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Religion, Politics, Culture

Commonweal

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LETTERS

Saving the eurozone, 'tariff' penances, and remembering Afghan refugees

CART BEFORE HORSE

As an economist, I believe one should not neglect to highlight the eurozone's problems when addressing the issues of the European Union. James J. Sheehan seems to be doing so in his review of Perry Anderson's *Ever Closer Union?* ("Here to Stay," March). Sheehan states that "replacing [the euro] with national currencies would be extraordinarily difficult to accomplish and would have incalculable economic consequences." This hides the fundamental shortcomings of the eurozone.

The fundamental problem can be summarized in two words: policy error. In 1999, European leaders put an economic cart, i.e. the common currency, in front of a political horse, i.e. political (fiscal) union. To seek a currency union without a political union is illusory. The designers of the EU and the common currency believed in the necessity of a federal Europe—ultimately like the United States of America—and hoped that a monetary union would lead to a political union. Unfortunately, however, the eurozone political leaders have been kicking the can down the road since the common currency's inception. How can anyone expect the eurozone to succeed without achieving a political union that allows for a common treasury and banking system?

German political leaders (represented by the successors to Chancellor Angela Merkel) hold the key. To save the euro (and the EU), German leaders must be able to persuade German voters to graduate from prioritizing short-term, parochial German interests to a more inclusive *Weltanschauung* that would tolerate Germany becoming a temporary financier to save the peripheral member countries that need help.

The legendary Chancellor Konrad Adenauer of West Germany allegedly lamented, "God made a grave mistake. He set a limit to the level of our intelligence but did not set a limit to our stupidity." When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, Germans proved him wrong. I believe that Germans have another opportunity to demonstrate their beloved late chancellor wrong by saving the euro and the European Union.

Yeomin Yoon
Stillman School of Business
Seton Hall University
South Orange, N.J.

JAMES J. SHEEHAN REPLIES:

My thanks to Professor Yoon for his thoughtful letter. I agree with his diagnosis of the eurozone's fundamental problem, but I am afraid that the solution he suggests is not possible at the moment: Germany will not—and perhaps could not—create the kind of political institutions the euro needs to function like a national currency. The EU is stuck with the euro and will have to learn to live with it as best it can.

'TARIFF' PENANCES & PENITENTIALS

I thank Michael Marchal for his comments about my article "How the Irish Changed Penance" (Letters, April), but I'm puzzled how he can claim I did not mention "tariff" penances and their eventual abuse by those who had others "pay" their penance for them. In fact, I devoted a full paragraph to the problem and another lengthy paragraph to numerous specific tariffs. The same section of my article discusses "penitentials"—another topic Marchal oddly claims I omitted.

I did leave out the forgotten initiative of the 1980s in which Marchal was involved and which he says fell afoul of supporters of "traditionalism." I was telling the tale of Irish monks in antiquity, not North American laymen of our day.

John Rodden
Austin, Tex.

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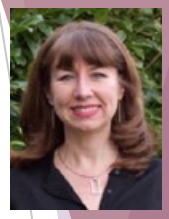
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LETTERS

WHO REMEMBERS?

Andrew Bacevich is right to remind readers of the impact of news cycles on memory ("The Value of 'Whataboutism,'" April). I write from Abu Dhabi, where roughly ten thousand refugees displaced during America's withdrawal from Afghanistan still await resettlement. Since last August, the UAE has stepped up to offer medical services, vaccinations, meals, clean beds, and more while State Department officials deal with our own bureaucratic hurdles in helping these people find homes in the United States or elsewhere. It's one of the strains on our relationship with the UAE government at the moment, but who, except those working on resettlement, remembers?

Bacevich rightly points out the "complexity" of war and its "chameleon" character and the understandable but imprudent desire for the United States to entangle itself more deeply in combat—again. He points out our amnesia with Afghanistan and Iraq, and though he doesn't say it here, he could just as easily add Korea and Vietnam. Contractors and arms dealers have done quite well in all these failed missions, while untold numbers of people have been displaced, maimed, or killed. A strong military should form part of diplomacy, and while it is clear Putin has no concern for rules of war, international law, or diplomacy, we need to remember, as Bacevich points out, repentance and reparation, not just military might.

I wish Bacevich's balanced voice were among those advising the highest levels of government during these very complex times.

Edward J. Dupuy
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Getting Used to It

One measure of a sick society is how much suffering it can resign itself to. By this measure, the United States isn't doing very well these days. Much of the country is now treating an ongoing global pandemic—one that has killed more than a million of our fellow citizens—as if it were already behind us, though thousands are still hospitalized every day. An opioid epidemic that took the lives of more than a hundred thousand Americans last year is often spoken of as if it were a natural disaster: lamentable, mysterious, out of our control. Meanwhile, as the rate of real natural disasters steadily increases, we carry on as if extreme weather events were acts of God rather than evidence of climate change, a problem we helped cause and could still correct if we chose to. Call this attitude exhaustion or call it callousness. Just don't call it resilience: there are things one shouldn't get over too quickly, and things one should never get used to. *This*—not the number of people leaving their jobs—is the Great Resignation we should be most worried about.

Perhaps the most egregious example of this disabling fatalism is our collective unwillingness to do anything serious about gun violence. The intervals between mass shootings seem to get shorter with every passing year. So does the time it takes us to mourn and move on. We know there will be another shooting all too soon, and many of us seem to have decided that there is nothing we can do about it. The names and places change, the death counts vary, but most of these stories are otherwise distressingly similar: a very young man, in the grip of some hatred or delusion, gets hold of a very dangerous weapon and kills as many people as he can.

On May 14 an eighteen-year-old white supremacist opened fire at a grocery store in a Black neighborhood of Buffalo. Ten people died, three more were injured. Eleven of the victims were Black. The next day there were two more mass shootings, one at a flea market in Houston, another at a church near Los Angeles, but these received relatively little media coverage. There is, after all, a limit to how many shootings the public can pay attention to in one weekend. The Gun Violence Archive reports that, as of May 23, there have been 210 mass shootings (shootings with at least four victims) in 2022. That's an average of ten a week.

Before his rampage, the suspect in the Buffalo shooting posted a 180-page manifesto explaining his motives. He subscribes to the Great Replacement theory, the pernicious idea that an elite made up of Jews and Democrats are trying to replace white Americans with immigrants and Black people. A slightly sanitized version of this theory has lately been taken up by several prominent right-wing figures, including Fox News host Tucker Carlson and Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York. Last year an ad for Stefanik's re-election campaign claimed that a Democratic "plan to grant amnesty to 11 MILLION illegal immigrants will overthrow our current electorate and create a permanent liberal majority in Washington." A *New York Times* report found that Carlson has made similar claims on more than four hundred episodes of his show. Both Carlson and Stefanik were quick to condemn the Buffalo shooter and his manifesto, which Carlson described as "the product of a diseased mind." But by normalizing what was until recently a fringe conspiracy theory, Carlson and others are playing with fire. Some Fox viewers may be naïve enough to take Carlson seriously when he says that powerful people in Washington are trying to crowd them out of their own country.

As it happens, the suspect in the Buffalo shooting appears to have been radicalized not by Fox News or a cynical member of Congress, but by the right-wing message board 4chan, where the Great Replacement theory circulates undisguised. Four days after the shooting, New York's attorney-general, Letitia James, announced an investigation into several social-media platforms used by the suspect.

Tech companies that provide a forum for right-wing terrorists should of course be held accountable, as should public figures who use coded language to stoke racial resentments. But other developed countries have racism, demagoguery, and the internet. The reason only the United States has so many mass shootings is its lax gun laws. Despite having been picked up by the police for making violent threats at his high school, the suspect in the Buffalo shooting was able to walk into a gun store a year later and buy a Bushmaster XM-15 semi-automatic rifle. Such weapons do not belong in the hands of any civilian, let alone an unstable teenager. As a senator, Joe Biden helped pass a 1994 law banning assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, but it was allowed to expire ten years later, with predictable consequences. Congress should restore that ban immediately and look for new ways to make it harder for people like the Buffalo shooter to purchase *any* kind of weapon. Gun violence is something no decent society can afford to get used to. We should call out all the politicians still pretending they don't know how to stop the carnage. Call them out now, and vote them out soon.

The Killing of Shireen Abu Akleh

Local Christian leaders didn't mince words following the killing of veteran reporter Shireen Abu Akleh in the Israeli-occupied West Bank on May 11 and the chaos at her funeral in Jerusalem two days later. Echoing pointed statements from Al Jazeera (Abu Akleh's employer) and the Palestinian National Authority blaming Israeli Defense Forces for her death, bishops and patriarchs from various denominations decried the "violent intrusion of the Israeli Police into a funeral procession of the slain journalist" as a "severe violation of international norms and regulations, including the fundamental human right of freedom of religion." This was in bracing contrast to the remarks from now-former White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki, who described the events only as "deeply disturbing." President Biden and Secretary of State Anthony Blinken issued little more than vague calls for "investigations."

What seems clear from videos, eyewitness accounts, and other evidence is that the shooting was no accident. Abu Akleh, who held dual Palestinian and American citizenship and had worked in the region for decades, was reporting on an early-morning incursion by Israeli Defense Forces into a Palestinian refugee camp in the city of Jenin. Her combat helmet and flak jacket—both clearly marked "Press"—did not protect her from a bullet that entered the back of her skull with lethal precision. Her producer, Ali Samoudi, was also wounded in the back. The shots almost certainly came from the IDF, according to independent analyses by different watchdog groups, including Netherlands-based Bellingcat and B'Tselem, an Israeli human-rights group. A third review, conducted by the *Associated Press*, bolsters their hypotheses.

Israeli officials, meanwhile, have denied and dissembled. On the day Abu Akleh was killed, military spokesman Ran Kochav quipped that Palestinian journalists in the West Bank were "armed with cameras," thus suggesting Abu Akleh was herself to blame. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett theorized that Abu Akleh was killed by Palestinians shooting in an "inaccurate, indiscriminate, and uncontrolled manner." Responding to growing global criticism, Defense Minister Benny Gantz and Israeli Police Chief Kobi Shabtai soon launched inquiries into the army's role in Abu Akleh's death and into police brutality at her funeral, where Israeli officers stormed the procession of mourners bearing her coffin and attacked patients and personnel inside nearby St. Joseph's Hospital. The probable result of these inquiries is hard to know. According to Yesh Din, another Israeli human-rights organization, just 3 percent of Israeli investigations into acts of violence against Palestinians by Israeli soldiers result in indictment and prosecution.

More facts concerning Abu Akleh's killing will eventually emerge. Perhaps they will confirm accusations by Al Jazeera, Reporters Without Borders, and other international organizations that Israel systematically targets those who dare to report on alleged human-rights abuses against Palestinians. Whatever we learn, Abu Akleh's death is indicative of the dangers faced by journalists as governments increasingly clamp down on press freedoms. And it's not just in combat zones or countries ruled by oppressive regimes: around 85 percent of the world's population lives someplace where press freedom has declined over the past five years, according to the *Economist*. Notwithstanding dishonest and irrational attacks on the media from right-wing politicians and pundits, the United States is not quite there yet. But that is no excuse for complacency, and vigilance is needed. President Biden has emphasized his goal of restoring the health of global democracy, which is impossible without the existence of a free and independent press. The administration could demonstrate its belief in this principle by demanding more from Israel about its role in the death of a reporter who was just doing her job.

—Griffin Oleynick

Anti-Trans Legislation

A new Alabama law banning gender-affirming medical care for transgender minors was in effect for less than a week before a judge ruled that several of its provisions were unconstitutional. The law is part of a larger trend of state legislation targeting trans and gay youth. Some of the legislation, like the Alabama ban, would make it a felony to provide puberty blockers, hormone therapy, or surgery to minors. Other laws, like one in Florida, prohibit any conversation about sexuality or gender in classrooms below a certain grade level. Still others would prevent trans girls from using girls' bathrooms.

Proponents of such legislation say they are only trying to protect children. There is a particularly cruel irony in this claim. Transgender youth are among the most vulnerable people in society. They are disproportionately subject to bullying and abuse and are significantly more likely than their cisgender peers to attempt suicide and struggle with serious depression. Numerous studies have associated affirming children's gender identities with improved mental health, and national surveys by the Trevor Project suggest that the best way to reduce the number of suicide attempts by LGBTQ youth is to provide a welcoming and accepting environment for them. Despite such evidence, one Tennessee bill would give teachers the right to "misgender" their students.

For prepubescent children, transitioning is not about surgery; it is about being allowed to choose one's own clothing, haircuts, and pronouns. In fact, no surgeons in Alabama provide gender-affirming surgery for minors, which means that clause of the law is merely symbolic and completely gratuitous. But thanks to the judge's ruling, the puberty blockers that the law also banned can once again be introduced in consultation with families and medical professionals. These medications, which have been in use for

decades, allow children who display "a long-lasting and intense pattern" of gender dysphoria to delay puberty. According to the Pediatric Endocrine Society, of youth who wanted puberty suppression, those that received it were 70 percent less likely to have suicidal ideation than those who did not.

Transitioning is complicated, and even medical professionals continue to debate the exact role of various medical interventions. But the people best poised to work through those physical and psychological complications are the children, families, doctors, and counselors involved. Sending doctors who provide this care to jail, with no provisions for children already taking medication, is not a solution. Anti-trans bills rely on misinformation about what transitioning actually entails, and have been sharply criticized by medical institutions, including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Medical Association. The rhetoric used by anti-trans lawmakers and their supporters is even worse than the legislation itself, stoking groundless fears that trans girls will prey on cisgender girls in school bathrooms (no such incident has ever been verified) or accusing critics of the new legislation of being pedophile "groomers."

Some of these bills will never make it to a governor's desk; some will be blocked by the courts. But the fact that they are even being introduced serves to shame and shun an already stigmatized and often defenseless group of people. Whether such proposals are motivated by ignorance or malice, it is clear that their practical effect would be to harm, not protect, children.

—Isabella Simon

The Bishops and Roe

On Wednesday, May 4, Religion News Service (RNS) carried a dispatch headed "Roe v. Wade: Faith leaders react to leaked SCOTUS opinion." The article quoted twenty different "faith leaders" speaking for or against Justice Samuel Alito's draft opinion. Not one of these religious leaders was a Catholic bishop.

That silence was quickly broken, by individual bishops across the country and by Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore, the head of the U.S. bishops' pro-life committee. They all said what was expected and in order: Catholics must care about every unborn child and every mother. The Church was doing so through many ministries and programs. If the law was changed, as they hoped it would be, Catholics would have to be ready to do far more.

I don't know why the bishops were a lap behind other religious leaders in commenting on the leak, and I'm not unhappy about it. Perhaps RNS simply didn't call them. Perhaps they wisely decided to take a few breaths before plunging into the scrum. They may recall one very distinguished prelate who, for all his smarts and likeability, seemed to hew to the motto "Ready, fire, aim!"

I suspect that many Catholics also welcomed the recent announcement by the bishops' conference that its June 13–17 semi-annual meeting would eschew all public sessions and statements in favor of a closed-door retreat. Last June's meeting, when the conference muddled the most genuine sacramental concern about the Eucharist with the most partisan political gesture of censuring President Biden, is all too fresh in our memory.

Unfortunately, episcopal silence at the very time when a landmark court decision on abortion is going to be announced will be a lapse with grave consequences.

Everyone knows of the bishops' opposition to *Roe v. Wade* and other court decisions defending abortion rights, although it wouldn't hurt to see this restated in a reasoned, sensitive, and pastoral manner. What the public has not heard is a matching statement from the Church's leaders spelling out the components of a "culture of life" that would protect and empower vulnerable women and children. Those components would have to include the guaranteed provision of health care, paid maternity leave, childcare, income support, and a variety of anti-discrimination measures. They would have to include a firm cultural and legal rejection of violence against women and sexual predation. They would have to include personal compassion and a vigorous mobilization of Catholic generosity for women and families confronting troubled or tragic pregnancies.

The bishops do not have to offer a full-fledged policy agenda in response to any Supreme Court decision. That would be impossible, if not improper. But the episcopal response has to be unambiguous about the direction and urgency of change, the need for personal and collective sacrifice, and the immorality of demanding sacrifice only from those who are already burdened.

There is strong precedent in the statement made last March by Archbishop José H. Gomez, president of the conference, and eight bishops leading committees addressing issues of women and children. They called upon the Church "to redouble our advocacy for laws that ensure the right to life for unborn children and that no mother or family lacks the basic resources needed to care for their children, regardless of race, age, immigration status, or any other factor."

No one knows exactly when the court will issue its ruling, or how closely it will resemble Alito's draft opinion. But a short, resounding statement from the bishops has to be at the ready. If they say nothing, or imagine that their longstanding opposition to abortion says all that needs saying, then their voices—and the Church's voice—will be swallowed up by the harshest and most partisan reactions on either side of the debate, including some who falsely pretend to represent the Church. If the bishops let that happen, then harmful public perceptions about the Church's views will be fixed in place during the many difficult battles over abortion yet to come.

—Peter Steinfels

A longer version of this article is available online.

MATT MAZEWSKI

Too Big to Pluck

Biden's 'billionaire tax'

During last fall's negotiations in Congress over President Biden's ill-fated "Build Back Better" package of social, environmental, and labor legislation, Senate Democrats put forward an intriguing plan for a new tax on the very wealthy. The proposal, which would have applied only to a few hundred of the highest net-worth Americans, called for treating "unrealized capital gains" as taxable income. Unrealized capital gains are the increased value of investment assets that are held without being sold. The proposal was presumably designed to win the support of the inscrutable senior senator from Arizona, Kyrsten Sinema, who had previously declared her opposition to any increase in personal or corporate income-tax rates.

Whether anything can win the support of Sinema—or of her fellow Senate enigma Joe Manchin—remains to be seen, but the Biden administration appears to be keeping hope alive. As part of his budget proposal for the next fiscal year, intended as a starting point for a new round of negotiations over his domestic priorities, President Biden has unveiled a new "Billionaire Minimum Income Tax" (BMIT) that resembles the Senate Democrats' idea from last autumn. Any taxpayer with a net worth of more than $100 million—around one one-hundredth of 1 percent of American households—would pay at least 20 percent of their "full income" in federal taxes, where full income is defined to include unrealized capital gains. For example, someone with a net worth over $100 million who bought stock worth $1,000 in January 2021 and saw its value increase to $5,000 by the end of the year would have owed taxes in 2022 on the $4,000 difference, even if they never sold the stock. (Someone worth less than $100 million who engaged in the same transaction would have owed nothing.)

The objective of such a policy is to ensure, in the administration's words, that "the wealthiest Americans no longer pay a tax rate lower than teachers and firefighters." Because income taxes are currently assessed only on *realized* capital gains—or the difference between the value for which an asset is sold and the price at which it was purchased—many among the ultra-rich are able to evade taxation by never actually selling their assets. Instead, they obtain whatever income they need for consumption by taking out loans secured by their holdings—and paying these off with other loans later. Since interest payments on these loans are often less than what would be owed in capital gains taxes, it can be highly lucrative for the very wealthy to pursue a tax-avoidance strategy that allows them to "buy, borrow, and die" without ever owing anything.

Still, the BMIT is intended to be a kind of *income* tax, and does not go as far as taxing the underlying wealth itself, a policy advocated in recent years by figures like Sen. Elizabeth Warren and Sen. Bernie Sanders. Nevertheless, the recent discussion around wealth taxes has no doubt helped to shift the Overton window far enough to put the notion of taxing unrealized capital gains well within the mainstream of Democratic policy discourse.

The BMIT raises some of the same questions that would be faced by a wealth tax, such as how to value assets that are not publicly traded, like ownership stakes in private companies, or how to pay taxes on illiquid wealth that cannot easily be turned into cash. Manchin, for his part, has already complained that you "can't be taxed on things you don't have," or that you might have only "on paper." Oddly, no one ever seems to raise this objection against the concept of property taxes, which are nearly ubiquitous and assessed on illiquid assets (houses and land). Critics of wealth-tax proposals have also charged that they are probably unconstitutional, since the Constitution prohibits "direct taxes" on individuals and the federal income tax is only permitted because of the Sixteenth Amendment, ratified in 1913. Even if public support for taxing the wealthy more aggressively remains high, a BMIT would almost certainly attract legal challenges based on the theory that unrealized capital gains are not truly "income."

These challenges are not insurmountable. Plenty of situations call

Billionaires Bill Gates and Michael Bloomberg at the Grand Palais in Paris, France, December 11, 2017

ABACA PRESS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

for valuing closely held businesses and other assets that are not publicly traded: these include mergers and acquisitions, divorce proceedings, or disputes among shareholders. As for concerns about money being tied up in assets that cannot be readily sold, the Biden proposal would allow those who deem themselves liquidity-constrained to defer tax payments for several years (with interest). One wonders how many people would really need such an exemption. As the economists Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman wrote in their defense of Warren's plan, "the notion that someone worth $100 million doesn't have enough cash on hand to pay a $1 million tax…is self-evidently absurd."

Nor is the constitutional case against any kind of wealth tax open and shut. In early 2021, Warren released letters from more than a dozen law professors arguing that Congress does in fact have the power to tax wealth, with one pointing out that the Constitution's definition of an impermissible "direct tax" involves only "capitation taxes," or those levied per person, as well as taxes on land alone, but not those on "other activities or bases." And if a wealth tax would pass constitutional muster, so would Biden's BMIT.

To my mind, the larger question is not whether the BMIT is a good idea—the White House projects that it would raise more than $300 billion over a decade, and from the right people—but whether it goes far enough in recognizing the societal threat posed by extreme inequality. The press release describing the BMIT proposal explains that "President Biden is a capitalist and believes that anyone should be able to become a millionaire or a billionaire"—a statement that capitalism itself renders essentially self-contradictory, and one that naïvely ignores the reasons why,

in the words of Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's former advisor Dan Riffle, "every billionaire is a policy failure."

Plutocrats use their loot to influence the political system both directly, in the form of campaign contributions and donations to super PACs, and indirectly, through expenditures on lobbying, policy shops, and media organizations that shape the information environment. This ensures that the idiosyncratic preferences of a tiny few, rather than the needs of society as a whole, determine how vast amounts of capital are allocated. In response to the suborbital space flights by Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson in 2021, Sanders lamented how "here on Earth, in the richest country on the planet, half our people live paycheck to paycheck, people are struggling to feed themselves, struggling to see a doctor—but hey, the richest guys in the world are off in outer space!"

