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JUNE 2023

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COVER IMAGE

"The Menace of the Hour," George Luks, the Verdict *magazine, 1899. Glasshouse Images/Alamy Stock Photo. Modified by David Sankey.*

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LETTERS

No end in sight for Ukraine; assisted suicide & God's will

AN INCORRECT ANALOG

Classicists, military officers and scholars, and community organizers are—to my knowledge—the three professions in the United States today for whom Thucydides's "Melian Dialogue" is a foundational text.

As with any foundational text, we practitioners run the risk of overusing it and applying it to cases that do not fit. ("If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.") That is the trap, it seems to me, into which Gregory M. Reichberg, Stein Tønnesson, and Henrik Syse fall in your March 2023 issue ("When Right Does Not Make Might"). Sven Holstmark rightly rebuts them in the same issue, in his article "Ukraine Is Not Melos." To begin with, Ukraine is not a small island cut off from its prospective allies; it's a large (41 million-person) country that borders four of its allies in the current war.

What's more, NATO is not Sparta. Already, NATO and its allies have delivered tens of billions of dollars worth of military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, while imposing significant economic sanctions against Russia.

And Russia is not Athens. One of the grand themes of Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War* is the corrosive effect of long-term and far-flung war on a democratic society (i.e., Athens). Better comparisons—and they have been made at U.S. war colleges and elsewhere—are the U.S. wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Yes, "The Time For Diplomacy Will Come," but military scholars will have to look somewhere other than to Thucydides for historical analogs to the Russia-Ukraine war.

Luke Hill
Boston, Mass.

BEATING PLOWSHARES INTO SWORDS

Inside a probing and serious exchange on the war in Ukraine, and how it might be resolved, readers face an unsettling takeaway. Namely, to the dictum "war is hell," we should now add "and so is ending it" ("Diplomacy in Ukraine," March 2023). Ironically, such unhappy resignation conforms to Vladimir Putin's strategy for victory: exhaust Western backing over time and ultimately declare a larger portion of Ukraine a vassal extension of the Russian Federation—a grim prospect indeed.

Relatedly, broadly trumpeted Western opposition to Putin's autocratic ambitions combines with our bloated and seemingly insatiable military-industrial budgets to stifle those of us questioning the war. Generally, we are cast as dupes, isolationists or Neville Chamberlain wannabes, blind to the risks of appeasing an enemy. Yet few who fully support the war acknowledge one overarching irony: while nations mobilize against expansionist totalitarian tyranny—with all the treasure, risk, and human cost that entails—political dissent is marginalized, even deemed treasonous.

Also missing in our debates is recognition that proponents of war are usually only checked by massive groundswells that dare oppose them. As abolitionist Frederick Douglass put it: "Power concedes nothing without a demand." And today as purported believers, if we simply allow this war to grind on, with minimal pushback, isn't this a grievous affront to God, the planet, and human aspirations for a more liveable future?

R. Jay Allain
Orleans, Mass.

WHO CAN KNOW GOD'S WILL?

Although Cole Hartin's article ("Assisted Suicide & the Cure of Souls," March 2023) was more nuanced and gentle than most I have seen regarding assisted suicide, it nonetheless neglected to discuss the spirituality (at least in potential form) that may well explain why a person would choose to end their

Send out your light and your truth; they shall be my guide ... Psalm 43

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LETTERS

life through their own choice rather than passively waiting for the inevitable.

While Christians are expected to develop informed consciences and to take active roles throughout their lives in bearing witness to Jesus' way, these elements seem to disappear when it comes to this question of end-of-life decisions.

As one who turns eighty next month, it seems to me that the Church—especially its "officialdom"—continues to struggle with patriarchy, top-down decision-making, and the sense that its understanding of "God's will" necessarily exceeds that of individuals. Since I think the entire matter of knowing God's will is problematic at best, I wish to briefly address the concept of human agency and the primacy of individual conscience.

Why is it so hard to understand the possibility that a mature person, having developed a relationship over the years with Jesus and the one he called Father, can come to a decision regarding how her/his life should end that does not require merely passively submitting to "nature"? That "nature" is the same as God's will is, at least for me, a highly dubious proposition.

Is it not possible that a person—spurred by love and gratitude for the great gift of life and for the beautiful fellow beings who have accompanied them through it—can decide that by choosing to end one's life before the person they are slips slowly away, or before they have to undergo months of pain and suffering, they are performing a sacramental act of self-sacrifice and thanksgiving? Is it so impossible to imagine a genuine prayer equivalent to: *Dearest Father, I thank you for the gift of life and with all respect and love I now give it back to you while all of the "me" that I am is still present to do so*?

If life is truly sacred—and I believe it is for all life—and if we are all somehow children of God, then why are we as individuals supposed to be powerless and reduced to passivity at the closing act of our lives?

The Church still struggles with its temptation to prescribe paths that are in effect one-size-fits-all. If we truly see each other as precious, then perhaps we ought to extend greater respect to the choices people make regarding their own life's end. After all, who are we to judge? Are we so certain that we know better?

Greg Cusack
Portland, Ore.

THE FAMINE CONTINUES

Thank you for publishing Karen Kilby's excellent article "Famine and the Living God" (May 2023). The drought-induced famine in the countries of the Horn of Africa region has been the topic of appeals for aid by the UN and UNICEF for over a year, but the international response has been woefully inadequate. As Kilby noted, both secular and religious media have largely ignored the crisis, limiting the awareness and response of private donors. I pray that Catholic Relief Services will follow their English and German counterparts and UNICEF in issuing appeals in the United States and sending aid to save the lives of the tens of thousands of children facing starvation in East Africa.

Richard F. Gillum
Silver Spring, Md.

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Hit Pause

In the United States, a country that came of age with the Industrial Revolution, progress and the advance of technology have been so closely associated that many of us have trouble imagining one without the other. Nuclear weapons are perhaps the only American invention most of us really regret, and even those are regarded as historically inevitable and not without benefit as a deterrent to another world war. In any case, we are told (or tell ourselves), you can't turn back the clock. Or stop it.

Now another, less obviously destructive invention threatens to disrupt our lives no less profoundly than the Bomb did. Artificial Intelligence (AI) appears to be on the brink of remaking our economy, our politics, and perhaps civilization as we know it. Its boosters predict that AI may soon be able to cure diseases such as cancer and mitigate, if not reverse, the effects of climate change. This, they explain, will be the first human invention capable of inventing things we could never invent for ourselves—things that promise to make our lives longer, easier, and more enjoyable. All we have to do is get out of its way.

But other experts say that is the one thing we must *not* do: if we want AI to serve us, they warn, we will have to make sure that we remain in control of it, which may be more difficult than it sounds. Last year, a survey of AI researchers found that half of them believe there is at least a 10 percent chance that future AI systems will cause the extinction or subjugation of the human race. Most people would probably steer clear of anything that had a 10 percent chance of killing or crippling them, but our tech sector and defense industry seem to be rushing heedlessly toward AI, afraid that, if they don't, our geopolitical rivals will beat them to it. In retrospect, this may come to look less like the Cold War's race to the moon than like a blindfolded foot race over a cliff.

The edge of that cliff may be closer than most of us realize. In March, more than a thousand AI researchers and tech entrepreneurs—including Elon Musk and Steve Wozniak, the co-founder of Apple—called in an open letter for a six-month pause in the development of all AI systems more powerful than GPT-4, the "large language model" released by OpenAI earlier that month. Their letter warned that "recent months have seen AI labs locked in an out-of-control race to develop and deploy ever more powerful digital minds that no one—not even their creators—can understand, predict, or reliably control." The letter's signatories believe that the risks posed by these "digital minds" are considerable:

> Contemporary AI systems are now becoming human-competitive at general tasks, and we must ask ourselves: *Should* we let machines flood our information channels with propaganda and untruth? *Should* we automate away all the jobs, including the fulfilling ones? *Should* we develop nonhuman minds that might eventually outnumber, outsmart, obsolete and replace us?… Powerful AI systems should be developed only once we are confident that their effects will be positive and their risks will be manageable.

The open letter—together with alarming press reports of chatbots going rogue—seemed to get Washington's attention. In May, the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology, and the Law held a hearing on what, if anything, the federal government could do to manage the risks of AI. Appearing before the subcommittee, Sam Altman, the chief executive of OpenAI, and Gary Marcus, a signatory of the open letter, agreed that the AI industry needs to be vigorously regulated. "I think if this technology goes wrong, it can go quite wrong," Altman said. "We want to work with the government to prevent that from happening."

Altman resisted calls for a moratorium on the further development of AI, but Marcus argued that what's needed is a moratorium not on the development of AI but on its *deployment*. That could give our elected leaders enough time to set up a new federal agency that would monitor and, where necessary, restrain the AI industry. Such an agency could also help design and implement a watermarking system to distinguish any content, verbal or visual, generated by AI. Meanwhile, state and federal legislators could pass new laws against the use of AI to propagate misinformation or to pass off what the philosopher Daniel Dennett calls "counterfeit people." We should always be informed when we are dealing with a chatbot, and we should always have the option of communicating with a real person instead.

Finally, a moratorium on the further deployment of AI would give our whole society more time to prepare for what's on the way. To prepare well, we will have to find an alternative to the blind enthusiasm and lazy fatalism that have too often characterized American discussions about technology. Between the short-term risk of AI-generated misinformation destabilizing our democracy and the long-term risk of AI turning us all into slaves, there is the medium-term risk that AI will make most of the workforce redundant. Is that really what we want? And if so, how will we make sure that we all have what we need to live good lives when most of us no longer have jobs? We cannot allow the people who stand to get rich from AI—or, worse, AI itself—to answer these questions for us.

Should Feinstein Step Down?

California Democratic senator Dianne Feinstein turns ninety in June. As the years have added up, her age has increasingly been a topic of general discussion, noted (depending on the observer) with pity, scorn, or ridicule. This is a hazard of growing old, compounded by doing so in public view and as a woman. She is not the first senator to serve past the age after which many people have retired from working life. But her return to the Senate in May from a lengthy leave while being treated for shingles has intensified the focus on her health and her ability to carry out her duties. Feinstein, guided through the Capitol in a wheelchair, looked as if she still remained in the midst of a terrible ordeal. She seemed not to know she'd been away from the Senate at all, and some of her answers to interview questions were confused. Her staff later admitted that she'd also contracted encephalitis—swelling of the brain—during her absence.

Feinstein has said she'll step down when her current term expires, after the 2024 election. But should she retire sooner—say, right now? The question has been considered—loudly on social media, quietly but insistently in Washington—since at least the 2020 confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett, which Feinstein inexplicably characterized as "one of the best sets of hearings" she had ever participated in. That still rankles Democrats, who'd hoped to cast the expedited hearings as an election-year sham, and who have longed for a way to escort her off the Judiciary Committee. The whispers have grown louder with every misstep and misstatement that has followed. In April, California Democratic representative Ro Khanna became the first member of Congress to publicly call on her to resign. Other Democrats have since added their voices.

Including Feinstein, there are five senators who are eighty or older. Iowa Republican Chuck Grassley turns ninety in September, which is when Vermont's Bernie Sanders turns eighty-two. Minority Leader Mitch McConnell is eighty-one, and Idaho Republican Jim Risch just joined the eighty-plus club. All have some time to go before matching Strom Thurmond, the South Carolina Republican who died in office in 2003 at the age of 101. Commenting on Feinstein's already-evident troubles in 2020, the *New Yorker*'s Jane Mayer wrote that Thurmond was known by the end of his career "to be non-compos mentis." A Senate aide told her that "for his last ten years, Strom Thurmond didn't know if he was on foot or on horseback." Prestige and perks, as a *New York Times* piece noted, make the Senate an appealing place to serve out one's commitment to the public good. But how does the public benefit when its representatives show obvious signs of not being up to the job?

It's a question that extends beyond the Senate, of course, with an octogenarian in the Oval Office and running for reelection, potentially against a seventy-six-year-old whose mental fitness has long been a major concern. There is no process for forcing a member of Congress to resign for health reasons, and as politicians serve later in life, that's probably something worth addressing. What doesn't help is the snark that masquerades as political analysis (old age makes for good material, and social media rewards mockery). It's fair to call on Feinstein to step down; her condition has interfered with the Senate's work and leaves Californians with less than adequate representation. But even so, her situation should be viewed with compassion. We might hope for the same if we're lucky enough to get old one day.

—Dominic Preziosi

The End of Title 42

With the May 11 expiration of the national health emergency related to the pandemic, the use of Title 42 as an immigration-enforcement tool also came to an end. That once-obscure public-health measure was used by both the Trump and Biden administrations to summarily deport millions without granting them the ability to seek asylum, all under the pretense of preventing the spread of Covid.

Despite the hysterical warnings of right-wing media and politicians, lifting Title 42 didn't bring a "catastrophic invasion" or open the "floodgates." Instead, border crossings surged in the weeks leading up to May 11 and dropped off afterwards, in part due to the new "Circumvention of Lawful Pathways" rule the Biden administration is implementing in place of Title 42.

It may be a departure from Covid-era policy, but the new rule isn't an unqualified improvement, imposing restrictions that immigration advocates have called "a dramatic denaturing of the right to seek asylum." Migrants are presumed ineligible for asylum unless they qualify for one of three exceptions: if they can enter under the humanitarian parole program; if they have made an appointment via the CBP One mobile app; or if they can show they have sought and been denied asylum in a country they passed through on their way to the United States. (Unaccompanied minors also qualify.)

Each of these pathways comes with its own set of problems. The extension of humanitarian parole offers two-year entry to the United States to thirty thousand migrants a month from specific countries—Haiti, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ukraine, and Cuba—but in order to gain entry, applicants must have a passport and a financial sponsor in the United States, qualifications that exclude many of the poorest and most vulnerable. Meanwhile, the CBP One app allows migrants to sign up for an asylum hear-

ing, but it offers only one thousand hearing appointments a day. Glitches in the app and overwhelming demand leave tens of thousands of migrants unable to snag one of the coveted slots, forcing them to wait in Mexican border cities where they are frequently subject to violence and extortion. Meanwhile, the asylum capacities of other countries on the path through South and Central America are also severely strained, with backlogs that can stretch for years.

The new rule also expands the expedited removal framework, in which asylum seekers face a preliminary screening in front of an asylum officer (not an immigration judge) shortly after they are taken into custody. With little time or opportunity to seek counsel or gather documentary evidence, many are unable to pass a "credible fear" test under these conditions. Those who fail are expelled and barred from re-entry into the United States for five years.

The blame for all of these problems, though, cannot be laid solely at Biden's feet: it's the responsibility of Congress to craft meaningful immigration reform. Democrats view the issue as toxic and unpopular, while Republicans exploit it to stoke xenophobia. Expanding legal pathways to citizenship and authorizing funding for new humanitarian facilities at the border and more immigration judges to hear asylum claims is essential. But with so little political will on one side and even less good faith on the other, this doesn't seem likely anytime soon.

Biden is known for saying, "Don't compare me to the Almighty, compare me to the alternative." A limited humanitarian parole system and an imperfect mobile app are better than wasting money on building more walls. But just because a policy could be worse doesn't mean we can't demand better. And right now, for migrants on the Southern border, the alternatives too often look the same: both leave them stuck on the other side, unable to properly claim their right to asylum, putting their faith in a country that seems to wish they would just disappear.

—Isabella Simon

Paying the Ransom

In 2011, the last time the country faced a debt-ceiling showdown, Republican lawmakers took away an important lesson: economic extortion and political brinkmanship are good politics. By threatening to tank the U.S. economy, Republicans forced President Obama to make significant cuts to federal spending. "What we did learn is this," then Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said at the time. "[The economy's] a hostage that's worth ransoming."

Today, as we face another debt-ceiling crisis, the GOP is at it again. Emboldened by the Congressional Freedom Caucus, Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy is trying to extract major concessions from President Biden. To raise the $31.4 trillion debt ceiling, Republicans are demanding caps on federal spending, work requirements for anti-poverty assistance programs, including SNAP and TANF, and cuts to federal programs, including a recently approved round of funding for the IRS meant to crack down on high-income tax evaders; those uncollected revenues will likely increase the deficit by nearly $500 billion over the next ten years. (McCarthy's push to make the Trump-era tax cut permanent would similarly increase the deficit by an additional $3.5 trillion over that same period.) If these demands aren't met, McCarthy and his caucus say they will let the country default, which would precipitate economic and financial catastrophe. It would disrupt financial markets around the world and effectively shut down the U.S. government. Monthly Social Security payments, which benefit about 70 million people—or one in five Americans—would stop. An estimated 8 million people could lose their jobs. Retirement accounts would be devastated, and the economy, still recovering from the pandemic, would fall into recession.

By now, no one should be surprised by the actions of the Republican Party. They are proving once again that they are deeply unserious actors manufacturing a very serious crisis for their own political gain. More surprising is the response from President Biden, who seems to have learned the wrong lessons from 2011. Rather than taking on the GOP's recklessness, he's rewarding it, just as Obama did more than a decade ago. The results have been alarmingly predictable.

Before Biden started negotiating with McCarthy, something he insisted he wouldn't do, he had other options, some admittedly more viable than others. He and Democratic leadership could have tried to neutralize the debt limit by raising it when they controlled Congress and the White House. While this is no longer possible, Biden and Congressional Democrats could still try to force a "clean" up-and-down House vote for raising the debt ceiling, which Republicans did three times during the Trump Administration without restrictions. Some Senate Democrats, led by Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, and members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus have urged the president to invoke Section 4 of the Fourteenth Amendment, which states that "the validity of the public debt of the United States…shall not be questioned."

Instead, Biden is reportedly willing to accept a new round of work requirements, spending caps, and not-inconsequential cuts to programs designed for the country's most vulnerable populations—perhaps the least surprising development in this premeditated game of brinkmanship. This is a price he is willing to pay to keep the economy running, which seems to be another lesson the president has taken from 2011. Despite capitulating to Republicans during the last debt-ceiling standoff, Obama won reelection. Biden appears to believe that paying the ransom still comes at a low enough political cost that taking on the GOP's recklessness isn't worth the fight.

—Miles Doyle, May 23, 2023

An installation in Washington D.C. draws attention to people suffering from "Long Covid" and related conditions like myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME), May 2023.

AP PHOTO/ANDREW HARNIK

MATT MAZEWSKI

Waving the White Flag

Why are both parties pretending that Covid is behind us?

The latest manufactured crisis in Washington over raising the nation's debt ceiling has been both tragic and farcical. In exchange for allowing the United States to continue paying its bills, Republicans in Congress have insisted on draconian cuts to federal spending. Yet rather than looking for savings in a military budget bigger than that of the next ten countries combined, or a tax code with loopholes worth billions to the uber-wealthy, the GOP has focused on what it sees as one of the real drivers of wasteful spending: health insurance for lazy people.

The "Limit, Save, Grow Act," a conservative-wish-list-cum-ransom-note narrowly passed by the Republican House majority in late April, contained a provision that would impose work requirements on recipients of Medicaid, the public health insurance program for low-income Americans. Eligibility for coverage would be conditioned on either working, participating in job training, or performing community service for at least eighty hours per month, with a few exemptions based on age, disability, or having a dependent child.

The Biden administration predicts that up to 21 million people might lose their Medicaid coverage if the House Republicans' plan were to become law. These could include people with chronic health problems who cannot pass a stringent test for disability; seasonal workers and those who work

irregular hours; or others who are in fact eligible for coverage but fail for one reason or another to fill out all the right paperwork.

The administration is right: the Republican plan is both morally objectionable and economically self-defeating. Everyone deserves to have health insurance, regardless of their station in life, and people who cannot pay for medical care will be less productive workers too. But it takes real chutzpah to attack your opponents for trying to kick millions of people off Medicaid when your *own* policies are about to result in the very same outcome. The Biden administration is currently on track to preside over what will likely be the largest mass disenrollment of Medicaid recipients in the history of the program. What's even worse is the fact that this disaster is entirely avoidable: it is happening only because of the president's failure to fight for the continuation of measures implemented as part of the federal government's response to COVID-19.

During the early phase of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, various federal agencies invoked authority under existing laws to issue emergency declarations empowering the government to respond to the crisis. President Trump declared a "national emergency," while the secretary of Health and Human Services declared a "public health emergency" and also allowed the Food and Drug Administration to grant "emergency use authorization" to novel vaccines and treatments for COVID-19.

In addition to these executive actions, Congress passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) in March 2020, which increased federal Medicaid matching funds to state governments in exchange for their agreeing to maintain "continuous eligibility" for Medicaid enrollees throughout the duration of the public-health emergency. Ordinarily, states conduct annual checks to verify that Medicaid recipients are still eligible for the program, and those who no longer meet all the criteria—because, for example, their income has increased beyond a particular threshold—have their coverage rescinded. But for the past three years, the FFCRA had put an end to this process, allowing anyone on Medicaid at the start of the pandemic to retain their coverage—no questions asked.

However, the end-of-year budget deal signed into law by President Biden in late December of last year allowed states to bring back annual Medicaid-eligibility checks starting on March 31, even while the public-health emergency was still in effect, and a number of states have already done so. The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that between 5.3 million and 14.2 million people stand to lose Medicaid coverage during the "unwinding" period over the next twelve months; estimates from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) suggest the number could be even higher. On top of that, HHS has projected that around 6.8 million of those disenrolled might still be eligible but will nevertheless go without coverage until their eligibility is verified. Given the overwhelming administrative burden this is likely to impose on state bureaucracies, even those who are entitled to coverage may have difficulty getting it back once they've lost it.

Biden and Democrats in Congress could have fought to prevent the repeal of continuous eligibility, but they didn't. It's true that the emergency declarations ushered in some policies that deserved to be phased out, like the Title 42 immigration restrictions that denied millions of migrants the opportunity to seek asylum. But the "decoupling" of the Medicaid provisions from the rest of the emergency measures only serves to illustrate how Biden could have rallied public support for extending the declarations while still revisiting particular issues as needed. Instead, he announced plans in January to terminate both the national and public-health emergencies on May 11. For Congress, even a few more months was simply too long to wait: the House and Senate passed a bill shortly thereafter to end the national emergency early, and despite some initial protestations President Biden signed it just after Easter. The public-health emergency ended on schedule in mid-May.

The end of the Covid emergency declarations is alarming not only because of the consequences for those who rely on Medicaid or other programs that were temporarily expanded, but also because the SARS-CoV-2 virus itself remains a serious threat—even as our leaders will to do anything about it evaporates. While the death rate from acute Covid infection has come down, it is still very high—higher than many people realize. During the past twelve months the disease has been recorded as the cause of around 125,000 deaths in the United States. To put that number in context, an average year sees between ten thousand and fifty thousand lives lost in this country to influenza; the historically brutal flu season of 2017–18, one of the worst in decades, was estimated to have claimed around eighty thousand. Despite the widespread perception that Covid is now no worse than a mild cold, it is still killing two to ten times as many Americans as the flu on an annual basis.

Moreover, looking at mortality statistics alone gives an incomplete picture of the impact that Covid continues to have on public health. A growing body of research demonstrates how infection can increase the risk of developing all manner of chronic health problems, including cardiovascular disease, autoimmune conditions, or neurological disorders. Data from the National Center for Health Statistics show that, as of March, around 6 percent of U.S. adults are experiencing some degree of post-acute or "Long Covid" symptoms. And "post-Covid conditions" are, unfortunately, not rare: according to the World Health Organization, "current evidence suggests approximately 10–20% of people experience a variety of mid- and long-term effects."

The People's CDC, a coalition devoted to advocacy for a more vigorous response to the Covid threat, has argued that the winding down of the national and public-health emergencies,

far from reflecting any kind of genuine victory over the virus, is in fact the culmination of a "major political push to minimize public recognition of the ongoing harm of the pandemic." Of course, Biden's defenders will insist that the end of the emergencies does not mean that the government is no longer concerned with protecting Americans from the virus. In an interview with *60 Minutes* last fall—the one in which he notoriously announced that "the pandemic is over"—Biden conceded that "we still have a problem with Covid" and claimed that "[w]e're still doing a lot of work on it."

Putting aside the technical question of how to define a pandemic and whether the term still applies to our current situation, the problem is not that the administration is entering a "new phase" when it comes to fighting Covid, but rather that it has very nearly given up on fighting it at all. Congressional Republicans cited Biden's remarks on *60 Minutes* to justify killing his request for $9.25 billion for vaccines, treatments, and research and development to be included in last December's spending deal; in its March budget request for fiscal year 2024, the administration did not ask for a single dollar to be spent on the Covid response. While running for president in October 2020, candidate Biden swore that "we can and will control this virus," and promised that, if elected, "I will never wave the white flag of surrender." Unfortunately, that flag now seems to be flying high above the White House.

The end of the emergency declarations will cement America's capitulation to Covid in a variety of ways. For one, vaccines, antiviral treatments, and high-quality PCR tests will no longer be paid for by the government and provided free to all Americans. Companies like Pfizer and Moderna have already signaled that they intend to jack up the prices of their vaccines well above cost (while gesturing at providing some form of assistance for the uninsured). Even those who have insurance could now face significant out-of-pocket costs for getting tested or for enduring a Covid-related hospital stay. White House Covid Coordinator Ashish Jha spoke enthusiastically about this shift last year at an event sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, telling attendees that "my hope is that in 2023, you're going to see the commercialization of almost all of these products." Heaven forbid people get the idea that any aspect of health care in America could ever be exempted from the logic of the market.

In addition to the fact that testing will now be more expensive and more difficult to access, labs are no longer required to report test results to the CDC. This is likely to hamper efforts at viral surveillance. The CDC itself has acknowledged that reduced availability of data means it can no longer reliably calculate rates of community transmission—already difficult given the rise of at-home rapid tests. Even more galling is the fact that hospitals no longer have to report when cases of Covid are contracted by patients in their facilities. Donald Trump rightly got blowback from many quarters for musing in 2020 that "if we stop testing, we'd have fewer cases," but his successor has brought his vision closer than ever to reality. When it comes to Covid, there is now a solid bipartisan consensus that ignorance is bliss.

