouldn't they then be heard?…But it didn't work that way."

How best to describe succinctly what these books and films have in common? Is it an argument, a mood, or just a common set of circumstances? The ministers in all these stories are caught in the liminal space between belief and unbelief that we know as doubt. This doubt finds expression through art because there is no theology that can articulate with sufficient intimacy and nuance the sense of disillusionment these characters feel. It cannot be resolved, systematically, doctrinally, or otherwise. Narrative art, whether novels or movies, offers an honest depiction of the spiritual displacement of modernity, and gives voice to its intense loneliness. And though such art foregoes easy resolutions and consolations, it does not refuse hope. Bergman ends his film with Pastor Ericsson once again in his pulpit, though his pews are empty. Bernanos's novel ends with his young priest's dying words: "What does it matter? All is Grace." In *The Pastor*'s final scene, Liv dons her vestments, "scared that there was no truth," that she is binding herself in "layer upon layer of something that wasn't truthful, until at last I'd be unable to extricate myself"—and then extends her hand to the bereaved mother. *Winter Light* "penetrated certainty," in Bergman's words, but what Liv is looking for is not certainty exactly. In any case, certainty is not available to any of these characters; they are all too mired in the muck of this world, no less so than the people to whom they minister.

It's a troubling tension familiar to many religious believers today, as they try to fit an ancient faith into a modern world that often seems to have no room for it. They look to stories to aid them in this task, and the stories that succeed neither pretty up nor condemn our modern world, but in their honesty continue to hold our attention. On Manhattan's Upper East Side, there is a Dominican church where one of the friars will often stand on the steps smoking a cigarette, dressed in his cassock. Passersby notice him and double-take with a smile at the sight of him, a visible conjunction of the ancient and modern, his nonchalant stance evoking both the relics of Christendom and smoky barrooms. A faint glimpse of all that exists where those two worlds meet lingers like the wisp of smoke from his fingertips.

LAUREN KANE *is the managing editor of the* New York Review of Books.

Ingrid Thulin and Gunnar Bjornstrand in *Winter Light*, 1962

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CIVILIZE THE SACRIFICE

Joshua Hren

> It seemed to me only proper that words
> Should be withheld from vegetables and birds.
> —"Their Lonely Betters," W. H. Auden

She is at home with a hard providence,
A field of measly, mealy beets,
An army of aphids repeating its beat.

Purple stems, like steel poles,
Resist her stubborn, reiterate pulls 'til
Their leaves pale like flagged surrender.

There is no water native to this state.
Her eldest daughter, twitching thirst,
Sketches seven rivers in the dirt.

You can rub a beet between your palms
Until the warmth makes soft the meat,
Teeth turn blued-red and tear the feast.

You can chew the food for your young like a bird,
Spit it into your hand and then split it in justice
Across seven plates—to civilize the sacrifice.

JOSHUA HREN *is founder of Wiseblood Books and co-founder of the MFA at the University of St. Thomas, Houston. He regularly publishes essays and poems in* First Things, America, Public Discourse, *the* Hedgehog Review, *and* LOGOS. *His books include the short story collections* This Our Exile *(2018) and* In the Wine Press *(2020), the novel* Infinite Regress *(2022), as well as* Middle-earth and the Return of the Common Good: Tolkien and Political Philosophy *(2018),* How to Read (and Write) Like a Catholic *(2021), and* Contemplative Realism *(2022). His first book of poems,* Last Things, First Things, & Other Lost Causes, *is forthcoming from Little Gidding Press.*

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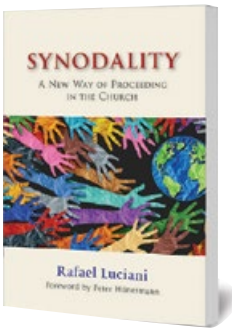

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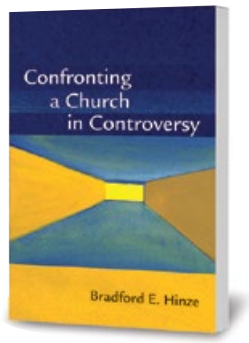

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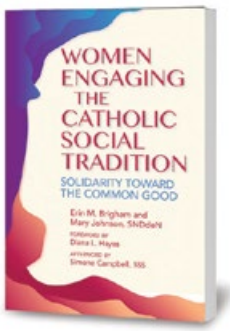