Even many of the Founding Fathers, who were among the wealthiest men of their day and certainly no advocates of eliminating all of capital's prerogatives, nevertheless understood how severe concentrations of wealth could be destabilizing to society. In *The Citizens' Share: Putting Ownership Back into Democracy*, Rutgers University's Joseph Blasi and Douglas Kruse and Harvard's Richard Freeman write that prominent early-American statesmen like Adams, Jefferson, and Madison believed that "broad-based ownership would give many citizens a stake in preserving the political and economic system," and that concentrated ownership would instead breed antisocial class resentments.

Going after this wealth is not only about raising revenue for public services; it's also about taking back some of the power that modern-day oligarchs have arrogated to themselves. Just taxing unrealized capital gains will never deconcentrate enough wealth to make a difference: as Warren and Sanders have insisted, you have to tax the wealth itself. According to the Institute for Policy Studies Program on Inequality, the combined wealth of U.S. billionaires increased by about $1.7 trillion, or 58 percent, between March 2020, when the pandemic began to meaningfully affect the world economy, and May of this year. Even if 20 percent of those gains were taxed away, the net increase would still have been more than 46 percent over the course of two years—an astonishing rate of return even in the best of times, never mind during a global public-health crisis.

Instead of just using the proceeds from such a tax to pay for existing federal expenditures or finance new programs, we could use at least part of the extra revenue to finance the creation of a social-wealth fund—a publicly owned pool of investments that would pay a dividend to all Americans. The Alaska Permanent Fund, which was first established in 1976 and remains popular among the state's residents to this day, provides a template for how to distribute capital income more broadly and thereby bring us closer to the Founders' vision of a society in which everyone has some ownership share in productive property. Over time, this approach could begin to make a meaningful dent in wealth inequality in America—and in the dramatic imbalance of power that comes with it.

Jean-Baptiste Colbert, King Louis XIV's finance minister, famously said that "the art of taxation consists in so plucking the goose as to obtain the largest possible amount of feathers with the smallest possible amount of hissing." Today, a tiny number of geese are growing much bigger and more ornery than the rest of the flock. Plucking even a handful of their feathers tends to result in vicious pecking. We should certainly keep looking for new ways to collect those feathers, but we should also figure out how to keep these geese from growing so big in the first place.

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CHARLES MCNAMARA

What Is Equity?

And why is the Right so upset about it?

We live in the age of "equity," a word suddenly on the lips of activists and politicians everywhere. We also live in an age of injustice: the murderous knee on the neck of a suffocating Black man, the systematic erasure of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, lopsided pandemic fatalities among poor, marginal populations. As we come to recognize how our own laws and investments can encourage such inhumanity, calls for "equity" continue to grow across contemporary society, from the boardroom to the classroom.

By the numbers, the notion of "equity" has become more prominent in our cultural lexicon during the past few years. According to statistics compiled by Google, the phrase "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" was practically nonexistent in search-engine queries until about 2014, ballooning in 2020 alongside the twin crises of the pandemic and the George Floyd protests. And as Harvard Law Professor Martha Minow points out in a recent article in the *American Journal of Law and Equality*, political leaders have increasingly embraced this term in their talking points. Minow points to its appearance in President Biden's executive orders and in legal protections for Americans with disabilities. One hears it in the speeches of Black Lives Matter activists and in White House press briefings.

This ascent of "equity" as our culture's ethical North Star, however, has provoked some backlash across the political spectrum. In 2020, the socialist magazine *Jacobin* published stinging criticism of anti-racist workplace trainings, on the grounds that they "allow employers to consolidate their power over employees under a veneer of social justice." These workshops, *Jacobin* contends, "mostly function as a form of legal protection for employers from potential discrimination lawsuits." Zeeshan Aleem recently discussed a perfect example of this kind of corporate cynicism in a column for MSNBC's website. The outdoor retailer REI was cloaking its union-busting propaganda in the language of equity initiatives, "signaling that it's on the right side of things and should be trusted while offering zero concessions" to exploited employees.

But the political Right is home to the most vociferous critics of our cultural and political turn toward the language of equity. In *National Review*, Christopher Caldwell warns that we "might call equity a no-excuses imperative to eliminate all collective racial inequalities." Rather than see equity as "a new name for something that Americans have been arguing about for two or three generations"—the equal treatment of minority groups and the expansion of civil rights—Caldwell and others argue that "the equity movement is radically new." More specifically, Caldwell claims that "equity is derived from so-called critical race theory," and warns that calls for equity constitute "an invisible legal revolution."

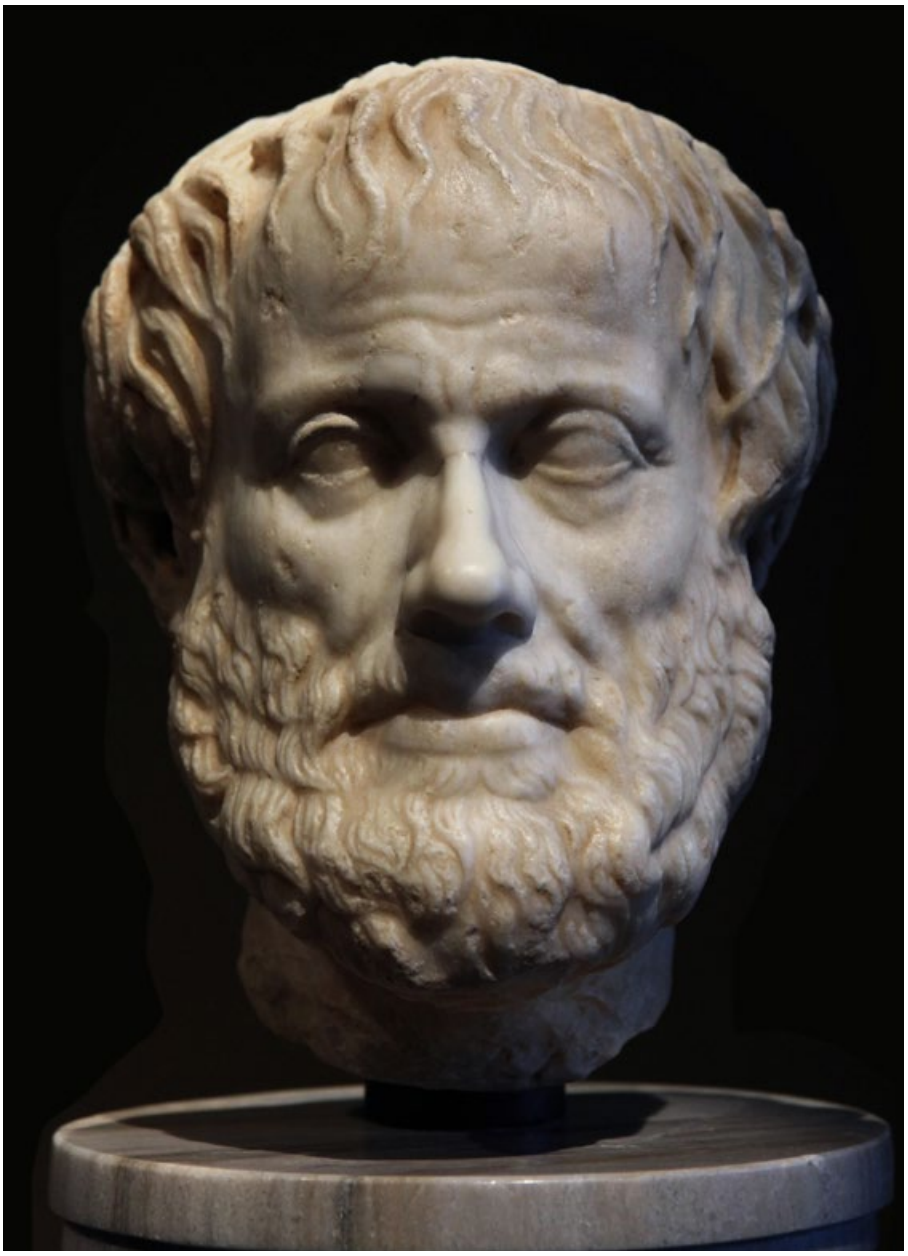
The upward slope of Google's statistical graphs, the proliferation of Robin DiAngelo–style corporate training, Caldwell's nod to vanguard frameworks of legal academia—these all suggest that there is indeed something "radically new" about equity as an ethical and legal concept. But this suggestion could not be further from the truth: "equity" is in fact one of the oldest principles of Western ethics, standing far above our moment of degraded partisan politics. We impoverish our understanding of it by consulting only the past two decades rather than the past two millennia. Hardly some novel "legal revolution," the notion of equity has always set before us the perennial challenge of doing both what is lawful and what is right.

Making sense of today's prevailing misunderstandings of equity will be easier if we excavate its origins, both as a matter of American legal culture and as a principle of ethics. First and foremost, it is simply untrue that "equity is derived from so-called critical race theory." Critical race theory, a set of ideas taught primarily in law schools, has existed for only a few decades, but even if we adopt a looser understanding of this label, we still run into historical impossibilities. Christopher Rufo, a leader of the Right's crusade to outlaw free discussion of race in classrooms, contends that "critical race theory is…built on the intellectual framework of identity-based Marxism." He claims that leftist activists hide their pernicious agenda by deploying "euphemisms" like "equity."

If we follow Rufo's suggestion that equity-based ethical thought has its roots not in the most recent trends of legal scholarship but instead in "Marxism"—whose eponymous founder lived in the 1800s—we're still off by about two thousand years. A brief historical survey will make this timeline clear. In the limited domain of English literature, the word is practically as old as the language itself: it appears as early as the fourteenth century, in the work of Chaucer and in *Piers Plowman*. And according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "equity" has always carried the meaning of "fairness" and "even-handedness." It has never had anything to do with seizing the means of production.

But perhaps Rufo would rather disregard these general notions of equity as "evenness" and focus strictly on equity as a principle of jurisprudence. How else are we to understand the threat he thinks it poses to American political institutions? "An equity-based form of government," he warns, "would mean the end not only of private property, but also of individual rights, equality under the law, federalism, and freedom of speech."

There is much to say about Rufo's catastrophizing fiction here, but let's concentrate on his presentation of "equity" as a novel principle designed



Blame him.

to undermine "equality under the law." Simply put, Rufo does not understand that for millennia equity has been deployed precisely as a tool to bolster the law's integrity. The importance of "equity" in this particularly legal sense is evident in all eras of the word's history. In one nineteenth-century example in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, we find that chancellors "moderated the rigour of the law according…to equity." Equity in this case, the *OED* informs us, refers to the "general principles of justice…to correct or supplement the provisions of the law," not to overturn it.

Anglophone jurists did not invent this legal brand of "equity" but were merely giving a modern English name to an ancient concept. In one sixteenth-century example, the *OED* reports that "equytye" was understood to be a synonym of "epykay" or "epiky," a word no longer used by English speakers. In another sixteenth-century text, the crucial project of "auoydyng disturbaunce in the communewealth" requires that we rely on "epiky and moderacion." "Epiky" and its variants, it turns out, are mangled English transliterations of the Greek word ἐπιείκεια or *epieikeia*, a key concept from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* transplanted into English prose. (Other historical attestations make this linguistic link even clearer: one example from the sixteenth century reports that "epicheia…is proprely the mynde of the lawe.") As these several citations demonstrate, the legal idea of "equity" originated in neither twentieth-century scholarship on race nor in nineteenth-century Marxist texts. Instead, it grew out of Greek philosophical source material. Equity is not some radical academic fad; it's one of the most ancient and canonical principles of Western ethical and legal thought.

What exactly does Aristotle have to say about this "epiky" that so influenced those sixteenth-century Anglophone jurists? If "equity" isn't some Marxist plot to overthrow American institutions, what is it? And how does Aristotelian equity continue to ground our contemporary yearning for a more just world?

Etymologically, Aristotle's idea of *epieikeia* combines the prefix *epi*, here meaning "upon" or even "in accordance with," and *eikos*, meaning "likely," "fitting," or "suitable." Our Greek dictionaries today recommend that we translate it as "reasonableness," "fairness," and yes, "equity." (It does not mean "equality," whose Greek root is *iso*, as in *isosceles* and *isometric*.) But Aristotle is not a lexicographer, and he did not write a dictionary. Instead, Aristotle introduces this idea of "reasonableness" during some extended remarks on "legal justice." The fifth book of his *Nicomachean Ethics* focuses on justice generally, and there Aristotle explains how justice can mean, on the one hand, providing to people what they deserve and, on the other, rectifying imbalances. Given the litigious character of the Greek culture in which he lived, it is no surprise that Aristotle wants to situate lofty ideas about justice in the scrappy world of the courts.

AZOOR PHOTO/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

In short, Aristotle praises the rule of law—whereby our actions are regulated according to statutes rather than the whims of despots—but he worries that laws alone might sometimes work unfairly. At one point, he writes, "whenever the law makes a universal pronouncement, but things turn out in a particular case contrary to the 'universal' rule," it is up to us to "rectify the deficiency by reference to what the lawgiver himself would have said if he had been there and, if he had known about the case, would have laid down in law." In such an exceptional case, Aristotle wants us to attend to what we would call the "spirit of the law" rather than the "letter of the law," and drawing on a memorable image, he urges us to think of "the soft, leaden rule used by the builders in Lesbos: the rule adapts itself to the configuration of the stone, instead of staying the same shape." He hopes that in a similar way a "decree adapts itself to actual events." In Aristotle's view, rules were made to be bent.

This ability to bend the strict language of the law—to "moderate its rigour," as later jurists would put it—is Aristotle's notion of *epieikeia*, later rendered as "epiky," and later still as "equity." The "equitable person," Aristotle continues, is one "who is not a stickler for justice in the bad sense but rather tends to take a less strict view of things, even though he has the law to back him up." In her aforementioned article on the contemporary use of "equity" in political discourse, Martha Minow echoes these Aristotelian notions: "From these historical sources, 'equity' involves adapting existing law to changing conditions or to unique circumstances and, often, departure from general, settled rules." Aristotelian equity, then, sees itself as a "corrective" to a strict, literalist reading of statutes, particularly when such a reading would bring about rulings that are linguistically punctilious but ethically dubious.

Some jurists, especially those adhering to a so-called textualist approach to the law, will reject Aristotle's advice to look to "what the lawgiver himself would have said" in unforeseen circumstances, joining critics like Jeremy Bentham who quipped, "equity is abracadabra." They are free to do so, of course. Contemporary ethical and legal thinkers, unlike those sixteenth-century jurists, have wisely moved past a blind deference to Aristotle, who began his *Politics* by proposing a theory of natural slavery. But there is something ignorant, if not dishonest, about the right-wing effort to paint "equity"—and specifically legal equity—as some pernicious invention of Marxists, vanguard professors, and leftist activists. Pundits like Rufo are welcome to go head to head with Aristotle, but they should stop pinning an idea they don't like on a nineteenth-century German they like even less.

Equity is not some radical academic fad; it's one of the most ancient and canonical principles of Western ethical and legal thought.

Aristotle's treatment of legal justice is not just historical trivia, and we might even dislodge some serious misconceptions about equity if we consider his definition of the "equitable person…who is not a stickler" and who "rather tends to take a less strict view of things." This brief portrait in the *Nicomachean Ethics* gives some philosophical grounding for contemporary examples of what we might call equitable behavior: the doctor who actively prioritizes vaccine distribution to overlooked minority populations, the admissions officer who contextualizes SAT scores in isolated rural communities, the judge who strays from draconian sentencing guidelines for young criminals. What makes all these actions equitable is not a specific political agenda but a general willingness to override defective rules. As Minow underscores, "The results [of equitable interpretation] can be unpredictable, subject to the views or whims of particular decision-makers," but physicians, academics, and jurists often need to exercise their own prudential judgment—even against the strict demands of regulatory language—to do what is right.

This prudential notion of "equity" would urge us to take seriously *Jacobin*'s critique of the corporate world's DEI initiatives. If, following *Jacobin*, we find in corporate equity programs a cynical "demand for [workers'] subservience" to the policies and protocols of their human-resources departments, all under a "veneer of social justice," we will end up with a compliant workforce but not necessarily a fair workplace. As Aristotle advises, sometimes we need to abandon meticulous rule-following, no matter how noble our mission statements and staffing policies may be, because rules alone can never make a just world. We should not, therefore, identify bureaucratic fealty to "best practices" with the pursuit of justice, which sometimes demands "unpredictable," but ultimately righteous, disobedience.

But since we cannot predict or guarantee those moments of equitable grace from the physician, the judge, or the coworker, we should first strive to make better, fairer laws that don't need to be bent so often. If we bend that soft leaden rule too much, it will break. Equity comes with its fair share of hazards. Even so, its long history reminds us that, in order to uphold the law, we must correct it whenever a mechanical compliance would spell catastrophe. *Jacobin* might be on to something, then, when they see upper management's demands for worker servility primarily as a talisman for averting litigation. We should expect to find rules, not equity, in a static PowerPoint slide. Only a flesh-and-blood human can choose not to be a stickler.

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PETER STEINFELS

Chronicler of Follies

Remembering John Leo

John Leo died on May 10 at the age of eighty-six. The headline for the *New York Times* obituary described him as a "Columnist Who Took Aim at Liberal Pieties." That he was. For several decades, John did a kind of sentry duty in national publications like *Time* and *U.S. News & World Report* against the cultural encroachments of dogmatic liberalism.

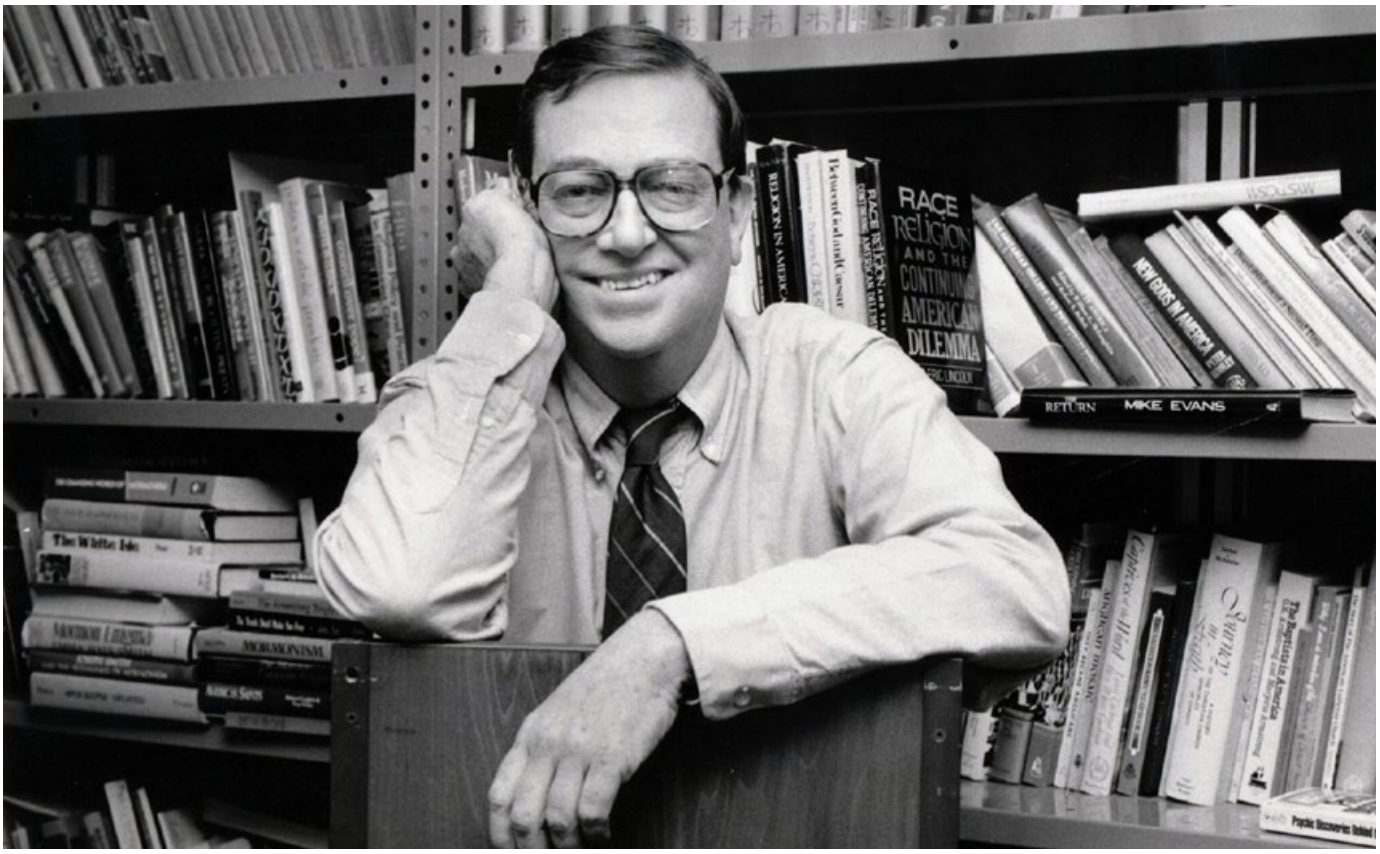
But before that, from 1963 to 1967, he was an associate editor at *Commonweal*, part of a squad of younger editors—Daniel Callahan, Wilfrid Sheed, and myself—who inhabited a small boiler room of ugly cubicles furnished with desks and bookshelves likely salvaged from bankrupt private eyes in the 1930s. Editor James O'Gara and publisher Edward Skillin toiled in equally Spartan offices off a larger room with filing cabinets and desks for our bookkeeper, receptionist, and subscription overseer. Anne Robertson, our essential production manager, laid out the pages and pasted up the galleys on top of a row of gunmetal-gray supply cabinets. Anne, if I recall, had the office's only electric typewriter. Like Ishmael, I alone survive to tell the tale.

Those were pivotal years—the close and fallout of Vatican II, the passage of the civil-rights struggle from the March on Washington to Black Power and urban violence, the ramping up of the Vietnam War from Ngo Dinh Diem's assassination to a full-scale U.S. invasion. Three days a week we would crowd into Jim's office to evaluate manuscripts, propose new articles, and on Friday discuss the editorials that we would research over the weekend and submit to one another for critique and revision by Monday afternoon. I remember, in particular, our intense efforts at surveying, comparing, and parsing contending reports on the war in Vietnam and its masterminds in Hanoi and Washington.