Those who would want to portray Covid as a completely intractable problem often frame our choice as one between doing nothing at all or "lockdowns," but there are plenty of less disruptive measures that would dramatically reduce transmission and the social burden of the disease. For instance, since SARS-CoV-2 is primarily an airborne virus, it should be a top priority to invest in infrastructure that would clean the air in all indoor public spaces, using technologies like HEPA filters or germicidal ultraviolet light. Waterborne illnesses like cholera were not vanquished in the developed world by leaving it up to individuals to boil their own water forever but by building public-sanitation systems to provide clean water for everyone. We can, and should, do the same for the air that we breathe. This is just one piece of what a comprehensive strategy for real disease mitigation could look like, one that also relies on tools like vaccination, testing, contact tracing, supported isolation, waste-water monitoring, and the use of high-quality masks.

In theory, none of this requires there to be a formal state of emergency. But without one, the most likely outcome is continued inaction. This is why many environmental activists have demanded an official emergency declaration over climate change. And for those tempted to object that a state of emergency cannot last forever, consider that the national emergency declared in response to the tragedy of the 9/11 terror attacks remains in effect more than two decades later. As Branko Marcetic wrote recently in *Jacobin*, we are currently witnessing "a 9/11's worth of U.S. deaths roughly every two weeks" due to Covid, yet "the U.S. political class can't be bothered to keep in place the policies to fight it."

Why not? Perhaps elected officials fear that anything involving the word "Covid" is politically toxic now that the public is thought to have "moved on" from the issue. But another part of the explanation might be that many of the unprecedented actions taken by the government in response to the onset of the crisis—from imposing moratoria on evictions and student-loan payments to expanding unemployment benefits, nutrition assistance, and access to Medicaid—visibly demonstrated how the state, when it feels like it, can do far more than it usually does to provide for the needs of ordinary people. For many in power, this was a dangerous development: after all, if voters get it in their heads that access to public health insurance can be broadened not just during an emergency, but in "normal" times too, who knows what they might demand next?

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AUSTEN IVEREIGH

True Allegiance?

Letter from the United Kingdom

The night before the new sovereign was anointed, I joined a "Mass for the Coronation of King Charles III & Queen Consort Camilla" held in every parish in England and Wales at the request of the Catholic bishops. We prayed for the newly minted if aging monarch—that he "may continue to grow in every virtue…be preserved from every harm"—and learned that through this eucharistic celebration we pledged our loyalty to him. This was not so unusual, our parish priest reminded us in his homily, for "Catholics have a very strong loyalty to the Crown." Even in the dark days between 1534 and 1680, he added, the Catholic martyrs of the Reformation period went to the gallows expressing their affection for, and loyalty to, the monarchs who were putting them to death.

True, of course; but the fact that this had to be pointed out showed how unusual it was. The post-Communion hymn was weirdest of all. Not everyone was happy to sing "God save our gracious King." "Never once heard the national anthem sung in a Catholic church, in a lifetime of going to Catholic churches in every part of the UK," tweeted Raymond Friel OBE, who runs Caritas, the official national body coordinating Catholic charities. It wasn't personal; Friel had been awarded the OBE by King Charles. But he spoke for many Catholics when he said he was "uneasy at the prospect."

These feelings never arose at the last coronation seventy years ago, when Catholics were offside spectators. In those days, a Catholic could not step into a Protestant church, let alone join a coronation service. The only non-Anglican minister in Westminster Abbey in 1953 was the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, who gave Elizabeth II the Bible on which she swore her oaths. Now the Catholic Church in England and Wales is one of the twenty-seven "privileged bodies" allowed to offer a "loyal address" to the monarch, as Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster, did at King Charles's accession last year. And he was in the Abbey on May 6, startling in scarlet, alongside various ecumenical representatives—Greek Orthodox, Free Churches, and so on—to pray over the newly anointed and crowned monarch, that God pour on him "the riches of his grace" and "keep you in his holy fear." Nichols was the first Catholic cardinal at the coronation of a monarch on these islands since Cardinal David Beaton presided at that of the infant Queen

The coronation of King Charles III, Westminster Abbey, London, England

OSV NEWS PHOTO/AARON CHOWN, REUTERS

In secular Britain, a liberal national church whose liturgies are rare and sparsely attended has taken on more and more of the role of an NGO, in partnership with other churches and faiths.

Mary of Scots in 1543. And Nichols wasn't the only one. The Vatican's secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, was representing Pope Francis, who had earlier gifted fragments of the True Cross for a "Cross of Wales" commissioned by King Charles for the Coronation.

It is hard to understand all this without the Queen's 2012 address to faith leaders at the start of her Diamond Jubilee. The enlargement of the established church's tent took place gradually during her reign, but this was the moment establishment itself was redefined. Standing in Lambeth Palace alongside the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, she told leaders of all the faiths and denominations that the point of this church recognized by the law as official "is not to defend Anglicanism to the exclusion of other religions" but "to protect the free practice of all faiths in this country." The Church of England, she said, "has created an environment for other faith communities and indeed people of no faith to live freely," and added: "Woven into the fabric of this country, the Church has helped to build a better society—more and more in active cooperation for the common good with those of other faiths."

The significance of the remarks was mostly missed, but the faith leaders there took note, and the coronation service on May 6 was the result. Given that the 1688 Oath of Succession and 1701 Act of Settlement were intended precisely "to defend Anglicanism to the exclusion of other religions," this was an ingenious reframing, one that allowed both church and monarchy to find a raison d'être and shared mission at a time when both institutions look ever more anomalous.

As a narrative it just about works because it reflects reality. In secular Britain (the 2021 Census revealed that a third of the population has no faith at all), a liberal national church whose liturgies are rare and sparsely attended has taken on more and more of the role of an NGO, in partnership with other churches and faiths. The Church of England does this well, taking advantage of its physical omnipresence and relations with power brokers to host food banks, support clusters of hosts housing Ukrainian refugees, run groups for the elderly and families with children, and so on. In times of crisis—Covid, floods, a local tragedy—the church offers organizational heft and armies of the willing, and a gentle, accessible form of religiosity (candles and hymns) for those who need it.

At the same time, the monarchy has itself become more and more like an über-NGO, a convenor of charitable and volunteer organizations, and a promoter of loving service. This shift is also a response to changing times. Even after the royals lost real power in 1688, they could still count on deference, both to their position at the apex of a social hierarchy defined by bloodlines and heritage, and to their role as defenders of a Christian morality defined by the Church of England. That deference was still in place in cap-doffing, churchgoing 1953, but has now all but vanished. What ties people to the crown these days is something far more vague and sentimental: a reassuring sense that it safeguards the national mythos, combined with affection and grateful admiration for royals who incarnate a spirit of service, as Elizabeth II did, and Charles III does.

This was the idea of royalty at the heart of the coronation service, which began with the king being welcomed by a child to the Abbey "in the name of the King of Kings." "In his name, and after his example," Charles declared, "I come not to be served, but to serve." In his brief homily, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said Jesus Christ "creates the unchangeable law of good authority that with the privilege of power comes the duty to serve." He described service as "love in action" and said it could be seen in care for the poor and conservation of the natural world. "We have seen those priorities in the life of duty lived by our king," he said.

At his touching tribute in the coronation concert the evening after the Abbey service, the Prince of Wales sounded like the executive of a major charity. William praised his "Pa" for his environmental advocacy and for the Prince's Trust, which "has supported over a million young people, many from disadvantaged backgrounds, to realize their ambitions." The King, he added, "has always understood that people of all faiths, all backgrounds, and all communities, deserve to be celebrated and supported"—precisely what Queen Elizabeth had said about the purpose of the established Church back in 2012.

The English genius for breathing new life into ancient institutions means now that church and monarchy share an identical mission as hosts of philanthropic activity in partnership with faiths and civil society generally. But then, into this irenicism and liberality, the coronation oath sworn by King Charles III at the Abbey landed like an unexploded bomb. Enshrined by an Act of Parliament in 1688 after the Glorious Revolution, the oath binds the king to the defense of the Reformation. Instead of the previous vague promise to protect bishops and churches, every monarch from 1689 has to declare himself "a faithful Protestant" who will defend "enactments which secure the Protestant succession to the Throne," while promising to uphold "the true profession of the Gospel and the Protestant reformed religion established by law."

The confessional state was enshrined because Britain felt beleaguered and demanded uniformity in religion for

national security. The first to take the 1688 oath, William and Mary, did so after the anointed king, James II, the last Catholic monarch, was overthrown by Protestants who feared a lifting of the penal laws. Later, the only justification for George I acceding to the throne in 1714 was that he was Queen Anne's most senior Protestant relative. George was the first of the house of Hanover, the current royal family, and ever since then the British monarchy has been legitimated not just by bloodline but also by belief in the Thirty-Nine Articles. The current prime minister may be a practising Hindu, but the monarch must be Protestant.

The oath is, obviously, anomalous and offensive—and not just to Catholics. Many Anglicans do not see themselves as Protestant. The Irish, Scots, and Welsh are excluded. And it is hypocritical: King Charles, who declared himself in the oath a "faithful Protestant," is spiritually closer to Greek Orthodoxy than to Anglicanism. So why not just remove it and replace it with an oath more in keeping with Queen Elizabeth's redefinition of the Church of England's role? Because that could only be done by an Act of Parliament, and the debate would open more than one can of worms. The appetite for a godless republic may be growing, but it is still a minority, and—so runs the prevailing view—it is best to leave well enough alone.

So while Charles was stuck with saying the oath—his expression did not conceal his distaste—Archbishop Welby tried to draw the sting out of it by explaining to him and to us that it meant not what it said but what his mother had said it meant. "Your Majesty, the Church established by law, whose settlement you will swear to maintain, is committed to the true profession of the Gospel, and in so doing, will seek to foster an environment in which people of all faiths and beliefs may live freely."

But is this shrewd re-interpretation enough to justify the enthusiasm for the coronation by the Catholic bishops? The unease at the new coziness could be seen, in the run-up to May 6, in the controversy over the so-called "Homage of the People." The idea had been to give space in the service for ordinary people—not just nobles—to declare their allegiance: Archbishop Welby would "call upon" all persons of goodwill "to make their homage, in heart and voice, to their undoubted king," using the words in the *ordo*: "I swear I will pay true allegiance to Your Majesty." But after the *ordo* was published a week before the coronation, many felt pressured, and said they would defy the call. Among the critics was the Dominican writer and preacher, Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, OP—tapped by the Pope to lead a retreat for members of the synod in early October—who told the *Times* of London that it could remind Catholics "of an earlier call for allegiance to the monarch during the Reformation, when failure to conform led to torture and execution." In the tradition of soggy Anglicanism, Welby dampened down the words on the day of the coronation, now "inviting those who wished to do so" to reflect silently or to use the words in the *ordo*.

The Catholic bishops, meanwhile, have done their own reframing, reminding Catholics that the coronation service, with its roots in antiquity, is essentially a sacramental liturgy, similar to an ordination, one that was Catholic for longer (five hundred years) than it has been Protestant (four hundred). Catholic participation at the service, as well as the inclusion of William Byrd's sixteenth-century *Gloria*, written for recusants, represented a "coming together again" of elements that had become divided, said Cardinal Nichols. He told the *Tablet* all this was "a reciprocal ecumenism, an exchange of gifts." The new king, he added, had the highest regard for Catholics, had met Pope Francis twice, and had been at the canonization in Rome in 2019 for St. John Henry Newman. Nichols acknowledged that the words of the coronation oath were "sharp," but he believed the king had set "his wholeheartedly accepted constitutional duty into the wider context of our contemporary nation."

British Catholics are mostly happy with this reset. As the coronation showed, the monarchy is one the few things that works well in the UK. Some also sense an opportunity. You could hear it in my parish the day after the coronation, when the parish priest pointed out that its ancient sacramentality was probably more intelligible to Catholics than to most people watching.

It was true that, while media coverage focused on the pageantry and pomp, the Shakesperian theatricality of it all, the angelic music and the bling (the swords, the orb, the bracelets, etc.), the heart of the service was not well understood. It was easier, perhaps, for Catholics to see that the real action was in "that strange moment when Charles, shielded by embossed screens, was anointed by the archbishop of Canterbury with holy oil poured from an eagle-shaped ampulla to the sounds of Zadok the Priest," as the *Guardian* put it, describing the coronation as "pure theatre."

But it wasn't, even if the crowning added nothing at all to the legal powers or authority that came to Charles when his mother died. The coronation service was, above all, a liturgy with a sacrament at its center. Disrobed to his shirt, the King was consecrated for service, especially of the poor. The previous archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, said it best when he described Elizabeth II's anointing, which she herself had often referred to as an experience of light and peace. It was, Williams said, "a gift of the Holy Spirit to hold a fragile human person in faithfulness to this place where community can gather for restoration and renewal."

It may be an unholy mess of entangled traditions, of shame as well as glory, that Britain keeps stitched together out of fear of something worse. But because church and crown still believe that authority is consecrated for service in a sacramental liturgy, I was happy on May 6 to stand in front of the TV, hand held aloft, to pay "true allegiance to our undoubted king."

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JACQUI OESTERBLAD

Care & Conscience Rights

Catholic hospitals can strike a better balance—and still be Catholic

St. Elizabeth's Medical Center in Boston

CNS PHOTO/GREGORY L. TRACY, THE PILOT

Catholic health care in this country has long had a conflicted relationship with the health-care system at large. Tentative steps toward compromise have been stalled by post-*Dobbs* changes in abortion access and continued fights over transgender care. Most recently, as part of an ongoing effort to realign federal regulations with the Supreme Court's 2020 decision that discrimination against transgender people is a form of sex discrimination, the Biden administration proposed a new rule to expand nondiscrimination protections in health care for transgender people. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops opposes it.

The bishops believe that such rules violate the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services (ERDs), which lay out "a theological basis for the Catholic health care ministry." Their position hinges on two arguments: (1) Catholic opposition to performing certain procedures is morally justified because the procedures do not constitute health care, and the refusal to perform them is not discriminatory; and (2) even if one disagrees with Catholic opposition to these procedures, forcing Catholic hospitals and medical professionals to perform them and thus violate their consciences should be opposed because it would pose a danger to conscience rights for all.

However, there are problems with this approach, which is unlikely to withstand the combined pressures of weakening Catholic political power, rising political and cultural polarization, and growing difficulty in accessing health care of all kinds, especially the kind not permitted under ERDs. Catholic health care thus faces a challenging future. Those who want Catholic institutions to remain substantively Catholic and to provide medical care within the constraints of Catholic medical ethics must articulate a more robust definition of pluralism and conscience rights. Here are four considerations for articulating that vision.

First, some Catholic health-care policies do discriminate against transgender people. Many in Catholic health care argue that criticism over supposed discrimination against transgender patients is misplaced: Catholic hospitals will not perform certain procedures for *anyone* of *any* sex or gender.

That's certainly true of some procedures, like vaginoplasties or tubal ligations. But the U.S. Health and Human Services anti-discrimination regulations are not referring to those. Doctors can choose the focus of their practice, and no law is going to force them to perform a procedure they don't have the skills and experience to perform. Instead, what is explicitly mentioned are hysterectomies, which Catholic hospitals can and *do* perform, in line with the Catholic ERDs. It's not true that Catholic hospitals decline to perform this specific procedure for everyone and for every reason. They perform this procedure for everyone with every medical diagnosis *except for* gender dysphoria. And this is the core of the disagreement.

The only reason to perform a hysterectomy on a cisgender woman with endometriosis but not on a transgender man with gender dysphoria is if one has decided that gender dysphoria—a medical condition recognized in the DSM-5 and covered by insurance—is different from other medical conditions. That is a permissible distinction to draw in Catholic ethics. But legally, treating some diagnoses recognized by the broader medical community differently from others based on the gender associated with those diagnoses is the very definition of sex discrimination. "We wouldn't perform that procedure for *anyone* with gender dysphoria" falls a little flat as a defense when the only people with that diagnosis are, by definition, transgender. Legally and logically, Catholic hospitals' refusal to perform these hysterectomies discriminates against transgender people.

Does this mean that Catholic practitioners and providers should be forced to violate their consciences and sincere religious beliefs? No. But it means Catholic hospitals are going to need an affirmative carve-out from nondiscrimination law. They need to *convince* lawmakers, and the voting public, that Catholic hospitals deserve an exception. It's no lon-

ger good enough, if it ever was, to argue that Catholic hospitals don't discriminate. Instead, Catholic hospitals need to argue that allowing them to remain substantively Catholic is good for American pluralism—and, crucially, that Catholic conscience rights don't have to interfere with anybody else's rights.

Second, not all consciences are equally protected in health care. If the best defense of Catholic health care is conscience rights, Catholics must answer: Whose conscience? Patients, institutional providers, and individual providers can all be said to have one, and Catholic social teaching speaks powerfully in favor of religious liberty and freedom of conscience. But Catholic application of that principle can feel self-interested, as though it is only concerned with the kinds of restrictions that bear on Catholic consciences per Catholic theology. Catholic advocacy for conscience rights in health care has resulted only in concern with the kind of positive coercion that is the focus of Catholic moral teaching (the need not to participate in evil) while being uninterested in protecting others, especially religious minorities, who understand religious liberty as being more about the right to *do* things that are ethically mandatory.

A conscience argument that will win in the public sphere has to be more pluralistic than that. Americans are unlikely to accept the peculiarly Catholic idea that it's worse to be forced to do something wrong than it is to be forcibly restrained from doing something you believe to be right and necessary.

Catholic employees and medical students at non-Catholic hospitals are protected under federal law. They cannot be forced to perform abortions, sterilizations, euthanasia, or certain contraceptive procedures that contradict Catholic teaching, nor can they be punished for their refusal to do so. The Church lobbied for that. But there's no corresponding protection for employees at Catholic hospitals whose conscience conflicts with that of their bosses.

For example, the University of California has several partnerships with Catholic hospitals, under which state employees and students at state medical schools spend part of their time under the state's supervision and on the state's payroll, but under the Church's roof and governed by the Church's rules. This has prompted an ongoing debate within California, driven by medical professors who feel that this arrangement forces them to practice medicine in a way that they consider unethical and contrary to their values. Under the Church's definition, those doctors' conscience rights are *not* being violated because they are not being forced to *do* something they see as unethical. But the doctors, in their own understanding of and relationship to their consciences, experience the relationship as a violation of their ethical autonomy.

The state briefly considered a policy that would allow state-affiliated medical providers to perform procedures forbidden by the ERDs inside Catholic facilities if, and only if, delaying treatment until the patient could be moved to another facility would be detrimental to their health. The Catholic hospitals pushed back and said that this policy would force them to cancel their university partnerships, with the result that tens of thousands of mostly low-income patients would lose access to esteemed University of California specialists.

Conscience always plays a role in the provision of medical care. No hospital or medical association allows every doctor to perform every procedure their conscience may compel. Very few doctors are comfortable performing every legal procedure a patient may demand of them. And medical providers are almost always prevented from providing even life-saving care to an adult patient if the patient's own conscience directs otherwise. The question is not whether conscience can be a limiting factor in health care but how to balance all the consciences at play. A basic starting principle is clear: A person who believes only in conscience rights for people who agree with them does not, by definition, believe in conscience rights. Conversations about conscience are fundamentally conversations about compromise.

Convincing the public that Catholic invocations of pluralism and conscience rights are sincere means considering whether any compromise to accommodate the consciences of health-care workers who disagree with Catholic hospitals is possible. Cooperation with evil is a serious matter, and if Catholic hospitals and moral theologians truly believe that no compromise is permissible, secular actors will have to respect that. But Catholics should not be surprised or offended if those secular actors come to the same conclusion.

The state of California ultimately backed down in its dispute with Catholic health-care partners. Next time, it might not. California voters may someday decide—in a world where doctors who provide transition-related procedures face increasing violence and threats—that it's immoral to spend taxpayer dollars supporting hospitals that won't employ those doctors. Catholics who insist that compromise is impossible do not have standing to complain about that choice. If Catholics present conscience rights as an all-or-nothing, us-versus-them matter, they shouldn't be surprised if the response is "nothing" and "them."

Third, without better access to health care, patients have no conscience rights of their own. Health care should always focus on patients. The best defenses of conscience rights for providers should, too: it's important for patients to be able to choose doctors who align with their values. If a patient wants a procedure that a Catholic hospital can't provide, that patient has the freedom to go somewhere else. But providers who are forced out by laws that don't respect their consciences have no immediate recourse to other livelihoods.

However, this articulation of compromise assumes a fully functional, expansive, and affordable health-care system. We don't have one. We have a system that makes it very hard to just "go to another doctor." Somewhere

between one-third and 45 percent of young adults have no primary-care physician. That's not just Millennial fickleness and laziness. Accessing a PCP is *hard*. I have had five different insurance plans in the seven years since graduating from college. With each new plan, I need to spend hours on the phone finding a physician who accepts my insurance, who is accepting new patients, whose office is accessible to my home or work, and who can offer me an appointment that is neither months in the future nor conflicts with an essential obligation—if I ever find one at all. I've *never* felt able to choose my PCP based on other factors that might be important to me, like gender or area of expertise.

The problem is even more pronounced in rural areas and for patients who need specialty care. Nearly 15 percent of plans for sale on the federal marketplace have no in-network providers at all in key specialties like oncology and endocrinology. Many contain fewer than five providers within a radius of 100 miles of the most populous city in the network—100 miles! Some 16 percent of Americans live more than thirty miles from their nearest hospital, and around five hundred hospitals nationally receive special funding as the sole hospital in their communities.

More than 6.2 million people—3 percent of U.S. adults—reported having visited an out-of-network provider against their will within the last year because they were experiencing a medical emergency. This number was higher among lower-income adults, both because they more frequently utilized emergency medical care and because lower-cost insurance tends to have fewer in-network providers.

Catholic hospitals fill crucial gaps in this inadequate health-care system. In a time of unprecedented hospital closures, rural Catholic hospitals have been expanding. And Catholic hospitals based in urban areas are more likely than their competitors to accept patients on Medicaid. This is an incredible and essential service. But it means Catholic hospitals' patients are quite simply less likely to have chosen to be there. They have nowhere else to go.

Effectively contesting regulations that infringe on conscience requires expending just as much energy, time, and money contesting the conditions that create them. The HHS explained that the proposed anti-discrimination rule was needed because, "[a]s a practical matter…many patients and their families may have little or no choice about where to seek care." If nobody is ever forced to choose a Catholic hospital when they'd rather be elsewhere, much of the justification for the rule and other policies like it disappears.

Health-care access isn't just an additional social-justice issue that the Church should be concerned with in its own way. It's also a religious-liberty issue.

Finally, for now, the key to compromise is transparency. Catholics, like all people, tend to overestimate how much other people are thinking about them. Catholic hospitals assume that patients have a general idea about procedures they are barred from performing. But this is a flawed assumption

It's not necessarily that patients don't *know* what the Catholic Church teaches. Sometimes they just have different definitions of abortion and contraception than the Church does and are surprised to learn about, say, differences in the treatment of incomplete miscarriages. Sometimes they don't know that a hospital is Catholic—as is the case for more than one-third of women receiving their reproductive care at a Catholic facility.

And yes, sometimes, the medical norm and the Catholic teaching are so deeply at odds that patients and doctors couldn't imagine a conflict. For example, many OB/GYNs consider it ideal to perform a tubal ligation during a C-section because it eliminates the need for an additional procedure, with an additional incision and anesthesia, which can cause complications. The ban on the procedure in Catholic hospitals can take people by surprise, either because the procedure seems so common, sensible, and innocuous—or because they unexpectedly end up giving birth in a Catholic hospital.

Or, consider that doctors don't categorize hysterectomies as a form of "sterilization" at all, and so they sometimes find themselves surprised to learn that transgender hysterectomies are barred on those grounds. As one doctor who unwittingly scheduled her transgender patient for a hysterectomy at a Catholic hospital put it, "No one would ever, ever do a hysterectomy exclusively for sterilization. I have never even had a hysterectomy [at this hospital] questioned."

A lot of misunderstanding and confusion could be avoided if patients were informed at the outset that a hospital is Catholic and what the ERDs mean for them. When this possibility was raised in a *New York Times* article a few years ago, however, the Catholic Health Association's senior director of theology and ethics replied that no business, whether a contractor or a car salesman, is "going to lead off with what they don't do."

That explanation might work if Catholic health care functioned first as a business with primarily economic concerns. But that would sell Catholic health care short. Concern for patients *combined* with clear expression of Catholic commitments regarding care should be the goal, and transparent implementation of this should take priority over worries about the bottom line.

The Catholic health-care tradition matters. It brings something important to larger conversations about how faith is lived through action and about acting within one's ethical beliefs. It brings something important to the Church, in that millions of people who may never otherwise come into contact with Catholicism interact with it when they come through the hospital doors. It's worth defending. And the best way to defend it is to clearly articulate respect for conscience rights within the context of America's pluralistic society while advocating for greater access to health care for all.

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Neil Gorsuch at his Senate confirmation hearing in 2017

CNS PHOTO/JOSHUA ROBERTS, REUTERS

BERNARD G. PRUSAK

Gorsuch Gets It Wrong

Religious liberty & moral complicity

With all the U.S. Supreme Court's other controversial decisions in its 2021–2022 term, it's understandable that its decision *not* to intervene in the politics of vaccine mandates passed largely unnoticed. Over the dissent of Justices Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch, and Clarence Thomas, the Court declined to review a challenge to a New York regulation mandating that health-care workers be vaccinated against COVID-19. The petitioners had objected to the regulation on religious-liberty grounds. Justices Alito, Gorsuch, and Thomas had also dissented from another 2021 decision not to issue an injunction against a similar regulation in Maine.

Even though his view did not prevail, notice should be paid to Justice Gorsuch's argument that such regulations violate the First Amendment. In both the New York case, *Dr. A v. Hochul*, and the Maine case, *Does v. Mills*, Gorsuch cites the 1981 decision *Thomas v. Review Board of the Indiana Employment Security Division*. That decision has become the Court's go-to precedent for cases in which people object either to having to *contribute* to an action they believe to be wrong (e.g. baking a cake for a same-sex wedding) or to having to *make use* of an action they believe to have been wrong (e.g. taking vaccines that were tested or developed using a cell line derived from an abortion). The first kind of case involves what ethicists call "cooperation"; the second involves "appropriation." The problem is that the *Thomas* decision is fundamentally confused. And that is also a problem for the important cause of religious liberty.