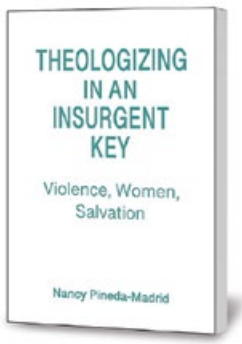

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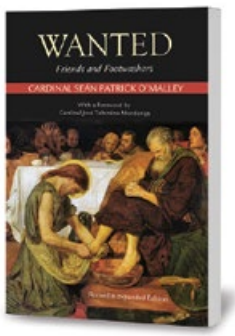

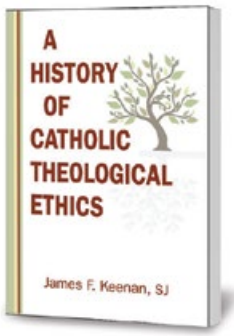

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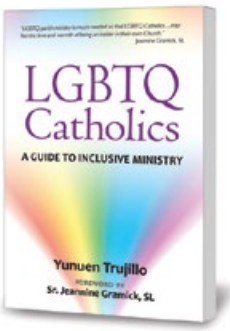

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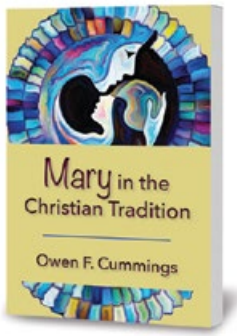

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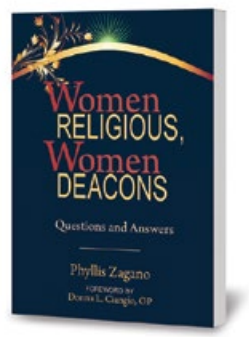

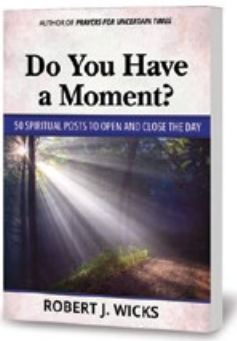

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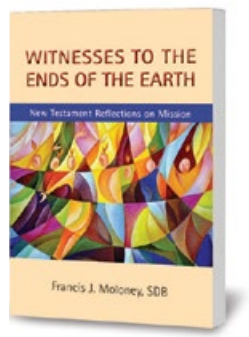

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Two people protesting the Russian invasion of Ukraine embrace, Washington D.C., March 6, 2022.

CNS PHOTO/SARAH SILBIGER, REUTERS

Christians First

CARRIE FREDERICK FROST

My paternal grandmother immigrated as a girl with her parents from western Ukraine in 1914. Her husband and family went to great lengths to get her U.S. citizenship in the 1930s. According to family lore, when it came time to sign the final papers, she looked at them and said, "I am no Polski." The documents listed her as renouncing Polish, not Ukrainian, citizenship, the border having changed after World War I. She refused to sign and did not become a citizen until twenty years later, after the border had changed again so that her hometown was officially in Ukraine.

I love this story because it illustrates three things: my grandmother's infamous obstinacy (a hereditary quality, my family used to say, looking at me); the instability of Ukraine's borders across time; and the way national identity is important to how people understand themselves, for better or for worse. My grandmother felt an allegiance to her native Ukraine that was even stronger than her dedication to her new home, though she and her husband from Belarus understood America to be the land of promise. (Her response also indicates that no love has been lost between Ukrainians and the Polish, but Poland is surely coming through now, in Ukraine's hour of need—and God bless them for it.)

A boy lights candles at the church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, Lviv, Ukraine, March 13, 2022.

Identity is still potent stuff. Surely one effect of Russia's horrific violence in Ukraine is a deepening of Ukrainian identity and loyalty. Many Ukrainians are essentially saying, "I am no Ruski."

As much as I am amused by my grandmother's refusal to be categorized as Polish, and as much as I am sympathetic to the strengthening of Ukrainian identity in the wake of the invasion, I have reservations about the kind of national identity that trumps every other loyalty. As an Orthodox Christian, I try to remember where I store my treasure. When I am at my best, my ultimate allegiance is only to my creator. This identity, as a beloved child of God, is my primary identity. My tribe is the human tribe, created in the image and likeness of God. The fratricide in Ukraine reminds us how far short of this ideal many Christians still fall. If we truly understood ourselves and one another as creatures formed in the image and likeness of God, war would not be possible.