Yet if the times often seemed grim, the staff was not. John was the liveliest among us, which is to say a lot. Bill Sheed might turn quiet in staff meetings but otherwise matched John quip for quip. The baby of the group, I mostly kept my head down. Not a small amount of talk in these august precincts of liberal Catholic (but uniformly male) intellectualism actually turned around sports. Dan may have just earned a national reputation for his prizewinning book, *The Mind of the Catholic Layman*, but to us that only disguised the fact that he had gone to Yale on a swimming scholarship. John and Wilfrid's knowledge of baseball statistics and history was encyclopedic. In a remembrance of John, his colleague at *Time*, Lance Morrow, recalls how John constructed a fantasy team with real players all bearing the names of vegetables (perhaps, Morrow guesses, Matthew Brucolli, the editor of Ring Lardner's baseball stories; Billy Beane; Dustin Pease; etc.) and another team whose players had fruit names (Bob Lemon, Ray Apple, and so on.) That came long after his *Commonweal* years, but John's sense of the absurd was already abundant when I worked with him.

Rodger Van Allen's history of *Commonweal* refers to "Leo's swinging and irreverent writing style," which proved "irksome to some readers." John was indeed constitutionally irreverent, but his major signed articles of those years were not. They involved extensive reporting of disputes that emerged as clerical authorities in dioceses and Catholic universities struggled to cope with activists energized by Vatican II. John gave plenty of space to all contending sides, especially in analyses of what eventually became his stamping ground, higher education. John's more pugilistic style showed itself not in *Commonweal* but in *The National Catholic Reporter*, whose founding editor, Robert Hoyt (later a senior editor at *Commonweal*), lined up John as a liberal Catholic columnist sparring with the conservative Garry Wills. Those old enough to have marveled at post-sixties ideological criss-crossings know how that turned out.

One possible turning point for John at *Commonweal* was the addition, in October 1965, of "News & Views," a page of brief items, some pointed, some wonderfully inane, like a Catho-



John Leo in 1995

lic college's announcement that evening rosary on Wednesdays and Thursdays would be postponed "so that no one need miss Batman on TV." Appearing on page two, inside the cover, it was created in part to rival "Cry Pax!", a front-page *National Catholic Reporter* column of amusing bits that Hoyt culled from Catholic sources. "News & Views" brought out John's talent for swordsmanship delivered with the light *touché*. On a few later occasions when I took over the spot, the result was heavy-handed and anything but Leo.

That was after John left *Commonweal* to take a position covering the "intellectual" beat for the *New York Times* and then on to a long and lively career as a writer, for more than a decade, of the "Behavior" section at *Time* magazine. After that, he was a columnist for seventeen years at *U.S. News & World Report*, and finally a senior fellow at the conservative-libertarian Manhattan Institute, where he oversaw an online chronicle of liberal academic follies and gleefully handed out an award for the year's most cowardly university president.

By that time, John had shaped his career around skewering political correctness, the begetter of 'Wokism.' It was territory he knew firsthand, having done a stint as a public-affairs official with the high-minded but politically hapless New York City mayoralty of John Lindsay, followed by rounds as a media columnist at the *Village Voice* and a books editor at *Society*, a social-science journal. For a blink of an eye he was an editor of *Scanlan's Monthly*, a 1970 venture in gonzo left-wing muckraking led by Warren Hinckle III and Sidney Zion. John was to be their seal of Catholic uprightness, he explained to me. In fact, he bolted before the first issue, and *Scanlan's* collapsed within a year under FBI investigation.

I saw or heard from John only intermittently after his *Commonweal* years. He probably recognized my regret that he was focusing so much of his talent on this one slice of the nation's problems. A diet of disinfectants, no matter how superbly prepared, is not nourishing. But John knew my strong belief that Catholic higher education should not surrender its distinctly Catholic character to the homogenizing pressures of conventional liberalism and the academic marketplace. So he would phone to pick my brain about some campus liberal folly that he was tracking. Usually, however, my campus experience was just too limited to confirm whether this menace was or was not the Godzilla he imagined. And if perchance I suggested that some Exhibit A was simply not so simple or representative as he thought, John would interrupt with "Always the *Commonweal* editor, Peter!" After that, I was never sure whether he was still listening.

For days gone by! May he rest in peace.

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COURTESY OF THE LEO FAMILY

JOSEPH SORRENTINO

Something Like Normal

Letter from Mexico

One of the most treasured traditions in San Gregorio Atlapulco, a pueblo of about 30,000 people in the southernmost part of Mexico City, is the celebration of Holy Week. Because of the pandemic, Holy Week events were canceled in 2020 and celebrated virtually in 2021. At several stages of the pandemic, San Gregorio recorded the highest number of Covid cases in Mexico City. Most residents know someone who died from it. "We lost many people," Arturo Galicia Carrasco told me. "Parents, grandparents, friends."

This year, despite fears of the new Covid variants, many people felt it was time to celebrate Holy Week in person once again. "Maybe it is not a good idea," said Artemio Godoy Venancio, who owns a chair-and-table rental business near San Gregorio's center. "But we have to return, little by little, to a normal life."

These Holy Week celebrations are largely organized by a group of young men known as *Los Varones*. Before deciding what to do about this year's celebration, leaders of *Los Varones* met with the parish priest. "We decided there were three options," said Carrasco, a former *Varone*, "suspend it again, have it with the doors closed again, or about as normal." Mexico uses a color-coded system to tell people what level of precaution to take against Covid. Red means the highest risk of infection, and correspondingly stringent restrictions. Green signifies low risk. "We decided that if Mexico was green, we could have Holy Week with precautions and changes," said Ricardo Castro, one of

Los Varones carrying a statue of Christ through the streets of San Gregorio Atlapulco on Holy Thursday

JOSEPH SORRENTINO

El Descendimiento, Good Friday: the two most senior *Varones* release and lower the figure of Christ from the cross.

JOSEPH SORRENTINO

the leaders of *Los Varones*. All of Mexico was declared "green" weeks before Holy Week and so the celebration proceeded as scheduled.

Not everyone agreed with that decision. Karla Manzanares Nieto, a photographer who has lived in San Gregorio her entire life, has documented life in the pueblo for years and has always attended the Holy Week ceremonies. But this year she had doubts. "I would like to go," she told me, "but a lot of people are without masks, there is no social distancing, someone may want to talk to me." Nieto is fully vaccinated but still contracted a mild case of Covid earlier this year. Her godfather died of Covid.

Still, the majority of San Gregorians wanted to celebrate in the usual, pre-pandemic way. Eduardo Gonzalez Morales, who works in the market adjacent to the local church, has his own misgivings—and takes his own precautions—but he thinks it's time to return to the public events. "It is necessary because it is a tradition," he said.

Los Varones trace their beginning to the Franciscan friars who arrived in San Gregorio in the late sixteenth century. "They were really the first *Varones*," said Carrasco, who has collected oral history about the group. "Probably in the early seventeenth century, they started using young men from the pueblo." Members of *Los Varones* must dedicate at least a year to serving the Church. In addition to the work they do during Holy Week, they're required to clean the church, care for various religious statues, help people in need, and attend Masses and Bible studies. This year, there was one more requirement. "Everyone had to be completely vaccinated," said Castro. "We are also using masks and we have antibacterial gel."

In a normal year, thousands of people attend the pueblo's Holy Week events, but this year changes were made to limit the crowds. "Things are starting earlier," said Carrasco. "We are not telling people what time things start." Those who wished to attend had to figure the schedule out for themselves.

On Wednesday of Holy Week, *Los Varones* and members of the community gathered in the church to decorate the altars with fruit. "The fruit represents the tears of the Virgin," said Javier Márquez Juárez, who has written extensively about the pueblo's traditions. He said that decorating altars with fruit is unique to San Gregorio. In past years, people wandered in and out of the church to watch the altars being decorated. This year, the church doors were closed.

On the evening of Holy Thursday people gathered in the churchyard for the start of the week's first big procession. The yard has three entrances, but this year only one of them was open. Before entering, people were sprayed

After the Good Friday procession, the coffin containing the figure of Christ is placed in a church and members of the community file past it for veneration.

In past years, people wandered in and out of the church to watch the altars being decorated. This year, the church doors were closed.

with disinfectant and given a dollop of sanitizing gel. A young woman at the entrance could be heard calling out to one man, "*Señor*, please wear your mask."

At the start of the evening's events, *Los Varones* carried statues of Mary and Christ out of the church and then stood silently next to them in the churchyard. A reenactment of the Last Supper is usually held on Holy Thursday, but this year it was canceled. So it was on to the next event: *Los Varones* carried the statues through the streets of the pueblo, accompanied by people singing hypnotically mournful *alabados*. A few local residents followed the procession or stood by to watch it pass. In a pre-pandemic year, there would have been crowds. Not this year. The whole procession took about three hours. Both *Los Varones* and the singers wore masks, as did most of those who followed them.

On the morning of Good Friday, carved figures of the two thieves and Christ were placed on crucifixes. At one o'clock in the afternoon, there was a brief liturgy, during which the priest reminded people to take precautions. Then came the *descendimiento*: the two most senior *Varones* climbed ladders to release and lower the figure of Christ from the cross. This alone took almost two hours.

The longest and most arduous procession of the week took place that evening. The figure of Christ was placed in a glass coffin covered with rose petals. Six barefoot *Varones* lifted the four-hundred-pound coffin, placed it on their shoulders, and carried it through the pueblo. This time efforts to limit the crowd were less successful: thousands of people followed the procession, and thousands more lined the streets.

Like most of those people, Octavio Israel Flores Victorio wore a mask

JOSEPH SORRENTINO

during the procession. He's vaccinated and has already had a mild case of Covid. "I trust that if we take care of everything and are conscientious, we will be alright," he said. "Holy Week is a tradition that is rooted in me. I cannot imagine San Gregorio without Holy Week." Nearby, Márquez Juárez stood with his two young grandchildren. They wore masks; he didn't. "I forgot mine," he admitted. "But I am not afraid because the virus has evolved and is less dangerous. And I am vaccinated." He said he wasn't worried about his grandchildren getting Covid because they, too, were vaccinated and had both recovered from the virus earlier in the pandemic. "I wanted them to continue the tradition," he said.

The whole procession took a little more than six hours and made stops at fourteen of the pueblo's chapels. This year, only *Los Varones* and a few attendants were allowed to enter the chapels—after being sprayed with disinfectant. At the end of the procession, the coffin was placed in the church, and anyone wearing a mask was allowed to file past.

On Easter Sunday morning, the fruit that had adorned the altars was distributed and two Masses were celebrated. Attendance for the outdoor Mass was unlimited, but only 150 people, all masked, were allowed inside for the Mass celebrated in one its side chapels. Others gathered outside the chapel's doors to listen in.

When the pandemic started in March 2020, the attitude in San Gregorio was, "*No pasa nada*." Nothing will happen. The pueblo's patron saint would see them through (see "San Gregorio Will Protect Us," May 2020). It has taken a long time—and many deaths—to change their minds. "We realized the reality that God will protect us, as will the saints, but we have to take care of ourselves," said Flores Victoria.

Like many other communities in Mexico, San Gregorio is still struggling to recover a sense of normalcy. And for this pueblo, life cannot be normal without a return to communal religious practices such as the Holy Week celebrations. "It is an event that means a lot for our pueblo," said Castro, "It is an opportunity to be closer to the statues—and to be closer to God. When we are closer to God, we have more hope. We have the hope to keep on living."

JOSEPH SORRENTINO *is a freelance writer and photographer who lived in San Gregorio Atlapulco for two years.*

San Gregorians tying fruit that will decorate the church

JOSEPH SORRENTINO

The Pope of Russell Square

Terry Eagleton

T. S. Eliot's conservative modernism

For much of the twentieth century, the most revered, influential figure in English literary criticism was unquestionably T. S. Eliot. He was poet, critic, dramatist, essayist, editor, reviewer, publisher, and public intellectual; and although he had rivals in some of these fields and superiors in others, none of them could match his authority as a whole. Eliot's consecration as high priest of English letters was all the more remarkable given the outrage that had greeted his early work as a poet. In the words of one of his first champions, F. R. Leavis, he had been regarded as "literary Bolshevik," audaciously avant-garde and bafflingly opaque; yet by the early 1930s he was being hailed as the preeminent literary mind of his generation.

Like many of the leading writers and intellectuals of twentieth-century England, Thomas Stearns Eliot was not in fact English. He was born in 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri, the son of a family so patrician that they refused to use the term "OK," and could trace their residence in America back over two hundred years. The Eliots were prominent among the intellectual aristocracy of the city, though Eliot's own father was a businessman. His grandfather had founded the local university, and championed an ideal of public service by which his grandson was to be deeply influenced. The current of Christianity associated with the St. Louis elite was Unitarianism, a moderate, high-brow form of religious faith at odds with the crude evangelical passions of the Puritan middle classes.

Yet the civilized, socially responsible class to which the Eliots belonged was being gradually displaced in the city by industrial and commercial forces, as a philistine middle class rose to power. The cultural leadership of the Eliots and their colleagues was in steep decline, as St. Louis became flagrantly boss-ridden and corrupt. The Eliot who would later speak sourly of the "dictatorship of finance" found himself an internal émigré in the place where he grew up, and would shortly become an exile in reality.

After studying at Harvard, Eliot abandoned his homeland for Paris and Oxford, and was persuaded to stay on in England by his friend, mentor, and compatriot Ezra Pound. Like a number of other expatriate writers (Wilde, Conrad, Henry James, V. S. Naipaul, Tom Stoppard), he compensated for his status as an outsider by seeking to outdo the English Establishment at its own game. He worked in a London bank and later for the distinguished publishing house of Faber & Faber, and had connections with the Bloomsbury Group. In 1927, he sealed his loyalty to his adopted country by converting to the Church of England and professed himself a classicist in literature, a royalist in politics, and an Anglo-Catholic in religion. The divine right of kings was in his eyes a "noble faith." Truly to flourish, he maintained, meant being rooted in a single spot. "To be human," he remarked, "is to belong to a particular region of the earth." That the local and regional take priority over the national and international is a familiar article of conservative faith. "On the whole," this refugee from St. Louis to London shamelessly announced, "it would appear to be for the best that the great majority of human beings should go on living in the place in which they were born" (*Notes Toward a Definition of Culture*).

T. S. Eliot in 1958

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There was, however, some benefit to be reaped from living on the margins of Europe on a small island that was formally European but, like the United States, ethnically Anglo-Saxon. His compatriot Henry James, Eliot wrote, no doubt with himself in mind as well, was a European in the way that only a non-European could be. He meant, presumably, that the outsider is more likely to be conscious of the spirit and culture of a place as a whole than those brought up within it, who tend to take it for granted and to lack an overall view of it. So there were advantages to not being a native European, as well as not having grown up in provincial Britain. Eliot may have been a pinstriped London publisher—he was jocularly known as "The Pope of Russell Square," which was where his publishing house, Faber & Faber, was located—but like many leading modernist artists he was nothing if not cosmopolitan, roaming freely in *The Waste Land* across a whole span of civilizations, appropriating chunks of them in order to cobble together a synthesis that suited his own spiritual needs. He was an unstable compound of bourgeois stuffiness and literary saboteur, moving between genteel Mayfair and bohemian Soho.

For most moderately enlightened readers today, Eliot's social views range from the objectionable to the obnoxious. In *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948), he portrays his ideal social order, which seems more rural than urban. There will be a culture of values and beliefs shared in common; but though society will thus constitute an organic unity, it will also be strictly stratified. There will be a governing elite, consisting of the traditional English rural class along with an intellectual coterie of men not entirely unlike Eliot himself.

The task of this elite is to protect and disseminate the (largely Christian) values of the society as a whole. It is a vital undertaking, since if Christianity were to founder the whole of Western civilization would collapse along with it. Yet since the mass of men and women are in Eliot's view incapable of what might properly be called thinking, their participation in the culture will be less conscious than that of their superiors. Instead, it will take the form of custom and tradition, myth and sentiment, ritual observances and spontaneous habits of feeling. All individuals will share in the same form of life,

but they will share in it in different ways and at different levels of consciousness. The organic and the hierarchical can thus be reconciled.

The ideal, then, is a common but stratified culture; yet the social reality is very different. Like many of his fellow modernists, Eliot had little but contempt for most aspects of actual civilization, with its godless materialism, worship of the machine, cult of utility, spiritual vacancy, and bogus humanitarianism. The love of man and woman, he remarks witheringly, is either made reasonable by a higher (i.e., divine) love, or else it is simply the coupling of animals. "If you remove from the word 'human' all that the belief in the supernatural has given to man," he warns, "you can view him finally as no more than an extremely clever, adaptable, and mischievous little animal" ("Second Thoughts on Humanism"). He praises Machiavelli, of all rebarbative thinkers, for his low estimate of humanity as well as his promotion of order over liberty. It is Eliot's conviction that the number of individuals in any generation capable of intellectual effort is very small. Indeed, he seems to derive a well-nigh erotic frisson from the phrase "only a very few."

Most men and women, like the "hollow men" of Eliot's poem of that title, are too spiritually shallow even to be damned, which means that "the possibility of damnation is so immense a relief in a world of electoral reform, plebiscites, sex reform and dress reform." In a faithless age, the idea of hell is to his mind a considerable source of comfort. Writing in the age of Auschwitz, he declares in the spirit of Charles Baudelaire that it is better to do evil than to do nothing. Evil people, as opposed to the merely immoral, are at least acquainted with higher spiritual realities, in however negative a fashion. Humanism overlooks what for Eliot is perhaps the most fundamental of all Christian dogmas: original sin. Humans are wretched creatures, and humility is consequently the greatest of Christian virtues. (For the Christian orthodoxy that Eliot is supposed to uphold, the greatest virtue is in fact charity, of which the other virtues are so many versions.) The Romantic faith in the potential infinitude of humanity is a dangerous illusion. So is the ideal of progress so zealously promulgated by the middle classes. Eliot's poetry is full of journeys either not undertaken, abandoned, or ending in disenchantment. It would seem that history neither improves nor deteriorates. In "Thoughts after Lambeth" he writes, "I do not mean that our times are particularly corrupt; all times are corrupt." Yet it is clear elsewhere in his work that the modern era represents a drastic falling-off from the age of belief that preceded it. Like many a conservative thinker, Eliot equivocates between the view that things are getting steadily worse and the claim that they have been pretty appalling from the outset.

By this point, the enlightened reader may well be wondering whether anything of value can be salvaged from this full-blooded reactionary. The answer is surely affirmative. For one thing, Eliot's elitism, demeaning estimate of humanity, and indiscriminate distaste for modern civilization are the stock in trade of the so-called *Kulturkritik* tradition that he inherited. Many an eminent twentieth-century intellectual held views of this kind, and so did a sizeable proportion of the Western population of the time. This doesn't excuse their attitudes, but it helps explain them. For another thing, such attitudes put Eliot at loggerheads with the liberal-capitalist ideology of his age. He is, in short, a radical of the right, like a large number of his fellow modernists. He believes in the importance of communal bonds, as much liberal ideology does not; he also rejects capitalism's greed, selfish individualism, and pursuit of material self-interest. "The organization of society on the principle of private profit," he writes in *The Idea of a Christian Society*, "as well as public destruction, is leading both to the deformation of humanity by unregulated industrialism, and so to the exhaustion of natural resources…a good deal of our material progress is a progress for which succeeding generations may have to pay dearly." There is nothing here with which an ecologically minded socialist would disagree. His first published review, of a handful of books on India, is strongly anti-imperialist. He is hostile to a social order that exalts the solitary ego and jettisons the past as dead and done with. For his part, Eliot understands that the past is what we are mostly made of, and that to nullify it in the name of progress is to annihilate much that is precious. It is thus that he can write that by abandoning tradition, we loosen our grip on the present.

In the modern age, Eliot protests, there is a provincialism not of space but of time, for which history is merely the chronicle of human devices that have served their turn and have now been scrapped—a viewpoint for which "the world is the property solely of the living, a property in which the dead hold no shares," as he writes in "What Is a Classic." The Marxist Walter Benjamin would have heartily agreed, along with critics of the conversion of history into a readily consumable commodity known as "heritage." Eliot goes on to speak of "our continued veneration for our ancestors"; but in practice, his approach to the past was a good deal more innovative and iconoclastic than such piety would suggest.

Nor does Eliot accept the arid rationalism that underpins the modern order, with its indifference to kinship, affection, the body, and the unconscious. Confronted with the creed that men and women are wholly self-determining, he insists instead on their finitude and fragility, an awareness of which belongs to the virtue of humility. Human beings are dependent on each other, as well as on some larger whole. For Eliot, as for D. H. Lawrence, we do not belong to ourselves. The idea that we can "possess" our selves like a piece of property is a bourgeois fantasy. The attachment to a specific place that Eliot admires may have sinister overtones of blood and soil, but it also serves in our own time as a rebuke to global capitalism—to the jet-setting CEOs who feel at home only in an airport VIP lounge. A belief in social order need not be authoritarian; it may rather be an alternative to the anarchy of the marketplace. It may also be preferable to a liberal civilization in which everyone may believe more or less what they want—but only because convictions don't matter much in any case, and because the idea of human solidarity has withered at the root.

Poets, in Eliot's view, must be both the most primitive and sophisticated of creatures. If they are more alive to the present than others, it is largely by virtue of being the bearers of a living past. There is a parallel here with Eliot's concept of tradition, in which the past still lurks as a shaping force within the present. It is this primitive bedrock of our being to which Freud and his disciples give the name of the unconscious—a region that is both antique and unchanging, like the mythological archetypes that secretly inform *The Waste Land*. For Freud, the unconscious is a stranger to temporality, rather as for Eliot the most fundamental emotions remain constant from Homer to Housman. In this way, one of the most scandalous, ground-breaking projects of Eliot's time—psychoanalysis—can be yoked to a conservative view of humanity as essentially unchangeable.