Eddie Thomas was a Jehovah's Witness. He worked at a roll foundry making sheet steel, which is used in all sorts of things. The roll foundry closed, however, and Thomas's employer gave him a new job making tank turrets. For religious reasons, Thomas sought to be reassigned to work that did not directly serve the military, only to learn that all his employer's remaining operations were in arms production. So he asked to be laid off. After his employer denied his request, he quit and applied

for unemployment benefits in Indiana, his state of residence. His application was denied, despite the recognition that he had acted on his religious beliefs as a Jehovah's Witness. Eventually, the case came before the Supreme Court.

In an 8–1 decision, the Court observed that Thomas "drew a line" between working in the roll foundry, which he found "sufficiently insulated from producing weapons of war," and working on tank turrets, which he believed made him complicit in war-making. The Court went on to state that "it is not for us to say that the line he drew was an unreasonable one." For "religious beliefs need not be acceptable, logical, consistent, or comprehensible in order to merit First Amendment protection." Instead, the Court decided that the case turned on the question of whether Thomas "terminated his work because of an honest conviction that such work was forbidden by his religion."

This is where the confusion starts. It is one thing to sincerely believe, on religious grounds, that war-making (or whatever else) is evil and that complicity in war-making is also evil. The government, including the judiciary, has no business judging whether such beliefs are reasonable, or trying to arbitrate disagreements among religious believers about how to interpret religious scriptures and traditions on such questions. The *Thomas* decision got that much right. But it is quite a different thing to believe that this or that *particular* action makes one complicit with an activity forbidden by one's religion. Here, government surely must judge the reasonableness of the belief, unless it is prepared to countenance objections that might seem frivolous or even absurd.

Imagine that Eddie Thomas had not lost his job in the roll foundry, but instead quit after coming to believe that his role in the production of sheet steel made him complicit in evil, since some of the steel he made might go to the military, just as some tax dollars do. Would the Supreme Court have insisted that Thomas was entitled to draw that line, too? What about the conscientious objector who refuses to pay taxes on the grounds that doing so makes her complicit in evil? Is the belief that paying taxes makes one complicit in war-making a *religious* belief beyond the scrutiny of the Court? If so, should it be accommodated under the terms of either the First Amendment or the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA)? The IRS currently rejects such arguments as frivolous.

The distinction that needs attention is between the sincere religious belief that, for example, war-making and complicity with war-making are evil and the sincere belief that a *particular* action constitutes complicity with war-making. No one would deny that the belief that war-making is evil may be a religious belief. Many Christian traditions take Jesus' injunctions against violence quite literally. It is not the judiciary's job to decide whether their interpretation of the biblical texts is correct. It may also be a religious teaching that *complicity* in war-making is evil, and the judiciary has no business assessing this teaching, either. But the Court cannot consistently avoid judging whether it is reasonable to describe a particular action as constituting complicity without tying our whole legal system in knots.

If Eddie Thomas had quit his job at the roll factory after coming to the conclusion that even just producing sheet steel made him complicit in the evil of war-making, would we call that conclusion a "religious belief"? No doubt we could, and perhaps, in this hypothetical situation, Eddie Thomas would do so himself, following legal advice. But that description would obfuscate the fact that Thomas was making a judgment about a particular action. Assessing the reasonableness of *that* judgment does not require assessing the reasonableness of his religious beliefs about war and complicity with war-making.

The line Thomas did in fact draw between working in the roll foundry and working on tank turrets appears quite reasonable. He was aware that the sheet steel he made in the roll foundry could be used by others to make weapons of war, but he rightly understood that kind of cooperation to be acceptably remote. By contrast, he reasonably understood the making of tank turrets to be proximate to the making of war, since these are a probable instrument of what he believes to be wrong. So the Court *could have* decided in favor of Thomas without treating his judgment that a particular action was contrary to his religious beliefs as itself a religious belief and, therefore, beyond the Court's scrutiny.

Justice Gorsuch's dissents in *Does* and *Dr. A*, as well as his concurring opinion in *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, perpetuate the Court's confusion in *Thomas*. In *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, Gorsuch praises *Thomas* for having "recognized that Mr. Thomas alone was entitled to define the nature of his religious commitments." In *Does*, Gorsuch writes that "receiving the COVID-19 vaccines violates [the health-care workers'] faith because of what they view as an impermissible connection between the vaccines and the cell lines of aborted fetuses." Similarly, in *Dr. A*, the issue, as Gorsuch frames it, is that the health-care workers "cannot receive a COVID-19 vaccine because their religion teaches them to oppose abortion in any form, and because each of the currently available vaccines has depended upon abortion-derived fetal cell lines in its production or testing." Gorsuch goes on to allow that "many other religious believers feel differently about these matters than they do," but to him that is irrelevant. Instead, all that matters is that "no one questions the sincerity of [the health-care workers'] religious beliefs."

All these cases do involve religious beliefs: in *Thomas*, beliefs about war; in *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, about gay marriage; in *Dr. A* and *Does*, about abortion. But it is not a religious belief per se that producing tank turrets makes one complicit in war-making, just as it is not a religious belief per se that baking a cake makes one complicit in same-sex marriage, or that being inoculated with a vaccine tested or developed using a cell line derived from an abor-

It may soon become possible for Americans to disregard many more laws by appealing to their private and essentially uncontestable sense of complicity.

tion makes one complicit in abortion. The question to consider in such cases is *not* whether the judgment is sincerely held, but whether it is reasonable—that is, whether there are good reasons to conclude that the actions in question (making tank turrets, or baking cakes, or getting vaccinated with a particular vaccine) would make a person complicit with the action to which he or she objects on religious grounds.

Consider one more example: *Braidwood Management v. Becerra*, which was recently decided by a U.S. district court in Texas. The owner of Braidwood, a for-profit corporation, objects to having to provide his employees with health insurance that covers pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) drugs, which prevent HIV infection. As the district-court judge writes, the owner of Braidwood believes, first, that "providing coverage of PrEP drugs 'facilitates and encourages homosexual behavior, intravenous drug use, and sexual activity outside of marriage between one man and one woman'" and, second, that "providing coverage of PrEP drugs in Braidwood's self-insured plan would make him complicit in those behaviors" in violation of his religious liberty under the terms of RFRA. The government's lawyers argued that the "claim that PrEP drugs facilitate various kinds of behavior is an empirical one that requires factual support," but the judge, relying on recent Supreme Court precedent, rejected the government's argument on the grounds that it "inappropriately contest[s] the *correctness* of [the owner's] beliefs, when courts may test only the *sincerity* of those beliefs." In other words, the owner of Braidwood didn't need to show that it's reasonable to believe either that providing insurance that covers PrEP facilitates behaviors to which he objects, or that his company's provision of that insurance would make him complicit in those behaviors. Instead, he just needed to state that he sincerely believes these claims to be true. This standard strikes me as absurd and unsustainable. It may be a religious belief that certain sexual behaviors are immoral, and that facilitating those behaviors is immoral. But the belief that providing insurance that covers PrEP facilitates those behaviors cannot be understood as itself a religious belief without opening the door to almost any exemption from law one can imagine. Nor does one need expertise in any particular religious tradition to assess the reasonableness of the Braidwood owner's claim about what constitutes complicity. Logic, prudence, and common sense suffice, and courts generally excel in applying these when they aren't blinded by bad precedent and ideology.

Some may object that what counts as "reasonable" in the application of general religious teachings to particular circumstances is not entirely separable from the tradition to which those teachings belong. Responding to that objection adequately would likely require a book rather than an article. In *Opting Out: Conscience and Cooperation in a Pluralistic Society* (2018), David S. Oderberg argues that the robust teaching on the ethics of cooperation developed within the tradition of Catholic moral theology is "reasonable and plausible *in its own right*, that is to say, independently of any specifically Catholic doctrine." Oderberg doesn't, however, defend that claim at length. For now, the best response to the objection might just be an expression of incredulity: Is there really no way for courts to adjudicate complicity-based conscience claims without appealing to comprehensive doctrines? If so-called public reason is really so out of its depth, then it may soon become possible for Americans to disregard many more laws by appealing to their private and essentially uncontestable sense of complicity.

Zubik v. Burwell, from 2016, takes this possibility all the way to its most absurd conclusion. Like *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* two years prior, *Zubik* was focused on the Affordable Care Act's contraceptive mandate. At stake was whether the accommodations to the Obama administration's contraceptive mandate violated the petitioners' religious liberty by requiring them to inform the federal government, their insurer, or their third-party administrator (TPA) that they were opting out of providing coverage for contraceptives. This requirement, the petitioners argued, would make them complicit in the provision of contraceptive coverage, since the government, their insurer, or their TPA would, upon being so informed, provide the coverage that the petitioners were declining to provide. As Oderberg writes, "If explicitly opting out of some activity ipso facto made a person a cooperator in that activity, then the very idea of opting out would lose all meaning." It is important to note that Oderberg is a defender of religious liberty against what he calls secular authoritarianism. If friends of religious liberty such as Oderberg find the petitioners' argument in *Zubik* absurd, imagine how it will play with people who are already put off by religion on account of its association with reactionary politics. Proponents of religious liberty need to avoid bad arguments, even if those arguments find favor with the current Supreme Court. If *this* is what religious liberty is supposed to require, then all too many Americans would sooner be rid of it.

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From Aggiornamento to Synodality

Bishop John Stowe

Like the council that forms his ecclesiology, Francis seeks a Church that's in service to the world

On the evening of October 11, 1962, the night preceding the opening of the Second Vatican Council, a crowd of mostly young people gathered in Saint Peter's Square, filled with energy, enthusiasm, and expectation for what was about to unfold. John XXIII came to the window from which popes customarily address the crowds at the Sunday Angelus and gave an impromptu *fervorino*, referred to simply as the "moonlight speech." It is probably his best remembered speech and provides an apt characterization of the man known to the world as Good Pope John. Rejoicing at the sight of the crowd and the glow of their candles, Pope John mused that even the moon came out for the event. After a few more words of encouragement, he said:

> When you go home, give your children a hug and tell them it is from the pope. And when you find them with tears to dry, give them a good word. Give anyone who suffers a word of comfort. Tell them, "The pope is with us especially in our times of sadness."

John XXIII called for *aggiornamento* so that the worldwide Church could be refreshed and renewed for its mission in the world. His fifth successor, Pope Francis, is convinced that it was the Holy Spirit's actions that made the council bear fruit, and he is making it clear that the Second Vatican Council has charted the course for the Church that he intends to follow. Like his smiling predecessor, Francis is attuned to the realities of the suffering of the innocent and is painfully aware of how inequality of access to the world's goods and the phenomenal disproportionality in the consumption of those goods contributes to violence, instability, and the threatened future of humanity. It doesn't have to be so, he reminds us again and again, and the remedy is to simply live as sisters and brothers as God's plan has designed. The *aggiornamento* needed for the present moment is to get back on course with the "pilgrim people of God" ecclesiology of the council and to forge even stronger bonds of fraternity—not only with other Christians, but with all of the world's religions, and even those of no faith who would be characterized as people of good will.

Pope Francis celebrates a Mass to open the synod process in St. Peter's Basilica, October 2021.

CNS PHOTO/REMO CASILLI, REUTERS

In the past few months, there have been many assessments of the Bergoglio papacy—some lauding its fruitfulness, others bemoaning the lack thereof. If one's primary concern about the Church today is access to the pre-conciliar liturgy, or pre-conciliar attitudes about ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, or a rigid interpretation of the Church's moral tradition when it comes to sexual ethics but not to social ethics; if one fears a Church in dialogue with the world or fears a hierarchy that listens to its own flock; if one wants to be certain that the sacraments be exclusively offered to the saintly or fears any greater inclusion of laity, especially women, in co-responsible roles in the Church—then the Francis pontificate has been an outright disaster. That is supposedly how a cardinal, once a close collaborator of Francis, described this decade in a posthumously released commentary.

If, however, one has been inspired by the fact that the cardinals selected a Bishop of Rome from the "ends of the world," a pope who chose the name of Francis in remembrance of the saint of the poor, of creation, and of peace; if one is grateful for relief from the imposition of Tridentine rubrics and pre-conciliar liturgical fashion by young clerics; if one is enthusiastic about the reintroduction and reimagination of synodality in the West; if one prefers a pope who washes the feet of women, Muslims, prisoners, and who brings refugees on board papal flights and invites them to live in the Vatican; if one nods in agreement with the idea that the Church is supposed to form consciences and not replace them; and if one rejoices to see accompaniment and discernment as the proper approach to those who lives are not fully reflective of the Church's teachings—then it is hard to consider these ten years as anything but a successful *beginning*.

No pope should be remembered for only one thing, but it seems that recent popes have each introduced a memorable word or phrase into the Catholic lexicon. For John XXIII it was "*aggiornamento*," for Paul VI it was "evangelization." For John Paul II, the word "solidarity" probably takes first place; for Benedict XVI, the "rejection of relativism." For a good while I was convinced that the Francis word would be "periphery." Was anybody talking about the peripheries before 2013? It shouldn't been surprising, coming from the first Latin American pope, who brought with him the legacy of CELAM, the Latin American Bishops' Conference and its aim to create missionary disciples, the same conference that declared a preferential option for the poor and aligned itself with the impoverished masses of the continent after centuries of being part of the privileged elite. The peripheries to which Father Jorge once sent his Jesuit novices have now become a worldwide directive from the center of the Church.

The word "joy" was also a real contender. When had we ever heard so much about the joy of the Gospel? The joy of love, especially married and family love? The joy of the call to holiness? Certainly more far-reaching than any of his encyclicals is the joy that Francis expresses in every encounter with refugees, migrants, the imprisoned, those who dwell in ghettos, the hospitalized, and those in nursing homes. Recently, after seeing so many pictures of the pope in discomfort and awkwardly moving around, I wondered if we would see that smile again. But sure enough, on Holy Thursday at the Marmo Juvenile Detention Center where he washed the feet of inmates, I saw the beaming smile, returned to him by those who experienced that close connection. The "Joy of the Gospel" was the title of

his first apostolic exhortation, and it really did serve as a programmatic essay about the way his papacy would unfold and the direction in which he would lead the Church.

But now my hope and prayer is that "synodality" becomes the lasting Franciscan contribution to our Catholic vocabulary. This pope—a man of deep prayer who is schooled in the Ignatian spiritual tradition of discernment and who bears witness to the freedom of the Holy Spirit—is content to convene the bishops and the whole People of God to learn again to "walk together," which he reminds us is the foundational meaning of "synod." It is also a phrase used by John XXIII in that moonlight speech: "*tutti insieme in fraternità,*" everyone together in fraternity towards peace. Pope Francis is also reformulating the use of synods so that they are not only periodic events for convening bishops in affective collegiality, but also the new way of being the Church at every level. If this attempt is successful, its impact will be comparable to that of the Second Vatican Council, opened by another pope who was seen to be nearing the end of his days.

Francis builds on the legacy of the Second Vatican Council's restoration of the Synod of Bishops as a permanent reality in the Church. *Lumen gentium* provided a renewed look at the traditional ministry of the bishop; the council restored the office of diocesan bishop as being much more than a "branch officer" for the corporate offices in Rome. The council also discussed the collegiality necessary among all bishops who share responsibility for the universal Church with and under Peter. Still, there was no intermediary structure between the local bishop and pope, except for the national and regional conferences of bishops, which are more about fraternal collegiality than effective governance. The Synod of Bishops would be convened by the pope, discuss pertinent issues at the pope's request, and provide a global perspective to the pope.

Pope Francis himself, as a bishop, did not appreciate synods that seemed to merely rubber-stamp decisions and directives made elsewhere, mainly by the Roman Curia. He lamented his own experience of bishops who shared opinions and critiques outside the synod hall, but who had been much more reserved about doing so in the Holy Father's presence. At his first synod as Bishop of Rome, the extraordinary Synod on the Family, Francis instructed the participating bishops to speak boldly and listen charitably. It seems that some were better at implementing the first half of the directive. Another of the frequently repeated words in the Francis lexicon is *parrhesia*, or boldness, which he insists is necessary in the synodal process if real discernment, listening, and dialogue are to take place. The Acts of the Apostles describes such *parrhesia*. But in the synodal setting, time for silence, prayer, processing, and discernment is just as important.

The recent diocesan phase of the universal Synod on Synodality was meant to be an exercise in teaching this method to the whole Church. Indeed it was a start, but there is a long way to go. Francis has clarified that synods are not to function in parliamentary fashion: there are no parties and it is not simply a matter of winning the majority to one's side of an argument. Real synodality should not have winners and losers; if people are not open to a change of heart through dialogue, they have yet to learn the synodal method. Francis is not at all afraid of learning from failures and trying repeatedly to get it right. Many across the ideological spectrum would consider the Amazon Synod to have been a failure—some because it did not result in the ordination of married deacons to the priesthood or women to the diaconate, others because of their horror that such issues even came to the floor. In his discernment, Pope Francis said that it was not the moment to act on such proposals, because all the participants came with their preconceived views on the topics and no one was open to change.

In considering the implementation of the Synod on Synodality in the United States up until now, we can see both an initial grasp of the concept of synodality along with an enthusiasm for the process of listening and consultation—but also a well-founded wariness about whether anything will come of it. (I am referring here to the laity primarily.) There are also critiques of the process, suspicions of its agenda, and attempts to discredit it. Reception by the bishops in the United States can be characterized as lukewarm at best. There are places in the country where the synod has been embraced and eagerly implemented, and places where there has been little to no engagement with the process.

My perspective is shaped by having been the bishop from my region (the ecclesiastical provinces of Louisville, Mobile, and New Orleans) who coordinated our regional synthesis and was part of the USCCB team that coordinated the national synthesis. I also participated in the drafting of the continental synthesis. While every diocese in my region did something, some were content to merely offer an online survey. An online survey can be a helpful tool, especially when there was a desire to include the disaffected and alienated who would probably not be inclined to come to a church gathering for the purpose. But an online tool alone can hardly be an expression of the "walking together" that the synod is supposed to be about.

The dominant cultural pragmatism in North America was evident in the desire to know "where this is going." Bishops frequently stated that they do not know how to lead a process when the desired outcome of that process is unclear. I think the pope's response to that complaint would be that the bishops are not meant to lead the process, but to facilitate the Holy Spirit's guidance. It is easy to see why the national "Eucharistic Revival" has received far more energy, attention, and resources in the U.S. Church: there is a plan, there is marketing, there is a beginning and end point, there is substantial funding, and there is a problem to be addressed, namely the concern that Catholics do not believe sufficiently in the Real Presence. Instead of ensuring a eucharistic centrality to the synodal process, allowing for an organic discernment about our eucharistic understanding, plans for a mega-event featuring plenty of pre-conciliar piety and theology have replaced the focus on the Synod for a Synodal Church in the USCCB. It does not strike me as coincidental that much of the Eucharistic Revival focuses on eucharistic adoration, passive in nature, and so offers an easy alternative to the active engagement of walking together synodally.

Several places in the United States could not resist creating a local action plan for their synod, even though this is clearly not the stage of the synod for that. Sometimes that push for a plan was about making sure that the insights gleaned from the People of God in dialogue would not be lost; I think that concern is valid, but also comes from thinking that the synod is an event rather than the way of being Church.

The first phase of the Synod, from October 2021 until April 2022, was to be the phase for listening and discernment in local churches, dioceses, and bishops' conferences. The *National Synthesis of the People of God in the United States of America* for the diocesan phase of the synod emphasizes the joy with which participants were engaged and the positive feelings that came from the listening sessions. The structure and facilitation of such sessions varied greatly. This was not seen as problematic by the Office of the Synod in Rome because the Church is diverse, and this phase was not meant to be a one-time opportunity to get it right, but rather a part of an evolving process. The number of people who expressed gratitude for being listened to and being able to express themselves was impressive, even if some of those who wish to discount the process prefer to emphasize the miniscule percentage of all Catholics who actually participated in a formal session. My own experience of sensing a palpable love for the Church, even when members have been frustrated, hurt, and are worried about its future, was echoed throughout the country and around the globe. The enduring wounds of the sexual-abuse and mismanagement crises were prominent in discussions; related issues, like the concentration of power among clerics, the loss of respect and trust in the hierarchy, and the fear about the faith not being received by the next generation, also came up frequently—as did concerns about the roles of women and LGBTQ people in the Church. There was a great desire expressed to become a more welcoming Church and to offer accompaniment to people at every stage of faith development.

It seems that those who were engaged in synodal processes throughout the country have come to appreciate the language and spirit of Pope Francis and really are learning the art of discernment. It should be noted that many groups conducted synodal listening sessions outside of diocesan or parish structures and sent their syntheses directly to the Synod Office in Rome or to the USCCB, sometimes expressing dissatisfaction with the local process. Even so, the concerns that came up frequently throughout the United States also surfaced in many other parts of the world. If Pope Francis was hopeful that the Spirit would provide the issues to be discerned, the Spirit is speaking.

When all these national syntheses were received in Rome, a working document was created. The title given by the Office of the Synod in Rome to the working document for the Continental Stage includes these words from Isaiah 54:2: "Enlarge the space of your tent." This reflects a desire for a less self-enclosed and more welcoming Church. The continental document describes a kind of wrestling with the concept of synodality and a real desire for a more missionary Church, even if we are unsure about how to get there.

Like John XXIII, Francis is aware of how inequality of access to the world's goods contributes to violence, instability, and the threatened future of humanity.

The working document for the continental phase was then sent back to the dioceses for further discussion, careful reading, reflection, and discernment in dialogue. All were asked to describe what in the document resonated with their experience and what would be most impactful in their local church. These discussions were to be in preparation for a continental synodal assembly, which happened on every continent—*except* North America. For the purposes of this phase of the synod, Mexico was included with Latin America (South and Central) because of linguistic, cultural, and historical ties. North America—that is, the United States and Canada—conducted several sessions by Zoom with the bishops and two delegates selected by each diocesan bishop. There were sessions available in English, Spanish, and French. Asia, Europe, and Africa, with their vast geographies and cultural diversity, were able to conduct continental assemblies. Even the Middle East created such an assembly. North America did not, citing economic and practical difficulties in coming together.

With a narrower selection of delegates in this phase, there were some notable differences from the broad content of the diocesan listening sessions. Concerns about the direction of the synod were more pronounced. Many raised questions about whether the synod was trying to change doctrine and voiced opposition to that possibility. Calls for greater precision in what inclusivity might mean and who it might involve were more common, and discussions of liturgical tensions, the loss of the Latin Mass, and confusion over the process were more vocal at this stage. The USCCB synod staff noted the low participation of priests in the synod process and asked each bishop to nominate one older and one more recently ordained priest to a special clerical session, also conducted by Zoom. The concerns I just mentioned dominated that session even more, but it was deemed unofficial and similar to a special session created for ecumenical

leaders (which I personally found very illuminating). It did not factor into the continental synthesis that was submitted to Rome and awaits publication.

Another aspect of synodality that I do not believe gets sufficient attention is the ecumenical incentive, especially concerning relations with the East. In 2008, well before the election of Pope Francis, his good friend, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the first Patriarch of Constantinople to attend a papal installation, spoke to the Synod of Bishops precisely on the issue of synodality. His speech was, in his own words, in response to St. John Paul II's 1995 encyclical *Ut Unum Sint,* in which he basically asks the larger Christian community for ways to reimagine the Petrine ministry in a Church healed of schism. Bartholomew suggested that for the Eastern and Western Churches to heal their millennium of division, it would be essential that the Petrine ministry be balanced by a rediscovery of synodality in the West:

> It is well known that the Orthodox Church attaches to the synodical system fundamental ecclesiological importance. Together with primacy, synodality constitutes the backbone of the Church's government and organization.... This interdependence between synodality and primacy runs through all levels of the Church's life: local, regional and universal. (Synodus Episcoporum Bolletino, 30)

Apparently, Pope Francis is interested in the Patriarch's suggestion. In a 2015 address marking the fiftieth anniversary of the re-establishment of the Synod, Pope Francis reminded us that the only authority in the Church is the authority of service. The pope, he said, is not above the Church, he is a member of the Church, a baptized person among the baptized and a bishop among the bishops; as successor of Peter he presides in love over the whole Church. He also made clear that the "Synod is with Peter and under Peter, not to dictate but to guarantee unity." This sounds like balancing synodality and primacy.

Striving to make the Church walk together on a path of renewal is a big enough challenge for anyone. Francis has certainly worked to fulfill the mandate of the cardinals who elected him to reform the Roman Curia. In keeping with principles he enunciated from the beginning of his papacy, he has created the structure for a Curia in service of the local churches and focused on mission over maintenance. The document reforming the Curia is called *Praedicate evangelium* (Preach the Gospel) and the Dicastery for Evangelization has the highest ranking in the new organization. Laypeople, including women, can hold positions of leadership. But like his predecessor John XXIII, who sixty years ago addressed an encyclical, *Pacem in terris,* to the whole world, inviting everyone to work together for peace, Francis sees the Church's mission as much more external than internal. He wants the Church to lead the whole world in recognizing that we are all part of God's family and have to live as sisters and brothers with all people and with all creation.

This first Jesuit pope has shown the world that his selection of the name Francis was more than symbolic. While he most certainly brings his Ignatian spirituality and charism for discernment to his exercise of the Petrine Office, he also embodies the spirit of the poor man of Assisi for the twenty-first century. Mission, for St. Francis and for Pope Francis, begins with an encounter with the all-merciful God, which sparks an overflowing joy that one is compelled to share. That is mission. When Pope Francis challenged the Church early in his pontificate to stop looking like Lent without Easter and to stop finger wagging and condemning as a way to spread the Gospel, he was drawing from his namesake. Like his patron saint, the pope has preached and worked for peace throughout his pontificate and has acknowledged the ongoing violence that many fail to see. He speaks about the Third World War being fought piecemeal and he has not shied away from war zones in order to personally bring a message of peace.

Francis is in line with all of his recent predecessors as a force for peace among nations and eager to serve in mediation. Yet even here, there is a particular style, an imitation of Jesus and a *vicinanza*, a nearness, like the words of Pope John in that moonlight speech. Francis traveled to war-torn Iraq, the first pope to do so. He met with Indigenous leaders in Canada who had been harmed by the Church's ministers and traveled to Congo and to South Sudan as a messenger of peace and to demonstrate his solidarity with those who have suffered the ravages of war. We have witnessed his tireless preoccupation with the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Trying to walk the diplomatic tightrope so that he might be able to serve as a negotiator for peace did not win him much support. But he did not deny that Russia is the aggressor and even jeopardized advances in ecumenism with the Russian Orthodox with his harsh words about Patriarch Kirill's support of Putin's war. Every Sunday he reminds the pilgrims in Saint Peter's Square to pray for "martyred Ukraine." He also prays for Russians, many of whom have a distorted view of the war through no fault of their own and many who favor peaceful coexistence with Ukraine. Both sides are necessary to bring about peace.