I do not know how to put an end to what's happening in Ukraine now. I, like so many others, feel lost, unsure of which course of action our leaders ought to take to end this slowly unfolding nightmare. Amid all the uncertainty, one can at least insist on our shared identity as created and loved—an identity shared by Ukrainians and Russians, as well as Christians around the world.

I mourn for Ukraine. I also mourn for the Russian people, who are being groomed by their government to value their national identity above all else, and to turn a blind eye to horrors perpetrated in the name of Mother Russia. I worry, too, about the way national identity may be treated here in the United States during this war. Will we look askance at Russian immigrants and their descendants? Will we treat them the way we treated Japanese Americans in World War II? Will our own American identity, and our pride in that identity, obscure rather than clarify our view of what is at stake in Europe, confirming Putin's propaganda that this is about a conflict of civilizations? I hope not. It would be dangerously myopic for us to elevate national identity today because it is strategically expedient. Even if we manage to avoid another world war, we are likely headed into another cold war. May we learn some lessons from the first Cold War and keep national identity from becoming an obstacle to peace.

My heart breaks for my Ukrainian brothers and sisters. It had been the hope of so many that the twenty-first century would be an era of recovery from the twentieth, not a perpetuation of life-destroying conflicts among nation states or would-be empires, not a fresh hell. Now we are watching the persecution of one Christian people by another, and a desecration of the belief shared by Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox Christians that all human beings are to be understood and treated as beloved children of God.

I pray, and hope against hope, that Vladimir Putin may experience a radical conversion of heart, and that the Russian people may understand and reject the atrocities being committed in their name. I pray, first and last, for those still in Ukraine and those who have fled. But my sense of solidarity is not mainly a matter of my own Ukrainian identity; it is a requirement of my Christian identity. Moved by sympathy with Ukraine and outrage at Russia's aggression, many now find themselves saying, "Today, we are all Ukrainians." But it is, or should be, enough to say, "I am a Christian—and therefore opposed to every attempt by one nation to dominate another." In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither Russian nor Ukrainian. As we pray in the liturgy, let us "hope for peaceful times for the whole world," and let us work to overcome the kind of pride that starts wars and keeps them from ending.

CARRIE FREDERICK FROST *is a professor of theology at Saint Sophia Ukrainian Orthodox Seminary, a lecturer in religious studies at Western Washington University, and a mother of five.*

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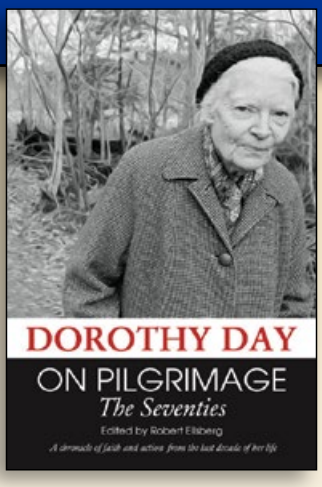

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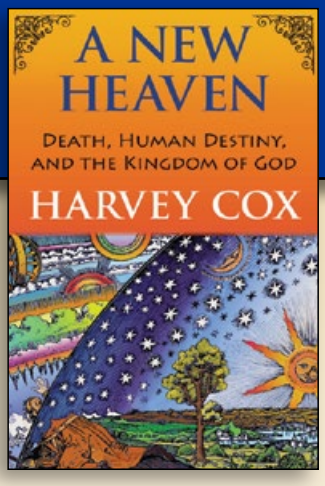

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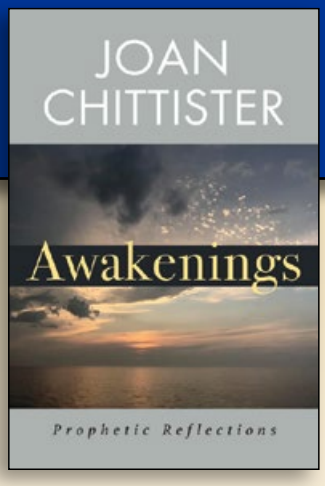