The unconscious, with its attendant myths and symbols, can also be used to underpin Eliot's aversion to individualism. True selfhood lies far deeper than individual personality. It has its roots in a submerged domain of collective images and impersonal emotions. The individual, not least the individual author, is of relatively trifling significance. He or she is merely the tip of an iceberg whose depths are unsearchable. We are dealing here with an early version of what would later be known as the "death of the author" theory, or at least with the author's drastic diminishment. The poet, Eliot remarks in a passage of unusual emotional intensity, is haunted by a demon, an obscure impulse that has no face or name, and poetry is an exorcism of this "acute discomfort" ("The Three Voices of Poetry"). It is a darker version of the Romantic idea of inspiration. When authors have finally arranged their words in an appropriate form, they can purge themselves of this demonic urge and in doing so rid themselves of the poem altogether, handing it over to their readers so that they can relax after their labors. It sounds more like a peculiarly painful childbirth than a piece of imaginative creation. Poetry is something to get out of your system. And whatever its mysterious source, it is certainly not the individual mind.

Poets cannot predict when these obscure upsurges will occur: they must simply devote themselves to the task of perfecting their craft in anticipation of such spiritual seizures. There is, then, a good deal of conscious labor involved in the poetic process, but it is not what is most essential to it. It is rather that the poem forces itself into the poet's consciousness like a blind, implacable force of Nature; and when it has taken root inside them, something has occurred that cannot be explained by anything that went before. The most powerful poetry in Eliot's view sets up an enormous echo chamber of resonances and allusions, all of which will infiltrate the reader's unconscious in a way quite beyond the poet's control. Perhaps the most magnificent example of this process in Eliot's own work is "Gerontion." If modern *reality* is spiritually bankrupt, one can compensate for this to some extent with a richness of *experience*, and much of this is a subliminal affair. It is no wonder, then, that Eliot is so casual about conscious understanding—about, for example, the scholarly business of tracking down allusions and explicating difficult passages. The Notes to *The Waste Land* purport to do just this, but it is now generally accepted that they are there mostly to fill in a few blank pages. Conscious meaning is not the issue—indeed, readers may well be understanding a poem at some unconscious level whether they know it or not. It is welcome news to the student who timorously opens Pound's *Cantos* or the poems of Paul Celan.

The idea of poetic impersonality is closely related to Eliot's self-declared classicism. The classic in Eliot's view is not in the first place the work of an individual genius. It is rather a piece of literary art that is resonant of a specific civilization—one whose language gives voice to a particular culture and history at the peak of its maturity. The unique genius that produces it is not that of an individ-

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ual author but the spirit of a particular age and a particular people. Virgil's greatness springs from his place in the history of the Roman Empire, as well as in the evolution of the Latin language. The classical work brings a national language to a point of perfection, and its ability to do so, ironically, is what makes its appeal so universal.

There is, however, a problem here. A classical civilization represents Eliot's social and cultural ideal, and the classical author who molds his mind most deeply is Dante. Yet though he produces a stunning pastiche of Dante's verse in a passage in *Four Quartets*, the influence is strictly limited when it comes to the composition of his own work. There are two reasons why this is so. If the classical work thrives on shared values and standards, the liberal pluralism that Eliot finds so displeasing in modern society means there can be precious little of this. Poets can no longer assume that they and their readers share the same sensibility. There is no longer a community of meaning and belief. At the same time, if a classic is to capture the spirit of an entire civilization, it must be in touch with its common life and language. But to stay faithful to the common life and language of early twentieth-century Europe involves registering a sterility and spiritual devastation that is nearer to Baudelaire than to Dante. It is thus that Eliot announces that the modern poet must see not only the beauty and the glory but also the boredom and the horror of human existence.

For Eliot to be loyal to one criterion of a classic, then, is to flout certain others: order, balance, harmony, nobility, and the like. It means producing a poetry marked by spiritual disorder, sordid imagery, broken rhythms, banal snatches of speech and barren inner landscapes. It was from Baudelaire, Eliot tells us, that he learned that the poet's business was to make poetry out of the unpoetical. Order and harmony can be hinted at only obliquely, either by dim allusion, ironic juxtaposition or (as in *The Waste Land*) through a mythological subtext that intimates the possibility of regeneration. Baudelaire, Eliot remarks, draws some of his most striking imagery from the common life, but at the same time makes that life gesture to something more than itself. It is a familiar strategy in his own early poetry. By presenting a situation in all its squalor, you can suggest the need to transcend it without having to spell out an alternative, which might demand a verse with too obvious designs on the reader. It is not until *Four Quartets* that this negative form of transcendence becomes explicitly thematized. If poetry must cling to the unregenerate nature of the present, it is partly because its language must be wedded to everyday experience, and partly because literary works that propose an abstract ideal will fail to engage skeptical modern readers. Instead, their language must infiltrate their reader's nervous system, sensory organs, and unconscious terrors and desires, all of which a remote ideal is unlikely to accomplish.

For this reason, the classical is more to be admired than imitated. More relevant to the modern age is a period which in Eliot's view is distinctly unclassical, that of the Elizabethans and Jacobeans. "The age of Shakespeare," Eliot comments in "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry," "moved in a steady current, with back eddies certainly, towards anarchy and chaos." It was an era of muddled skepticism and clashing faiths, along with a confusion over what counts as a literary convention.

Yet it is just these aspects of the early-modern period that Eliot can bring to bear on his own tumultuous times. The "anarchism" of the Renaissance is also the unleashing of a wealth of complex feeling and exhilarating new modes of language, so that, to adopt a phrase of Karl Marx, history progresses by its bad side. In an essay on Seneca, Eliot writes, "If new influences had not entered old orders decayed, would the language not have left some of its greatest resources unexplored?" It is this fertile legacy that authors like Eliot himself will inherit some centuries later. The loss of social and cosmic order may be a spiritual disaster, but it also represents an inestimable gain for language and sensibility, which break through traditional constraints to become more subtle, diverse, volatile, and exploratory. The textures of poetry grow finer and their images more richly compacted. It is a language close to the bone yet fast-moving, packed with perception but intellectually agile. The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries bear witness to "a progressive refinement in the perception of the variations of feeling, and a progressive elaboration of the means of expressing these variations" (*The Sacred Wood*). That this stretch of time is also the matrix of much of what Eliot detests—materialism, democracy, individualism, secularization—is an instance of the cunning of history, which takes with one hand what it gives with the other.

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RUIN

Eric Rawson

For a time we will move lightly.

The ash of evening fills the fields.
    We don't know where to go. We go.

Others will come to tell us when
    the worst is over, but we will
        not believe them. First love or last

love, it leaves us like abandoned
cities, ungoverned; where houses
    stood, the wilderness returning.

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Diego Velázquez, *The Supper at Emmaus*, 1622–23

Closeness & the Common Journey

Bishop Daniel E. Flores, STD

Synodality as an expression of the Church's responsiveness to Christ

The synodal focus of Pope Francis is best understood in light of his call for an evangelizing Church; it is a practical extension of this plea for the Church to embrace a style of ecclesial life that opts for mission over maintenance and outward extension over inwardly turned complacency. *Evangelii gaudium* is the charter, so to speak, framing this prioritization of the mission.

In *EG* 23, Pope Francis says:

> The Church's closeness (*intimidad*) to Jesus is part of a common journey (*intimidad itinerante*); "communion and mission are profoundly interconnected." In fidelity to the example of the Master, it is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance (*asco*) or fear. The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded.

The evangelical impulse is rooted in the closeness (*intimidad*) of the Church to Christ and implies conforming ourselves to his example. Jesus' style is the model of the Church's activity. Thus it is an "*itinerant intimacy*" (*intimidad itinerante*). The universality of the mission is a going out "to all"; and within the Church it is the responsibility of all the baptized: "*no one can be excluded.*" Already in *Evangelii gaudium* we see clearly expressed the three principal elements governing the synodality of the Church: communion, mission, and participation.

To understand synodality, it is important to begin with the source of the mission. The impulse to synodal enactment is the same impulse that animates the mission of the Church. And the source is Christ. In *EG* 264, Pope Francis says: "The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him." The experience that gives birth to the Church is the experience of being saved (*ser salvados*). Christ's work is an act of saving, and it is this saving work that also urges us (*nos mueve*) to respond through a missionary movement outward.

This experience defies complete analysis from outside the grace of faith experienced. And even within the faith experience of the Church and of each of the baptized, we can only speak of it more or less descriptively. What is essential here is our faith in a love that acts to save while in some way pulling us into the experience of and participation in that very love. The experience of that love initiates in us a move (*nos mueve*) to love him "always more" (*siempre más*).

This way of expressing the move of love to Christ is both profoundly Johannine and eminently Pauline: "In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10); "I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Here Thomas Aquinas can help us appreciate the depth of this dynamic. In the treatise on the life of Christ (*ST* III, 46, 3, c.), Thomas provides a simple and comprehensive theological account of what Pope Francis describes. It appears as the first of five reasons Thomas offers to shed light on the theological convenience of the Passion of Christ.

Given that God could choose any number of ways to save us, Thomas asks, "Why the Cross?" To respond, he searches the scriptures to locate the convenience, or fittingness, of the salvífic work. Thomas articulates how it is suitable to God's aim and purpose to remedy our needs, that Christ should suffer the Cross. Thomas gives the following as the first reason:

> In the first place, man knows thereby how much God loves him, and is thereby stirred (*provocatur*) to love Him in return, and herein lies the perfection of human salvation; hence the Apostle says in Romans 5:8: "*God commends His charity towards us; for when as yet we were sinners…Christ died for us.*"

The work of Christ is a provocative action, the preeminent example of God taking the first step in our direction. This is what Pope Francis refers to when he invents the word "*primerear*" to describe the total primacy of God's initiative toward us.

The Passion and death of the Lord is a great showing that is designed to begin a movement of intelligible recognition and response. The Cross of Christ insinuates into our minds something we did not really know before—namely, just how much God loves us. The citation of Romans is telling because the Vulgate says *commendat caritatem suam in nobis,* which Thomas takes to imply a movement of God's love in our direction. We are confronted with it as something coming to us from outside ourselves but which, by our grasping it as love, insinuates itself within us.

In his commentary on Romans 5, Thomas identifies this loving in return with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers, and this constitutes our justification. Salvation is essentially a grace initiated in the act of faith, culminating in a participation in the love Christ has shown and in which we have believed. Enacted by the gift of the Spirit, this amounts to human participation in Trinitarian life.

Faith is an act that by grace understands something: "In this we have believed," John says in his first letter, "that God has loved us first." The intellectualism of Aquinas (if you want to call it that) is resplendent here: the grace of faith believes in this love, precisely because it is perceived by the senses and understood by the person as an act of self-giving love given when we had no grounds to ask for it, *while we were yet sinners*. Pope Francis points to this aspect of the Mystery when he says that "the primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received."

Similarly, when Pope Francis says that "the experience of salvation urges us (*nos mueve*) to ever greater love of him," he is describing what Thomas identifies as the finality of faith that *aimed at provoking a response of love in return.* This responsive move to love in return is the wellspring of the evangelical impulse, and indeed of any authentic Christian impulse to act. Thomas describes this responsiveness to the love of Christ as an act on our part, made possible by the Holy Spirit, that constitutes the perfection of our salvation.

This is as classic a Catholic expression of justification and of being saved as you will find. And it is a summation of the received Scriptural tradition. Faith does not save unless it is allowed to open us to a participative move into the very love animating the move of Christ towards us. Further, the mystery of our salvation and the mission of the baptized are both bound up in the movement to in some way respond to Christ's love with a love that flows back to him.

Thus, the preeminent question of salvation and mission for us is: "Where are you, Lord, that we might respond to you?" Francis, echoing Scripture and the Catholic tradition of preaching, tells us that in reality Christ is not that hard to find. There is in fact a more pressing question for the Church: Are we really looking for him?

Later in *EG* 264, Pope Francis says:

> How good it is to stand before a crucifix, or on our knees before the Blessed Sacrament, and simply to be in his presence! How much good it does us when he once more touches our lives and impels us to share his new life! What then happens is that "we speak of what we have seen and heard" (1 John 1:3). The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart.

The primordial grace is the manifestation of the Word made flesh. And the conduit, so to speak, between that gift and the gift by which we respond to him is contemplative apprehension of the whole of Christ: his style of interacting with us, his particular teachings, his example, his aims, and ultimately the how and why of his work.

The Christian apprehension of the love God has for us relies on familiarity with the Gospel. This is so because through them we have access to Christ himself. Scripture provides the words that in the Spirit of their writing put us into contact with the Word who authors them. This is a theological truth of grace embedded in human ways of communication. This involves a meditative entering into the particular love manifested in the words of the gospels. This in turn can by grace lead to a gazing upon the summation of all things godly in the image of Christ Crucified, and in the presence of the Eucharistic Christ within the Church. Aquinas speaks of contemplation as a move of the mind from the particular instances of God's actions to a simple perception of the whole present in the parts.

This is what makes synodality a properly ecclesial act: it is enveloped within the Spirit's gift of access to Christ. It is the error of an overly aggressive Christianity to propose a program for evangelization that is not rooted in the contemplative gaze, in receptivity to the gift of Christ, in awareness of the manner of his giving. The totality of Christ's active work conveyed to us by the New Testament is a manifestation of how his love came and continues to come to us, in ways that can make sense to us and that invite love in response. *How* Jesus does his work is not less important than the *what* and the *why* of his teaching. If God chose the means of our salvation with a view to our need, the Church must order her practical mission in view of the same end and in analogous ways.

Here it is also vital to note that the baptized, by instinct of the Holy Spirit, and by contact with Christ and with his people, savor the things of God. They have a sense of how to distinguish between what comes (tastes) of God, and what does not. Aquinas, speaking in consonance with the patristic and earlier medieval tradition, locates this in the gift of wisdom flowing as the connatural effect of charity in the Christian life. This is where the "sense of the faithful" derives its efficacy. The gift of wisdom, in turn, is closely allied with contemplative grace. This gift is a precious resource proper to the Church. It requires discernment, both individual and communal. But we have to hear it first. During the course of my participation in listening sessions, I have been deeply moved and edified by the wisdom expressed by people, especially the elderly, who live and work in close communion with the everyday manifestations of the things of God. To hear this spoken is an unspeakably beautiful gift to the Church.

At the foot of the Cross, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, with the gospels in our minds, and by the witness of the gift of wisdom in the Body of the Church, we learn who has loved us, how he has manifested that love, and how we can offer him an appropriate gift of love in return. Thus, when Pope Francis proposes as one of his principles that "*La realidad es más importante que la idea*" (*EG* 231), he is first exhorting the Church to seek the gracefulness of Christ in contemplative gaze. We must let Christ show himself to us as he is. Ideologies of a theological stripe conceive of Christ without bothering to verify the truth of our perception in the meditative apprehension of the Gospel, in an experience of encounter with him in prayer, and within the communal experience of the Church's life of faith. Our sense of Christ must be in meditative dialogue with Christ himself in the rich variety of ways he shows himself to us.

This leads to my next theme: the metaphysics of dialogue.

There is an analogy here that has wide and deep implications for the whole synodal enactment the pope appeals for. Just as our methods and aspirations in the Church must be informed by a constant return to the actual lived source in Christ present in the Church, so also our enactment of the mission must be informed by an accurate perception of the particular situations we are facing.

Synodality involves a responsive listening to Christ in his person and a responsive listening to Christ in the lived circumstances of his people. The action of the Church, and of each of her members, is entirely animated by receiving the grace of loving him in return, yet it is entirely enmeshed in a world of an almost infinite number of contingent circumstances. And just as God the Father sent his son into the world in a particular way suited to our need, so we must, in our responsiveness to him, act in the world with a realistic assessment of the need. This means knowing the hurts, hopes, anxieties, and aspirations of real people. Thus synodality is a particular enactment of ecclesial pastoral prudence, a use of reason at the service of charitable response to Christ in his people. The response must have the particular circumstances of the Lord's beloved people in realistic view.

The prominence of dialogue throughout Francis's pastoral vision is best understood as a call to a constant *contact with the real*, which is always based on contact with the being of

another, beginning with the senses and then elaborated by the mind in practical and speculative ways. "There also exists a constant tension between ideas and realities. Realities simply are, whereas ideas are worked out. There has to be continuous dialogue between the two, lest ideas become detached from realities" (*EG* 231).

Aquinas's approach to the metaphysics of human knowing has given birth to a number of different epistemological schools. Still, it is safe to say that a bedrock of a Thomist realism is the necessity of a constant *turn to the phantasm* (the sensible image present to the mind that is then understood as one thing or another by the intellect). This phrase refers to the fact that conceptual, abstract elaboration of the real must involve a return to seek verification in what the senses perceive. This could be called the dialogue between the intellect and reality.

You may think you see a unicorn approaching from a distance and then proceed to elaborate a theory of unicorn being. But if you never again look up at the approaching creature, or touch its forehead, or hear its breathing, you will have produced a beautiful theory with no foundation in the real. This is the point. The idea is based on what reality shows your senses, and what the intellect beholds in a concept. But the concept and the elaboration of it can never prescind from or dispense with the particular sensibility that first manifests itself to you.

Human dialogue is a communicative movement that begins with listening because listening is the sensible attentiveness to the other, a genuine metaphysical opening to let the other express themselves. Without this, we respond to the other, not based on an encounter with a human being in all the mysteriousness of their particular lives and histories, but based on an elaboration of impressions and ideas that may have no basis in the real embodied person in front of us. Dialogue within the Church is thus a turn to realism that makes the discernment of prudential judgment possible. Aquinas describes prudence, be it natural or informed by grace, as necessarily informed both by universal principles and particular circumstances: "Actions are in singular matters: and so it is necessary for the prudent person to know both the universal principles of reason, and the singulars about which actions are concerned."

As human beings, we simply cannot know how to justly and compassionately respond to other human beings unless we are listening to them. This is necessary along the whole spectrum of human endeavor, from accompanying a person struggling with a situation of divorce and remarriage to a teenager indifferent to Christ and the Church. It also operates in the sociopolitical realm where judgments about the just treatment of migrants, for example, must be based on a realistic account of their lived circumstances. It is ideology-driven political judgment that sees no need to actually ask a migrant family about their life and circumstances before we decide whether to deport them.

Hence the synodal way begins with the realism of the local church in communion with the universal Church, listening to its own circumstance and to the voices of others. It moves along to assemble a basic sense of the challenges and hopes of the members of Christ struggling to bear witness and engage the mission in the particular contingencies of their lives. This kind of movement then informs the realism and judgment of the universal Church.

I believe that the urgency with which Pope Francis promotes synodal enactment in the Church is based in part upon his own wise discernment that ideology and social deafness are among the deepest wounds of modernity. By default we have become divided into groups that only talk among ourselves about "the others." Only rarely do we speak familiarly with someone who may have a different perspective, a different starting point, a different priority. And so Pope Francis has chosen to plant a series of local seeds, hoping that with the help of the Spirit, local churches can cultivate spaces and times for people to gather and listen to each other. A sense of communion in the Church and of greater solidarity in the world needs the conscious cultivation of real human encounters. This can, with time, accomplish two things: allow the true character of the communion of the Church to manifest itself; and serve as a catalyst for a return to solidarity and realism in the social order.

In some ways our sense of the communion of the universal Church has been reduced to a sound-bite measure of whether this or that person agrees or disagrees with the pope and bishops on this or that point of Catholic doctrine. Hence, synodal emphasis on the vivacity of local communion directs our senses and our minds to concrete and particular manifestations of communion. The Church's universal communion in faith, hope, and charity expresses itself locally. To experience this helps us to rediscover that the communion of the baptized is much more than what the world reduced to a screen can show us.

Fostering a renewed sense of ecclesial communion, real expressions of Christ-formed charity would seem by this account to be a work that best begins locally. The Church is not a political party, nor a corporation, nor an NGO. And though we know by instinct of the Spirit what we are not, we can do better at consciously expressing more clearly who Christ has made us to be: we are common drinkers from the wounded side of Christ. Within the local communion, we can palpably perceive that there is no "us and them" in the Church. There is just *us*, trying to limp along in the right direction.

Humanly, we cannot dialogue with an idea of the Church, we can only dialogue with one another in the Church. We cannot love the Church as we wish she were, or imagine she might be; we can only love her as she is. For that is how Christ loves us. Respectful listening is responsiveness to one another in the realism of the charity of Christ, and it is responsiveness to him. The words we throw at each other in the Church are fairly beside the point if they are not responses to one another in the grace of our responsiveness to Christ.

Actually doing the listening is a start to overcoming this reality of scorn and disinterest that many perceive in their relation to the Church.

As to the social order and the Church's responsibilities in this regard, Pope Francis says in *EG* 99:

> In various countries, conflicts and old divisions from the past are re-emerging. I especially ask Christians in communities throughout the world to offer a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion. Let everyone admire how you care for one another, and how you encourage and accompany one another: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). This was Jesus' heartfelt prayer to the Father: "That they may all be one…in us…so that the world may believe" (John 17:21).

Our witness of actually loving one another, which begins with listening to one another, is reflected into the wider social context as an alternative to ideological conflict. We hardly have much to offer a world of conflict if conflicts dominate the inner life of the Church.

This love reciprocated to Christ by means of the gift of the Spirit is by necessity a love that moves us out of ourselves. In *EG* 39, Francis says, "Before all else, the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others." In this regard, synodality in an age of pandemic is a pastoral response to isolation and self-preoccupation. Again, physically going out to encounter someone else, to hear them and to share something of their burden, is a basic responsiveness to the initial grace of having been loved by the Christ who came in search of us. Francis reminds us that responsiveness to Christ cannot be expressed in isolation from other human beings. This is perhaps the forgotten element of the truth that the Church is necessary for salvation. Belonging and responding to one another is the sacramental manifestation of our belonging and responding to Christ.

"What counts above all else," Francis says in *EG* 37,

> is *faith working through love* (Galatians 5:6). Works of love directed to one's neighbor are the most perfect external manifestation of the interior grace of the Spirit: "The foundation of the New Law" [as St. Thomas teaches] is in the grace of the Holy Spirit, who is manifested in the faith which works through love.

Francis's reference to Aquinas's teaching on the New Law is, I think, an iconic reference. It encapsulates Aquinas's emphasis on the primacy of charity in the Christian life, and the Spirit's mission to enact this charity in the world through our attentiveness to the peripheral, the outcast, the disrespected. This amounts also to a diagnosis of what is most needed in the mission today: The challenge before us is not primarily that we engage an age that has lost faith in the truth of Christian revelation; the challenge, more deeply, is that our age has lost faith in the possibility of selfless love. Young people especially find it difficult to believe in love as anything more than a mythologized power-play. This observation, of course, needs to be verified in the particular through a dialogical realism. But if we are talking to those who are indifferent, and to non-believers, I think we know this is a pervasive problem. I think the pope hears this everywhere he goes.