It was on the Vigil of the Feast of Saint Francis in 2021 that Pope Francis signed his encyclical *Fratelli tutti (Brothers and Sisters All*) at the tomb of the famous peacemaker whose writings gave rise to the name of the document. With this encyclical and the earlier *Laudato si'* (2015), the pope has given the global Church a healthy dose of Franciscan spirituality: he highlights the interrelatedness of all creation and the need to live as brothers and sisters, in fraternity with all humanity and indeed all of creation. In *Fratelli tutti*, written in the midst of the global pandemic, he laments how humanity failed to come together to address this common threat, and he urges humanity to start building the friendships and relationships that will be necessary to avoid resorting to war and violence and to work together to address the accelerating climate catastrophe. Just as the human family and all creation are interrelated, so are all the issues that threaten human existence, human dignity, and human life today. Climate

change disproportionately affects the poorer countries of the world that consume less of the fossil fuels that have caused the warming. The loss of islands, the destruction of land and biodiversity, and the unusual and brutal weather patterns all lead to greater migration, even as the wealthier nations close their doors to the suffering migrants trying to preserve their lives. All of this is a form of violence.

Why should the pope be the only one who sees the unsustainability of the present situation? Are we so unaccustomed to having prophets arise from within the Church's hierarchy? Are human beings today so suspicious of any kind of organization that the common good becomes unthinkable? What will it take for all the leaders of the Church and of other world religions to speak as forcefully about the need for structural change and allow human values to supersede economic values for the common good and common survival of all?

To consider the common good, without rooting the common good in one's own personal needs or advantage, requires the chief theological virtue of charity. We rarely consider charity as a political solution; rather, what the government is unable or unwilling to do for the disadvantaged is often left to private or institutional "charity." In *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis invokes the classical meaning of disinterested love and suggests that charity unites the abstract and the institutional; it moves from the theoretical good to the desire to help that results from a direct encounter with a person in need. But as even the case of the Good Samaritan reveals, there is always a need for a structure or institution, like the inn, to provide the help an individual is unable to offer. The pope reminds us of the ancient yet ever-present reality of concupiscence, a proclivity to selfishness and narrow interests, that always has to be confronted and overcome through fraternity. Any perfect world order in theory will need to recognize the reality of human weakness; systems cannot just be put in place, nor can we think our way through every problem with a technological or market-based solution.

Following a creative exegesis of the Good Samaritan parable, Pope Francis offers a reflection on a more open world in contrast to the closed world described in the encyclical's beginning. The more open world is based on human relationships that, like the Good Samaritan, transcend national and ethnic boundaries. He decries the results of the breakdown of such transcendent relationships: racism, which never goes away but periodically retreats; anti-immigrant sentiment; and lack of attention to the "hidden exiles" in our midst, like the disabled or abandoned elderly. The common good requires a recognition of the great worth of each person. Solidarity is born of conversion and is more than sporadic generosity. Francis re-introduces the concept of gratuitousness (not being useful to the market), a concept that removes relationships and even politics from the realm of the utilitarian to one more responsive to the God who allows the sun to shine and the rain to fall on the good and the bad alike. Not everything has to be limited to political favors and even exchanges; in fact, the common good requires a certain gratuitousness, which is quite different from the "pay to play" system at work in our country that excludes so many.

Many raised questions about whether the synod was trying to change doctrine and voiced opposition to that possibility.

"Dialogue and friendship" are introduced as a part of the path to a more fraternal world. Pope Francis describes dialogue as "approaching, speaking, looking at, listening, coming to know, understanding, and finding common ground" (FT 198). Dialogue is not the exchange of opinions, but rather a desire to come together. Selfish indifference or violent protest can undermine or end dialogue. Dialogue requires clear thinking, rational argument, a variety of perspectives, and the contribution of different fields of knowledge and points of view. It does not result in relativism but is rather a search for truth. Respect for the dignity of the other and the recognition that persons are more valuable than material things or ideas are necessary for a dialogue that contributes to the common good.

Pope Francis, in the spirit of St. John XXIII, has been opening the windows of the Church to allow a fresh breeze in. And as with John XXIII, there has been considerable resistance to what he is imagining, with the opposition to it far more blatant than it was for his predecessor. Francis, like the council that forms his ecclesiology, is interested in a Church in service to the world, filling that world with the Gospel in deed as much as in word. The recent announcement that lay delegates, including women, will be voting members of the synod, demonstrates the pope's willingness to make the synod more representative and responsive to the whole Church. The embrace of synodality has the potential to revive and enliven the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This Church will strive to lead humanity to greater fraternity and unity—for our survival, and hopefully for our flourishing.

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A Connoisseur of Uncertainty

Jackson Lears

For John Maynard Keynes, economics was as much about 'animal spirits' as it was about statistics.

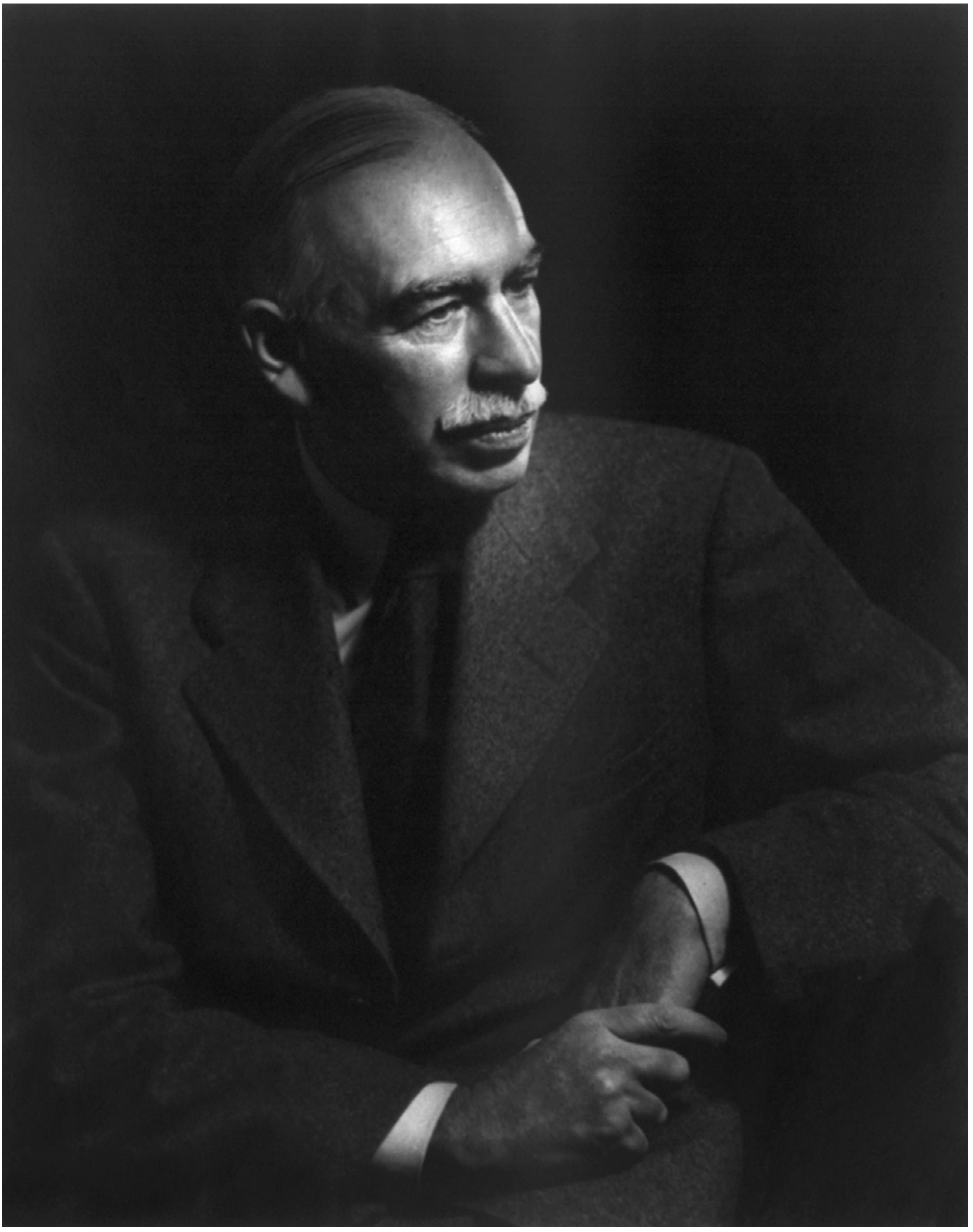
In the early twentieth century, psychologists began exploring a new frontier—a science of subjective experience that would link body and mind in systematic ways. Advocates of this emerging science, whatever theory they espoused, strained for complete illumination of hidden depths. The ambition itself was not novel: mystics in many traditions had sought union with the deity in contemplative practice; Calvinists and Pietists had encouraged constant scrutiny of the soul for evidence of salvation or damnation. What was new in the early twentieth century was the belief that emotional depths could be measured or at least described with scientific precision. The project animated professional strategies for the systematic understanding of mental life and its connections with physical life. Everyone agreed that mind and body were linked; the question was how. Did mind influence body, or the other way around? Or did the two realms interact in subtler ways?

Psychologists posed rivalrous answers to those questions as they struggled to create legitimacy for their infant discipline. Psychotherapists sought insight through narratives, which became case histories. For therapists who were psychoanalytically inclined (as increasing numbers were), the task was to chart the workings of the "great unconscious force that exists within every person," as Anne Harrington writes, the force that George Groddeck called the It and that Freud rechristened the Id.

The other main branch of psychology was based in the laboratory and made more conventional claims to scientific certainty. Like psychoanalysts, experimental psychologists aimed to provide precise information about subjective experience. Unlike psychoanalysts, they tended to define subjectivity as a mere expression of objectively measurable bodily processes. At their most dogmatic, in the behaviorist formulations of John B. Watson, they came close to denying independent subjectivity altogether, reducing consciousness to an assemblage of reflexes.

The problem for both branches of psychology was a reductionist impulse to turn amorphous psychic energy into rigid categories and spurious certainties. When complex currents of mental and emotional life were channeled into a system, the resulting synthesis left little room for spontaneity, fluidity, or uncertainty. The older vernacular language of "animal spirits" and the larger tradition of vitalism created a more capacious intellectual space, where thinkers could speculate more creatively about the relationships between subjective experience and everyday life—including economic life. Few were more venturesome than John Maynard Keynes.

Keynes was born in 1883, to a comfortable upper-middle-class household in Cambridge, the son of an anxious university administrator who was more ambitious for his children than for himself, and a Nonconformist preacher's daughter with Liberal political inclinations. From about the time he was in short pants, young Maynard was being groomed for one examina-



EVERETT COLLECTION HISTORICAL/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

John Maynard Keynes, circa 1940

tion or another, and to his parents' relief and delight won a scholarship to Eton. Keynes was housed with other "scholarship boys," and spared confrontation with the anti-intellectual aristocratic ethos that dominated much of the school population; his parents valued intellectual pursuits and he could freely indulge his own proclivities for them.

Numbers played a crucial contrapuntal role in Keynes's intellectual development. As an adolescent, he "had a passion for exact information, particularly when expressed in numerical form," his biographer Robert Skidelsky writes. This was what one would expect of a clever boy from a liberal household, raised with the conventional Victorian faith in quantifiable knowledge as a utilitarian instrument of progress. But as a Cambridge Apostle—confidant of Bertrand Russell, Lytton Strachey, and other luminaries—he came under the spell of the philosopher G. E. Moore, who inspired his young followers to spurn mundane utility in favor of more exalted notions of the good: the love of friends, the contemplation of beautiful objects, the pursuit of knowledge. Numbers continued to fascinate Keynes, and he manipulated them skillfully. But gradually he came to recognize their limits as a pathway to truth.

Upon graduation Keynes aced another examination and took a position in the India Office of the Treasury Department, which he soon left to return to Cambridge as a lecturer in economics. He championed better statistics and secured the appointment of a statistician to the department, but he also came to doubt the excessive claims statisticians made for quantitative knowledge. Too often, he thought, they slid unwittingly from precise description to sweeping interpretation. Numbers were essential to knowledge, but when they acquired a fetish-like quality they led to intellectual laziness—creating an aura of precision around unwarranted claims, fostering fantasies of control over the future.

Early on, Keynes realized that statistics were strictly limited as a tool of prediction. He saw that relationships between variables in the present—interest rates, unemployment, copper prices—however precisely quantified, could not be used to predict those same relationships in the future. This recognition would be the basis, later in the century, for Keynes's skepticism toward the budding discipline of econometrics.

The heart of the matter was uncertainty, which in economic life (as in all life) was pervasive and inescapable. So the young Keynes came to believe. Even before the Great War had shattered the foundations of Victorian certitude, he questioned the implicitly positivist pillars of economic wisdom—especially the role that rational calculation was alleged to play in financial markets. "I lie in bed for hours in the morning reading treatises on the philosophy of probability by members of the Stock Exchange," he wrote to his father in 1908. "The soundest treatment so far is by the owner of a bucket shop." Keynes's bemusement was palpable: a bucket shop was a seedy backstreet operation where the desperate or the gullible could borrow dangerously large sums to gamble on share prices.

Modernist artists and writers, including Keynes's friend Virginia Woolf, were connoisseurs of uncertainty. But Keynes was the only one brave enough—or daft enough—to carry that connoisseurship into economic thought. By 1910, he was already bringing his awareness of uncertainty to bear on his view of investors' motives—to formulate the foundation of his insight into the centrality of animal spirits. The assumption that investors behaved like calculating "economic men" required overlooking the true nature of financial markets: what really made them hum was investors' willingness to make bets on a largely unknown future. As Keynes wrote, the investor "will be affected, as is obvious, not by the net income which he will actually receive from his investments in the long run, but by his expectations. These will often depend upon fashion, upon advertisement, or upon purely irrational waves of optimism or depression." Decisions were rooted in subjective experience, not objective data; to pretend otherwise was to try quixotically to calculate the incalculable.

The implications of this observation are vast. It contains the germ of Keynes's General Theory, of his critique of classical economics, and indeed of his larger contribution to twentieth-century social thought. Economics was not a science depending on precise data, advancing through falsifiable hypotheses, and creating enduring laws; it was more like politics—"a flexible field of custom, rule of thumb, and adjustment," as Zachary Carter writes. Had politicians and economists themselves realized this, Keynes's impact on policy might have been greater and longer-lasting than it was.

Throughout his early career, Keynes inhabited a rarefied social world where young people—especially but not exclusively young men—were free to seek the ends elevated by Moore: love, art, knowledge. Among the Apostles, love meant the "Higher Sodomy." Keynes pursued an active gay life for twenty years, in London and Cambridge, including a years-long affair with the painter Duncan Grant. Keynes, Grant, Strachey, and other Apostles migrated to Bloomsbury after graduation, where the Higher Sodomy competed and sometimes combined with heterosexual high jinks. The Bloomsbury set created an atmosphere of self-congratulation that could verge on self-parody, but also a community that sheltered the likes of Keynes, Strachey, and Virginia Woolf. For Keynes as well as others among a literate and prosperous minority, the prelude to the Great War was a golden moment. The war and especially its aftermath would darken and deepen his social vision.

He witnessed world events from an office in the Treasury. As a rising star in the economics profession, he had been an obvious early hire as a junior adviser. His first book, *Indian Currency and Finance* (1913), along with his articulate participation in government inquiries, had earned him a growing reputation. He was even called in to give expert advice to Prime Minister Lloyd George during the banking crisis at the beginning of August 1914, between the assassination at Sarajevo and the outbreak of hostilities.

Keynes was as indifferent to the war as the rest of Bloomsbury until November 1914, when a chatty letter he had written to a Cambridge friend in France came back with the word "Killed" scrawled across the envelope. In the months and years ahead, Keynes's outlook would become more attuned to chance and uncertainty, to the role of mere caprice in human affairs. He began by thinking the war a gigantic blunder, rather than a noble necessity, and gradually his views sharpened to an openly pacifist opposition. His friends in Cambridge and Bloomsbury were ferocious opponents of the war and conscription; and he did what he could from his Treasury post to push the legislation authorizing a draft in flexible and humane directions. He eventually received an exemption for doing work of "national importance," but he applied for conscientious-objector status as a matter of principle. The principle was apparently all that mattered, as he never attended the hearing called to consider his application.

When the Armistice finally came and the carnage ended, Keynes felt a surge of relief and hope. While the bodies had been piling up he had become increasingly depressed, skeptical, and pacifistic, but Woodrow Wilson's vision of a postwar world stirred the liberal idealist in him. When the Peace Conference convened in 1919, the Treasury dispatched him as part of a deputation representing British interests. Keynes had an opportunity to observe the proceedings firsthand. The result was his most impassioned book.

The Economic Consequences of the Peace (1919) forcefully demonstrated the devastating impact of a punitive peace settlement on Germany and its allies. Expropriation of the defeated nations' assets, steep reparation payments for damages inflicted on the victors—all the treaty provisions were calculated to keep the Central Powers on their knees and unable to function as modern industrial societies. Keynes was appalled by Georges Clemenceau's vindictiveness, Wilson's ineffectual moralism, Lloyd George's chameleon-like manipulations. He drew portraits in acid of them all.

With equal precision he evoked the devastation wrought by the war in Central and Eastern Europe—and predicted the catastrophic consequences if no relief were provided to the suffering populations. "The danger confronting us," Keynes wrote, is:

> the rapid depression of the standard of life of the European populations to a point which will mean actual starvation for some (a point already reached in Russia and approximately reached in Austria). Men will not always die quietly. For starvation, which brings to some lethargy and a helpless despair, drives other temperaments to the nervous instability of hysteria and to a mad despair.

In recognizing that "nervous instability" could animate lethargy into hysteria and helpless despair into mad despair, Keynes acknowledged the darker underside of animal spirits—"the spontaneous impulse toward action" could even be bred by starvation, and could lead to unlovely consequences.

Monetary instability, he believed, would further exacerbate mass hysteria. "Lenin was certainly right. There is no subtler, no surer way of overturning the existing basis of society than to debauch the currency," Keynes claimed, anticipating the financial disorder of the Weimar Republic:

> As the inflation proceeds and the real value of the currency fluctuates wildly from month to month, all permanent relations between debtors and creditors, which form the ultimate foundation of capitalism, become so utterly disordered as to be almost meaningless, and the process of wealth getting degenerates into a gamble and a lottery.

As a connoisseur of uncertainty, Keynes was a bit of a gambler himself, but he knew no organized society could long survive the constant "arbitrary rearrangement of riches" created by runaway inflation. Baffled and angry, ordinary citizens continue to believe in the value of their own currency long after it has depreciated. "To their minds it appears that value is inherent in money as such," Keynes observed. But he had come to understand that money's value resided in the labyrinth of the human imagination.

Ultimately the consequences of the treaty were about far more than monetary instability. The greatest dangers it posed lay in the human suffering it would cause, and the torrents of rage that suffering would unleash. Keynes put it succinctly: "If we aim deliberately at the impoverishment of Central Europe, vengeance, I dare predict, will not limp." In Russia, Hungary, and Austria, "the miseries of life and the disintegration of society are too notorious to require analysis, and these countries are already experiencing the actuality of what, for the rest of Europe, is still in the realm of prediction," Keynes wrote: "they are the signal to us of how in the final catastrophe the malady of the body passes over into malady of the mind." Deprivation fostered derangement; whatever animal spirits remained available to desperate, starving people could be harnessed to destructive ends.

> Physical efficiency and resistance to disease slowly diminish, but life proceeds somehow, until the limit of human endurance is reached at last and counsels of despair and madness stir the sufferers from the lethargy which precedes the crisis. The man shakes himself, and the bonds of custom are loosed. The power of ideas is sovereign, and he listens to whatever instruction of hope, illusion, or revenge is carried to him on the air.

Keynes's prophecies were soon borne out. Across the ravaged postwar landscape of Central Europe, the air was full of voices murmuring vague ideas of vengeance.

Britain's economy lurched about uncertainly after the war, and Keynes was called in frequently to minister to the nation's needs—though ultimately the men in charge never followed his advice. Still, the postwar decade was a crucial moment in Keynes's intellectual and emotional development. Throughout the 1920s, his skepticism toward statistics as a source of truth intensified. So did his appreciation for animal spirits, in economics and in everyday life.

By 1920, Keynes was a rich man, partly from the sales of *Economic Consequences of the Peace* and partly from successful investing in stocks. He acknowledged the "fun and mild excitement" to be had from either playing the ponies at the track or betting on stock prices, both of which he compared with the consumption of alcohol. All were pleasant pastimes that only occasionally led to ruinous outcomes. "It is agreeable to be habitually in the state of imagining all sorts of things are possible," he said. This sanguine point of view was underwritten by his new wealth and celebrity, which allowed him to take up foxhunting with the "kid gloves and tiara set"—a sport that lured him into awkward adventures as his horse wandered off from the pack.

After *Economic Consequences*, he turned to the completion of *A Treatise on Probability*, a book he had been writing and rewriting for over a decade. It was an argument against the reigning view that probability was an objective fact in the world, which could be statistically calculated with reference to frequency of occurrence: if one smoker in ten dies of cancer, according to this view, the probability of smoking causing cancer is 10 percent. But to identify probability with frequency, Keynes wrote, "excludes a great number of judgements which are generally believed to deal with probability." Probability judgments may depend in part on statistical data, but they are not reducible to the data—in fact they might have nothing to do with data at all.

Comparative judgments of probability are not numerical, Keynes observed; they are approximations, not precise calculations. And sometimes they are arbitrary. Consider the question of whether it is more or less likely to rain. There are times, he wrote, when "it will be an arbitrary matter to decide for or against the umbrella. If the barometer is high, but the clouds are black, it is not always rational that one should prevail over the other in our minds, or even that we should balance them—though it will be rational to allow caprice to determine us and to waste no time on the debate." Few devotees of reason were as willing as Keynes to grant so much space to caprice, even in trivial matters.

Keynes was groping toward his own version of a distinction between risk and uncertainty—one the Chicago economist Franklin Knight was already making in *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (1921) when he wrote: "A measurable uncertainty, or 'risk' proper…is [so] far different from an unmeasurable one that it is not in effect an uncertainty at all." But Keynes was more doubtful than Knight that the probability of most events could ever be precisely measured.

Instead of a description of events in the world, Keynes argued, probability was a belief about those events, based on logical inference. This was a subjective process, but one that all rational beings shared. To make rational choices under conditions of uncertainty, one had to take into account what Keynes called "the weight of argument"—the amount and relevancy of evidence that an event is likely to occur—and the "moral risk"—the phrase that summarized his preference for choosing a smaller good with a higher possibility of attainment over a greater good with a lower possibility. The principle of moral risk underlay his choice of gradualist reform over socialist revolution. More broadly, the *Treatise* suggested the future direction of his economic thought—away from statistically based prediction and the spurious reduction of uncertainty to certainty, toward arguments that depended on persuasion rather than proof.

While Keynes's professional life prospered, his personal life swerved in a new direction. In December 1921, Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes came to London, and Keynes saw an accomplished Russian ballerina called Lydia Lopokova dance a dual role as Aurora and the Lilac Fairy in Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty*. She was already a celebrity; the London papers waxed rhapsodic over her "exquisite plebeian beauty," and "Lydia dolls" were flying off the shelves. Keynes found her performances hypnotic; he returned night after night, embracing the unfamiliar role of stage-door Johnnie. She was stirred by his cornucopian intelligence; he by her energy, vivacity, and talent. She invited him to tea on December 26; they were both already smitten.

By April, they were exchanging erotic notes. Hers were in the idiom Keynes and his friends later fondly dubbed Lydiaspeak: "I gobble you my dear Maynard"—"I place melodious strokes all over you"—"With caresses large as sea I stretch out to you." Keynes reciprocated: "I want to be…gobbled abundantly," he wrote. They kept this up well after they were married in 1925, though Keynes sometimes resorted to scholarly indirection. Researching Babylonian coins in 1926, he wrote to Lydia that he had found the earliest recorded "love poem"—"Come to me my Ishtavar and show your virile strength / Push out your member and touch with it my little place." Keynes's growing awareness of animal spirits in the 1920s was as much a matter of physical and emotional as of intellectual experience. Sex was at the heart of it.

Lydia was Maynard's first and only female lover. After twenty years in enthusiastic pursuit of gay sex, Keynes's heterosexual turn shocked his Bloomsbury friends, who gradually came to appreciate Lydia but for a long time viewed her with dismissive bemusement. Lydia did not cultivate the exquisite self-consciousness of the hyper-civilized Bloomsbury set—indeed, that lack of self-consciousness was one source of her charm: Lydia and Duncan Grant, Keynes's other great love, were both "uneducated; their reactions were spontaneous, fresh, unexpected," as Skidelsky remarks, noting that despite Keynes's devotion to reasonableness, his "fancy could leap and soar over all rational obstacles. He was a gambler, and Lydia was his greatest gamble." It paid off. Keynes was already in high gear intellectually, but after taking up with Lydia, his engagement with public affairs was relieved at least occasionally by the peace and contentment he craved.

The British government continued to invite his advice, and Keynes continued to supply fresh ideas, which had little or no effect on policy. In his *Tract on Monetary Reform* (1924), he argued that the government had a responsibility to protect the population from

the worst lurches of the business cycle—to stabilize prices rather than letting inflation or deflation burn itself out. Classical economists' resort to "the long run" was misplaced; we live our lives in the short run; while "in the long run, we are all dead." It was his most famous utterance, and it perfectly captured his preoccupation with lived experience over theoretical formula. He would find occasion to return to it.

Meanwhile, Europe seemed to be falling apart. The young Weimar Republic was in a state of constant upheaval. In January 1923, when Germany failed to meet a reparations payment to France, the French army occupied the Ruhr Valley, home to much of German industry. The Versailles order crumbled, only to be restored by the American intervention of the Dawes Plan, a weaker version of what Keynes had suggested at the Peace Conference. The French withdrew in 1925.