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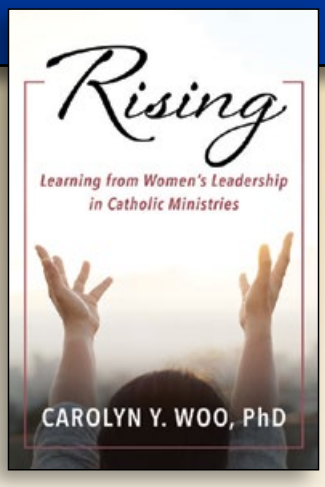

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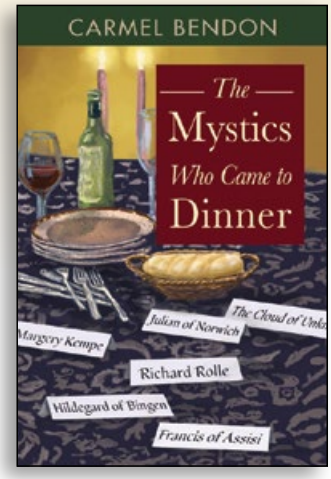

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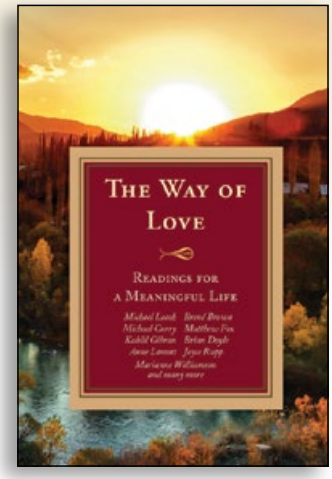

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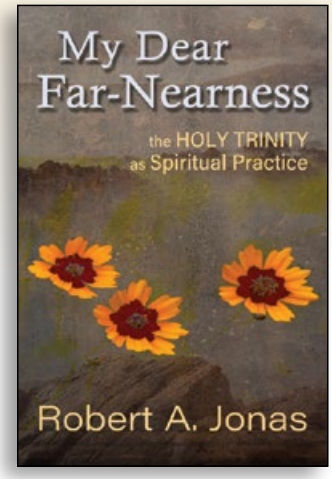

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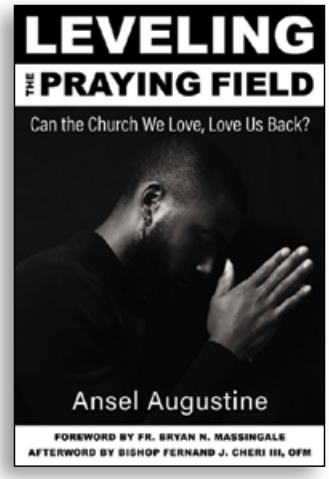

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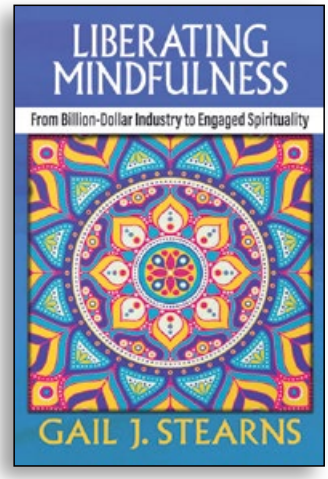

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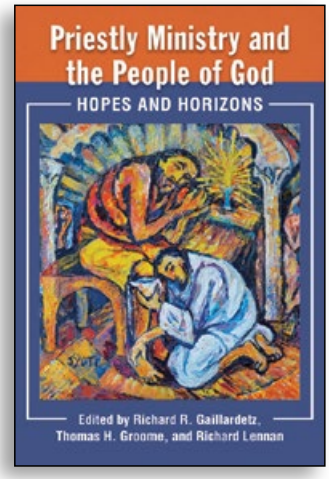

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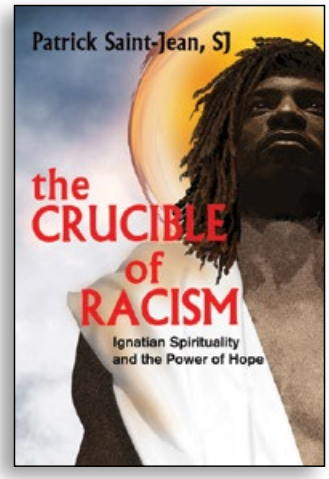

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