At issue is the credibility of the Spirit's gift of charity. Two thousand years since the coming of Christ and the world very articulately doubts that the claim we make about his love is in any way real. And it doubts that historical sharing in it is in any way possible.

This diagnosis is not unique to Pope Francis. It is, I think, what Pope Benedict XVI was trying to say when he decided to write *Deus caritas est* as his first encyclical and then moved toward a treatment of hope and faith. The credibility of faith today rests on the primacy and credibility of charity. The only response the Church can make to this particular malady of spirit is the witness of authentic selflessness. If we think we can conjure such a thing by our ingenuity, we are hapless successors to Pharaoh's magicians.

The witness of charity, nourished by faith in Christ and by the sacrament of charity, is ordered to action, and action involves right judgment about principles and particulars. The principles are in the contemplation of Christ; the particulars are in listening to people. Right judgment about particulars in turn involves contact with the real. So we are back to the posture of the Christian as listener to human reality and responder to what is heard.

Practically speaking, though, this much seems clear: there are many groups and factions in the Church that do not seem to like each other, and so find it impossible to discern in each other a basic communion of love. And there are many in our local communities distant or outside the Church who perhaps justifiably think we do not like them; thus they find it impossible to imagine that we might actually love them. This is the contemporary log-jam impeding receptivity to Christ. In *EG* 268, Pope Francis says this:

> To be evangelizers of souls, we need to develop a spiritual taste for being close to people's lives and to discover that this is itself a source of greater joy. Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people. When we stand before Jesus crucified, we see the depth

of his love which exalts and sustains us, but at the same time, unless we are blind, we begin to realize that Jesus' gaze, burning with love, expands to embrace all his people.

In this sense, actually doing the listening is a start to overcoming this reality of scorn and disinterest that many perceive in their relation to the Church.

I have often thought that the world finds it harder to believe that God likes them than to believe that he actually loves them. We tend to think of love in abstract terms, and we think of liking someone in particular terms. We say we love the whole world, but in practice we don't like or love many of the people in it. Perhaps I speak hyperbolically, but the lesson of Christ's style is important here. The Gospel clearly conveys that Jesus enjoyed the company of people. Poor people, sick people, desperate people, outcast people, rich people, and people who ultimately decided not to follow him through the narrow gate.

Local synodality already enacts the first thing we need to be doing in the Church: learning to savor the spiritual joy of being close to people, as the Holy Father says, in the messiness of our lives together. The act of gathering is a concrete expression of that desire to be close to Christ by being close to those who are around us, be it in the local parish, the apostolic movement, the soup kitchen, or the loneliness of grief. "We do not live better when we flee, hide, refuse to share, stop giving and lock ourselves up in our own comforts. Such a life is nothing less than slow suicide" (*EG* 272).

Pope Francis rather surprised the local churches, and I suspect much of the Roman Curia, with this call for a worldwide synodal action over a three-year period. Everyone asks, what's the plan? What's the agenda? What happens when it's finished? There is often suspicion behind the questions, and this already indicates why a time of local listening and discernment is needed. People in my diocese ask me all the time: What are we going to do? I simply say, *I'm not sure yet, we have to do a good amount of listening first, so we can discern and decide what needs attention as we move forward, and make good decisions about how to go about meeting the challenges together.* I also tell them we will need the generosity of many prayerful people to help us discern well what we have heard. Many people find this a perplexing answer, but I think it is a true one.

I think Francis acts from a perspective that time truly is more important than space, and that seeds in the Kingdom grow by a will that is not limited to our own. As he says in *EG* 278: "The kingdom is here, it returns, it struggles to flourish anew. Christ's resurrection everywhere calls forth seeds of that new world; even if they are cut back, they grow again, for the resurrection is already secretly woven into the fabric of this history, for Jesus did not rise in vain." This is a profoundly moving expression of "the Faith of Peter," the faith that will not fail, the faith that prevails over the powers of hell.

Synodality is thus an initiative prudentially promulgated by the Successor of Peter for the sake of seeking an opening of air within a progressively more suffocating circumstance. It is a chance to render our communion more real and less infected with the ideological, more dialogical with Christ and each other, and more focused on our common baptismal identity than on our partisan differences. It is a way forward, more focused on the authenticity of our charity and less obsessed with the un-Christlike preoccupation with who we think deserves it and who doesn't.

The synodal action is a seed planted that offers hope of renewing our sense of common identity and mission as Catholics in the world. It is not a quick fix; it is a renewal of the way forward in a way proper to our baptismal dignity. And it is an enactment that accomplishes great good just in the act of gathering and listening, something simple, something eminently responsive to the love we have received in Christ. Building up our communion is not separate from engaging the mission to the nations, because the witness of this love is essentially what our woundedness seems to need most.

The Church is a "we" that exists as a communion within the "I" of Christ. In the Spirit poured out by Christ through his dying and rising, we can overcome our tendency to interrupt, argue, and ignore. But it is a habit of grace that must be appreciated, cultivated, and allowed to grow.

There will be regional and national summations and ultimately a gathering in Rome to survey what we have learned and, on the universal level, what needs to be discerned. How to theologically construe this dynamic movement within the Catholic Church between the universal, the whole, and the particular is not so clear at this time. It is, however, an ecclesial reality ever in act, but not one we have thought about sufficiently. As we grapple with how this works, it helps to remember the metaphysics of human knowing: the whole (the universal) can never prescind from attentiveness to particular parts, and particular parts can never act by ignoring the good of the lived being of the whole.

We do not know what the fruits of this endeavor will be. But in the course of these three years we will have learned something about how to engage the local reality and how to integrate what we hear into the whole of the universal Church's identity as a real communion that is clearly one and yet active in the responsiveness of the parts to Christ. We will learn from our mistakes as much as from our good judgments. The aim is that the Church learn by responding how better to show herself in the current situations, local and universal, more in keeping with her deepest identity—*abscondita cum Christo in Deo* ("Your life is hidden with Christ in God," Colossians 3:3)—and thus, paradoxically, that it also more effectively offer a responsive witness to the presence in the world of that selfless love by which Christ has loved us first.

BISHOP DANIEL E. FLORES, STD *was installed as the sixth Bishop of Brownsville, Texas, in February 2010. This essay has been adapted from the Cardinal Bernardin Common Cause Address delivered by Bishop Flores on May 5, 2022, at Loyola University, Chicago.*

Bucha's Wounds

ANNA SURINYACH

Bucha, a small city northwest of Kyiv, is a place whose name will be remembered long after the war in Ukraine ends. Like Guernica or My Lai, it has become an emblem of atrocity. When it was liberated at the end of March after more than a month of occupation by Russian forces, the bodies of local residents were found lying on the streets or inside their houses and yards. Many of them showed signs of torture. About half of them had been shot. Behind Saint Andrew's Church, a mass grave with more than a hundred bodies was discovered. When these photographs were taken in April, hundreds of survivors were still living in shelters without water or electricity. Some of them remained in the shelters because their houses had been destroyed. The following photographs show the carnage and destruction the Russian forces left behind and how the population began rebuilding their town and recovering their lives after a month spent living in hell.

ANNA SURINYACH *is a Spanish freelance photojournalist based in Barcelona who focuses on migration, refugees, and human-rights issues. Her work has appeared in* Revista 5W, NPR, *and the* Los Angeles Times, *among others.*

RIGHT: Valeriy with his eldest son, Oleksiy, who was shot to death on March 12. Valeriy found his son's body on a street in the city center. After giving Oleksiy a temporary burial in the family garden, on April 8 Valeriy had to dig him up and transfer him to a morgue. After an autopsy was performed, Oleksiy's body was cremated.

TOP LEFT: The view from a window in a house that was occupied by Russian troops.

The glass is broken where a Russian soldier pointed a machine gun at Yablunska Street.

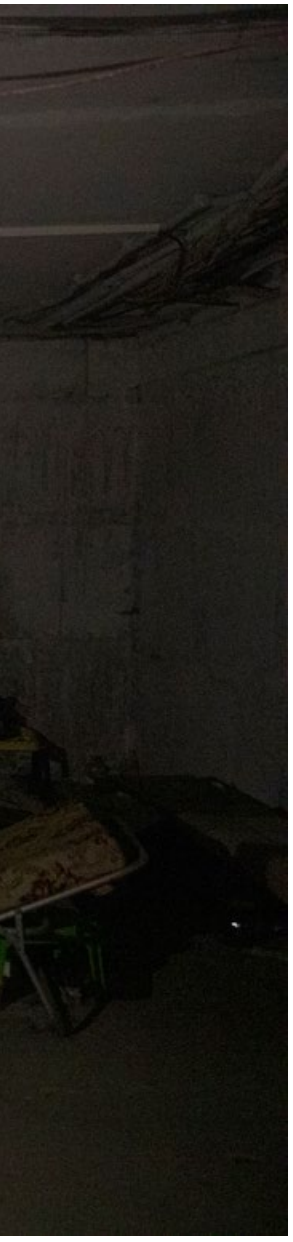
BOTTOM LEFT: A local woman in her thirties found dead with a gunshot wound to the head. The police say she had been forced to live in a basement during the occupation.

ABOVE: A group of older women who remained in Bucha during its occupation wait for a food distribution. Most of the local residents who stayed in the city are older.

ABOVE: More than four hundred people lived in this basement shelter, located under a nursery, during Russia's occupation of Bucha.

TOP RIGHT: A woman named Olga is comforted by her son-in-law, who arrived with a friend to repair a fence knocked down by Russian troops. Olga is eighty years old and spent the entire occupation at home in Bucha. She could not flee because her husband is blind and has reduced mobility.

BOTTOM RIGHT: The Villa San Marino, once a place of recreation for local families, was destroyed by Russian attacks. A trench was dug in its garden.



TOP LEFT: In the days following Bucha's liberation, volunteers and cemetery workers collected hundreds of bodies in streets and houses throughout the city.

BOTTOM LEFT: The bound feet of a Ukrainian man whose body was found in a forest in the outskirts of Bucha. He was shot in the head.

ABOVE: The funeral of a man named Andriy at Bucha Cemetery Three.

Human Fundamentals

Zena Hitz

The case for great-books programs

When Roosevelt Montás, a newly arrived immigrant from the Dominican Republic, was a sophomore in high school, he found a set of the Harvard Classics in the neighbor's trash. He took home two volumes, including Plato's dialogues on the trial and death of Socrates. This find set Montás on a journey that culminated in his attending Columbia University and cutting his intellectual teeth on the famous great-books program that constitutes its Core Curriculum. Today he teaches at Columbia, having spent ten years directing the Core. His book *Rescuing Socrates*—part memoir, part reflection, and part polemic—argues that general education in the great books is essential for social mobility and democracy.

Montàs's story of the found book echoes the memoir of another Dominican, Danel Padilla Peralta. In *Undocumented*, Padilla writes that when he was a child he found a book called *How People Lived in Greece and Rome* at the Bushwick homeless shelter where his family lived at the time. The book sparked an interest in Greek history that shaped his life. Padilla now teaches ancient history in the classics department at Princeton, and has become known for his charge that the field of classics is shot through with the ideology of white supremacy.

Butler Library, Columbia University

RANGILO GUJARATI/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

We may be puzzled that these two men, born ten years apart, with such similar trajectories, seem to take opposite sides in the campus culture wars. Yet both Padilla and Montás teach great books every summer in the same program for low-income high-school students. Perhaps we ought to wonder instead if the campus culture wars generate more heat than light. More to the point: we ought to wonder if there's something to admire in an education that leaves the mind of the student free to choose different ways of living and imagining one's life.

Stories of autodidacticism have a distinguished history in the United States. Frederick Douglass relates finding the *Columbian Orator* at the age of twelve, while still enslaved, and through it finding both his literacy and his identity as an abolitionist. Zora Neale Hurston found a copy of John Milton in a rubbish heap, not knowing the fame of the poet, and read it slowly while on breaks from work. A rebellious and disaffected Huey Newton, who finished high school virtually illiterate, found the remedy in reading and re-reading his brother's copy of Plato's *Republic*. Later in life, when he was falsely accused of murder, he told the jury how he saw in the famous image of the cave his own people, chained in the shadows, in need of liberation.

Having seen one of these stories, you start to see them everywhere: Malcolm X's prison library; the books temporarily left aside by schoolchildren that Richard Wright could steal for a few minutes, squeezing out their words and wisdom; the wonderful memoirs of working-class self-educators collected in Jonathan Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*. These stories, like Montás's book, dispel the culture war and bring us into contact with the central reality it obscures: education through books is essential for self-determination and liberty.

Since the 1990s, it has been taken for granted in some academic circles that the great books are racist and sexist, instruments of patriarchy and white supremacy. Montás joins a growing number of people of color who testify to the value of classics and great books in their communities. His witness joins the work of educators Anika Prather and Angel Parham, who seek to teach the continu-

ity between the Black American literary traditions and the Western canon.

Today's renewal of the great-books movement holds out the prospect of an education based on shared humanity, and rejects the patronizing and demeaning division of curricula according to race or gender. Yet it keeps in view how this tradition has been taken up and adapted by the oppressed and the marginalized; it can hardly be accused of naïve absorption of the self-interested perspectives of the ruling class. We find in this newly visible group of educators a study of the past that is deeply humanistic, without being blind to the harsher realities of history.

Montás writes in a mild and understated style, but he calls bullshit when he sees it. Of the conventional wisdom that the great books are white, he writes:

> My being a brown immigrant from the Dominican Republic does not make the Constitution less relevant to me than it is to my wife, a white woman born in rural Michigan. She is no closer and no further from Homer and Socrates than I am.

The illusion that ancient Greek books are white belongs to the hocus-pocus of what the Fields sisters describe as *racecraft*. The spells of racecraft cut deep; their concrete effects are as real as life and death. Do we really want to suggest that the Constitution is white? In doing so, might we contribute to a habit of denying the constitutional rights of non-white immigrants?

The Indian philosopher Arudra Burra takes Montás's point a step further. Burra also complains of the absurdity of having to justify studying Western books to his Indian contemporaries: "Is present-day New Delhi so much further removed from Plato's Athens than, say, present-day New York?" In Burra's view, anyone can read anything they might find illuminating. He cites Tagore: "Let us be rid of all false pride and rejoice at any lamp being lit at any corner of the world, knowing that it is a part of the common illumination of our house."

The world of learning is simply the world of humanity. It is common property, a shared home. Readers of all locations, backgrounds, and walks of life are free agents, capable of creative engagement and repurposing such culture as they find for the needs they see for themselves. "Humanity" is not a piece of essentialism, as some of its critics claim. It is an aspiration, a dream shaped by all who share it, toward which we advance piecemeal and with difficulty.

The discussion of higher education has been distorted, inflated, used, and abused by virtually everyone with an objective that has nothing to do with education. Education, we are told, is for skills acquisition, for innovation, for free markets, or for social justice—for anything but the development of fuller human beings more capable of the various forms of flourishing. These non-educational agendas shape not only conversation, but daily life at every American educational institution, large or small, driving decisions at every level. The publication of *Rescuing Socrates* and its success are clear signs that the adults have entered the room.

By "the adults," I mean most centrally teachers, the men and women who have spent decades in classrooms face-to-face with students and with books, stewarding the intellectual growth of the young, observing what works and what doesn't. In this respect, Montás's book joins Jonathan Marks's recent defense of higher education against its conservative critics, *Let's Be Reasonable*, and Scott Newstok's *How to Think like Shakespeare*, another defense of classical education for progressive ends. These authors, all teachers, have something in common with one another and with this reviewer: transformed by our own liberal-arts education and devoted to our students, we watch the paths we traveled as young people disappear, leaving today's youth lost and without resource. It is a matter of urgency to bring real education and its conditions back into public view.

Secular great-books programs, like Columbia's Core and the program at St. John's College, where I teach, are relics of the great egalitarian movements of the early twentieth century. They have a simple purpose: to facilitate encounters between human beings and books, sparking open-ended reflection. In such reflection, the participants remove words from their use in social competition and ask in honesty what they mean. In open conversation, slogans and buzzwords are abandoned or repossessed by living and active readers. Such encounters take center stage in *Rescuing Socrates*.

Montás undertakes his defense of the great books with simplicity and humility. He keeps the reader's eye on the crucial, universal experience of those who work in great-books programs: these books change lives. The change comes not through grandiose reverence or civilizational jingoism, but because—however we understand the how and the why—these books constitute an education in human fundamentals.

Along the way, at every crucial stage of Montás's journey, teachers appear, caring authority figures who take an interest in a young man toting around a volume of Plato's dialogues. Liberal education happens between people. It is not a matter of the transmission of content. All the databases in the world are pointless without a human being doing some thinking. Unlike data sets, books have authors, resembling human teachers, companions on the journey. Montás limits himself in this book to reflections on four: Augustine, Plato, Freud, and Gandhi.

Montás avoids the false piety that sometimes attends talk of great books. Rather, he shares the reactions of the college freshman he was, asking "Why does Augustine hate babies so much?" and "How can Socrates abandon his family?" These questions are critical without being dismissive. They reflect the honest confrontation of modern adults, young and old, with books from various times and places, from various points of view.

Likewise, Montás chooses as case studies authors who not only changed the way he thought and lived, but whose thinking was integrated with their own real lives. Augustine was not merely a theologian, but a saint; Socrates not just

Roosevelt Montás

a philosopher, but someone who died for philosophy and founded a way of life; Freud not just a theorist of the mind but a healer; Gandhi not an armchair activist, but someone who risked, and ultimately lost, his life for his ideals. With such examples, Montás cuts through the charge that these books are useless in the real world.

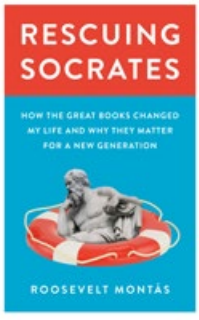
Benjamin Franklin once responded to a query about the uselessness of speculative study with a quip: "What's the use of a baby?" The quip still stings. What is the point of a human life? Should we send our young people out to perform obscure tasks for obscure taskmasters, without having trained them to ask the question, without having given them some tools to try to answer it for themselves?

The way Montás made use of the great books is at first glance little more than a highbrow version of the American Dream, another legend of a self-made man. Such legends can constrain and obscure as much as they illuminate. Daniel Padilla Peralta responds to the burden of the rags-to-riches narrative by making war on what he judges as white supremacy. Montás takes a low-key approach, marked by his characteristic subtlety and humility. He tells it like it is—or like it was—emphasizing his losses at least as much as his gains. His discussion of Augustine highlights his loss of youthful faith; of Plato, the loss of his father, who stayed behind in the Dominican Republic; of Freud, the end of his first marriage. Standing over all is Gandhi's critique of Western materialism, materialism that shapes the fabric of American life at every level. Montás describes both his achievements and his ordeals in terms given to him by the great books, thus demonstrating the relevance of old texts to contemporary human life.

The stories of how the great books helped him handle loss and suffering are both moving and illuminating. The discussion of Freud in particular, perhaps the least popular of the four authors today, sparkles with clarity and insight. In the face of public conversations marked by fear, anger, and hostility, Montás chooses the path of vulnerability. In that, he shows the wisdom of a person who has navigated real conflict, away from the seminar table.

There is great strength in the simplicity of Montás's personal approach to defending the great books. He offers his story with fearless respect for the reader's ability to evaluate it. He does not over-generalize or dwell on questions outside of his experience. In this way, he shows his talents as a teacher. How we generalize and apply Montás's story will be up to us. However, he does intend his story to be evaluated in one particular way: he uses it to argue, first, for a common core in undergraduate education and, second, for a common core consisting of great books.

The common core emphasizes that education in human fundamentals is necessary for any career and any walk of life. If we reserve such studies for budding humanities specialists, we force a brutal choice on young people whose priority must be to get out of poverty. By doing so, we reserve such study for the few and the rich—a reality that becomes more vivid and clear every day.



RESCUING SOCRATES

How the Great Books Changed My Life and Why They Matter for a New Generation

ROOSEVELT MONTÁS
Princeton University Press
$24.95 | 248 pp.

INBAL SIVAN

In great-books programs, we study philosophy not to become a professor of philosophy, but to feed the reflection and contemplation that crown any human life.

Montás points out that the current hodge-podge of general education proferred by most universities is the product not of reason or choice, but of fear of conflict and dereliction of duty. Our course catalogs show the studied avoidance of basic questions like: Is there anything in particular that everyone should study?

Studying great books in general education brings all the human virtues of amateurism without compromising seriousness and rigor. Great books meet every reader where he or she stands. In great-books programs, we study philosophy not to become a professor of philosophy, but to feed the reflection and contemplation that crown any human life. Philosophy, literature, political theory—and I would add the classics of mathematics and science—bear on every career. The serious pursuit of human questions cannot be reserved for a small group of elites preparing for academic life.

Montás's agenda resonates so deeply with my own that I have difficulty evaluating it. Yes, it is fear, not thinking or choice, that governs many of our institutional difficulties (a diagnosis echoed by Jonathan Marks). Yes, communities of learning must openly discuss and choose what is worth learning, and the decision cannot be shirked without consequences. Yes, such decision-making is ongoing and necessarily provisional. Yes, without the great books, we risk losing the arts and habits of self-knowledge and so the greatest riches of human development. Yes—most of all—the great books serve a liberating purpose in particular for the poor and the marginalized. They are for everyone.

Montás does risk a certain provincialism by defending great-books education for the sake of personal self-knowledge and personal autonomy. He comes across as a learned, thoughtful, compassionate person, stubborn and courageous, an exemplar of the liberty our liberal education seeks to cultivate. But there is more to learning than acquiring a good character or coming to know one's self. Augustine sees the whole nature of the universe and its loving Creator; Plato the invisible structures of what is; Freud the nature of civilization; Gandhi the intersection of contemplation and action before God. Part of the splendor of the human intellectual endeavor is that visible and invisible worlds are open to it: mathematics, biology, and physics all fall under its purview. There is more to the humanities, and more to great-books programs, than heightened introspection.

Montás's disciplined focus on the place and time whence he came threatens a different kind of provincialism, one that presents a problem for the reader who seeks to act on the ideals Montás celebrates. We all learn under certain material conditions—in particular spaces that can be crowded or spread out, among objects that may or may not strike the eye. I couldn't help but notice how much of Montás's development depended on the unique environment of New York City. Surely the new immigrant arrived in one of the very few places in this country where he might have been seen by a teacher for who he was, guided into the local Ivy League university, and launched into middle-class life without abandoning his community of origin.