Amid the intermittent chaos, Keynes began to write the lecture that would become *The End of Laissez-Faire*. Like almost everything else Keynes wrote in the 1920s, this pamphlet signaled an important new direction in his thought, as he urged that economists acknowledge the primacy of ethical concerns over technical economic efficiency. The mature Keynesian vision was coming into focus.

By the mid-1920s, Britain's stagnant economy was poised on the brink of prolonged depression. Winston Churchill's decision to stick to the gold standard at an overvalued exchange rate tipped it over the edge. Keynes was appalled by any contraction of the money supply in a depressed economy. "The proper object of dear money is to check an incipient boom," he wrote. "Woe to those whose faith leads them to use it to aggravate a depression!" Dear money was exacerbated by falling incomes. An overvalued pound sterling meant that British mine owners had to sell their coal abroad at reduced prices in order to compete in the world market; to make up the difference, mine owners imposed steep wage cuts. The miners struck to protect their wages, and soon the General Strike followed.

Amid spreading class war, Keynes wrote *Can Lloyd George Do It?* This proposed a preview of what Franklin Roosevelt would try during the New Deal—an ambitious public-works program to counteract the looming depression, to combat collective gloom and to banish visions of a bleak, limited future. "There is no reason why we should not feel ourselves free to be bold, to be open, to experiment, to take action, to try the possibilities of things," Keynes wrote—the only obstacle was "a few old gentlemen in their frock coats, who need only to be treated with a little friendly disrespect and bowled over like ninepins." All of this was a valiant effort to rally the population. But the public was already convinced that laissez-faire was dead; class conflict was regnant. And Britain was not the United States, where a raging bull market provided a textbook example of animal spirits on the loose—and of the futility of attempting to quantify them.

But by Labor Day 1929, signs of a market slowdown on Wall Street were unmistakable. Throughout the early fall, fitful sell-offs would course through the market, until they were stopped by a wave of buying. But the general tendency was down, and on Friday, October 24, the market opened with a broad sell-off that simply would not stop. After a noon meeting with other New York bankers, Thomas Lamont of J. P. Morgan admitted there was "a little distress" that morning on the floor of the exchange. After lunch, the bankers launched a classic rescue operation, much like the one J. P. Morgan had staged in 1907. As they bought millions of dollars' worth of shares, fear on the floor vanished. Prices boomed upward. Black Friday ended happily. But the following Tuesday, October 29, did not have so cheerful a denouement. That Black Tuesday marked the end of organized support by the bankers. Panic selling began at the bell and persisted all day. Outside the exchange a crowd gathered, emitting an "eerie roar." Said one eyewitness: "It wasn't an angry or hysterical sound. That was the most ominous thing about it. It was a kind of hopeless drone, a Greek dirge kind of thing. It was damned distracting, I must say."

Not everyone was dismayed. Edmund Wilson admitted that "the stock market crash was to count for us almost like a rending of the earth in preparation for the Day of Judgment." Yet, he added: "One couldn't help being exhilarated at the sudden and unexpected collapse of that stupid gigantic fraud." Keynes was far more engaged than Wilson with policy matters, but his first reaction to the crash was upbeat too, though for different reasons. There was, he announced in the *New York Post*, "an epoch of cheap money ahead." Britain had been struggling economically for years; there was no sense of sudden collapse there as there was in the United States, no sense that the bottom had fallen out. For Keynes as for most Europeans, the sound of the Wall Street crash was muffled. He continued to produce work that laid the groundwork for the *General Theory*—arguing (for example) in his *Treatise on Money* (1930) that money and markets were the creation of the state, and not the other way around—and that the largest aim of public policy, the creation of a vibrant culture, was the consequence of lending and spending, and not the "voluntary abstinence of individuals from the immediate enjoyment of consumption which we call thrift." "Were the Seven Wonders of the World built by Thrift?" Keynes asked. "I deem it doubtful."

Keynes's buoyant sense of possibility contrasted sharply with the atmosphere of doom enveloping American society from boardrooms to breadlines. But when he visited the United States in spring 1931, he was reminded of what would become a key theme in the General Theory: the emotional basis of economic policy. He admitted what he had not earlier realized: "the anxiety of many banks and depositors throughout the country is a dominating factor." Economic recovery would not occur as long as the people were paralyzed by fear. On that key insight, Keynes and Franklin Roosevelt were united.

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Let Them Eat TVs

Regina Munch

How we traded away our democracy for cheap stuff

In January 2021, *New York Times* reporter Peter S. Goodman visited a family of cattle ranchers in Shepherd, Montana. The memory of beef shortages, increased food prices, and crises at meatpacking plants due to the COVID-19 pandemic was still fresh in Americans' minds, and Goodman wanted to see one of the U.S. ranches that help keep grocery-store shelves across the country stocked.

Most small-scale ranches sell the cattle they raise to a large meatpacker like Tyson or JBS for processing and distribution. For years, this system had delivered reliable, if inadequate, income to ranchers. Most of them at least broke even. But Goodman found that in spring 2020, when the pandemic began and consumer demand for beef "had never been higher," ranchers couldn't find anyone to buy the cattle they had raised. And even though the wholesale price of beef had increased by 40 percent in 2021, the ranchers who raised the cattle were not seeing any increase in profits.

Goodman writes that these trends in the meatpacking industry reflect something wider in the American economy of the past few decades: across dozens of industries, a few companies control huge portions of the market, which gives them the ability to dictate prices, production, and distribution. In the beef industry, just four companies—Cargill, JBS, National Beef Packing, and Tyson—control 85 percent of the market. (In the 1970s, the four largest controlled only 25 percent.) In other industries—air travel, health care, technology, publishing, and many more—the numbers are similar. This kind of control does not always benefit consumers or the economy widely; in Goodman's words, the corporations are often "ending up with fatter profit margins while everyone else ends up with less."

The trend toward mergers, which leads to the consolidation of industries, began in the 1970s, when corporations and their lobbyists argued that consolidated industries were good for consumers; better economies of scale would lead to lower prices, allowing more people access to more stuff. In the wake of the pandemic, there has been more attention paid to how the consolidation of industries affects not only prices, but also wages, labor conditions, and supply chains. In the past decade, a new movement of anti-merger, antitrust, and anti-monopoly politicians and activists have sought to reverse this trend toward ever greater consolidation. They argue that, while consolidation has (sometimes) led to lower prices for consumers, it comes with a host of other, often-hidden costs worth considering.

Among its other effects, consolidation in the name of lower prices has subtly changed the way many Americans see themselves and one another; it has encouraged us to conceive of ourselves and our fellow citizens not mainly as producers, nor even as producer-consumers, but merely as consumers. What we do or make has become less important than what and how much we can buy. For decades, Americans have been drowning in *stuff*, and buying that stuff has become our primary way of engaging with strangers in public. What has this done to us, individually and as a society?

In his book *Davos Man*, Goodman describes the type of person who gives his book its title: an ultra-wealthy master of industry who uses his power to lower taxes and minimize regulations—the kind of person who's a guest of honor at the World Economic Forum held in Davos, Switzerland. In the process, Davos Man racks up massive profits for himself and justifies it with promises that this arrangement is also good for everyone else. Jeff Bezos is an obvious example: someone whose business strategy involves "amassing monopoly power and applying it to crush competitors; relentlessly squeezing workers for productivity; and gaming the tax system to avoid surrendering money to the government." Once the world's richest man, Bezos accumulated his mind-blowing fortune by wielding a massive amount of power over competitors and shrewdly manipulating the business landscape.

In doing so, Goodman writes, Bezos has delivered a business model very popular with consumers: a "miraculously efficient marketplace and distribution network." Famed for its "Customer Obsession," Amazon "bestowed once-unimaginable convenience on humanity while erasing the traditional limits of time and space, pervading the sense that virtually anything can now be purchased nearly everywhere." From the perspective of consumers, there is a strong argument for

Flatscreens in a Best Buy in Midtown Manhattan, New York, USA

RICHARD LEVINE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

letting Amazon continue to do what it's always done. Its prices are lower than those of its competitors, and the convenience it provides to consumers is unmatched. Goodman writes that, according to Amazon, "[a]nything that yielded lower prices was to be applauded as consistent with the public interest. Amazon was a monument to the success of that formulation."

Davos Man has deployed similar arguments in other industries, with less convincing results. In *Washington Monthly*, Shannon Brownlee has described the consolidation of hospital systems by private-equity firms. Promising that consolidation would bring prices down and the quality of care up, these companies created health-care monopolies in many regions in the United States, such as the UPMC system in Pittsburgh and Northwell Health on Long Island. But these rosy predictions have not panned out. Brownlee writes, "The cost of health care keeps going up, bankrupting families and depressing wages for average workers, and a major reason for its meteoric rise is the giant hospital chains that have come to dominate the health care landscape." Goodman writes about Stephen Schwarzman, CEO of the private-equity firm Blackstone Group, which paid $6.1 billion to take over TeamHealth, one of the two largest emergency-room staffing companies in the United States. "As in everything that private equity touched, health care found itself subject to intensifying demands for profit," Goodman writes. Patients were treated more like customers who could always be squeezed for more money. Hospitals prioritized big-ticket elective surgeries rather than guaranteeing that they had adequate emergency supplies, sufficient staffing, and safety protocols, with predictably devastating consequences during the pandemic. These are obviously not good outcomes for patient-consumers, and the effects have been just as dire for many health-care workers.

All this would have been unimaginable a few decades ago. To begin with, it would likely have been prohibited by antitrust law. For the better part of a century, it was assumed by regulators and policy-makers that economic concentration leads to political concentration. In *The Economists' Hour*, Binyamin Appelbaum points out that, until recently, the government "treat[ed] size itself as un-American. A dominant company might provide the best service at the lowest price, but economic efficiency was not the goal of public policy." The goal of antitrust law—including the famed Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890—was instead to balance competing goods. Sherman was, Appelbaum writes, "a conscious effort to subordinate economic efficiency to politics. It was intended to preserve the autonomy of small business owners. More than this, it was meant to safeguard the viability of democratic government." A good regulatory landscape, of which antitrust law is just one important part, protects both the political and economic interests of ordinary citizens. It is part of the federal government's responsibility to take political and social considerations into account when deciding whether to interfere in corporations' business.

The *political* considerations in political economy fell out of favor in the 1980s, as economists popularized the idea that the sole purpose of antitrust law was to deliver economic benefits for consumers. Appelbaum writes, "[E]conomists gradually persuaded the federal judiciary—and, to a lesser extent, the Justice Department—to set aside the original goals of antitrust law and to substitute the single objective of providing goods and services to consumers at the lowest possible price." Famously influential in this transition was Robert Bork, whose 1978 book, *The Antitrust Paradox*, "rewrote history" to claim that Sherman's actual intent had been to maximize consumer welfare. Less famous figures, like Aaron Director (Bork's professor, as well as Milton Friedman's brother-in-law), George Stigler, and Richard Posner had laid the groundwork for Bork's argument. In his 1976 book, *Antitrust Law*, Posner insisted that economic efficiency should be the sole standard of antitrust policy. "In his view," Appelbaum writes, this meant that "the government mostly should let corporations do as they pleased."

In 1968, the federal guidelines for antitrust law stipulated that the "primary role" of merger enforcement was "to preserve and promote market structures conducive to competition." But as Lina Khan, the current chairwoman of the Federal Trade Commission, has explained, new guidelines issued by the Reagan Administration in 1982 marked a "radical departure" from the demand that mergers "should not be permitted to create or enhance 'market power.'" "Today," Khan writes, "showing antitrust injury requires showing harm to consumer welfare, generally in the form of price increases and output restrictions." The result is the highly consolidated economy we have today.

So what has been the result of all these changes? How have they affected workers and compensation? The short answer is that they have made working life harder and less rewarding. They have also led to a massive shift of wealth to the very rich from almost everyone else.

Between 1980 and 2019, the share of household income going to the richest 1 percent more than doubled in the United States; meanwhile, the earnings of the bottom 90 percent barely rose. CEO pay increased by 940 percent while the average worker's pay rose by a mere 12 percent. This growing income inequality has led to growing wealth inequality: the richest 0.1 percent of American households now own almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent combined—the bottom *half* own just 1.3 percent. The former secretary of labor Robert Reich thinks there's a clear connection between the trend toward corporate consolidation and worsening economic inequality. In *The System: Who Rigged It, How We Fix It*, he writes:

> Since the 1980s, after the federal government all but abandoned antitrust enforcement, two-thirds of all American industries have become more concentrated.... All this consolidation has inflated corporate profits, suppressed worker pay, supercharged economic inequality, and stifled innovation.

The consumerist model can get you cheaper TVs, but people can't live on TVs; and what we do need in order to live comfortably and securely is often harder to obtain today than it was before the consumerist model took over.

Nevertheless, it is hard to deny that, during the same period, the economy became friendlier to consumers. As the globalization of production and trade became more common, prices for consumer goods did indeed drop. Globalization also meant that many American workers suddenly faced more competition from abroad. Even as their productivity increased due to advances in technology and automation, they put up with slow wage growth because they knew that their bosses could move their factories overseas and pay foreign workers even less.

The consumer-based economy was created by decisions at both the domestic and global levels. On the home front, the 1944 Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates made the dollar the world's currency. Ultimately, the global demand for dollars drove down the price of foreign goods, which Americans eagerly imported. But U.S. manufacturers that had to compete with foreign rivals suffered, and, as Appelbaum writes, "the American economy tilted toward consumption at the expense of production."

When Nixon finally unpegged the dollar from the price of gold in 1971—ending the Bretton Woods system and letting exchange rates float—the American consumer bonanza grew even more. Over the 1980s, the dollar soared in value, imports got cheaper, and more American factories closed. Meanwhile, Appelbaum writes, Walmart "ended the decade as the nation's largest retailer, operating more than four times as many stores, each staffed by low-paid workers and stuffed with cheap imported goods."

Another push toward an economy built for consumers came from a new crop of economists reacting against the old Keynesian consensus. In the tradeoff between inflation and unemployment, Keynesians since the Great Depression had prioritized keeping people employed rather than raising interest rates to fight inflation. Milton Friedman, Paul Volcker, and Alan Greenspan convinced policymakers to take a different approach. "Monetarists," as they were called, believed that driving down inflation should be the overriding goal, not full employment.

The infamous Volcker shock that began in 1979 was the death knell of the Keynesian response to inflation. Millions of Americans lost their jobs, and American workers never regained their standing. The median income for a full-time male worker in 1978 was $54,392; as of 2017, the median income of the same worker was $52,146. Appelbaum notes that the nation's annual economic output tripled during that period. The "Volcker recession" of 1981–1982 was "hugely profitable" for the financial industry, whose ascendency in the following decades would permanently alter the balance of economic power in the country. "The benefits of low inflation…were concentrated in the hands of the elite," Appelbaum explains. "By punishing workers and rewarding lenders, monetary policy was contributing to the rise of economic inequality."

All of this was paired with trade policies meant to deliver low prices to Americans while doing little to protect their role as producers. In fact, lower prices were seen as a kind of compensation for job losses and stagnant wages. Writing for the *American Prospect*, David Dayen and Rakeen Mabud describe the "bargain" thus:

> In exchange for funneling all this money upward, hollowing out the industrial base, ruining competitive markets, and worsening U.S. jobs, businesses would keep consumer prices low. And low prices have a definite psychological pull. That belief in getting more for less, of perceiving that you've beat the system, was enough to keep people reasonably satisfied. If you are stuck with low wages, you depend on low prices. As long as shelves were stocked, and America's desires were covered with overseas goods, this radical reinvention of the supply chain kept us fulfilled.

An increasingly powerful Wall Street pushed "profit maximization through deregulation, mergers, offshoring, and hyperefficiency," prioritizing short-term profits over every other goal. Over time, Dayen and Mabud write, "financiers built our supply chain to enrich investors over workers, big business over small business, private pockets over the public interest."

One of the results of these new priorities was the consolidation of industries, creating in some cases oligopoly or monopoly conditions. Bork's philosophy ruled the day, not just on the political right, but among Democrats as well. Goodman explains that, while liberals had once opposed consolidation and monopoly, the promise made by economists and corporations that consolidated industry could deliver lower prices for Americans was very tempting. In the 1990s, Bill Clinton and other Democrats "embrace[d] this idea that's sold to them by the [meat]packers…[that] the way you get low-cost food is by large, efficient companies that are allowed to amass scale, continuing to consolidate the marketplace." In reality, "they can control not only the relationships with the ranchers.…They can dictate the prices that they're going to charge grocery stores, supermarket chains, and restaurants." But the spiraling food prices of the pandemic reminded us that these

major companies are not public-benefit projects; when they can get away with charging more, they will.

All these conditions—a system that rewards imported consumer goods, the policies designed to combat inflation rather than unemployment, and the goal of keeping prices low through consolidation—have conspired to change the way most ordinary Americans see themselves and each other in relation to the economy: their principal role is now that of the consumer, not the producer. Instead of secure, high-paying manufacturing jobs, working-class Americans are now more likely to work in Amazon warehouses and Walmart supercenters, where the hours are unpredictable and the work itself is relatively unfulfilling.

During the pandemic, there was a brief moment when the tide seemed to have turned in favor of worker power. Suddenly, everyone could see how valuable and necessary these "front-line workers" were, and how much more exposed to Covid. As the crisis unfolded, these workers were often able to demand more from their employers. A wave of unionization at companies like Starbucks and Amazon, supported by President Joe Biden, suggested that something had changed in the way we think about work.

Many commentators blamed the higher wages that resulted across the economy for the spike in inflation that began in 2021. But, as Timothy Noah points out in the *New Republic*, it didn't take long for this trend toward higher wages to come to an end.

> If anything was going to boost labor's share of corporate income, you'd think it would be a Covid-induced labor shortage. But it didn't. From the start of the pandemic through 2021, labor's share of corporate income actually *fell*. The same corporate executives complaining that you simply can't get good help these days are paying that help a smaller share of company revenues.

Some might argue that, especially during the pandemic, the tradeoff of less-than-rewarding work for affordable consumer goods paid off. "When it comes to buying stuff online, American workers have it made," writes Galen Herz in *Jacobin*. Many Americans relied on deliveries of necessities and diversions while they were sheltering at home, and massive companies like Amazon and Walmart met this demand more or less successfully. "But," Herz continues, "when it comes to 'mass services'—transportation, housing, education, health insurance, and childcare—American workers are getting fleeced." These "mass services" are "unavoidably collective in nature," reliant especially on public-policy decisions about taxation, investment, and access. They make up the bulk of most households' expenses. This is especially true for working-class households. The consumerist model can get you cheaper TVs, but people can't live on TVs; and what we do need in order to live comfortably and securely is often harder to obtain today than it was before the consumerist model took over.

In the past several decades, as government has increasingly shied away from directly providing the things we need (access to higher education, health care, housing, etc.) such goods and services have been left to private, for-profit companies, with the result that these goods have generally become more expensive without their quality improving. The providers of consumer goods—electronics, clothing, housewares, and other physical products—have been able to deliver on the promise of lower prices, at least to some degree. And, yes, perhaps Amazon will keep things cheap if they're allowed to dominate the market. (It should be noted, though, that Amazon has cashed in on the previous two years of inflation, sometimes raising prices simply because they have the market clout to do so.) But the same logic does not tend to deliver benefits for consumers when it comes to such things as medical care. As Herz concludes of current trends, "The consequences for working-class living standards are stark: fewer living options, higher costs, more instability, and less freedom."

Why less freedom? The question is not only economic (how many consumer options do we have, and can we afford them?) but also political. As Reich insists, "The reason to fight oligarchy is not just to obtain a larger slice of the economic winnings; it is to make democracy function so that we can achieve all the goals we hold in common." When citizens are treated only as consumers, with minimal say in how the services they rely on are delivered, they lose their political agency.

Today, there is a tacit understanding that policymaking is the proper domain of a credentialed elite: the experts (mostly economists and lawyers) who advise our elected leaders. Ordinary citizens, lacking the relevant expertise, are expected to defer to this elite, which is thought to be entitled to its power and influence because of its superior intelligence and training. In the *The Tyranny of Merit*, Michael Sandel denounces this understanding of desert as corrosive to democracy. Of course, taking talents and skills into account when deciding who should perform which jobs is generally a good idea. But making a good life or full democratic participation contingent on meeting a narrow definition of merit is not. As economic inequality has deepened in the past several decades, those with wealth or credentials have come to see their fellow citizens as unworthy, or at least *less* worthy, of taking an active role in our political institutions. The result is a fracturing of society and an underclass left precarious, alienated, and angry. "The same market-driven globalization project that had left the United States without access to the domestic production of surgical masks and medications had deprived a great many working people of well-paying jobs and social esteem," Sandel writes. Politically, the loss of social esteem is every bit as important as the lack of well-paying jobs. Again, this was not the result of inevitable economic developments, but the natural consequence of a collection of policy choices that benefited one group of Americans over another.

The last socially acceptable kind of prejudice, Sandel claims, is against the uneducated. Our meritocracy teaches

We have to reprioritize understanding ourselves and each other as producers as well as consumers—as people with a need to contribute, to meet each other's needs, and to be part of a community.

us that it's the most talented and determined who get to go to college, and that the educated are those who have the most to contribute to society. The ones who don't make it to college didn't have what it takes. And so the division between those who have a college degree and those who don't is one of the starkest in our society. It has become as much a political division as an economic one.

As good jobs become scarce, areas of the country from which both companies and government have disinvested become poorer. As Reich writes:

> Corporation after corporation began laying off workers in the 1980s without easing the often difficult transitions that followed—without providing workers with severance payments, job retraining, job search assistance, job counseling, help in selling homes the values of which predictably dropped when businesses left town, or help moving to where jobs existed; without aiding affected communities that were being jettisoned, or seeking to attract other businesses to make up for their losses of jobs and tax revenue, or finding other uses for the abandoned infrastructure of schools, roads, pipes, and real estate; without giving workers and communities sufficient advance notice so they could plan their own transitions.

The result was "a systemic change that would scar the nation for decades." One of the largest predictors of support for Donald Trump in the 2016 election was whether one had a college degree. This fact became an obsession of elites. Perhaps they realized the effects of their last acceptable prejudice but were unwilling to take responsibility for the conditions their policies had created. "Since 2016," Sandel writes,

> pundits and scholars have debated the source of populist discontent. Is it about job loss and stagnant wages or cultural displacement? But this distinction is too sharply drawn. Work is both economic and cultural. It is a way of making a living and also a source of social recognition and esteem.

Sandel argues that what the United States lacks is not merely distributive justice—the equitable use of resources to provide for everyone's material needs—but "contributive justice," or the ability to contribute to the common good. For decades, Democrats have offered working- and middle-class citizens measures of distributive justice but devoted insufficient attention to contributive justice. People want "an opportunity to win the social recognition and esteem that go with producing what others need and value," Sandel writes. Being without a job—or being without a job one considers meaningful—is not only a material deprivation; it can also deprive one of a sense of purpose, a sense of being useful to others. The result is often loneliness and despair, and the destructive behaviors to which these give rise: alcoholism, opioid overdose, or suicide.

In his seminal work *The True and Only Heaven*, Christopher Lasch lamented that our obsession with the bottom line has corrupted all kinds of working life.

> At every level of American society, it was becoming harder and harder for people to find work that self-respecting men and women could throw themselves into with enthusiasm. The degradation of work represented the most fundamental sense in which institutions no longer commanded public confidence.

Instead, we equate social progress with the "indefinite expansion of the demand for consumer goods" and assume that "our future is predetermined by the continuing development of large-scale production, colossal technologies, and political centralization."

In his analysis of previous generations of economic-justice movements, Lasch is critical of both Left and Right for assuming that unbridled industrialization and the endless division of wage labor were necessary ingredients of all economic progress. Mainstream labor movements like the Progressives or the Fabian socialists proposed only a redistribution of income, not a reconsideration of work. Today's liberal and progressive movements also tend to emphasize fiscal redistribution rather than fostering economic conditions that wouldn't funnel so much income to the top in the first place. Their focus is mainly on the purchasing power of consumers, not the security and dignity of labor.

How, then, do we regain a sense of what Sandel calls contributive justice? Most basically, we have to reprioritize understanding ourselves and each other as producers as well as consumers—as people with a need to contribute, to meet each other's needs, and to be part of a community. "It is in our role as producers, not consumers, that we contribute to the common good and win recognition for doing so," Sandel writes. Without this role, we are liable to become passive, surrendering to processes and decisions over which we have no control.

To this end, economic policy should be focused not only on prices but on creating jobs that provide adequate compensation and involve meaningful activity. One of the best ways for policymakers to do this is to reverse the trend toward consolidation that has come to mark so many industries. The ultimate goal is to "democratize the economy," as Brian Callici and Sandeep Vaheesan write for *Dissent*. That requires "not only more choices over employment options among different employers, but also more voice and power within the businesses that employ them." Businesses such as Amazon make decisions that can restructure a whole local economy, mustering an army of

workers and delivery people—or, just as quickly, hanging them out to dry. Callici and Vaheesan argue that "employment should confer a kind of economic citizenship in the firm. Current law, however, structures business firms as authoritarian regimes with all power concentrated in the hands of boards and managers serving financial interests." Cooperatives and employee-owned companies do exist, but they are far less common in the United States than in some other developed countries. Other policies could give workers more stability and better compensation—for example, a higher minimum wage, caps on the ratio of CEO-to-average-worker compensation, and better enforcement of the right of workers to unionize.

Keeping people in their jobs needs to be as important to central bankers as fighting inflation. For decades, employers have been used to a "slack" labor market, one in which workers are inexpensive and always available. A tight labor market, as we saw briefly during the pandemic, creates very different conditions: higher wages, better bargaining conditions, and more investment in training and employee benefits.

Ultimately, reprioritizing work as a social good puts the "political" back in "political economy." Rather than allowing purely commercial indices to dictate our economic policies—whatever maximizes a company's profit, whatever keeps prices low for consumers—we can deliberate together how we want to produce and distribute the goods we need. Our role as producers is not incidental for these deliberations; it is a fundamental component of our individual lives and of our communities.

Another way of putting this is in Sandel's terms: the market can't solve problems or answer questions that belong in the realm of democratic deliberation. Deciding what will contribute to the common good "cannot be achieved through economic activity alone.... It requires deliberating with our fellow citizens about how to bring about a just and good society, one that cultivates civic virtue and enables us to reason together about the purposes worthy of our political community." Insisting, as corporations, lobbyists, and many of our politicians do, that the best policy is always whatever is best for consumers is a simplification that preempts true democratic deliberation. It reduces all social goods to one: the efficient satisfaction of appetites. It treats citizens as units, not agents.

Consumption, it should be acknowledged, is an important aspect of our lives. We need some basic things for survival, of course, but we also enjoy goods that rise above the realm of mere necessity: books, art, nice clothing. One can easily become too moralistic about the pleasures we get from the things we buy. The problem with consumption arises when the acquisition of more and more material goods—including goods that aren't actually very good for us—is the only remaining activity that allows us a sense of purpose.

Of course, we can also risk over-romanticizing production. We must avoid the Promethean valorization of "creators"—the visionaries who rise above the riff-raff to produce, innovate, and crush the competition. This was the warped anthropology of Ayn Rand, for instance, and it usually entails a toxic elitism. Historically, fascists have been obsessed with the productive capacity of the population—to preserve the glory of the state, to win the never-ending war, to root out bourgeois weakness or halt a supposed decline of masculinity. This, too, can have the effect of reducing citizens to units.

We tend to think of the postwar decades as an era that struck a happy balance between production and consumption. Work paid well enough for most workers to afford to buy the goods they produced, and leaders of corporations saw themselves as benevolent lords providing for the good of their workers as well as that of society. As Eugene McCarraher writes in *The Enchantments of Mammon*, "All parties agreed that steady economic growth, distributed with unprecedented equity, would mitigate class conflict; all disagreements would be conducted within the parameters of Keynesian economics, a welfare state, and anti-Communism." The material abundance the American economy produced would guarantee social stability, even if much of the (decently compensated) work was tedious and unfulfilling.

But there's a reason that the counterculture of the 1960s emerged. A hollowness exists at the heart of this vision, one that confuses human flourishing with mere satiety. It is yet another substitute for politics—perhaps this vision was better than the neoliberalism that replaced it, but it was nonetheless incomplete. McCarraher argues that the seeds of our own era were already present in the postwar complacency: as factors like increased automation and the globalization of trade tempted us to sharpen our focus on consumption rather than production, we had few political or philosophical reasons to resist. The American Dream had long since been reduced to an idyll of material abundance. What we did mattered less than what we had.

What we need now is a reassessment of our priorities, a shift in the way we think about work, consumption, and justice itself. For decades, justice movements have argued that the price tag on all kinds of products doesn't accurately capture the true cost of making them. Environmentalists point out that the price tags on Ikea furniture, for example, don't take into account the ecological cost of clear-cutting. Workers-rights advocates insist that cheap groceries don't reflect the poor wages and workplace hazards that farmworkers bear. If good work, and the protection of workers, were a priority, we would have to make fair prices, not low ones, our policy goal. It's likely that, if we did this, the ordinary consumer wouldn't be able to buy so much so cheaply. (As a model of political economy, producerism is probably not compatible with the business model of Amazon.) But more important than mere convenience and sheer accumulation is having the things we need to lead good lives, as well as the ability to do meaningful, satisfying work that contributes to our communities. Today, too many of us have neither.

REGINA MUNCH *is an associate editor at* Commonweal.

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LOCKDOWN

Howard Altmann

In the residue that is the world's we scrub
for meaning, oceans of knowledge undulating

to a wave, reading rereading the sand, white
foam at peak and trough a spell of wonder,

the infinite water molecule a finite breath.
Walking restores what is upright in our minds,

the fragility of a step, the insistence of the earth,
borders tracing retracing their edges, dusted

missiles pointed as word circles round. Here
in the French Quarter the black crow is king,

sailing her way through the Big Easy—shuttered
and boarded, not a hint of vomit or beer, voodoo

or bead—where centuries-old balconies offer
shade and glimpses of light, her caw at home

in the emptiness, rooftop to rooftop, stoplight
to bin, calling out the fullness of our flight,

our spirits perched, scavenging for sustenance
in the open sky, the vast solitude, clamoring

for keys to envision the invisible, this our rhythm
this our blues. Here the funeral marching band

knows its place and doesn't know its place,
the brass horn the silver trumpet burnished

to a shine in the dark, the whistle of the midnight
train rattling the Mississippi River; black crow at rest.

HOWARD ALTMANN'*s most recent book,* Forgive Time, *is an original collection of fifty poems translated into Hebrew by award-winning poet/translator Tal Nitzán (Keshev Press, 2021).*

ALEXANDER STERN

On the Clock

'Unrest'

Given their similar spellings, a young student might be forgiven for confusing the words "anarchism" and "anachronism." The concepts named by each term, on the other hand, are relatively easy to distinguish. But *Unrest*—a film based on Russian political philosopher Pyotr Kropotkin's 1870s travels among the anarchist watchmakers of the Swiss Jura Mountains—mixes together anarchistic opposition to coercive social organization with a refusal of the dictates of time.

A straightforward (but intentional) anachronism captures the film's central theme. At a meeting of an anarchist collaborative, one of the members reads out a letter from an affiliated organization in Campania, Italy, where there was an anarchist uprising in 1877. Its authors write, in part, "An anarchist society that organizes itself without authority exists always, like a seed beneath the snow, buried under the weight of the state." The quotation comes nearly word-for-word from a book by British anarchist Colin Ward, inspired substantially by Kropotkin but published in 1973, nearly a hundred years after the action of the film. It neatly describes Kropotkin's understanding of anarchism as an organic form of organization whose natural origins make it a superior alternative to the artificial, hierarchical, and oppressive organization of the state and industry. *Unrest* dramatizes resistance to a form of tech-reliant, state-facilitated capitalist control that was just getting started in the 1870s, was well-established by the 1970s, and is hypercharged today. A meditative reflection on this form of control, director Cyril Schäublin's film manages to avoid heavy-handedness while leaving no doubts about where its sympathies lie.

The technology at the center of *Unrest* is time itself. The workers of the watch factories of the Jura Mountains—still the center of Swiss watchmaking today—both produce time through their craft and are increasingly ruled by it. The film's title contains a double meaning, referring to both the social agitation rampant in the region and a watch's "unrest" or "balance wheel." The so-called "heart of the watch," the unrest wheel oscillates back and forth to turn the watch's gears and produce the familiar ticking that constitutes much of this film's spare soundtrack. In one scene, Josephine, an unrest-wheel fitter, and other workers are timed by a lab-coat-clad forerunner of today's management consultants to see how long it takes them to assemble the parts of the watch. Some of the workers resist this Taylorist intrusion by working slowly on purpose, but others worry that they will be fired if they don't raise their work rate.

An anarchist collaborative in the town tries to counter this accelerating transition from an artisanal to a mechanistic form of production. It provides affordable health insurance—which is otherwise unavailable to the single women working at the factory—sends money to fellow anarchists undertaking a rail strike in Baltimore amid violent repression, and, in an effort to raise funds for unions around the world, stages a play reenacting the short-lived Paris Commune of 1871. Technology is deployed against anarchist workers both in the factory and outside it: four workers, including Josephine, are fired after they are photographed at a meeting of the collaborative. But technological surveillance and control doesn't turn the anarchists into technophobes: they swap photographic portraits of anarchist figures like baseball cards and rely on the telegraph for international communications. In fact, their extensive telegraph networks at this early stage of the so-called "first globalization" made them better connected than the mainstream press. In one scene, the factory's director general, Roulet, recommends anarchist newspapers to a colleague. "Thanks to their network," he claims, "I was able to anticipate the crisis [the Panic of 1873] and save money." (The scene originated in research by historian Florian Eitel, who served as a consultant for the film.)

Director General Roulet also runs unopposed for the Grand Council of Bern, one example of the close-knit cooperation between the state and industry that is featured throughout the film. When Kropotkin first arrives in town, ostensibly to make a map of the region, he is prevented from crossing a road by two police officers who are helping stage a photo shoot for the factory's new catalogue. "We are in the middle of a sales crisis on an international, even global level," the officers tell him, as if they work for the watch factory themselves. "We have to fight against it." The copy for the new catalogue is to read: "Nowadays, one cannot imagine a man without a watch in his hand."

This, in a sense, is precisely what Schäublin is asking viewers to do: imagine human beings unburdened of time and other technologically manufactured realities. "We really think it's 4:30," Schäublin said during an interview about the film, "It's so concrete. And I think this is interesting, because it's such a construction. It's so made up." *Unrest* defamiliarizes time by exposing the absurdities and flaws in the emerging technological regime. There are, for example, four slightly different times in use in one town: municipal time, local time, factory time, and church time. The factory runs eight minutes ahead of municipal time and its bosses dock the pay of workers who show up late as a result of the discrepancy. When the telegraph breaks down, no one knows what time it is, and the police are at a complete loss as to how to set the clocks. The coercive power of the state and industry is revealed as a power to turn congenial fictions into something like second nature. A failure to resist is therefore, in large part, a failure of imagination. Another world is not only possible; it is waiting for us underneath the accumulated layers of imposed convention that distort our relations to one another, our work, and ourselves—a seed beneath the snow.

Schäublin's first film explored the endpoint of the developments just beginning in the 1870s. A pitch-black comedy, *Those Who Are Fine* (2017)

A still from the movie *Unrest*

is set in a dreary, dystopian Zurich and follows a worker at a call center selling low-priced internet access. She runs a scam on its elderly customer base by posing as a granddaughter in need of emergency funds. The characters in the film are constantly fumbling with identity numbers, wifi passwords, and banking codes. They can talk to each other of nothing but the best available cell-phone data plans and half-remembered movie plots. Many of these conversations are between police officers, who, just as in *Unrest*, provide regular comic relief. Where *Unrest* defamiliarizes our technologically constructed and saturated form of life by depicting a time before it was fully realized, *Those Who Are Fine* does so by exaggerating it. Where the anarchists of *Unrest* establish a natural, cooperative form of social organization as an alternative to private and public power, the characters of *Those Who Are Fine* are swallowed up by an artificial environment where their every thought and action is mediated by technology and bureaucracy. They are much more concerned about connecting to the internet than to each other—and scarcely able to do either.

Schäublin shoots both films at a distance from the characters and, in *Unrest*, sometimes confines them to the bottom or corner of the frame. (One reviewer complains, not without justification, that the characters can get lost behind the subtitles.) The effect in *Unrest* is very much in keeping with its anarchist theme. It decentralizes the characters, portraying them as organic parts of their environment rather than operators above and outside it. Both Josephine and Kropotkin explicitly deny that they are protagonists. And Schäublin abjures overtly dramatic action, casting mostly non-actors, who give understated performances, and soft-pedaling all the conflict. When one worker is arrested for not paying her taxes, the police are exceedingly polite and she acquiesces meekly. The film's gentle tone—or what the jury at the Berlin Film Festival called its "strange and unsettling calm"—is in keeping with its view of anarchism, which one also finds in the recent writings of political scientist James C. Scott. This is an anarchism rooted less in a violent revolutionary impulse than in the quiet resistance of ordinary people to top-down surveillance and rule.

Schäublin's method of decentering the main characters and deflating the drama may turn off some critics, but it allows the viewer an unusual range of freedom to survey the screen without being coerced into this or that emotion or identification. *Unrest*'s anti-drama invites contemplation. One almost feels as if it is not individuals or groups that are in conflict in the film so much as the ideas themselves. At the same time, it implicitly rebukes the charismatic magic of individual personality sold so relentlessly through so much of our popular entertainment. Indeed, it suggests, however quietly, that the proud individualism of our current culture is the flipside of, and feeble consolation for, the conformity of our economy and our politics. We are compensated for our alienation with fantasies of self-realization that are never fulfilled, only refreshed.

Anarchist activity in the Jura Mountains began with a split in the First International between Marxian socialists and the anti-statist followers of Mikhail Bakunin, who detected a latent authoritarianism in Marxism. Occupy Wall Street and the Democratic Socialists of America notwithstanding, the century and a half that followed seems to have brought dead ends to both socialist movements. Marxist doctrine was used to justify brutal authoritarianism, arguably in just the way Bakunin predicted. Anarchism, at least of the kind *Unrest* represents, seems to suffer from the opposite problem. If an anarchist society always exists beneath the surface, it may also lack the impetus to ever rise above it. *Unrest* ends with a stopwatch hanging evocatively from a tree. It finally, mercifully, stops ticking and the camera pans left to an unfocused forest. We hear nothing, only birdsong and the rustling of the trees.

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

KIMSTIM

GRIFFIN OLEYNICK

Old Motifs Made New

'Cecily Brown: Death and the Maid'

Like many of Cecily Brown's paintings, *Vanity Shipwreck* (2021–22) sits uneasily between figuration and abstraction. Visually, it both repels and attracts. At first, it appears chaotic and disorganized, a foaming churn of anxious whitewater that thwarts viewers' attempts to find a way in. That's especially true on the canvas's upper right, where Brown's harried brushwork haphazardly traces compressed waves and frenzied streaks in muted blues, greens, yellows, and whites. Is there anything meaningful in this riot of paint? Maybe not: our gaze founders, and we're tempted to give up and look away.

But recognizable shapes and patterns soon begin to emerge. There's a large chest floating on the lower right, while a small ship's rudder, curved anchor, and cruciform mast occupy the upper left. Seated on a bench a little left of center is a nude blonde woman with her back to us. We can't quite make out what she's doing: Is she staring at herself in a mirror? Or painting a portrait of another woman, whose gaping mouth is possibly screaming, or singing, or neither? Despite this ambiguity (perhaps because of it), the blonde woman's stable, erect posture conveys a sense of meditative calm, a confidence that radiates outward, rebalancing the entire painting. In relation to her upright body, the foaming waves no longer threaten or overwhelm; everything in this pulsating mass of paint becomes beautiful and still.

Born in England in 1969 to a novelist mother (Shena Mackay) and an art-critic father (David Sylvester), Cecily Brown attended London's Slade School of Fine Art before quickly rising to art-world prominence after her permanent move to New York in the mid-nineties. Since then, Brown has achieved a level of critical and commercial success that's still relatively rare for a living female artist. Her paintings, many of them executed at monumental scale and exhibited in grand public venues like the Metropolitan Opera House in New York and the Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte in Naples, regularly sell for millions of dollars.

Collaboratively conceived by Brown and curator Ian Alteveer during the pandemic, *Cecily Brown: Death and the Maid* is the artist's first major museum exhibition in New York. The show includes around fifty paintings, drawings, sketchbooks, and monotypes made during the past twenty-five years. With its sprawling galleries and encyclopedic collection, the Met serves as a fitting venue for Brown's art, which regularly absorbs and transforms fragments from the whole sweep of European art history, from old masters like Velazquez, Rubens, and Rembrandt, to modernists like Manet and Soutine, to abstract expressionists like de Kooning and Pollock. The show is small for a mid-career retrospective, but that doesn't make it any less powerful. Like a seventeenth-century *Kunstkammer*, or cabinet of curiosities, the show's packed, windowless (and benchless) galleries literally overflow with paintings and visitors, underscoring the electrifying excess ("overripe abundance," one wall text calls it) that lies at the center of Brown's painting.

Eschewing chronology, the show groups small clusters of Brown's works into two separate but intertwined themes: *vanitas*, or the ineluctable vanity of human life, and still lifes (ironically called, as the catalog notes, "*nature morte*" in French). Among the most accessible and arresting canvases in the *vanitas* section is *Aujourd'hui Rose* (2005), a large trompe l'oeil painting of a grinning, cream-pink skull whose brownish-yellow eye sockets are formed by the heads of two small girls holding a puppy, which in turn comprises the skull's nasal cavity (their ruffled dresses form a row of crooked teeth below). Brown's source is a popular Italian photographic postcard from 1900, in which an ominous inscription hints at the eventual ruin lurking behind even the happiest times: "*Aujourd'hui rose, demain…*" (Today pink, tomorrow…). The original image is kitschy, but the delicate attention Brown lavishes on

Opposite:
Cecily Brown,
Aujourd'hui Rose,
2005

CECILY BROWN

the crown of the skull—a long, blurry smear of cream-colored paint—is quietly moving. As if caressing death with her brush, Brown invites us to find beauty's impermanence worthy of admiration.

Brown revels in annihilation in other paintings, too. *Memento Mori I* (2006–8), featuring a cramped interior scene dominated by a billowing avalanche of pastel colors, pays homage to Heinrich Hoffman's Victorian-era nursery tales. One presents "Fidgety Phil," a boy who rocks back and forth in his chair at the dinner table with his stern parents. Unable to sit still, Phil loses his balance and latches onto the tablecloth for support, sending everything—dishes, plates, utensils, food—crashing to the floor. Like many Victorian fantasies (Brown's 2006 *The Picnic*, also included in the show, adapts Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*), Phil's story holds a grim moral for its young audience: misbehavior breeds catastrophe, so conform and obey. Brown's painting reverses this message by lavishing smooth brushwork and soothing colors on the spinning dishes and falling utensils, rendering everything else (Phil's mother with her hand on her hip, his wooden chair) in clumsy, clashing strokes. It's as if Phil's rebellion has become an act of creation, and a declaration of freedom.

Brown enacts a similar reversal in her paintings inspired by Dutch still lives, a genre that flourished in the seventeenth century, when artists and patrons from the Netherlands began confronting the social contradictions arising from their booming mercantilist economy and iconoclastic Protestant morality. Painted with hyperrealistic precision, those works featured ornate tableware made of precious materials stuffed with sumptuous delicacies like lobster and oysters. Other objects like spent candles, peeled fruit, and wilting flowers reminded viewers of the fleetingness of such earthly pleasures and the possible sinfulness of their appetites. Brown's spiral-bound sketchbooks, housed in table-like display cases, reveal her particular fascination with the still lives of Flemish painter Franz Snyders (1579–1657). The drawings—which foreground the limp carcasses of flayed rabbits, plucked geese, and groaning boars' heads that

Cecily Brown, *Maid in a Landscape*, 2021

CECILY BROWN

frequently appear in Snyders's work—highlight not just Brown's virtuosic figural technique, but also the violence undergirding such displays.

Paintings like *Nature Morte* (2020) and *Lobsters, Oysters, Cherries, and Pearls* (2020) push this a step further. Both canvases are awash in glowing blood-red paint, overpowering the yellow lemons and black cat crouching beneath. Instead of critiquing this extravagance, though, Brown luxuriates in it. The frameless sides of *Nature Morte* are particularly telling. On the right, strings of oil paint drip down the linen; on the left, we find a clutch of fingerprint smudges, presumably Brown's, as if seizing the plenitude of paint with her bare hands.

Is Brown then an aesthete, interested in nothing more than the excitement brought on by appearances and ephemerality? *Carnival and Lent* (2006–8), easily the grandest, most complex, and possibly best work in the show, suggests not. Here Brown has again adapted a Netherlandish source, this time Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 1559 *Fight Between Carnival and Lent*, which unfolds as a series of comic vignettes situated in the vast town square of an anonymous Dutch city. At the center of Bruegel's work, the fat figure of Carnival, wearing a pie for a hat and straddling a huge keg, jousts with the emaciated representative of Lent, veiled, habited, and wielding a baker's peel holding two fish. Hordes of pleasure-seekers and penitents wrestle in the background while some of their number slink back to the tavern and file back to church on either side.

What makes Brown's *Carnival and Lent* so compelling is the way she synergistically blurs Bruegel's opposites into a harmonious whole. She brightens his drab brown, blue, and yellow color scheme with oranges, greens, and pinks, while fusing figures, faces, and architectural elements into a dense, throbbing flow. Sure, there's a struggle at the center, but it's subsumed in a river of peach-colored paint that carries our eye to a huge, glowing yellow disc in the upper-left corner of the canvas. This disc, of which we see only a sliver (the rest is hidden by a blend of half-drawn figures and abstract strokes), could be anything—maybe the moon, or the sun, or, given Brown's religious source material, a gilded paten. With its five star-shaped lines, another nearby lavender circle looks (at least to my Catholic eye) like a Eucharistic host.

Brown invites us to find beauty's impermanence worthy of admiration.

Whatever these images represent, it's clear Brown has sequestered them from the rest of the action, holding them in a kind of respectful reserve that lends grace and stillness to the busy canvas. She has also—uncharacteristically, judging from other works on display, in which her signature usually appears at bottom left or bottom right—signed her name in an unoccupied field between the two. The two brown horizontal and vertical lines just above it make it seem suspiciously like a painter's canvas, with what looks very much like a head looming behind it. Could Brown, like Velazquez in *Las Meninas* (1656), be inserting an image of herself at work into her *Carnival and Lent*, inviting us to read it as a painting about painting? If so, what conclusions would she like us to draw?

One of the critical truisms about Cecily Brown is that she launched her painting career at a time when many artists and critics, especially those affiliated with the Young British Artists movement, were questioning the very possibility of painting. But painting has always been viewed as a kind of paradox: it's ephemeral, but gestures toward permanence; it's static, yet seems to move; it uses external symbols to depict internal realities; it makes the invisible visible. Since the ancient Greeks, Western painting has also been considered a portal to the divine; medieval and Renaissance theorists considered the act of painting akin to prayer.

Brown never quite gets there, at least not in such explicit terms. But two of her most recent paintings, *Maid in a Landscape* (2021) and *Death and the Maid* (2022), strongly suggest that Brown's interest in what may lie beyond the grave is very much alive. Both are variations on the tradition of the *danse macabre*, a trope that arose in medieval France in response to the ravages of the bubonic plague. Brown's most immediate source is *Death and the Maiden*, an 1894 print by the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch, in which a young nude woman seductively embraces a dancing skeleton man. (Brown's sensuous 2004 sketchbook drawing of the image, opposite a drawing of Adam and Eve tasting the forbidden fruit offered by the serpent, after Masolino, is on view nearby.)

Freud would say that the twin drives depicted here, eros and thanatos, are fundamentally at odds, but Brown's canvases suggest a deeper unity made possible by painting. Both repeat the same basic motif: the couple dances alone in a forest clearing. The earlier version is the more figural (a wall text points out that the skeleton's pelvis resembles an artist's palette), yet it's the more abstract, later version, in which death and the maid are reduced to two white and pink masses that can barely be distinguished from each other, that's more affecting. Here Brown has swapped out the bright greens and muddy browns of spring for more autumnal oranges and yellows. Though it's abstract, the trees create a set of perspectival lines that converge on a horizon point in the background, placing us in convincing three-dimensional space. This isn't a world that will last forever, but it's not meant to. Brown's gift is to help us realize that painting—like life—is a paradox that needn't be resolved.

GRIFFIN OLEYNICK *is an associate editor at* Commonweal.

Pathways to Holiness

MICHAEL J. HOLLERICH

In a recent, highly public dustup, Bishop Thomas Paprocki of Springfield, Illinois, raised the question of heresy because of his disgust with calls for greater Eucharistic inclusivity for people who are gay, lesbian, and transgender, or divorced and remarried. His unnamed target was Cardinal Robert McElroy, bishop of San Diego, whose article in *America* Bishop Paprocki cited. Cardinal McElroy responded by repeating his objection to the traditional moral teaching that all sexual sin is objectively mortal sin. That was the trigger for the heresy charge.

The principle itself—that all sexual sin is mortal sin—would not seem shocking to American Catholics who attended parochial schools in the 1950s. "Mortal" signified the rupture of the soul's relationship to God, and its eternal damnation if its sins were left unrepented before death. As it happens, not a month after encountering this exchange, I discovered the same declaration on page 260 of the book under review, James Keenan's *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics*: "All sins of impurity of whatever kind or species are of themselves mortal." The source for this (endnote 98, p. 384) was unclear, so I looked it up where someone of my generation would have encountered it: in the Baltimore Catechism. And here it is, from *Baltimore Catechism #3: Fr. Connell's Confraternity Edition,* intended for those who had been confirmed or were in high school, authorized in 1949 by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. This edition was a revision of the original Baltimore Catechism made by Professor Francis Connell of the Catholic University of America, copyrighted and published by Benzinger Bros. in 1949 and 1952. (*Baltimore Catechism #3* was one of four age-appropriate levels in the revision, according to the Wikipedia article on the catechism.) I cite from the free site archive.org:

A HISTORY OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

JAMES F. KEENAN, SJ
Paulist Press
$49.95 | 456 pp.

> Question 256. What does the sixth commandment forbid?
>
> The sixth commandment forbids all impurity and immodesty in words, looks, and actions, whether alone or with others.
>
> (c) Immodesty is any deliberate thought, word, or action that tends toward impurity.
>
> (d) When there is full deliberation in any sin of impurity it is a mortal sin. Immodesty may be either a mortal or venial sin depending on the greater or less danger of impurity to which it tends, the degree of scandal, and the intention of the sinner.

Fr. Connell's parsing of the gravity of sins against the sixth commandment relaxes the absolutism of the original quotation. But the principle itself is reaffirmed: any fully deliberate sin of impurity is mortal.

I begin this way not in order to skewer, once again, the pedagogical shortcomings of preconciliar catechesis. The Baltimore Catechism is an easy target that did its share of harm, though this reviewer thinks it had its redeeming side as well. I begin with it because it offers a direct way into *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics*. James F. Keenan, SJ, is Canisius Professor of Theology, director of the Jesuit Institute, and vice provost of global engagement at Boston College. He is the prolific author and editor of more than two dozen books, dozens of essays and chapters in books, editor of two academic series, and the founder of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World

An illustration from the New St. Joseph Baltimore Catechism, 1969

BALTIMORE CATECHISM

Church. That last distinction has been the focus of his energies in recent years, and the place where this sprawling survey reaches its conclusion. The book is a recapitulation of his three and a half decades of remarkably productive and creative service to the Church and to the theological academy. It reveals his commitment to historical consciousness, to interdisciplinarity, to pastoral practice, to bioethics and issues related to sexuality and gender, and to a global inclusivity.

Despite its ambitious scale, the book sits rather easily with the reader for at least three reasons. First is its relaxed and discursive style. We hear the voice of a writer who is patently a teacher, supportive and encouraging rather than domineering and overweening. He explains at the outset how the book grew out of thirty-three years of teaching: "I am welcoming you into my classroom." He is a charitable analyst, even of texts whose obsessions with spiritual control and intimidation may irritate many readers. The eighty pages of endnotes tell you how much reading and study went into the assurance of that voice. Fully one third of those endnote pages are from the eighth and last chapter of the book, on "Moral Agency for a Global Theological Ethics"—an indication of the author's energy and attention for the past dozen years and more.