Consider another material condition: the physical book. Our formative stories of the self-taught belong to an age of physical books—concrete objects that can be lost, found, thrown away; objects that are a sign to others of what is within. Both Montás and Padilla are seen reading, or aspiring to read, by key figures in their lives. (Of course, there is more aspiration than actual reading. As a teenager I carried around a copy of Plato's *Republic* for a time, without ever cracking it open. It signaled an ambition, one might say a pretense, more than a reality. Yet far-fetched as the prospect was at the time, I did eventually become a scholar of classical philosophy, with special expertise on the *Republic*. On the one hand, this was more or less pure chance; on the other, perhaps we are too hard on pretense.)

The physical book goes into the trash, into the donation bin, into shared space; the PDF, the e-book, the audio file is kept behind a paywall that cannot be breached by a child or most anyone else. At the mercy of invisible overlords and blind mechanical principles, files disappear in the utmost privacy, unable to be rescued. Nor does the online resource advertise its value, like an old book suggesting a whole manner of life with a little leather and ink. These days one can find almost anything online with the right access codes—but how does one know what to look for? Educational technology risks being a mere convenience for the already equipped, while shutting out those who need equipment.

The loss of the physical book as a ubiquitous mode of instruction does not concern Montás directly in *Rescuing Socrates*. But the core concern here does: the fear that what is called the "crisis in the humanities" will damage beyond recognition a well-traveled path for the poor and the marginalized. That path leads not only to middle-class success, or to life as a professor, as Montás traveled it, but to the self-reflection and dignity that liberal education makes possible. May his book inspire many people, young and old, to choose that path for themselves.

ZENA HITZ *is a Tutor at St. John's College in Annapolis and founder and president of the Catherine Project. She is the author of* Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life.

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NEST

Richard Schiffman

I cupped the nest as Rembrandt's Aristotle
held the bust of Homer and thought
of all those restless flights to ferry twigs
and blades of grass and scraps of bark, and the urge
to fit them in a hoop as perfect as the sky.
Built, some would say by instinct— I saw love,
the flaming care stars lavish on their planets.
Made not to last, but serving for a single season
before the fledglings launch themselves
into the air their wings were made for.

RICHARD SCHIFFMAN *is an environmental journalist, poet, and author of two biographies. His first poetry collection,* What the Dust Doesn't Know, *was published in 2017 by Salmon Poetry.*

'There's Always Something We Can Offer Someone Else'

An interview with Mallory McMorrow

Dominic Preziosi

On April 19, Mallory McMorrow, Democratic State Senator of Michigan, delivered a speech in the chamber of the Michigan State Capitol. It instantly struck a chord on social media, and has since been viewed by millions of people around the world. Pushing back forcefully against a Republican colleague's accusations of "grooming and sexualizing children" as well as defending her support of LGBTQ people, McMorrow emphasized her Christian faith and Catholic upbringing as an inspiration for her political outlook and her insistence on taking the side of the marginalized. This interview originally aired on the Commonweal Podcast and has been edited for clarity and length.

DOMINIC PREZIOSI: What has been the response to your remarks? Did you ever think the speech would generate such attention?

MALLORY MCMORROW: No, certainly not! It's been overwhelming, but in a really positive way. People from all walks of life have reached out: seniors, young people, parents of gay and trans kids. They told us it felt so reassuring and wonderful to hear their kids described *as people*, and that it really mattered. One older gay man in particular told me how good it felt for his life of service to be recognized, instead of being targeted for belonging to the LGBTQ community. He's been involved in soup kitchens and taken care of sick and needy family members for many years. I'm not part of the LGBTQ community, but he thanked me for taking a stand on his behalf.

DP: You said that you wanted to reclaim faith from people who are using it as "a weapon to hate other people." What were you paying attention to in Michigan and elsewhere that brought you to this point?

MM: When you run for office, you're always asking groups, newspapers, and other outlets to endorse your candidacy. And you end up filling out a lot of forms: "What's your name?," "Where do you live?," "Are you married?," "Do you have kids?," and so on. Then there's a line for religion. It's usually just a one-word answer. And I've never really known how to answer it.

For me, as for a lot of people, faith is a really important part of my life. But it's also more complicated than just one word. I was raised Catholic, and I have to acknowledge that the Catholic Church itself has a dark history—and current history as well. Think of the abuse crisis. Faith can be incredibly powerful, and a source of hope. But it can also be weaponized. So we have to recognize that when we see it in the world, and respond to it.

DP: Some who listened to your speech heard unusually compelling and familiar language. You talked about CCD, and referenced Fr. Ted Hesburgh, the long-time president of your alma mater, Notre Dame, without explaining either. What was your intent in drawing on these parts of your upbringing and experience?

MM: In part, I was trying to signal to people who also consider themselves people of faith that I'm not making this up—that I know what I'm talking about. Stories are important, and the beauty of every story lies in the richness of the details. I wanted to include enough of them to say: this is real, this is part of me, and this is my story. It was a nod to those who know what that means; for those who don't, it didn't take anything away from what I was trying to say.

DP: You also said that Fr. Hesburgh marched alongside Martin Luther King Jr., adding with emphasis, "*when he was alive*." Tell us why that's important.

MM: Let me offer some context here. In Michigan, we are currently grappling with a police shooting in Grand Rapids. Patrick Lyoya, a Black man, was shot in the back of the head by an officer during a traffic stop. A few years ago, in response to the protests following the murder of George Floyd, we'd introduced bipartisan legislation designed to improve Black Michiganders' experience with police. Despite the ongoing injustices we still see, and the real pain in Grand Rapids right now, that legislation hasn't moved. Some of our colleagues even look at this situation and say, "Well, Lyoya should've just complied with the police." So I wanted to say something that would address that.

Over the past few years I've grown very close with Senator Adam Hollier, a colleague from Detroit. He's shared stories with me about what it's like to be a young Black man with kids. He has to take precautions whenever he drives or goes running. When he runs, for instance, he always wears neon colors. He's also an active-duty military member, so he intentionally wears something that makes that clear. Adam knows that if he wears black, or a hoodie, he's putting himself at risk.

Sen. Mallory McMorrow

People often quote Dr. King today, but it wasn't popular to march beside him when he was alive. He was a controversial figure because he said what he said, and he did what he did. And he saw injustice and asked for white Americans to recognize it and to be active participants, not to stand on the sidelines. I really wanted to highlight that Fr. Ted could have easily just said, "It's not my problem," but he didn't. He saw injustice and took the risk of being an ally, even when it was not a popular thing to do.

DP: You spoke about the responsibility that power and privilege confer on those who possess it: a duty to offer service, protection, and allyship to the marginalized and powerless. A lot of people have been waiting for something like this. Why aren't we getting it? And how can we begin to act?

MM: Even the word "privilege" has been politicized. There are certain people for whom I'm "White Privilege McMorrow," or "Senator White Privilege," and that's used as a pejorative. And for me, especially the way that I was raised, it's nothing to feel bad about. But it's something to acknowledge. All of us have some privilege compared to others. We have something that others don't have, regardless of our income or education level or how comfortable we are. There's always something that we can offer to somebody else.

Service itself is a privilege. If we have the ability, mental capacity, and time to be of service, that is a privilege. It's so easy to be comfortable and to say, "You know what, this isn't my issue." And for a lot of people who look like me, there's also a fear of engaging in the wrong way, or saying the wrong thing. In an attempt to be sensitive, and out of a fear of saying the wrong thing, too often people aren't saying anything at all. And that's not doing anything to stop hate from growing in really dangerous ways.

If we have the ability, mental capacity, and time to be of service, that is a privilege.

DP: Although you continue to draw on your Catholic upbringing, you've been pretty frank about how the experience you had with the Church growing up was "not the best." How do you go about reconciling some of these factors? How do you stay committed to ideals like faith and service when the Church you were raised in can sometimes make it so hard?

MM: It's been a lifelong journey—not a struggle, that's the wrong word—but a journey, to figure out those two things.

I think of it like any job: you can get hired into a position you think is your dream job, because it's a company you admire and love. But imagine the management is bad when you get there. It might not be the experience you wanted, but that doesn't necessarily change what that organization stands for. And that's sort of the way that I understand the Church.

The fact that the management of my church didn't offer the most welcoming experience to me, my mom, and my family doesn't mean that faith is any less powerful. That's something I take from my mom, who was pretty young when she had me, about twenty-five. She had to figure out her own relationship with the Church. She taught CCD for a while and was very active in choir with us. But she really found her comfort and strength in service, in the soup kitchen, in inviting people to our house.

I joke with people that I never had a key to my house growing up. People just walked in, sat down, and started eating food. It didn't matter who they were, or where they were from. Sometimes they were strangers—which, looking back, might not have been a super safe thing to do. But that's who my mom was. Our house was a community center for anybody who wanted a place to go or somebody to talk to. My mom was always of service to others, sometimes to her own detriment, but I think that's what she really took out of life: You don't have to be in church in the same pew every Sunday, but you can do things in your

PHOTO COURTESY OF SEN. MCMORROW

daily life every single week that are of service and express faith through works.

DP: Current polling shows that a majority of Americans favor codifying key LGBTQ rights. Do you see a role for religion and, in particular, Christianity, in helping to convert this popular support into legislative policy?

MM: Yes, I think so. I know that I am not an anomaly in terms of my own experience with faith. I think we just have to stand up and say that these things are not at odds with each other. I fundamentally believe that religious freedom in the United States means you have every right to practice and express your belief, as long as it does not hurt others. You don't have the ability to inflict your personal beliefs on other people. So I don't see any conflict between ensuring that our LGBTQ friends and neighbors are protected from discrimination and being a person of faith. I think that a lot more of us should get more comfortable saying so, because we know the support is there. We just have to get over our fear of speaking out imperfectly.

DP: How big a role did your understanding of faith and religion play in your decision to enter a life of public service?

MM: I don't know that I actively thought about it. I graduated from Notre Dame, and had always wanted to be a car designer. I got to do that first, interning for Mazda before moving on to Mattel, where I was a designer for Hot Wheels. That was super fun, and now every four-year-old thinks I'm very cool.

I loved my job, but I also realized that I really missed the service aspect of my years at Notre Dame. A lot of the projects that we did in my industrial design program focused on service. We designed refugee shelters for disaster areas and thought about how to create pop-up schools. I loved that. So it wasn't as linear as "my faith drove me to service," but faith has definitely made me a better public servant. It impacts how I approach this job and how I found myself in this space, which wasn't my original career plan.

DP: I want to talk about a phrase you used in your remarks on the floor that really resonated for a lot of people: "performative nonsense," which you've used as a criticism. To what extent do you see "performative nonsense" taking the place of authentic political action and the responsibility of delivering concrete gains for constituents?

MM: It's frustrating. Not only are the actions of the senator who said the really hateful things about me negative towards the LGBTQ community, they're also really disingenuous to her own supporters. They're a deflection, a way of scapegoating, of making people so angry and hateful that they somehow believe that the reason health-care costs are too high is because a trans fifth-grader wants to play soccer. And that is wrong.

It really comes back to authenticity. I remember one of my favorite classes in college was comparative religion. I loved learning about all the different religions and what we had in common. I vividly remember sitting in class with a student who had gone through Catholic school—I was in public school from kindergarten through twelfth grade—and who made the argument that a character in a book we were reading couldn't be held responsible for his actions because he wasn't a practicing Catholic, because he hadn't received proper moral instruction. And I just thought that was such *nonsense*.

It doesn't take sitting in the same pew every Sunday to look around the world and your community, and apply the lessons of faith through works: reach out to the sick and the poor, love those who have less. Calling yourself a Christian, or putting it in your Twitter bio, is not the same as being one. It's performative, and it's nonsense. It's not showing faith through works.

DP: Fairly or not, Democratic politicians are perceived not to acknowledge how faith and religion figure into their lives and their work as legislators and leaders. Yet we do see from figures like President Biden and others that faith can guide their approach to policy and to action. Do Democrats have a "faith problem" they need to address? And if so, how do they do it without engaging in a different version of performative nonsense?

MM: I don't want to claim that my story is everybody's story. I do think that people are hungry for authenticity. I think everybody should share what their own beliefs are, even if it's complicated. If you have a faith background, wonderful. Tell people about it. If you don't, and you find service in other ways or value in the community, share what that is. The most important thing is that we find that connection with people first.

DP: How do you plan to proceed from here? What happens next?

MM: If anything, the response to my remarks has really renewed my faith in this job and why I'm doing it. Sometimes it can be frustrating to come to work—I've introduced forty bills since taking office almost four years ago, and none of them have even gotten a hearing. The past few years have been hard, and everybody's tired. Many of us struggle to show up every day and get through it—even those of us who are, like me, comfortable suburban moms.

But my hope is that if I can help inspire more people like me, who are not members of marginalized groups, to realize that we have not only the duty, but the power to stand with our neighbors and help them when they are being targeted unfairly, we can do that.

LISTEN

Hear the full interview with Mallory McMorrow on Episode 80 of the Commonweal Podcast.
commonwealmagazine.org/podcast

William Jennings Bryan speaks at the 1908 Democratic National Convention.

What Does It Take Now?

JOHN T. MCGREEVY

It is the world's oldest mass political organization, founded by Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren in the early nineteenth century, promoted at first through partisan newspapers and now releasing TikTok fundraising videos. For all its flaws, what contemporaries in the 1800s called "The Democracy" may provide the last line of defense for republican government. Many members of its rival party now spout absurd conspiracy theories and remain in thrall to a former—and perhaps future—president still trying to overturn the 2020 election through unconstitutional means.

Enter Michael Kazin. His new book, *What It Took to Win: A History of the Democratic Party*, could not be better timed. The underlying questions are simple: Can the Democrats win? And can they save American democracy while doing so?

Topic and author are well matched. Kazin's scholarly career began with a monograph on the labor movement in nineteenth-century San Francisco. He has also written impressive studies of the American peace movement during World War I and populism on both the Left and the Right in American history. His most influential book was his most unlikely: a biography of the three-time Democratic presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan. Bryan's evangelical Protestantism—he died while campaigning against the teaching of evolution in public schools—has recently overshadowed his pleas for a more equitable economy. Kazin reclaimed this populist Bryan, whose religious convictions informed not just his support for Prohibition but also his impassioned defense of ordinary farmers and workers.

Bryan, the voice of Nebraska's farmers, and Kazin, the son of prominent New York intellectuals, might seem an unlikely pair. What they shared—and what Kazin believes has informed the Democratic party throughout its history—is belief in a "moral capitalism." In the nineteenth century, this meant the defense of common people against manipulative banks and financiers. In the twentieth century, moral capitalism meant Social Security, the GI Bill, and Medicare, all devised during Democratic administrations and now, as Kazin writes, "impregnable pillars of state policy." The Affordable Care Act might join this list, as participation in the program grows and as Republicans abandon their hope of destroying it.

Kazin knows and regrets that moral capitalism did not mean racial equality. The Democratic party at its origin and until the mid-twentieth century was a white man's enterprise. Many of the party's leading figures, including Thomas Jefferson (whose Democratic faction preceded the Democratic Party) and Andrew Jackson, were unapologetic slave owners. Jackson brutalized Native Americans to appease land-hungry white settlers. Interestingly, Martin Van Buren, who created the actual

WHAT IT TOOK TO WIN
A History of the Democratic Party

MICHAEL KAZIN
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
$35 | 416 pp.

NIDAY PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

organization of the Democratic Party in the 1820s and 1830s, ended his life leading an anti-slavery political party. More typically, however, Democrats, including the many Irish Catholics drawn to the party for its rejection of nativism, only grudgingly supported the abolition of slavery. Most Democrats derided Reconstruction. In the South they drafted laws guaranteeing racial segregation. Woodrow Wilson founded the Federal Trade Commission and pushed through the first graduated income tax. He also mandated segregated lunchrooms in federal buildings.

Much of *What It Took to Win* detours in interesting ways from textbook narratives. For example, Kazin identifies Frances Perkins and other women advisors to New York governors Al Smith and Franklin Roosevelt as central to the foundations of the American social-welfare state. His sketches of Hubert Humphrey, the mayor of Minneapolis, and Adam Clayton Powell, the congressman from Harlem, illuminate how in the 1940s the two men pushed the Democratic Party away from its segregationist history and toward a commitment to racial equality.

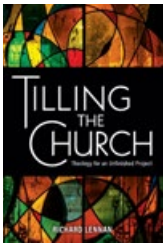
Humphrey urged civil and human rights at the Democratic convention in 1948, although the gesture spurred southern Democrats such as South Carolina Sen. Strom Thurmond toward a short-lived Dixiecrat third party. Black voters became (and remain) a core Democratic constituency. Civil-rights legislation in the 1960s was a bipartisan project, supported by many moderate Republicans such as Nelson Rockefeller, but northern Democrats and one southern Democrat in the Oval Office, Lyndon Johnson, took the lead.

Historians used to occupy more of a bully pulpit in public affairs. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., the most prominent mid-twentieth-century historian of the Democratic Party, began his career with a pathbreaking 1945 study of the age of Jackson and then authored three volumes on the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt. He famously advised John F. Kennedy and composed a celebratory history of the Kennedy administration. Schlesinger's journals, published in

BOOKS IN BRIEF

A CHILDHOOD
The Biography of a Place
HARRY CREWS
Penguin Classics
$16 | 192 pp.

"The only thing worse than my nerves was my curiosity," the late novelist Harry Crews reveals near the end of his 1978 memoir, just reissued as a Penguin Classic, "which had always been untempered by pity or compassion." His compulsion is the reader's reward. In this vivid account of growing up in rural Georgia around the time of the Great Depression, Crews draws from closely observed moments of familial strife and communal connection to create an indelible portrait of a place and its people. A bout with polio and a near-fatal scalding are among Crews's own travails, and though poverty and violence are as inescapable as the weather, this elegiac, exquisitely told story is also filled with humor and love—indeed, compassion, contrary to the author's claims. Featuring a new foreword by Tobias Wolff.



TILLING THE CHURCH
Theology for an Unfinished Project
RICHARD LENNAN
Liturgical Press
$29.95 | 288 pp.

A farmer tills the soil when he notices that it needs to be renewed, enabling it to best bear fruit. Just the same, the Church must constantly be attentive to movements of grace so that it can be cultivated for fruitfulness. Open to the echoes of Vatican II and aligned with the mission of Pope Francis, Richard Lennan's new book, *Tilling the Church*, lays out an ecclesiology for today. The Church is an unfinished project, he writes, constantly tilled by grace through the Holy Spirit—that is, made more authentic, aided in its growth, and formed truer to its mission. The Church must be self-critical and responsive in order to actualize this tilling. As times change and the Spirit moves, so too must the Church continually respond and convert. Lennan's theological endeavor, an expression of his own love for the Church, is for anyone who wants to see the Church thrive now and into the future.

THE CONVERT'S HEART IS GOOD TO EAT
MELODY S. GEE
Driftwood Press
$9.99 | 29 pp.

For the fawn taking its first steps, the "open / meadow is spread with harm," but also with nourishment. For the convert playing hide-and-seek, the urge rises to say "here I am." Melody S. Gee's poetry chapbook grapples with growth and the accompanying betrayal it inevitably causes as she quests outward toward faith, abandoning and then revisiting pieces of her past. An immigrant's daughter, she finds the liturgy in overfilled take-out containers from her family's restaurant, their strained seals saying, "*See how much // was poured out for you.*" But there is grief there, too, its presence a prerequisite for consolation. Gee pays special attention to the body, the paradoxes of motherhood, divine brilliance, and physical mundanity: the "glint of light" that "always thinks / it is God, even slick parking / lot runoff."

2007, confirm his mover-shaker status as they detail lunches at the Century Club in New York and trips to Washington to attend high-level party strategy meetings.

Kazin perches on a different branch of the influence tree. As a college student in the late 1960s, he turned away from the Democratic Party out of disgust with its support for the American war effort in Vietnam. He became active in Students for a Democratic Society, a group disdainful of Schlesinger's establishment liberalism. Kazin is a longtime editor of *Dissent*, a magazine of the Left. Very much like Schlesinger, though, Kazin encourages historians to cultivate a public voice. He bemoans putatively radical academics mining "postmodern discourse theories" while crafting prose "only an insomniac could appreciate."

What It Took to Win hints at Kazin's presence on the edge of a more diffuse, looser Democratic Party establishment. He teaches at Georgetown and is familiar with Washington D.C.'s political circuits. He met with Congressman Richard Gephardt after the catastrophic Democratic losses in 1994. He played poker, we learn, with Bill Clinton's aide, George Stephanopoulos. He drafted a historians' manifesto in support of Barack Obama as he battled Hillary Clinton in 2008. His son managed a successful 2018 Democratic senatorial campaign.

Kazin's overarching goal is clear: "mobilize working people of all races and national backgrounds behind a vision of a generous welfare state that would also preserve the health of the planet." But how to get there? Kazin's elegant narrative is as informed a guide as readers will find, but when he gets to the current moment he is surprisingly cautious, as if afraid to offend. He understands the puzzles. Democrats are now the clear majority party among college graduates, but only about 40 percent of Americans who voted in 2020 had a college degree. The majority of American voters are still white people without a college degree. Two-thirds of them voted for Donald Trump in 2020.

The success of the Bernie Sanders campaigns in recruiting young, often working-class voters seemed to signal an important shift in the Democratic Party's appeal. Now, more than a year into the Biden presidency, the Sanders campaigns seem to have been a false dawn. Many of their goals—notably a $15-an-hour minimum wage—are more popular than ever. But beyond Sanders himself, the messengers of left-liberalism struggle to catalyze a Democratic majority.

The challenge, which Kazin could spell out more clearly than he does, is that many working-class whites, along with some working-class African Americans and Latinos, seem alienated from the mores of the Democratic party's cultural left wing. They recoil from party orthodoxy on topics ranging from immigration to gender to antiracism to a perceived radicalism in public-school curricula. They dislike that some teachers' unions were so resistant to reopening schools during the Covid crisis.

These working-class voters are often pro-choice but more moderate than college-eduated Democratic activists on abortion. A Supreme Court reversal of *Roe v. Wade* and the virtual outlawing of abortion in some red states will mobilize Democratic partisans and may place Republican candidates on the defensive. But the evidence from Texas since that state passed its restrictive laws is inconclusive. That some Democratic politicians declare abortion rights non-negotiable under any circumstances may only deepen polarization rather than persuade the diminishing number of undecided voters.