Second, Keenan has a strong narrative line and an argument that he presses from the beginning to the end. The story he tells is how sin-consciousness gradually captured the Catholic conscience and took hostage the primal message of the Gospel, which is not the conviction of sin but the call to discipleship: "[T]his early classification of such major sins became, I think, the beginning of a terrible mistake, for along the way we lost a sense of the gospel meaning of sin as the failure to bother to love." Keenan examines in great detail the manuals of moral theology that shaped Catholic life and conscience-formation for the entire period between Trent and Vatican II. But more important than these—or the penitentials of Irish monasticism or the disciplinary regimen of the early Church or the confessional practices of the Middle Ages—are what Keenan calls "pathways to holiness," the positive call to goodness and to discipleship that is the real message of Jesus:

> [I]n lieu of the patristic period as foundational for a sin-oriented ethics that became manifested in the penitentials and the practice of auricular confession, I propose that from the beginning of the church, members sought pathways toward the holy, and the confessing of sin and concern about this matter was only a part of the pathway to holiness and not the overall focus of either the patristic or the medieval period.

That is a large claim and Keenan hangs a lot on it. Chapter Three—at fifty-five pages the second longest in the book—runs us though twelve centuries of history to make the case that the forgiveness of sins was only one stage of the Christian's growth in the moral life, understood as the cultivation of the virtues and the avoidance of vices by following exemplars of the moral life. There was, he says, a certain dynamism that always pushed the Christian further and further.

> From the very beginning, Christianity had the instinct, as in the death of the deacon Stephen, to live beyond expectations, to go further into the land of holiness as Anthony did when, at the age of nineteen, he entered the desert in the third century…the line between the moral life and the life of holiness is not simply found or drawn.

It seems, though Keenan does not say so explicitly, that he chose this language of "pathways to holiness" in order to undo the deeply embedded idea that there is one privileged pathway that sanctions those who take it to be arbiters of the rest who do not—whereas in reality all are on a journey to the same goal, though not by the same routes or at the same pace. I take this to be his way of incorporating the "universal call to holiness" advocated by the Second Vatican Council in order to deepen the dignity of the laity and bridge the lay-clerical divide, grounded as it often has been in the claim to bind or to absolve.

Third, Keenan enlivens his narrative with a gallery of sharply defined portraits of his favorite heroes from the theological tradition. In his Preface, he notes a preference for "innovators" rather than for the "grand achievers" who built on the first steps taken by the innovators. There is Peter Abelard, for Keenan a hero of conscience: "There is no sin, except against conscience," from Abelard's unfinished book *Scito te ipsum (Know Thyself)*. Heloise too is featured, for her thought on intentionality. Thomas Aquinas gets fourteen generous pages with special attention to how he shaped the tradition he inherited from Augustine (who is *not* among Keenan's heroes) by incorporating Aristotle's teleology of human nature and thereby opening up the possibility of the virtuous pagan. (In 1992, Keenan published a book titled *Goodness and Rightness in Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologiae*, which was based on a course he taught.) There is Erasmus, celebrated for his "distinctively lay, nonmonastic spirituality that could encompass all Christians." There is Scottish philosopher John Mair, or Major (1467–1550), author of "the earliest full successful work of casuistry in Europe," which is also the fruit of "a very late form of scholasticism."

The pages on Erasmus are some of the freshest and most cheering in the book: "The moral life was no longer understood by the devout Christian as the simple avoidance of sin." Keenan pairs Ignatius Loyola with Erasmus: both had a christocentric focus, believed in the primacy of the individual's conscience, and privileged the spiritual over the moral.

Keenan also includes the Spanish Dominican Francisco de Vitoria for his adaptation of natural law to recognize what is now called international law, which asserts the rights of all people, by virtue of being human, to their own legitimate dominion—in this case, against Spanish aggrandizement. Keenan pairs de Vitoria with Bartolomé de las Casas, the repentant priest-colonialist who became the great advocate of the Indians, critic of mass and coerced evangelization, and chronicler of Spanish atrocities. Then there is Alphonso

The practitioners of theological ethics are no longer chiefly clergy taught to treat the confessional as "a tribunal" and the priest as a judge, as they were from the time of the Council of Trent.

Liguori, founder of the Redemptorists, humane confessor, and reformer of moral theology. (Keenan didn't quite convince me on that one, but where mission preaching is concerned, perhaps grading on a curve is the best one can expect.) By the time Keenan gets to his last chapter on global theological ethics, the parade of names from across the world becomes a little dizzying and an impressive testament to the contemporary catholicity—to invoke a very ancient word—of theological ethics, across every boundary of nation, language, and gender.

Who is this book for, and what will they get out of it? I have already complimented the book's readability. I would call it a high-level textbook, though a certain level of theological education is presumed. Keenan helps the reader by staying in touch with primary sources and singling out specific works for extended quotation and discussion. And he is forthright and complimentary about secondary literature he relies on and recommends.

He seems most sure-footed in the long section on the manualist tradition after the Council of Trent (Chapter Five) and the extension of that discussion in Chapter Seven, with manualism's death in the furor stirred up by *Humanae vitae*—and its resuscitation in new dress in the long reaction to Vatican II that has now come up against the pontificate of Francis. Keenan's discussions of the origin, development, and decline of casuistry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are fascinating. So is his coverage of moral-juridical trends like the "probabilism" advocated especially by the Jesuits, and the rigorist and mainly Dominican "probabiliorism" that it provoked in reaction, which in turn inspired the "equiprobabilism" of Liguori and the Redemptorists. The defense of probabilism found on page 198, and attributed to the early twentieth-century Jesuit Thomas Slater, gives fresh meaning to "jesuitical." Keenan gives his dry verdict on manualism as the conclusion of Chapter Five: "It is no wonder that for almost four centuries Catholics were fascinated by the principle of double effect. They had nothing else with which to work."

Keenan's readers will enjoy the tour in Chapter Eight of contemporary theological ethics around the globe. I found it chastening how few names outside of North and South America I even recognized. Keenan finds two unifying features in all of this diversity: the way attention is now paid to the local and particular rather than to the universal (as it was traditionally conceived); and the focus on suffering—no longer seen as a problem of theodicy (why does a good and omnipotent *God* allow suffering?) but of human accountability: Why do *we* tolerate or contribute to conditions and structures that are contingent causes of immense suffering around the world? The registers of suffering run from environmental degradation and climate change to war to gender discrimination, racism, and poverty.

The exhaustion one feels after reading this chapter may tempt one to crisis fatigue and resignation—and perhaps to wonder whether so much talk about others' suffering can become a cover story of its own: travel, conferences, publications, lectures, as an ersatz reality. But then one remembers the witness of those who died acting on behalf of others' suffering—and Pope Francis's indignation against "the sin of indifference," uttered after the drowning of African refugees in the Mediterranean.

From this book readers will not get substantive discussion of specific issues, though some are favored for illustrative purposes—e.g. usury and contraception. Keenan largely leaves to masters like the late Judge John T. Noonan Jr. the enormously important area of the institutional intersection of law, morality, and religion. I don't think education and schools are even mentioned. Considering how central, even obsessive, they have been in modern Catholic teaching, that is a revealing lacuna. Just consider how much they occupied the published work of someone like John Courtney Murray—or the Jesuits in their entire history. War and even nuclear war don't get significant attention. Colonialism and empire, on the other hand, are well covered.

Nor is this a work of history in the normal sense. The treatment of early Christianity seemed kind of disembodied, despite Keenan's attention to "the body." It was necessarily topical and tailored to suit the author's commitment to the importance of mercy over sin as governing motifs. But it wasn't the primitive Christianity of the first two hundred years or the developed institution of the next four hundred years that I am familiar with. I would have liked to hear more, too, about the changing social and cultural conditions in which the casuists and manualists taught—the early modern preoccupation with certitude and credibility, as revealed in the work of historian Stefania Tutino or Jesuit scholar Michel de Certeau, or the growing power of "confessionalization" in the partitioning of Western Christendom. How much did the unwinding of Christendom in the modern period shape how and what moralists taught? Leslie Woodcock Tentler's *Contraception: An American History* (2005) shows brilliantly how increased education (especially of women) at first heightened American Catholic *reception* of Church teaching on contraception (in the modified form permitted by Pius XII after 1951) and then led to the *rejection* of the Church's teaching after the promulgation of *Humanae vitae*.

On the other hand, Keenan is quite frank that he has not written a work of history as such, nor does he intend to be comprehensive. He *has*, however, tried to think historically. And he is acutely

aware (with full knowledge of the work of people like Noonan) of how teaching has had to change to accommodate new conditions, while avoiding the banal relativism of the "situation ethics" that some propagated two generations ago. In a few well-conceived pages, he makes the case for the historical consciousness famously formulated by Bernard Lonergan, which incorporates experience as a crucial personal appropriation of an objective moral horizon as it emerges with time. His three examples of the Jesuit adoption of probabilism, the Jesuit defense of the Chinese rites as civil and not religious, and the defense of the independent rights of the Guaraní in the Paraguayan reductions are well chosen—if forgivably Jesuit in their focus.

Keenan is also acutely aware of, and stunningly well informed about, how the social, geographical, ethnic, and gender status of those who are doing theological ethics today quite naturally affects the work they do. The practitioners of theological ethics are no longer chiefly clergy taught to treat the confessional as "a tribunal" and the priest as a judge, as they were from the time of the Council of Trent. They no longer—as early and mid-twentieth-century moral theologians were increasingly made to do—write with the Roman magisterium as their primary intended audience.

I am guessing that many readers of this book have probably abandoned the weekly confessional practice of their parents and grandparents. My own parish church has eight or ten massive marble confessionals whose utility is not what it once was, much though many American bishops might wish it were otherwise. People simply stopped going, as one of the priests with whom Tentler speaks in her book says in wonderment. Readers of *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics* will come away with a powerful explanation of why that happened and what serious attempts are now underway to give conscience and discipleship their due.

MICHAEL J. HOLLERICH *is professor emeritus of the history of Christianity at the University of St. Thomas.*

POETRY

THOUGHTS IN EDEN

W. S. Di Piero

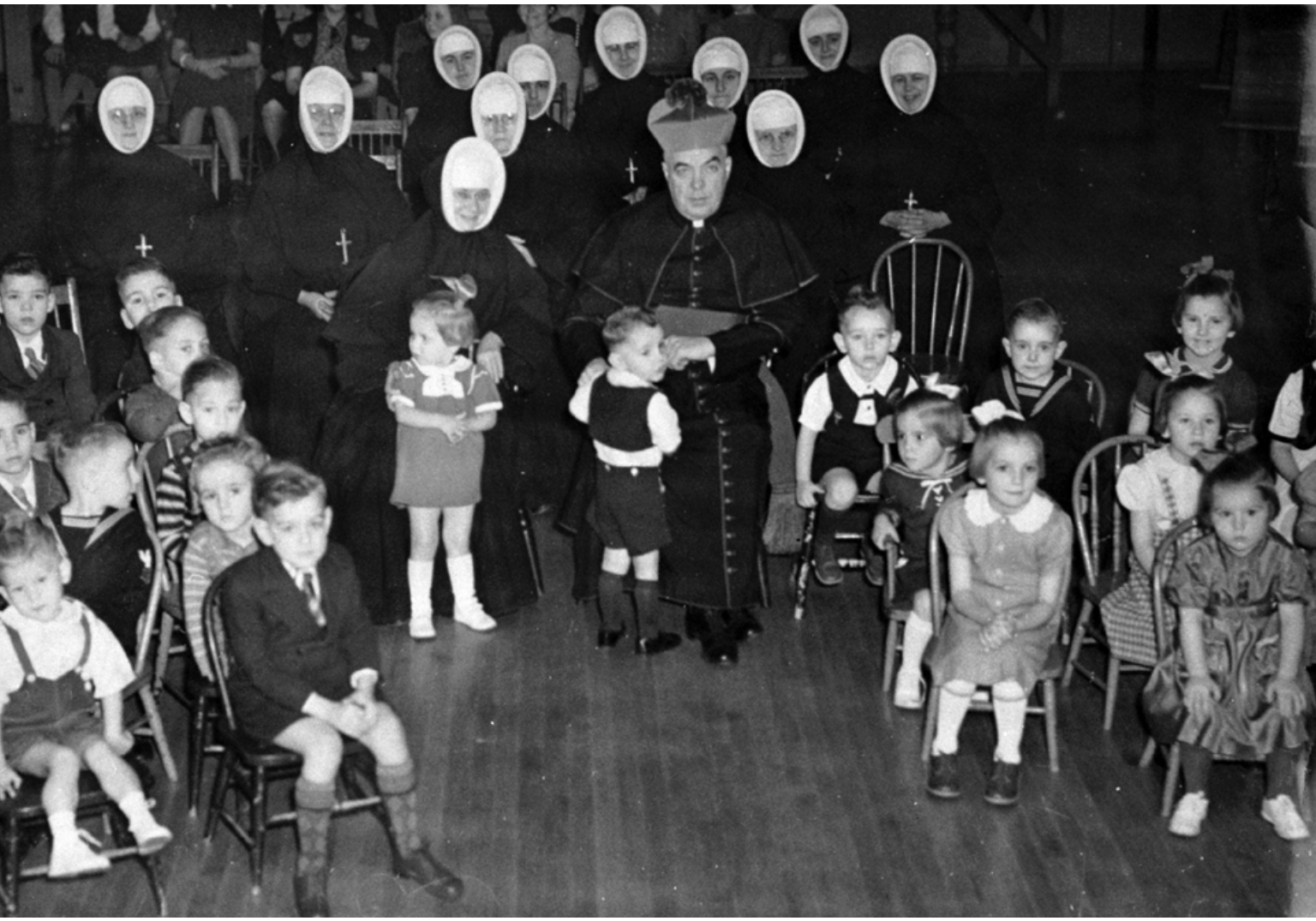
No mesas here, no high desert
blooming with Indian paintbrush
and lupine, no rhino-corrugated hills

or jungle canopy permafrost
ice sheets fiords torrents cataracts
and volcanoes. We want savage tones,

a jaguar, howler monkeys, peacocks,
wheels of fire above, celestial fields slashed by
lightsails and outgassings. We want

more prickly pear and blackberry thorns.
Not a good home for us. We lust to fall
into the lesions of a wailing world.

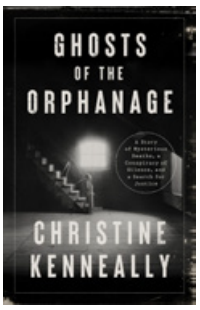
W. S. DI PIERO'*s recent books are a volume of poems,* The Complaints, *and* Fat: New and Uncollected Prose.



Children with nuns and a priest at St. Joseph's orphanage in Burlington, Vermont

No One Listened

HELENE STAPINSKI



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A Story of Mysterious Deaths, a Conspiracy of Silence, and a Search for Justice

CHRISTINE KENNEALLY
PublicAffairs
$17.99 | 384 pp.

Our culture is crazy for orphan stories. From *Harry Potter* to *The Last of Us* to *The Batman*, from *Demon Copperhead* to *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, we just can't get enough of a good orphan yarn. Our fairy tales—and Disney films—are based on abandoned, tormented children. But of course, these are fictional tales. No one likes to hear, or write, about the real thing.

I know because I tried. I stumbled across the real thing in Northwest Alaska at St. Mary's Mission back in the 1990s and considered writing a book about it. But I didn't have the stomach for the gory details. Dipping your toe into *Cinderella* or *Anne of Green Gables* is one thing. But spending a decade researching and living with the true horror is quite another.

Christine Kenneally did just that for her new book, *Ghosts of the Orphanage: A Story of Mysterious Deaths, a Conspiracy of Silence, and a Search for Justice*. She spent more than ten years gathering documents, police reports, letters, diaries, and depositions; reading through trial transcripts; and interviewing hundreds of people to tell us what went on behind

The book is a deep, depressing dive into the stories of children forgotten but still walking—grown—among us.

closed doors for decades at St. Joseph's, a Catholic orphanage in Burlington, Vermont. The stories are at first unbelievable, not only to the reader, but also to the authorities. But Kenneally—and the lawyers who fought the battles for these now-adult orphans—patiently and unflinchingly stitch together the brutal reality.

When Americans think of orphans they think of red-haired Annie or nineteenth-century Oliver Twist. It's all safely in the past or a continent away. But Kenneally is here to tell us that those orphan tales are closer than we think, geographically and temporally. The book is a deep, depressing dive into the stories of children forgotten but still walking—grown—among us. Not ghosts as the title suggests, but flesh and blood, in search of healing.

For anyone who attended Catholic school in the 1940s, '50s, '60s, or even '70s, some of what the nuns at St. Joseph's did will sound familiar. I found myself flashing back to nuns slapping children across the face, hitting us with big wooden paddles, and making us kneel as a group for extended periods when a suspected perpetrator refused to come forward. For years I have written about, and laughed about, what the nuns did at my school, Our Lady of Czestochowa, in Jersey City, New Jersey. But the St. Joseph's stories go beyond the typical—and no longer acceptable—corporal punishment some of us endured. They are no laughing matter, and reading this book made me realize my own nun stories weren't funny either.

Ghosts of the Orphanage grew out of Kenneally's *BuzzFeed* investigative piece published in 2018, which was viewed more than six million times over six months. Kenneally won the Deadline Club Award and was a finalist for the National Magazine Award. But her book is one of those books that you want to put down time and again because the details are just too awful.

Kenneally mentions not once, not twice, but nearly a dozen times that the children were forced to eat their own vomit by the vicious Sisters of Providence, who ran St. Joseph's. They were also severely beaten, kicked down stairs, locked in freezing attics and water tanks, hung out windows, burned with matches, used as guinea pigs by a pharmaceutical company, and sexually abused, not only by the nuns but also by the priests who worked as chaplains overseeing the orphanage. As with Holocaust stories, it's hard to look away from what Kenneally herself calls "a series of unrelenting gruesome events." Reading the book is itself, at times, an act of masochism. This is not to say there were not happy days at St. Joseph's. Children sang, celebrated Christmas, took part in sports, and received a thorough education. But the good times do not balance out the wretched reality.

Helping move the narrative forward are the well-sketched personalities, particularly those of attorney Robert Widman and survivor Sally Dale, who spent twenty-three years in the orphanage, first as a child and then as a worker. We care about these fully formed characters and so need to know if justice will ever come. Will the horror, embedded in survivors' memories and now ours, ever end? Will they get their day in court? As the criminal case builds, as the witnesses grow in number, and as the sharp diocesan attorneys start their attack, the story becomes a gripping nailbiter.

As with the sexual-abuse scandal, the Catholic Church's conspiracy, coverup, and refusal to make amends is nearly as mind-boggling and horrific as the abuse itself. For decades, no one would listen to the stories of these orphans. They were silenced and ignored not only by the Church, but even by their own families and by authorities who thought it was all too terrible to be believed. What's most shocking is the systemic nature of it all—"the Catholic Church's institutionalized sadism, glorification of suffering and how commonplace abuse was in its institutions," as Kenneally writes. The abuses were constant, out in the open, and accepted. "It was not one priest at one time," says one of the attorneys. "It was Dante's inferno."

To show that St. Joseph's was not an isolated case, Kenneally cuts between similar Catholic orphanage stories in Canada, Great Britain, and her native Australia, some involving the same order of nuns. But her main subject is St. Joseph's, whose sheer number of survivors and abuses are sometimes hard to keep track of. A cast of characters at the front of the book would have helped. But as we find in the author's notes at the back, these stories are just a few of the many Kenneally discovered.

At their peak in the 1930s, there were around 1,600 orphanages in the United States, with as many as 5 million children passing through their doors during the twentieth century. Many were not orphans at all, but were abandoned by those who couldn't care for them, or simply taken from alcoholic or mentally ill parents.

Many of the walking wounded repressed their memories and only came to think and speak about their years at St. Joseph's when a support group was formed in the 1990s. But others, emotionally broken from years of experiencing and witnessing abuse, committed suicide, became homeless or addicted to drugs, or wound up in jail for their own violent or sexual offenses. Some, while still at St. Joseph's in the late 1960s and '70s, tried to burn the orphanage buildings down. Sally Dale herself contemplates suicide at one

point, just so she doesn't have to think about St. Joseph's anymore.

The weak links in the book are the reports of deaths that residents say they witnessed at the hands of the nuns, deaths that Kenneally believes were covered up by the Catholic Church over the decades. There was the boy pushed by a nun out a fourth-story window who bounced on landing, the boy who froze to death when locked in the cupola staircase, the boy who was held by his feet over another staircase and dropped either intentionally or accidentally, and the boy who was thrown from a rowboat into a lake by nuns during a "sink-or-swim" lesson. There is the story of a nun smothering the illegitimate baby of another nun with a small satin pillow. Kenneally digs and digs, but in the end, no bodies turn up. "The deaths," she writes, "still had a powerful aura of unreality."

Is justice served? Only partially. A settlement is reached. No one gets their day in court. But after Kenneally's *BuzzFeed* exposé, the statute of limitations on civil actions for childhood sexual abuse as well as for childhood physical abuse was lifted in Vermont. As we now know, post-*Spotlight*, it can take years for memories to resurface, and even more time to work up the courage to come forward.

There are other small victories. In 2021, the St. Joseph's Orphanage Task Force, set up by the attorney general to investigate the survivors' claims, produced a report that officially validated many of the complaints. "No historical context," the report states, "excuses the failure to protect these children." The Sisters of Providence, whose order is based just over the border in Montreal, refused to cooperate with the investigation. "The goal of the church," Kenneally writes, "is suprahuman and is measured in centuries: it has been working to control history."

Though none of the nuns is punished, Kenneally names those who ran this "tiny totalitarian state"—Sister James Mary, Sister Jane of the Rosary, Sister Mary Vianney, Sister Claire of the Providence, Sister Noelle, and Sister Priscille, whom she visits and who admits to having pushed a girl out a window. Kenneally tells the backstories of these nuns, many of them who came from poor farm families in Canada and who were barely adults themselves when they entered the convent, ill-equipped to handle troubled abandoned children.

But at center stage are those who were abused, who are given their space and time to grieve—along with the reader—for their lost childhoods. We may not be able to right the past, but we can make the effort to listen to their stories.

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

THE BALLOONS

Paul Martin

The morning after Rita's birthday celebration,
we descended the stairs,
surprised the balloons had moved
from the dining room to the kitchen
their colored ribbons trailing down to the floor.
How festive it was to eat
breakfast beneath them.
By the next day a couple had drifted
upstairs to the head of the hallway,
as though deciding which bedroom to claim.
Others lowered their blank faces
to ours. For days they bobbled among us
as we prepared meals or drank wine
and nibbled cheese, at every turn bumping
into them like guests at a crowded party
or our missing family reconvened,
in no hurry to leave,
desperate to eat and speak.

PAUL MARTIN *has published two books of poetry:* Closing Distances *(The Backwaters Press) and* River Scar *(Grayson Books), as well as three prize-winning chapbooks.*

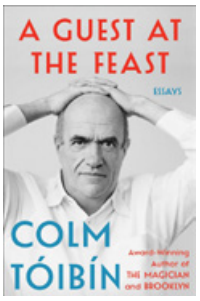
Colm Tóibín, 2022

Magisterial Silences

BAILEY TRELA

For a writer of his generation, Colm Tóibín might be the closest thing to a celebrity the twenty-first century is capable of producing. The source of his popular appeal, however, can be a little tricky to pin down. Tóibín's novels are often understated and elliptical, driven more by small human interactions than by plot. His most critically acclaimed work, 2004's *The Master*, is a dense, involuted treatment of the life and emotional weather of Henry James as the specters of old age and death loom. Even his most commercially successful novels, including *Brooklyn* (2009) and *Nora Webster* (2014), are far frostier and stranger than their warm popular reception would lead you to believe.

Though Tóibín is most famous as a novelist, he's also a prolific and omnivorous essayist, regularly turning out lengthy pieces of criticism and cultural commentary for publications like the *London Review of Books* and the *New Yorker*. Over the past three decades, he's published a celebratory homage to the city of Barcelona; travelogs detailing a walking tour along the Irish border and investigating the state of European Catholicism in the mid-1990s; studies of the Irish dramatist Lady Gregory and the American poet Elizabeth Bishop; and themed essay collections on the lives of gay artists, writers and their families, and (of course) Henry James.



A GUEST AT THE FEAST
Essays

COLM TÓIBÍN
Scribner
$28 | 336 pp.

In a way, it's surprising that a writer so prolific shouldn't have a Selected Essays, but the peculiar qualities of his criticism, which tends to be information-dense and quote-heavy, might offer an explanation. Tóibín doggedly pursues his own curiosities, leaping down rabbit hole after rabbit hole and reveling in the warren. That his earliest nonfiction outings, including *Bad Blood: A Walk Along the Irish Border* and *The Sign of the Cross: Travels in Catholic Europe*, were essentially peripatetic pieces of journalism makes sense. A leisurely stroll is the clearest model for his nonfiction style.

His latest collection, *A Guest at the Feast*, comes closest to being a general compendium, though its contents are weighted in favor of a particular subject of abiding interest to Tóibín: religion. The book is anchored by three essays on popes, and three essays on writers concerned, in one way or another, with religious themes. This may seem odd to some readers, since religious themes aren't terribly prominent in Tóibín's novels, where they emerge (if they emerge at all) in oblique ways—for example, as imposed silences, dictating what may and may not be said. Unsurprisingly, the collection as a whole is interested in "religion and its shadowy aftermath," to borrow a phrase from Tóibín's essay on Marilynne Robinson. Dealing with the shards of a religious tradition, as Tóibín's essays make clear, can be intensely clarifying—after all, when things break up, they are quite literally made particular, and can be examined from all angles.

The collection's title essay, a rambling piece of psychogeography, offers a magpie's view of Tóibín's artistic development. He quotes writers he admires, recounts the history of landmarks in his native Enniscorthy, and drinks his way through his student days in Dublin. At one point, he recalls finding a stash of forbidden books above his mother's wardrobe, including Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls* and John McGahern's *The Dark*. These texts, "samizdat Irish-style," are tokens of "a great unsettling," the seismic cultural shifts that occurred as Ireland opened itself to the world in the 1960s. The essay's discontinuous, mosaic-like structure, treating every fragment of experience with equal weight, is a reflection of this disturbance. Tóibín is attempting to capture a culture, and a self, that has been fractured and riven by deep changes.