It's not that some Democratic strategists and many Democratic voters don't realize the need to appeal beyond the party's base. Some voters may not be persuadable, in part due to racist fears of changing American demographics. Others are. When given a wide range of Democratic primary candidates to choose from in 2020, working-class Black people, in particular, chose Joe Biden, the candidate with the most familiar face and the most mainstream politics.

Biden's 2020 victory seemed to confirm the shrewdness of that choice. But in the 2022 midterm elections, culture—often culture refracted through a hostile right-wing media—may triumph over class. Recent polling data on working-class Latinos and Latinas show them drifting in a conservative direction, and Republican Party operatives now swarm one-time Democratic redoubts such as the Rio Grande Valley. Some in the GOP are hopeful that they may be able to stitch together their own multiracial working-class party.

Kazin ends *What It Took to Win* with an extended tribute to Culinary Workers Union Local 226 in Las Vegas. The union includes workers who come from more than 170 countries and speak forty languages. Most members are Latinos or Latinas. They clean the rooms, carry the bags, and pour the drinks of the city's tourists. Union members prepared thousands of their immigrant peers for citizenship exams and helped them register to vote. More than any other group, they propelled Nevada's Democrats to electoral triumphs in both 2018 and 2020. More than any other organization, they bargained for a decent life for their members.

It's an inspiring tableau. Kazin plausibly sees unions as crucial to mobilizing a sustainable Democratic majority, not only now but for almost the entire history of the party. But Las Vegas is not yet America. Forty percent of households with a union member voted for Donald Trump in 2020. Eighty percent of households with a union member voted for Lyndon Johnson in 1964. Winning beyond Las Vegas may require more message discipline, more evasion of culture-war squabbles, and fewer condemnations of more conservative Democrats than has been on recent display. *What It Took to Win* will inform both Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Joe Manchin about their party's history. Let's hope it's widely read. Whether it will help these Democrats figure out what it now takes to win is—given the alternative—an urgent question.

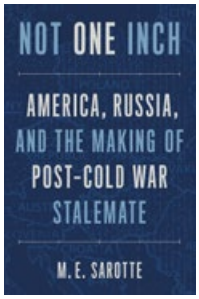
JOHN T. MCGREEVY *teaches history at the University of Notre Dame. He is the author of* Catholicism: A Global History from the French Revolution to Pope Francis, *forthcoming from W.W. Norton in September.*

A Missed Opportunity?

JAMES J. SHEEHAN

A character in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* describes the two ways in which he went bankrupt: "Gradually, then suddenly." The same thing can be said about the political bankruptcy of the Soviet Union. In retrospect, we can see the gradual erosion of the regime's power and legitimacy, but its final collapse was sudden and, to almost everyone, surprising. M. E. Sarotte's superb new book examines the decade after the great surprise of 1989 when political leaders on both sides of the Atlantic struggled to come to terms with the dangers and opportunities of a new international order.

The first and in many ways most dramatic expression of these dangers and opportunities was the "German question," which was dramatically reframed by the opening of the Berlin Wall in early November 1989. No one knows this story better than Sarotte, who has written two fine works on the process of German unification. In *Not One Inch*, she brilliantly captures how an extraordinary interplay of long-term trends and sudden events made unification possible. Once the wall was gone, the increasing flow of migrants from east to west threatened the stability of the Federal Republic and, more importantly, the very existence of the East German state. Until November 9, West Germany's policy toward the East had emphasized the use of economic pressure to produce gradual changes—this was the essence of the *Ostpolitik* begun by Willy Brandt in the late 1960s and eventually accepted by the majority of Germans. By the end of November, gradual change was no longer an option. As Chancellor Helmut Kohl told the British Foreign Minister in May 1990, "foreign policy was like mowing grass for hay. You had to gather what you had cut in case of a thunderstorm." The storm that Kohl feared most was the replacement of Gorbachev's reformist government in Moscow with a regime less willing to



NOT ONE INCH
American, Russia, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Stalemate

M. E. SAROTTE
Yale University Press
$35 | 550 pp.

Boris Yeltsin speaking with George H. W. Bush at a news conference in the White House, June 1992

ROB CRANDALL/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Would a more prudent and flexible set of policies, especially on the part of the United States, have avoided alienating Russia and thus encouraged the emergence of a more stable and peaceful order?

allow the two postwar German states to unify peacefully. After all, in 1990 there were still 338,000 Soviet troops on German soil. Could one really be sure that they would simply pack up and go home?

In Washington, the Bush administration sympathized with Kohl's desire to use this historic opportunity to end Germany's postwar division. But American policymakers were worried that Kohl might be willing to accept, as the Soviets insisted, a neutral status that could detach a unified Germany from the Western alliances that had been the anchor of West German foreign policy throughout its existence. Knowing how this turned out, it is easy to overlook the complex combination of diplomatic skill and good luck that made it possible to have a peacefully united Germany, still firmly integrated in NATO and the European Union.

Germany's future was only one of the difficult questions posed by the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the international system created during the Cold War. The Russian Federation (still in possession of the world's second-largest nuclear arsenal), the former members of the Warsaw Pact, and the Soviet Union's successor states (including Ukraine, independent since 1991) had to create a new set of political, economic, and social institutions and, at the same time, redefine their place in the post–Cold War order. In Washington, the Bush and Clinton administrations had to address the security demands of the new Eastern European democracies without threatening Russian interests and undermining Boris Yeltsin's fragile and increasingly erratic government. In the end, American policymakers failed to find a way to do both. By taking advantage of Yeltsin's vulnerability and the Russian Federation's desperate economic situation, they were able to impose a NATO expansion that included most of Eastern Europe. (Ukraine and Georgia were promised NATO membership but without a clear timetable). At the end of 1999, when Yeltsin was replaced by a former KGB operative and local politician named Vladimir Putin, it appeared that the West had succeeded in shaping a new European order in its own interest. The price of this victory is, of course, now becoming apparent.

Not One Inch is a book to which historians will return again and again, as they try to understand why an era that began with such promise ended so badly. Sarotte's scholarly apparatus, a hefty 177 pages, will provide a treasure trove of material for future researchers. But this is also a book for our historical moment, a work to be read and pondered now, as we live with the gradual and then sudden bankruptcy of the post–Cold War international system. It is no surprise that the first edition has already sold out and that a paperback will be issued soon.

At the core of the book's immediate relevance is a counterfactual proposition. Would a more prudent and flexible set of policies, especially on the part of the United States, have avoided alienating Russia and thus encouraged the emergence of a more stable and peaceful order? Sarotte answers yes. In contrast to some of the more flamboyant expressions of this argument, her version is characteristically nuanced and cautious, yet she makes clear that for a variety of reasons both Washington and Moscow failed to take full advantage of the possibilities opened by the end of the Cold War. The key issue here, of course, was the expansion of NATO to include the states created from the wreckage of the Soviet empire. Sarotte suggests that it might have been possible to find a way of satisfying these states' need for security without threatening Russia's status as a great power. It seemed for a time that the Partnership for Peace program—which provided a connection to NATO without the guaranteed support stipulated by Article Five of the alliance's treaty—might have accomplished that. As Sarotte shows, that alternative eventually collapsed under the weight of opposition in Washington, pressure from the Eastern European states, and the increasingly unstable situation in Moscow.

Like all counterfactuals, this assessment of how a different approach to NATO expansion might have affected the international order is inherently speculative. We will never know for sure what might have happened. Moreover, one counterfactual proposition usually suggests other possibilities. For example, what if a more sympathetic attitude toward Russian interests had not produced a less aggressive response in Moscow? In other words, what if a more accommodating approach had whetted rather than dulled Russia's appetite for empire? Then the states surrounding Ukraine, instead of having the guarantee of a NATO defensive response, would have been protected by the more flexible but also more uncertain provisions of the Partnership for Peace. Would this situation have been less perilous than the one in which Europe now finds itself?

Such questions will surely not go away, but their shape and significance will be determined by when and how the fighting in Ukraine ends—an issue that, as I write these words at the beginning of May 2022, is still very much open.

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Eugène Isabey, *A Storm off the Normandy Coast*, c. 1850

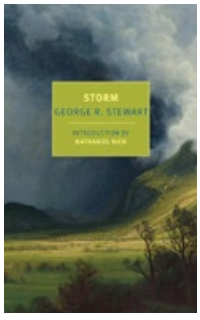
On the Horizon

KATHERINE LUCKY

In today's stories about weather, humans are the villains. At least, that's how it feels. When reservoirs run dry, when a wildfire burns, when a "historic" flash flood or freeze arrives—we feel responsible, even ashamed. *Climate change*. We shake our heads. This is what we get for driving cars and eating meat, for being unable or unwilling to reduce emissions. In reality, of course, it's impossible to determine global warming's precise impact on every hurricane or tornado, much less our individual responsibility for these catastrophes. We're not just perpetrators, but victims, too: evacuating, rationing fuel and food, and shivering in our apartments. Still, we're pitiful in the way of a crook who's had his comeuppance, suffering, at least to some degree, because of our own hubris.

George R. Stewart's novel *Storm* doesn't think about weather this way at all. Written in 1941, and recently re-released by New York Review Books, the novel takes place before any code red for humanity has sounded. People aren't responsible for the severity of Maria, a storm that washes over the novel's drought-stricken California. She brings rain and snow. She causes a fair degree of damage, plus sixteen deaths—but not because of anything we humans did.

Indeed, one of Stewart's grand theories of nature is that it's indifferent to us. He writes scornfully of the "high-priests and shamans and medicine-men" who "beat drums for rain, and cried that the gods were wroth." Though eventually more scientific minds prevailed (Plato, Galileo), and man "no longer babbles a charm, or tears his flesh in supplication to a storm-demon," he has not yet attained "that dream of Magaian, witch, and druid—not to predict weather, but to control it."



STORM

GEORGE R. STEWART
New York Review Books
$17.95 | 304 pp.

Each of *Storm*'s twelve chapters, representing a day in the life of Maria, begins with this kind of discourse from Stewart—a heady proclamation about history and geologic time and the futility of human endeavors. "Air is so bound up with a man's life that only with difficulty can he realize its existence as something in itself," he writes. Perhaps we owe our durability as a species to weather: "With each storm and passing front, blood pressure rises and falls, nerves react, secretions alter." Stewart, who was a historian and professor of English at UC Berkeley, proposes theories about ancient civilizations and faiths. He questions free will and progress. He imagines the end times, when man will have "run his course and vanished" with "sky-towering crags reduced to gnawed stumps

of granite" and a "stormless climate" covering the earth. He quotes from *Hamlet*. He quotes King David. He has little sympathy for the storm's victims, reminding us that "the sixteen died not because of the storm, but because of their own mortality…after a few years they would in any case have died."

You could read all this grandiosity as irritating or entertaining. Either way, it's part of the book's intention to take weather seriously, not just as a physical reality, but as essential to religion, culture, and the endurance of our species. This concern with survival and extinction appears throughout Stewart's work. From his post-apocalyptic novel, *Earth Abides*, to his historical study of the Donner Party, to a volume of speculative anthropology, he wonders where we came from and where we'll end up. His hunch is prescient: our environment will determine our fate.

Each of *Storm*'s chapters proceeds in brief, numbered sections, moving between different landscapes and characters. Some passages describe the storm's physical impacts on thirsty fields, a glimmering city, a rotting stump, and animals, including a boar and a coyote. Others feature catalogs of trees, peaks, lighthouses, and summits. (Stewart, a toponymist, is also known for his academic volume of place names, *Names on the Land*.)

Stewart does his best to make Maria herself a character, namely through the imaginings of a Junior Meteorologist (the J.M.) who first spots her forming over the ocean. The J.M. observes Maria with "fatherly feeling" over the course of her life, watching her grow from an "incipient little whorl" with a fate as unknown as a "human child, born the same hour," to a crotchety, middle-aged person, to a mother, spinning off another storm, until finally watching her death. He feels "sentimental" about it all, though as Stewart points out elsewhere, thinking of weather as your daughter is a fallacy: "Great storms know neither love nor hate." But the long passages about Maria that are purely scientific—all pressure readings and moisture content and cold fronts—are dull, even skippable. Turns out, a reader needs some anthropomorphizing—a name, and a relationship to a sympathetic meteorologist—to make the storm worth watching.

Thank goodness the novel has other characters to contend with. The storm "vitally affected, in one way or another, the life of every human being in the region," and the book is at its strongest when it describes those effects. Stewart was a master of microhistory; his book *Pickett's Charge* examines the final attack at Gettysburg as a way of studying the entire Civil War. In *Storm*, too, he takes a detailed look at individuals in order to study a larger entity. We follow some people throughout the book: an electric lineman who has fallen in love at a dance; an elderly meteorologist who longs to be taken seriously; a waitress who takes an ill-fated road trip with her boyfriend. Other people and places appear only once. The congregation of a country church prays for rain just before the storm breaks. A Berkeley literature professor writes a poem about seagulls on a campus lawn who've flown in from the turbulent coast. A fur trader fills up his tea kettle and hunkers down against bitter winds. The novel is scientifically structured as a chain of causes and effects, its stories both linked and fated. Characters are in the right or wrong place at the right or wrong time. Best-laid plans go astray. The impacts we celebrate—"the saving of a crop in California," for instance—might lead to "foreclosures in Oklahoma, suicides in Florida, strikes in Massachusetts, and executions in Turkey," for all we know.

And yet, the novel is also a testimony to human ingenuity and invention, an ode to a series of men named only by their occupations. The J.M. uses colored pencils and mathematical equations to calculate storm trajectories on a map. The Superintendent directs snowplows, desperate to keep the Donner Pass open. The General decides when to open the floodgates. Various men dispatch planes and trains; they write news reports and reroute telephone connections. Some die of cold, or of a "drenching." They rise early and stay up late. They drink strong cups of coffee, eat steaks and boiled potatoes. They do whatever it takes to get their jobs done. At its core, *Storm* is dedicated to public utilities and the fellows who maintain them. Stewart acknowledges a whole list of bureaus—the California Divisions of Highways, PG&E, Western Pacific—that offered "generous assistance" during the writing process.

Meanwhile, the rest of us are bumbling. We try to drive on a mountain road without chains. We grumble about momentarily dropped business calls, not knowing the work that's happening behind the scenes to repair the connection. A sixteen-year-old ("Dirty Ed") shoots out a switch box with a pellet gun on a dare, which later causes a tunnel to flood. Foolish college kids speed through the rising water, stalling out their engine. They light some cigarettes and wait to see what will happen. It takes capable professional people (the police, a truck driver) to fix the situation. It's not unlike today, as we buy goods wrapped in plastic and draw energy from fossil fuels, waiting for scientists and politicians to come up with solutions. With Maria, at least, there's an end. The storm breaks up, the roads get repaired, the crops blossom, the deaths are mourned. The globe gives "no sign that storms or men disturbed its tranquil round," hanging "unflickering and serene."

If man could "master the laws of the air," then "will he at last have to stop talking and speculating about the weather?" Stewart wonders. And will the "removal of the daily mystery only serve perhaps to make life safer and more boring?" Safe and boring: two adjectives we likely all wish were more applicable to weather. Stewart didn't need to worry—we certainly haven't mastered anything, even with computer modeling systems and more advanced radar. It's still true that "man is of the air, and the air must rule him." It's truer than even Stewart could have imagined.

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The Vagaries of God-Making

NATE KLUG

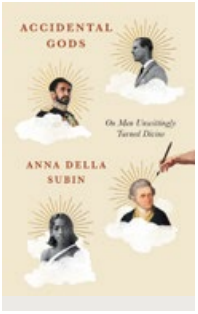
Handcoloured copperplate of Captain James Cook and Hawaiian natives engraved by Sasso, 1844

FLORILEGIUS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

"A poem containing history," Ezra Pound called his unfinished *magnum opus*. *Accidental Gods* is a book of history that sometimes reads like a poem, a rangy modernist one, with that tradition's eye for imagery, juxtaposition, and paradox. Unlike the modernist poets, however, Anna Della Subin writes from an anticolonial perspective as she traces the ways that deification has revealed and responded to power all over the globe. *Accidental Gods* begins in Ethiopia, where Ras Tafari Makonnen, known from then on as Haile Selassie, was crowned emperor in 1930. Almost eight thousand miles away in Jamaica, prophecies had been spreading about a Black divinity who would arise from that singular African nation, the only country on the continent not to be colonized. (Psalm 68:31 provided a biblical foundation for Ethiopianism, which fed into many Black nationalist movements of the time.) Over the next several decades, despite the best efforts of Jamaica's British occupiers and ultimately Selassie himself, Rastafarianism ("Ras" means "head" in Amharic) gained hundreds of thousands of followers.

Selassie's deification functioned as an act of resistance against colonization, a "way to insist against the white supremacist that black people were human," Subin writes. By the 1972 elections in Jamaica, the opposition party candidate, Michael Manley, was playing to the "dread" movement during his speeches, wielding an ivory-tipped scepter gifted to him by Selassie. The country elected Manley in a large majority, and his three terms introduced progressive measures such as free education and maternity leave. So it was that "the adoration of a distant Ethiopian autocrat had served, in a concrete and effectual way, as a democratizing force" for a decolonizing island in a different hemisphere.

That's one way to tell the story of Selassie's apotheosis, but with any god there is never just one story to tell. Another history of the Rastafari movement might zero in on the fact that Selassie would at times disclaim his Blackness and adopt a strictly "Semitic" racial identity. Determining that Selassie was "decidedly Semitic," *National Geographic*, a racist and imperialist publication in the 1930s, commissioned an extravagant story that celebrated his coronation as an exotic continuation of biblical lineage, "descended from the dynasty of Menelik the First, who was born of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba." But the magazine's Selassie issue circulated, and to the Jamaican readership who took the emperor's Blackness for granted, the lavish sixty-eight-page spread became sacred scripture: "By the 1950s, men in Kingston were preaching with the Bible in one hand and a copy of *National Geographic* in the other." Selassie tried to disabuse his followers in person, but his presence only fanned the flames of their devotion. At Selassie's invitation, two thousand Rastafarians from Jamaica eventually immigrated to Ethiopia. Granted land allotments, they settled in a place called Shashame, where they displaced some of the native Oromo people. "For the pilgrims, there was only space for one struggle, only one map of redemption for their own centuries of loss," Subin writes, nodding toward other settle-



ACCIDENTAL GODS
On Men Unwittingly Turned Divine

ANNA DELLA SUBIN
Metropolitan Books
$35 | 550 pp.

ments of our past and present. Thousands of Ethiopians starved to death in famines during Selassie's divine tenure.

Somewhat abruptly, Subin's narrative shifts from Selassie to the deification of the British Prince Phillip (in the South Pacific) and the American General Douglas MacArthur (in Panama, Japan, and elsewhere). The middle chapters of *Accidental Gods* visit India, where imperialists like the Irish Protestant soldier John Nicholson (a candidate for the most horrifying deity in the book, though it's not easy to choose) share space with liberators like Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. The book's final section, "White Gods," focuses on the Americas. Unraveling the deifications of Hernán Cortés and Francis Drake, and, in a vivid chapter, detailing the Hawaiians' worship and subsequent murder of Captain James Cook, Subin presents the "origin story of how whiteness became divine."

It's understandable that Gandhi might be deified. But why would anyone worship her oppressor? For communities in India, accustomed to a pantheon of deities and unconcerned with a strict division between human and divine, "the deification of a British officer was proof of the daily terrors of colonial life," Subin writes. "Colonialism was so inhumane it could only be understood by the colonized as something supernatural." To venerate such an oppressor was to arrogate his power. For the *Hauka* mediums of Niger, who would become involuntarily possessed by spirits of the French generals who terrorized their land, "deification was a means of dissidence.... It was painful and unwilled—but it was precisely in the fact of its unwantedness that its power lay."

The complex circuitry of such god-making strewed confusion among the colonial authorities, one sign of the practices' effectiveness. "The worst part of the matter," bemoaned one British magistrate in India, "is that there is no official controller of the right to deification." Through these paradoxical rituals, colonized groups could convert their extreme experiences into a kind of "equipment for living," to borrow a term that critic Kenneth Burke uses for poetry. ("Poetry...is undertaken as *equipment for living*, as a ritualistic way of arming us to confront perplexities and risks. It would *protect* us," Burke writes.)

While attesting to the empowering effects of these deifications, Subin also highlights the material events that validated the communities' worldviews, without which her account would risk condescension. On Tanna in the South Pacific, for example, the islanders had been weathering European invasion and enslavement for half a century since the 1870s, and their population had fallen by half. A prophecy arose about a god arriving from the newly powerful land of America. In 1942, with World War II in full swing elsewhere, the U.S. army suddenly appeared out of the sea, with its "endless quantities of Coca-Cola, cigarettes, and chocolate." How better to respond to the ongoing shift in the structure of experience than through an invocation of the supernatural?

Subin's tone of suspended disbelief leaves room for humor and humility, acknowledging that no spiritual practice can be fully understood by someone outside it. Even a sympathetic account of the way a deification functioned as an act of anticolonial resistance might veer into cross-cultural misreading. Unlike religions whose practices are prescribed by fixed texts, in primarily oral cultures, as one Tanna chief puts it, "our thing...is alive and it's moving." Different strands of Nikalsainism—the worship of John Nicholson—eventually merged with both Hinduism and Islam in South Asia, and one movement in Abbottabad only recently seems to have died out.

Like a collection of poems, *Accidental Gods* is a book to jump around in, savoring Subin's irreverent turns of phrase (a character in a Kipling story "godsplains") and set pieces (the occultist Aleister Crowley baptizes, then eats, a frog) that are worth the hardcover price alone. Uncaptioned images, like the disturbing sculptures of "Young Europe" and "Grace" by Nazi artist Arno Breker, haunt the text as in a contemporary novel. But beneath these surfaces, and alongside her tour of unwitting deities, Subin constructs two metanarratives more deliberately.

The first is the origin myth of "religion" itself, which, as Subin demonstrates, arose out of the administrative anxieties of colonialism. Remember the magistrate's complaint that he couldn't manage the way his Indian subjects picked their gods? On a larger scale, the study of "world religions" that emerged in nineteenth-century Europe was an attempt to do just that. For the German philologist Max Müller and other early theorists, "a religion was essentially anything that sufficiently resembled Christianity." With the presumptuousness of gods, these scholars couldn't help but see their own ideas and practices mirrored in other cultures, and they compiled their classifications for the sake of control.

Of course, Müller's idea of Christianity was itself very partial. His was a Christianity that had turned inward with the advent of Protestantism and the truces achieved after the Reformation, placing priority on "an inner state of mind, in the sense of belief." What arrived as a crucial insight for Martin Luther in sixteenth-century Germany—that God was alive in his conscience, apart from Church mediation—made no sense when applied to the ancient communal spiritualities of people living along the Indus River. But comparative religionists like Müller (who never set foot in India but became an "expert" on the region nonetheless) began seeing versions of their own "belief" elsewhere, translating it for the Vedic practice of *sraddha*. Subin points out that, in its own context, *sraddha* didn't refer to "some interior conviction, but rather was an empirical observable exchange." Out of such mistranslations, Hinduism emerged, compressing millennia of diverse traditions into staticky paraphrase.

As its stories of white deities pile up, *Accidental Gods* becomes more and more concerned with the theological construction of race itself. Unlike

the gods of earlier chapters who often resisted deification, the explorers who occupy Subin's last section, "White Gods," hustled along their own apotheoses. Here Subin relinquishes the imaginative sympathy of her earlier style to demonstrate how the deification of European explorers sanctioned their arrival in America, while seeming to confirm their assumption that the indigenous populations required theological intervention. God was speaking through their idolatry. In 1493, the pope decreed that, in Subin's words, "the right to annex territory in the New World rested upon the conversion of its natives to the Catholic faith." An estimated fifty-six million indigenous people in the Americas would be killed over the next century.

During the Inquisition, Spain began to require proof of Christian ancestry, which it called *limpieza de sangre* ("cleanliness of blood"). In a New World that was minority Spanish and majority indigenous and Black, a different version of this test evolved. As Subin writes, "*Limpieza de sangre* shifted in meaning from a conception of purity of blood based on theological lineage to a biological concept," as the one true race came to replace the one true religion. Of course, indigenous populations had to adjust to this newly invented category. Originally, the Lenape on the island of Manhattan referred to European settlers as *Shuwanakuw*, or "people who had come from the sea." But the modern Delaware-English dictionary defines *Shuwanakuw* as "white person." The victims of racial oppression had to be trained to recognize race.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, whiteness had come to supersede Christianity as the basis of the European settlers' superiority. The nineteenth century saw clergymen and biologists competing to construct the most outlandish etiology of white supremacy. (A Confederate doctor speculated that the snake in Genesis was actually Eve's "negro gardener.") "The scholars of empire had classified and reified sets of beliefs and ritual," Subin writes, "but these divisions, in turn, could be seen as reflecting the racial essence of people, as the deeper truth." As the Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite remarked bitterly about Shakespeare's Caliban, "He chose the wrong people to make God."

What began as a book about the eccentric relationship between spirituality and power ends by illuminating a new way to understand the original—and ongoing—sin of whiteness in the Americas. In a coda called "Liberation (Last Rites)," Subin recounts the work of the "Cercle Harmonique," an Afro-Creole community in New Orleans that practiced seances for twenty years during the Civil War and Reconstruction. According to records of this group's "over seven thousand pages of messages from the dead," the undiscovered country contains no heaven or hell and no racial categories whatsoever. George Washington no longer considers himself American, a French slaver has renounced white supremacy, and John Brown is flourishing "free from your atrocities." (Where, we ask for the umpteenth time, are the women?) The spirits relate an existence "perfect and delicious," where "each receives that which is due him." It's a surprisingly uplifting way to end a book in which atrocity usually precedes or follows religious enthusiasm.

Subin's decision to conclude with the Cercle Harmonique, coupled with her playful openness to metaphysical possibility through most of *Accidental Gods*, suggests that she remains invested in what the poet Robert Duncan called the "truth and life of myth." Duncan loved to cite Jesus' remark from the gnostic gospel of John: "If you have not entered the dance, you mistake the event." One way that Subin wiggles outside the dispassionate "religious studies" framework is by including a chapter about her own friendship with an accidental god, the poet and anthropologist Nathaniel Tarn, who found himself deified in 1952 during his field work in the highlands of Guatemala. Traveling together in Morocco while revisiting his earlier apotheosis, Tarn and Subin argue about belief. Tarn thinks the world is divided into two kinds of people, "those who believe in some sort of transcendent, divine power…and those who don't." Subin disagrees: "Perhaps belief is just as much a set of relationships between people as it is an absolute state of mind…. Perhaps transcendence is all around us, and so the sacred stays within reach for us to grasp when we need it."

After reading *Accidental Gods*, one is tempted to predict that god-making, near and far, isn't going anywhere. At one point, Subin offers a quote from Ashis Nandy about the development of democracy in India, and Nandy's words apply to the United States in 2022 as well: "The distinction of religion versus politics was not working well." In a Bay Area neighborhood where I lived around the time of Trump's election, yard signs began appearing that proclaimed, "In This House, We Believe…" followed by a series of affirmations that ranged from the topical ("Black Lives Matter") to the self-satisfied ("Science is Real"). These signs felt more like markers of social location than creeds or ritual practices, but Subin reminds us how permeable the boundary is between the political and religious. Even in a heartland of secular modernity, people still reached for language of belonging and belief when responding to an unnerving shift in power.

History wants to record the facts, and we need to come face to face with them. But as Mahmoud Darwish argues in a poem called "Don't Write History as Poetry," "History / has no compassion that we can long for our / beginning, and no intention that we can know what's ahead /… it has no rest stops / by the railroad tracks for us to bury the dead, for us to look / toward what time has done to us over there, and what / we've done to time" (translation by Fady Joudah). The human inclination to ritual, magic, and belief in all their forms remains one way of knowing among others, and sometimes it is the one that responds to events most convincingly.

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JOHN RODDEN

Gogol or Hohol?

Was the great writer Russian, Ukrainian, or both?

Was Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol a writer without a fatherland? Or was he a writer with two fatherlands that are now at war with each other? Vladimir Putin once exalted Gogol as "a Russian patriot" and "the father of Russian literature"? In 2009 Viktor Yuschenko, the third president of Ukraine, declared that Gogol "belongs to Ukraine"?

Amid all the horrific news of carnage and cruelty in Ukraine, an odd literary paternity suit has resurfaced. In fact, this dispute over the right to claim the legacy of Gogol has regularly been discussed in cultural publications and even official circles in Moscow and Kyiv ever since Ukrainian independence in 1991. The question is: Which of the two countries is entitled to claim Gogol, the beloved nineteenth-century writer known to every schoolchild in both nations?

Gogol is honored as the father of no less than four separate genres: the Russian novella (*Taras Bulba,* 1835; revised 1842), the Russian comic drama (*The Government Inspector*, 1836), the Russian short story ("The Overcoat," 1842), and the Russian novel (*Dead Souls,* 1842). This year on April 1, Gogol's birthday, cultural functionaries and university professors on both sides of the border trumpeted their rival claims about the "real" homeland of Gogol. (It seems fitting that the supreme jokester of Slavic literature—best known for his treatment of the grotesque—was born on what we call April Fool's Day, and what the Ukrainians call "Laughter Day.")

Born in central Ukraine, known colloquially as "Little Russia," Gogol (1809–52) left home at the age of nineteen to make his fame and fortune in the cultural capitals of Saint Petersburg and Moscow. He never published a line in Ukrainian, which was viewed as an oral "language of the people" or even dismissed as a mere dialect by Russian authorities. They regarded it as unsuitable for literature or intellectual discourse. The czars of Gogol's day, like the Communists of the twentieth century, tried to suppress attempts to publish in the Ukrainian language: their censorship represented a sustained, ruthless state policy, whose aim was to secure allegiance to a pan-Slavic, specifically Russian national consciousness by mandating a "legitimate" national language. Ukrainians are also quick to point out that Gogol first came to attention throughout Russia as a Ukrainian (or "Little Russian") author—not as a "Russian" one. He was first celebrated as the author of bizarre, comic tales of Ukrainian folk life based on his village youth.

But Gogol's success in Russia raises another question: Does your national identity change if you go abroad and write in another country's language? Since when do we treat great world authors of Irish birth—like the novelist James Joyce or the poet William Butler Yeats—as "English" just because they did not write in the Gaelic language? What about the great Manhattan-reared novelist Henry James or T. S. Eliot, who grew up in St. Louis? Were they not American writers just because they lived much of their lives in England?

And so the debates proceed. The overheated rhetoric in the dispute over Gogol's national identity reached a fever pitch during his April 2009 bicentennial—and has remained incandescent ever since. Museums were opened and exhibits staged both in his hometown near Poltava and in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Each of the two countries had bicentennial ceremonies presided over by their respective presidents.

And today? Can we even agree on the name "Nikolai Gogol"? "Already you have loaded the dice!" an expatriate Ukrainian colleague warns me. In Ukrainian, the great writer's name—the one he was born with—is Mykola Hohol. But Nikolai Gogol is the name his works were published under, and the name used not only by Russians but also by most Ukrainians, not to mention the rest of the world. Nowadays, however, he is not infrequently cited in official Ukrainian announcements as Mykola Hohol—to which Russians respond with either indignant outrage or withering mockery.

This controversy may seem rather trivial to American readers, especially during a brutal war that has already claimed an estimated 20,000 Ukrainian and Russian soldiers, along with up to 25,000 Ukrainian civilians. But scratch the surface and you will find that the question of who gets to claim Gogol is connected to larger questions, the kind of questions wars are fought over. Much of the impetus for the Russian invasion—and for the Ukrainian resistance—has to do with appeals to history. Historians refer to "the uses of the past": how the past is used (and abused) to validate (or condemn) the present, and to lay claim to the future.

Putin argues that, except for a few months in the aftermath of World War I, Ukraine was either part of Russia or a state within the Soviet Union until its dissolution in 1991. Ukrainians reply that the focus should be not on the long-ago past

CHRONICLE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Nikolai Gogol

but rather on the near-past and the present: Ukraine has been a fully independent and internationally recognized nation for more than three decades—and it must remain so. The debate about Gogol is really a skirmish in this broader conflict of historical interpretation. By establishing "title" to this world-class writer, the Russian government reinforces its claim that national borders, as currently drawn, are less important than the "Russian World," a civilization whose literary constellation may include any writer who wrote mainly in the Russian language. By reclaiming Mykola Hohol, Ukraine is trying to remind the rest of the world that its culture no more belongs to Russia than its territory.

Such literary turf wars may also have a different valence in that part of the world. Russia is often called "a nation of readers"—and the same is true of Ukraine. Catherine the Great, the multilingual Nicholas I, Lenin, and Joseph Stalin all fancied themselves sophisticated thinkers, capable of engagement with intellectuals on serious political, economic, or literary matters. Regularly sought out for their pronouncements on various issues of public import, Russian intellectuals and writers have traditionally stood as guiding spirits of the nation, and are often treated as celebrities equivalent to American sports heroes, Hollywood entertainers, and Big Tech entrepreneurial geniuses. The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, in Ukraine.

Beyond all that lies a larger and more pressing reality: ideas have consequences. Every war is fought not only by military means, but also through propaganda, and the propaganda war is sometimes just as important as the military campaign. "Win the minds of men!" ran the old Communist slogan. To win the minds—and the hearts and the souls—means to win the war. How people think and feel about a war often determines their will to fight, endure, and prevail.

Propaganda campaigns may take the low road or the high road—and usually take both. The low road consists of feeding the enemy disinformation, blaring fake news, and blocking non-official new sources on the home front. "Shocking" bulletins describe the (subhuman?) enemy's atrocities, their dwindling morale, and their battlefield disarray. Interspersed with such stories are inspiring eyewitness accounts attesting to the superhuman heroism of the soldiers on one's own side and their limitless capacity to endure all hardship.

Yet propaganda that takes the high road is also important, and its role in warfare is less often reported by the media. Appropriating the glories of another country's literary patrimony is an excellent example of high-road propaganda. So the stakes for the controversy over Gogol, while obviously a minor issue compared with the rival territorial claims of Russia and Ukraine, are real enough in their way. He is reportedly a favorite writer of Putin himself, and has been treated for generations by all Russians as a *velikii russkii pisatel* ("a great Russian writer"). He is also Ukraine's most important, or at least most famous, contribution to world literature. Gogol is, as it were, the Ukrainian Shakespeare. "He is *our* Great Writer," my Ukrainian colleague wrote to me, "the single Ukrainian figure with a long-recognized place on the world stage." No wonder, then, that Russia's attempt to add him to their own literary pantheon is viewed as a gross injustice in Ukraine.

Gogol may not be as well known, or as often read, in the West as the novelists Fyodor Dostoevsky, Ivan Turgenev, Leo Tolstoy, and Anton Chekhov, but that is partly due to the far more difficult task of translating his exuberantly rich, densely textured, vivaciously irregular Russian prose style (dotted with Ukrainian expressions) into idiomatic prose in Western languages. But he is widely credited in Russia as the "father" of Russian fiction. Dostoevsky himself is said to have remarked that "we all came out of Gogol's overcoat" (a reference to Gogol's most famous story, "The Overcoat"). Waggish Ukrainians might reply: Since Gogol hails from central Ukraine, isn't all Russian literature actually derivative of Ukrainian literature? It is, in the current circumstances, a grim joke—the kind that was Gogol's specialty.

Suffering severe depression in the winter of 1852, Gogol apparently went mad and starved himself to death. He was forty-two years old. Before the end of his short life, he had become a mystic and visionary, focused on otherworldly concerns. The Slavic "soul," the future of humanity, and the writer's role in spearheading the Slavic people's divinely ordained mission to save the race—not the mundane politics of "Little Russia" and "Big" Russia—commanded his attention. One considers his dying words: "The ladder, the ladder."

In a Christmas letter to a literary friend in 1844, pondering the matter of his national allegiances, he confessed: "I don't know whether my soul is Ukrainian or Russian. All I know is that I would never give preference to someone from Little Russia or to someone from Russia." And then, as if anticipating the cataclysmic conflict underway in his homeland today, he added:

> The natures of both [countries] are so lavishly gifted by God. It is as if, on purpose, each of them contains precisely that which is absent in the other one—which is a clear sign that they should complement each other. That is why the stories of their past lives have been given to them differently, so that, growing for a time apart, the distinctive powers of their characters may be developed. Then, having merged into one, together they can form something perfect within mankind.

That was long ago—before two world wars, before Stalin's forced mass famine of Ukraine (the Holodomor), before Putin's revanchist war of aggression. That kind of national mysticism, combined with a supranational imagination, may seem archaic and even alien now. It's safe to say it would not be welcome by nationalists in either Russia or Ukraine today. It's Gogol's stories both sides would like to claim, not his idiosyncratic politics.

JOHN RODDEN *has written widely on Russian topics, ranging from Catherine the Great and the recent Dostoevsky bicentennial to Soviet-era cultural policies and USSR–East German relations.*

‘Still Beloved’

ROBERT W. FIESELER

It is late morning as I cross the lawns of Calvary Hill Cemetery in Dallas. Looking for the grave of a twenty-four-year-old man who burned to death in a working-class gay bar nearly half a century ago, I pass an inscription chiseled in stone. It reads, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord for their works follow them—Apoc 14:13.” I adjust my shades. The words seem to follow me as I walk.

Reginald “Reggie” Adams was one of thirty-two people killed in the infamous fire at the Up Stairs Lounge gay bar on June 24, 1973, an act of arson that was the deadliest fire on record in New Orleans history and the worst mass killing of homosexuals in twentieth-century America. The crime received scant media attention in its day because of the anti-gay bigotry that followed, and it remains officially unsolved. Adams was the tragedy’s only known Black victim. In 2018, I published a nonfiction book on the Up Stairs Lounge fire called *Tinderbox: The Untold Story of the Up Stairs Lounge Fire and the Rise of Gay Liberation*. In 2021, I published a follow-up investigation on the religious journey of Reginald Adams. That investigation ended with me standing at Adams’s grave in Dallas, which was then unmarked.

In many ways, Reginald Adams’s trailblazing young life was overshadowed by the circumstances of his passing. In addition to being a sexual and racial minority in the Deep South, he was once an aspiring priest—a factor that played a role in how he was interred. In 1969, at the age of twenty, Adams entered the Jesuit seminary in Grand Coteau, Louisiana, the only Black member of his formation class. He witnessed the burning of a cross nearby after local Jesuits began to integrate their parishes. Adams ultimately declined to take “first vows” with his formation class in 1971 and was instead sent to study at Loyola University in New Orleans.

In the Crescent City, he experienced a personal awakening. Adams abandoned his path to the priesthood and began a relationship with a white Mormon named Regina, who came to identify as transgender. Straddling religion, orientation, race, and gender, theirs was a union almost impossible to understand even among the gay people of the French Quarter.

As an “out” resident of New Orleans, Adams broke another barrier by becoming the first Black

Marker for Reggie Adams, Calvary Hill Cemetery, January 2022

ROBERT FIESELER

customer to drink in Café Lafitte in Exile, a racially segregated gay bar on Bourbon Street. Living in violation of Catholic doctrine, Adams nevertheless did not abandon his faith. He spent Sabbath days with a congregation called the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) of New Orleans, which conducted worship services that included a communion ceremony. Evicted from their first two locations, the MCC congregation met for a time at the Up Stairs Lounge, which served as a makeshift community gathering place.

Then, within a span of minutes one random Sunday at his favorite bar, Adams died violently in an intentionally set blaze. He suffered third- and fourth-degree burns over 95 percent of his body. Given the condition of the several dozen corpses removed from the bar, the Orleans Parish Coroner urgently needed medical and dental records to identify the victims, and they appealed to local Jesuits for help with Adams. According to several Jesuit sources, a house superior named Fr. Joseph Doyle at Loyola University's Jesuit residence stepped forward to transfer those files. Through this process, the coroner positively matched Adams to "Body No. 8." He was exempted from the fate of fellow Up Stairs Lounge victims who went unidentified or unclaimed. Three unknown victims and one identified victim whose family could not be located were buried without markers in a remote potter's field called Resthaven. The city and cemetery subsequently lost their burial records, and those men still lie in what is now an unkempt field behind a chain-link fence near a storage yard for port-o-lets. But thanks to the mercy of the Jesuits who knew him, Adams was able to travel home to Texas in the care of his mother. The *Dallas Morning News* called Adams a "seminary student" in its obituary that July, which also noted that he received a funeral at St. James Catholic Church. Hours later, he was buried at Calvary Hill Cemetery, in Catholic soil.

When I first stood at Adams's grave in Dallas, the ground was bare, reflecting the history buried with him. Despite efforts by the Jesuits in 1973 to honor their former novice and afford him Catholic death rites, no one took the last step to put a name on his gravesite. Given the biases of the times, it would have been expedient for Church authorities to squelch questions that lingered about being so charitable to a lapsed novice, a transgressor of "natural law" who died unrepentant. And so for nearly fifty years, Adams rested in a kind of anonymity, his presence unknown even to many who eventually heard the Up Stairs Lounge story. I regarded the oversight as a kind of unfinished business, seething with the past and its pain. Following my discovery, a queer-history organization called the LGBT+ Archives Project of Louisiana stepped forward to cosponsor the purchase of a bronze marker for Adams's grave. Weeks later, I received a voicemail informing me that the marker was in place.

Which is what now brings me back to Calvary Hill. January sun shines honey-colored light on honey-colored grass. Low-flying Southwest airliners buzz the cemetery as they descend toward Love Field. For ten minutes, I search alone in the expanse, seemingly as flat and featureless as all Texas scrublands. When I reach the gravesite, between a pine tree and a small statue of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, I fall to my knees. I can see the soil, once a bare plot thought to be empty, has recently been tilled. A newly installed plaque reads:

Reginald Eugene Adams
May 31, 1949 – June 24, 1973
Still Beloved

I weep for some time, my eyes pinned to the words "Still Beloved." I can't quite articulate why this small change in a Texas field overpowers me in this way. Perhaps, as a gay Roman Catholic like Adams, I relate to the feeling of being perceived as an unwelcome fact. I am a same-sex-married contradiction, a spirit and a body at odds with the canon. After I perish, I wonder if some future regime might try to hush my memory, lest my story be presented as a viable way to live. After the fire, Adams joined untold numbers of Catholics who, like him, rested without acknowledgement of their faiths, their loves, their names. I wonder how many others rest this way. Respectfully, if all of these graves could be marked, it might provide a stunning visual lesson for those who fight an ideological war against a mystery of human nature. Look at all of us, across time.

When I rise, I walk to the nearby statue of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. She holds a rose bouquet. Thérèse died of tuberculosis, at the age of twenty-four—the same age as Reginald Adams when he died in a fire. She had made a pilgrimage to Rome in 1887 and sat at the feet of the Holy Father. She had cloistered in a convent to "pray for the souls of priests," knowing their paths to be difficult. She had written an autobiography called *Story of a Soul* but died too soon to hear it strike a chord. "If a little flower could speak," she wrote, "it seems to me that it would tell us quite simply all that God has done for it, without hiding any of its gifts." Today, worshippers visit the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Little Flower in San Antonio.

In the light of this field, I am struck by coincidence piling on coincidence—saint and exile struck down at the same age, both carrying messages for the future, both grappling with the pressure to be holy while called by the Spirit to live uniquely. And I start to pray. Something in me believes it is not mere chance that Thérèse, who celebrated all of God's little flowers, watches over Adams. For "the little bird… with bold surrender," she wrote, "wishes to remain gazing upon its Divine Sun." Something in me understands that Thérèse, in her guardianship, played a role in ensuring that Adams's gifts and sacrifices would be known today. Isolated from the faith, Adams found a way to continue his praise.

The inscription from the cemetery stone is still in my mind, and I apply it through prayer to Adams's life: *Blessed are you who died in the Lord, Reggie Adams. The Spirit calls you to rest from your labors, for your deeds follow you.*

ROBERT W. FIESELER *is a lifelong Catholic and a National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association "Journalist of the Year." The author of* Tinderbox, *he lives with his husband and two kittens in New Orleans.*

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Natalia Imperatori-Lee
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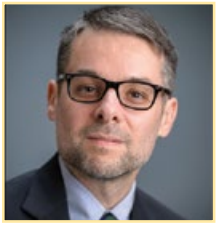
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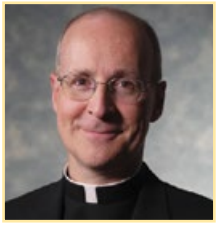
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