There's always been something clinical about the tone of Tóibín's writing, a severity that insists on the raw accretion of facts. At its worst, this tendency can make his essays feel like little more than collections of quotations. Elsewhere, it provides a powerful charge. "A Brush with the Law," which recounts Tóibín's fascination with Ireland's Supreme Court, is a case in point. The essay's lengthy explanations of court

cases dealing with homosexuality bear a clear edge. Tóibín's real aim is to demonstrate how religious ideas get filtered through the legal system, how legal arguments against homosexuality are often just moral arguments in disguise. In a sense, his method elevates pedantry to a moral art.

This understanding of religion as a richly material, specific, and grounded thing gives shape to the collection's contents. Structured religion is, naturally, political, as Tóibín's essay on Pope Francis, which charts the prelate's maneuverings and continued silence during and after Argentina's Dirty War, makes clear. Despite Francis's reputation as "a poster boy for informality, humility and good-natured cheerfulness," in Tóibín's estimation he is fundamentally a shapeshifting figure, capable of an almost ecstatic vacillation. "Bergoglio could play the anarchist one moment and the next revert to his role as authoritarian," he writes. That this degree of vacillation, the absence of a coherent center of thought and action, might be central to a successful papacy in the twenty-first century is the essay's unspoken fear, one borne out by the fate of Benedict XVI, a deeply intellectual prelate firmly committed to theological revanchism.

Tangling with the paradoxes of religious life provides the foundation for many of the collection's most powerful pieces, including, naturally, "The Paradoxical Pope," Tóibín's's searching analysis of John Paul II. Written for the *New Yorker* in 1995, the essay appeared at a time when it seemed the Polish pope was on the way out, and there was the hope of massive reform in the Church. This focus on a moment of illusory optimism makes the essay a strange, almost autumnal read—after all, we know that John Paul II held on for another decade, and that he was replaced by Ratzinger, who was in some ways even more conservative. At the same time, it's a remarkably prescient essay, a powerful example of Tóibín's interest in the forces of compromise, which allow things to appear to change while really staying the same.

John Paul II, as Tóibín portrays him, was "a master of ambiguities." His public performances late in life were defined by a dialectic of frailty and sudden strength, a "mixture of bemusement and power," which Tóibín suggests was central to their appeal. His standard move of "on the one hand, forbidding debate, and, on the other hand, seeming sympathetic and open" cloaked the Catholic Church in a deceptive air of flexibility during a period of great geopolitical changes. Like the Catholic Church itself at the end of the long twentieth century, Tóibín is fascinated by the fact that, as John Paul II "grows weaker, the light in his eyes strengthens, and his performances become more powerful and fascinating."

The collection is rounded out by a handful of essays on writers. "Putting Religion in Its Place," an essay on Marilynne Robinson, is concerned with the question of how religion is to be treated in a novel. Tóibín seems to settle for a clear and relatively simple answer. "Making religious thought easy is part of the genius of *Gilead*," he writes, and notes of *Home*, Robinson's third novel, that in spite of her "interest in religion, the predicaments dramatized in the book—including the religious ones—are rendered mostly in human terms." What Tóibín is praising is essentially embodiedness, which is exactly what makes most realist fiction successful: the religious or the social or the political (and so on) is made granularly present in the minds of the characters. There's something slippery about Tóibín's treatment of his subject, a lack of clarity in his own chosen terms, which is perhaps why the essay contains lengthy asides on a number of other writers, including Henry James and Ernest Hemingway. It's as though Tóibín is a touch uncomfortable dealing with Robinson's honest religiosity.

The most riveting essay in the collection is likely "Issues of Truth and Invention," on the Irish novelist Francis Stuart, who during World War II delivered radio broadcasts from Berlin that were intended to convey German propaganda to his homeland (though he refused to make any anti-Semitic statements). Stuart managed to have a successful career after the war, publishing several novels that dealt with his experiences—whether unsparingly or not is still a matter of debate. Tóibín became a close acquaintance of Stuart's toward the end of his life, and his attempts to wrangle with Stuart's messy literary legacy propel the essay. But Stuart seems irreducible, and Tóibín is led down a path of generalizations. In his postwar novels, Tóibín writes, Stuart "created versions of himself and versions of the war and its aftermath that redeemed him, inasmuch as they could, from the ordinary guilt or blame that might attach to collaboration." Behind this was Stuart's need "to believe that he had gained something spiritual, some new insight into the human condition, during and after the war."

These are sharp observations, and they cast a few brilliant patches of light onto the shadowed monolith of Stuart's psyche. But a far more affecting note is struck at the start of the essay, when Tóibín is recalling his own memories of the elderly Stuart and his wife, Madeleine: "I knew they both lived in the shadowy spaces between knowledge and forgiveness; their response to this was not simple, and I never fully understood it, and I still don't." There is a sense, here, of abiding in mystery, of a magisterial silence scrupulously maintained—in a way, a fundamentally religious posture. Silence, in particular, has a paradoxical grace to it—it models the virtue of forbearance, but at the same time can be a product of conservative forces and inclinations, or of fear. But there are different types and qualities of silence. Bergoglio's silence, one senses, was simple, an absence of noise. Stuart's was something more complex, an immanent force, closer to a prayer than anything else. It's no surprise that Tóibín would be drawn to it, like a moth to a votive flame.

BAILEY TRELA *is a writer and critic whose work has appeared in the* Baffler, Frieze, *the* Cleveland Review of Books, *and elsewhere.*

A Voice in the Chorus

PAUL BAUMANN

Clare Boothe Luce and Henry Luce in New York City, 1954

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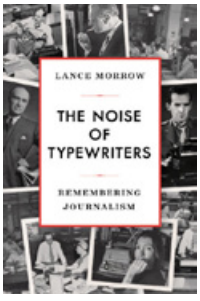


THE NOISE OF TYPEWRITERS
Remembering Journalism

LANCE MORROW
Encounter Books
$27.99 | 200 pp.

The clattering sound of typewriters—"*slapsplapslap…slap…slapslap….slapslap…ching!*"—can be heard in veteran *Time* magazine essayist Lance Morrow's new book. But the more insistent sound in this slim volume is the *thud, thud, thud* of name dropping. If you were born in this century, you might need a scorecard to know who the players are.

To be fair, Morrow describes himself as a kind of Zelig. He has known—or at least encountered, read, or reported on—a great many powerful people and influential writers. Just a partial list of the major and minor characters who make an appearance in *The Noise of Typewriters: Remembering Journalism*, includes: *Time* publisher and editor Henry Luce, his glamorous and accomplished second wife Clare Boothe Luce, Franklin D. Roosevelt, JFK (a careless PT boat skipper), Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Bill and Hillary Clinton, Elie Wiesel, Joe DiMaggio, Norman Mailer, Mary McGrory, Robert Caro, Alger Hiss, Joseph McCar-

thy, William F. Buckley Jr., Carl Bernstein, Henry Kissinger, *New York Times* executive editor Abe Rosenthal, Allen Ginsberg (Morrow "detested" his poetry), and an interminably rambling Mikhail Gorbachev.

I could go on; Morrow certainly does. Thucydides and Herodotus are also summoned on stage as archetypal journalists, indispensable "storytellers," and presumably a reminder of the value of a good pre–Vatican II Jesuit education. Morrow attended Gonzaga College High School in Washington D.C. before Harvard. He graduated from Gonzaga two years after the tribal Catholic brawler Pat Buchanan. In addition to teaching Latin and Greek, the "Jebbies" did not hesitate to discipline unruly students with a biblical rod of iron, or a fist. It was a different time. Much of *The Noise of Typewriters* is also, as Morrow's subtitle suggests, about "a different time."

After college and a brief stint at the *Washington Evening Star*, where he worked with columnist Mary McGrory as well as Carl Bernstein of *All the President's Men* fame, Morrow joined *Time* in 1965. He stayed for forty years, and his new book is an apologia for that magazine's partisan journalism in defense of capitalism, liberal democracy, anti-communism, the Republican Party, and middle-class American values. Morrow laments the loss of the social and cultural consensus of the 1940s and '50s, an era *Time*'s publisher evangelically named "The American Century." The emergence of a prosperous and seemingly homogeneous American middle class was celebrated and to some extent shaped by "Harry" Luce's artful and wildly successful magazines, which included *Life*, *Fortune*, and *Sports Illustrated*, as well as *Time*. (Morrow neglects to mention that *Life*, once the most popular magazine in America, was as much Clare Boothe Luce's idea as Harry's.)

Luce's magazine empire made him a fortune, placing him at the center of cultural and political power. *Time* embraced a "great man" approach to journalism, exemplified by the magazine's much-anticipated and debated "Man of the Year" issue. Luce made a point of almost always putting a person on the cover of *Time*. The magazine's profiles and trend issues helped readers make sense of events as well as their own lives and aspirations. That, Morrow believes, is what good journalism *should* do. Journalists are unavoidably storytellers and mythmakers. "Legends endure. Legends are memorable. Everything vanishes into the country of myth," Morrow writes.

Time's profiles and trend issues helped readers make sense of events as well as their own lives and aspirations. That, Morrow believes, is what good journalism should do.

Luce (1898–1967) was born in China, the son of American Presbyterian missionaries. In that sense he came by his evangelistic zeal, for both America and traditional values, naturally. A scholarship student at Hotchkiss and Yale, he was an epitome of the American "self-made" man. Under his hands-on editorship, Time Inc.'s properties brought an unabashed Christian perspective to issues of the day. Luce was a staunch East Coast Republican, fervently anti-communist, an opponent of FDR and the New Deal, worshipful of Churchill, obsessed with the question of "who lost China," and an unrepentant advocate for U.S. intervention in Vietnam. "The right war in the right place at the right time," was how *Time* justified that tragic blunder, a catastrophe that exposed the fallacy of thinking that America knows what's best for everyone else. Morrow admires Luce's sincerity and "piratical authenticity" and for the most part dismisses his legions of liberal critics as naïve or, worse, soft on the threat of communism.

Morrow initially had doubts about Luce's overbearing editorial influence, but time and events softened his assessment. Luce presided over "America's long golden age of magazines," and we are the poorer for living in a fragmented media world, where the idea of journalistic "gatekeepers" is scoffed at as elitist. I suspect he is right about that. When a thousand different voices demand our attention, our interest and focus quickly flag. When Morrow started at *Time*, bylines were rare; what appeared in the magazine was a collective effort. But that collaborative (and hierarchical) process had its compensations. "I was a voice in the chorus," he writes, noting that President Lyndon Johnson waited up at night to receive an advance copy of the magazine.

> I knew that my story would be read by every mayor and governor in America, by every senator and congressman, every justice of the Supreme Court—by the president of each corporation, by all who were in power in America, or wished to be in power; and by every lawyer, every doctor and dentist, and by their patients in the waiting room.

The acquisition and use of such political and cultural power is a major theme in *The Noise of Typewriters*. Beyond Luce's "genius" as an editor and creator of magazines, what Morrow most admires is perhaps Luce's determination to leverage his influence in pursuit of his declared aims. In that context, for example, he argues that John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, the groundbreaking *New Yorker* report on the aftermath of the atomic bombing, was ultimately "fatuous," distorted by the "defect of its own simplicity." In Morrow's account, Luce's journalism avoided such sanctimony.

What Morrow cannot bring himself to admit is that there was something flawed and self-deceiving in the myth of America's providential status all along, and Boomers were not wrong to question it.

Hersey was originally a *Time* reporter. Although no Communist, he was not clear-eyed about the evil of communism, or so Morrow contends. That myopia compelled Hersey to see the bombing of Hiroshima as "a great sin" rather than an ambiguous and unavoidable moral choice. A sterner cost-benefit analysis, Morrow believes, is required in judging such military or political decisions. He suggests that what the Japanese did in the "rape of Nanking" was arguably more abhorrent than the use of the atomic bomb.

Luce had recognized Hersey's gifts as a writer and thinker and offered to make him editor-in-chief of *Time*. The offer was declined. "Hersey did not want the power; he was appalled by it. I suspect that Luce found his attitude incomprehensible," Morrow writes. "Luce's deepest convictions revolved around the dilemmas and temptations of power." He understood temporal power in a Christian context. Man is obligated to use power to pursue "the Good." Unintended consequences are inevitable, and a refusal to act and shoulder the burden of responsibility is the greater moral failing. To be sure, Morrow concedes, "the powerless did not seem to interest [Luce] much. It was a flaw in him—a missing circuit." Luce was a Yale-trained classicist, and in that sense his understanding of virtue was "less Christian than Roman or Greek." Morrow speculates that Luce thought "moaning over the sufferings of others" was a kind of "condescension." There may be some truth in that sentiment, but if Hersey's attention to the suffering of Hiroshima's mostly innocent victims is condescending, perhaps the world needs less classical virtue and more Christian "condescension."

The Noise of Typewriters comprises thirty-one short chapters. Consequently, Morrow's argument about the nature and value of journalism, especially its religious and "metaphysical" warrant, is more gestured at than sustained. He believes journalism *at its best* helps us make sense of the world and our place in it, which is a theological task as well. *Time* was scrupulous about facts and statistics, but to make sense of the facts you need context, and you can't provide context without making moral or even religious judgments. *Time* explained "what it all meant," Morrow writes. "*Time* has always worked in a zone somewhat beyond journalism. We justified that by claiming to be moral in our judgments of the news."

A cranky antagonism toward Baby Boomers is threaded throughout this book. For Morrow, the sixties remain "the seedbed of later miseries and heresies." In that vein, he dismisses contemporary critiques of American exceptionalism. The critics who see only racism, white supremacism, "and all that" are blind to the "Emersonian idealism'" and "innocence" of Luce's American Century. "There were giants in the earth in those days," he writes of the media mogul's midcentury allies and adversaries. The Boomers, exemplified of course by the Clintons, "brought a certain impatient depthlessness to the work. They lacked resonance."

I suspect there are worse failings than a lack of "resonance"—an instinctive indifference to the suffering of the poor might be one. Resonance requires hard surfaces, and (we) Boomers came of age in a culture and economy where "everything solid melts into air"—and now into digital algorithms. The moral clarity of the fight against Hitler and the Soviet Union did not exist in Vietnam. Far from it. Giants stumbled badly in those days. The U.S. economy, which won World War II and was an engine of stability and widely shared prosperity in the 1950s and much of the '60s, has careened from one crisis to the next for the past fifty years.

Boomers have contributed to that chaos, to be sure. But if Trump is any indication, what has survived of Luce's fabled mid-century American consensus is finally unraveling in calamitous fashion. What Morrow cannot bring himself to admit is that there was something flawed and self-deceiving in the myth of America's providential status all along, and Boomers were not wrong to question it. Partly as a result of that questioning, legally protected racial segregation and the war in Vietnam were ended and a greater measure of equality for women won. Those developments have a certain resonance for many people. More to the point, no single generation is responsible for any given historical moment. There is enough guilt to go around, regardless of age.

I share much of Morrow's skepticism and exasperation with today's "woke" journalistic and intellectual shibboleths. But it is not illuminating or helpful to attribute our current difficulties mainly to the excesses of America's critics at home, most of whom still believe in the country's governing principles and promise. "Giants" might have walked the earth back in the day, but that didn't stop Luce from hating FDR, uncritically worshiping Churchill, divorcing the mother of his children, or experimenting with LSD. Attending *Time*'s seventy-fifth birthday party at Radio City Music Hall in 1998 (where John Kennedy Jr. walks elegiacally away in the "cold and rain"), Morrow admits to feeling like Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*. He's at least right about that. There's too much Scrooge in this very short book. "Never be certain of anything too quickly," is one of the fundamental rules of journalism for Morrow. Unfortunately, it is a rule more affirmed than observed in *The Noise of Typewriters*.

PAUL BAUMANN *is* Commonweal*'s senior writer.*

Consider the Birds

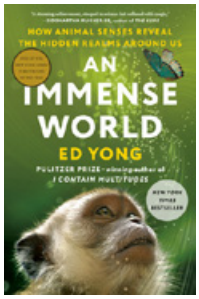
ROBERT RUBSAM

Imagine yourself as a star-nosed mole. You are about the size of a hamster, and you live most of your life underground in darkness. For this reason, you depend upon the eleven pairs of pink sensors that jut out from the front of your face. You depend upon them for everything: to sense the tunnels around you, the objects you encounter, the food before you. These sensations are nearly instantaneous, reaching the brain in about ten milliseconds. Imagine yourself rooting about in the dark, living by the pressure on the front of your face, forming a vision of the world entirely via touch.

We might be forgiven for assuming that other creatures perceive the world more or less as we do. But we would be mistaken. Our world is full of creatures with sensory organs so different from our own as to render their lives unimaginable to us. This is the premise of the philosopher Thomas Nagel's groundbreaking essay "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?": "In so far as I can imagine this (which is not very far), it tells me only what it would be like for *me* to behave as a bat behaves. But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a *bat* to be a bat." If one's perceptions constitute one's sense of being in the world, then how could we possibly hope to imagine ourselves in the lives of those whose perceptions are nothing like our own?

In *An Immense World*, Ed Yong gives it a shot. Yong is a science writer at the *Atlantic,* where he has published some of the best reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic, but his background is in reporting about the nonhuman world. His first book, *I Contain Multitudes*, is on the subject of microbes, and he has published articles on endangered whales, malaria, mushroom parasites, and corals. In his new book, he takes on the vast subject of animal senses, attempting to synthesize hundreds of years of research into a tight 350 pages.

Yong is trying to tug readers beyond their own experience and intuitions into the deeply alien world of nonhuman lives. He begins his book with an account of the German zoologist Jakob von Uexküll's concept of the *Umwelt*: environment, literally, but more "specifically the part of [an animal's] surroundings that an animal can sense and experience—its *perceptual* world." All animals perceive some things and do not perceive others. Consider the tick, which senses heat and skin odor but has no need to perceive color. Uexküll compared the *Umwelt* to a house whose many windows open onto a garden, and whose view of the garden depends on which windows open when, and onto what. "Each species is constrained in some ways," Yong writes, "and liberated in others."



AN IMMENSE WORLD

ED YONG
Random House
$30 | 464 pp.

A MOST REMARKABLE CREATURE

JONATHAN MEIBURG
Vintage
$20 | 400 pp.

As Yong shows, the animal kingdom is full of wildly diverse kinds of perception. Deep sea creatures evolved in a zone without sunlight and proceed largely according to the signals they gather from the movement of the water around them. Tiny insects hunt and communicate using vibrations on the surface of a leaf. Many animals see deep into the ultraviolet end of the color spectrum, perceiving patterns and colors invisible to the human eye. Cock-eyed squid have evolved two different kinds of eye, one to look upward for prey in downwelling sunlight, the other to search for bioluminescence below. Pit vipers have developed immensely sensitive nerve endings that can perceive changes in temperature of as little as .001°C, which enables them to hunt in the dark. The whiskers of harbor seals track fish by detecting invisible water trails.

As the previous paragraph suggests, the collection of facts in *An Immense World* can overwhelm the reader; the book has so much information to convey that it rarely devotes more than a few pages to any particular example. This has real implications for the ideas Yong is trying to get across. In his final chapter, he draws the reader's attention to the many ways in which human beings are polluting the sensory landscapes of the world's creatures, distracting their specially honed sensors with new sounds, colors, smells, and physical sensations. Migrating birds are distracted by beaming lights; giant whales find their hearing diminished by container ship traffic; bats crash into the windows that don't return their sonar pings. And this is to say nothing of all the species made extinct by humans. "With every creature that vanishes," Yong writes, "we lose a way

of making sense of the world." But perhaps because of the size of his topic, those ways of making sense only rarely come into focus. The scientific methods of establishing how we know what we know about the way other animals perceive the world can sometimes take precedence over the perceptions themselves. While *Umwelt* can be translated to mean "environment," the original German is much broader—from *welt*, meaning "world," and *um*, meaning "around," "surrounding," "total." *Umwelt* suggests the full world that comes into view when several senses combine in the mind of an animal. We can observe how an animal responds to discrete stimuli, but not how those sensations are *experienced*, together with others. Yong tells us that songbirds have begun to alter their calls to combat urban noise, but we as readers have no idea what it is for one bird to sing to another bird, and for that other bird to hear it. Whatever the song means to them is not what it means to us, however sophisticated our instruments for recording it. That humbling gap is sometimes obscured by all the scientific research Yong has gathered in this timely book. What is it like to be a bird? We still don't know.

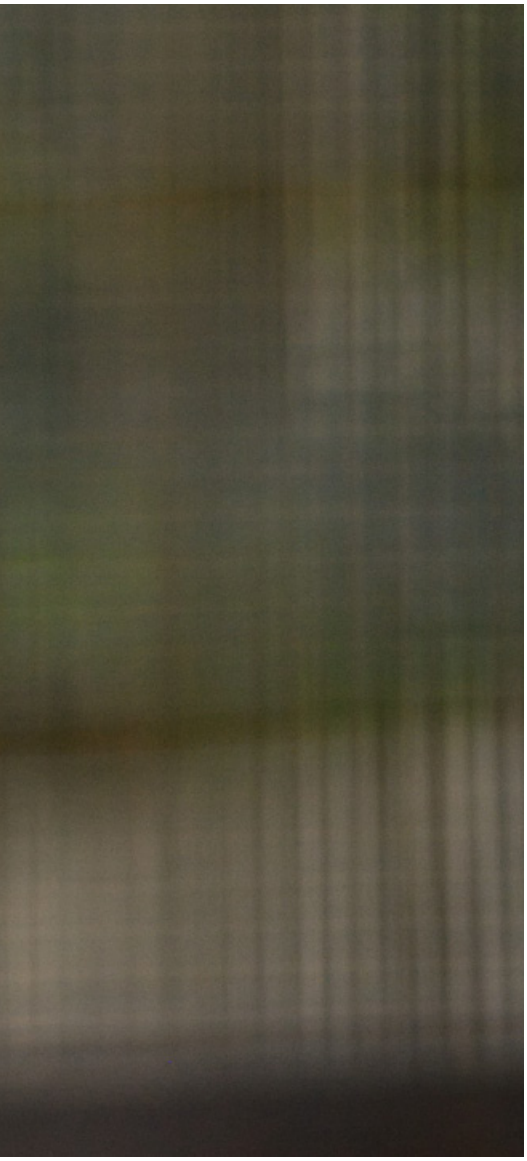
It's that same question that the musician, naturalist, and now author Jonathan Meiburg explores in *A Most Remarkable Creature*, now out in paperback. But first he must establish what, exactly, a bird even is. His subject is the caracara, a subfamily of five falcon species native to Central and South America. The first birds were feathered dinosaurs and emerged in the aftermath of the Cretaceous extinction, repopulating the earth over the next ten million years. As Meiburg notes, it took another forty million years for a recognizable ancestor of human beings to emerge—about ten million years ago.

Southern crested caracara

In short, birds have been around much longer than we have.

The landmass that then comprised what are now Australia, Antarctica, and South America proved especially hospitable: at least twelve different lineages of feathered dinosaurs survived in the southern hemisphere, and their descendants continue to thrive. It's a lot, but Meiburg's fluid storytelling is necessary for establishing how caracaras came to be, which allows him to explore what they now are. Caracaras are immensely clever, communicative, and social. In an experiment, one group of Argentinian chimango caracaras were shown how to open a closed plexiglass box with a piece of food. A second group was shown the food in the box, but not how to open it, yet learned the technique simply by watching the first group doing it successfully. "The observer chimangos had learned," Meiburg writes, "from a single observation, that an object they'd never seen before contained food, and their peers' actions had taught them how to get at it."

TOMÁŠ PÍŠEK/FLICKR



We can observe how an animal responds to discrete stimuli, but not how it experiences *them.*

This remarkable intelligence is reflected in the caracaras' remarkable adaptability. Caracaras evolved in South America, isolated from human contact until fourteen thousand years ago, at the earliest. Yet they have very quickly adapted to the human presence, hanging around dumps and garbage tips, waiting outside back doors, and visiting generous windowsills even in major cities like La Paz. In the Falklands, an isolated group of islands three hundred miles east of mainland Argentina, striated caracaras—also known as Johnny Rooks—flit between their rocky roosts and the islands' isolated residences, feasting on both penguin chicks and kitchen scraps.

Their willingness to approach and interact with humans and human things has long made the birds an object of fascination. Meiburg first encountered the Johnny Rook on the Falklands when he was a younger man, just out of college and exploring remote settlements around the world. He found himself disarmed by caracaras' curiosity and even their impishness, their willingness to tag along beside an unknown person, pluck hats from heads, tug at backpack zippers, and stare a person right in the face. "The first ones I saw," he writes, "stared back at me so intensely that I felt slightly abashed, as if I owed them an explanation."

The birds left a similar, if less fond, impression on Darwin when the *Beagle* called in at the Falklands; they even stole his hat. Meiburg devotes substantial space to the naturalist and writer William Henry Hudson, who grew up on the Argentinean pampas and died in England, longing for the flora and fauna of his youth. The caracaras left a particular impression upon his memories. He described them as "a species so cosmopolitan in its tastes," and in their social intelligence he recognized a certain resemblance to human beings. They helped spur the passionate argument he often made in print about the rich interior worlds of animals. Meiburg quotes him as writing: "All that is in our minds is also in theirs."

Yong would object to this as untutored anthropomorphism—a failure to acknowledge that other species perceive the world very differently from the way we do. But perhaps Hudson only meant that the minds of other animals capture as much of the world as ours do. In focusing on this single subfamily of birds, Meiburg's wonderful book prods at our preconceptions about what counts as intelligence, and suggests that certain qualities we associate uniquely with human beings are to be found in other creatures. "If the ability to train your own intuition, rather than waiting on natural selection to do it for you, leads to the process that we might call consciousness," he writes of the chimangos, "then another name for 'socially transmitted adaptive behavior patterns'—compounding the insights of individual consciousness—is culture."

ROBERT RUBSAM *writes fiction and nonfiction. His work has been published in the* New York Times Magazine, *the* Washington Post, *the* Atlantic, *the* Baffler, *and the* Nation, *among other places.*

Domenico di Bartolo, *Anointing of the Sick*, Santa Maria della Scala, Italy, 1440

Each a Thread in the Tapestry

SHEILA CAVANAUGH

I was introduced to death at the age of five in the home of my great aunts, Elizabeth and Gertrude, who lived across the street from my family. My mother dressed me up one day and walked me over to visit the two single sisters in their eighties, who had opened their home to my mother and me for endless afternoons of tea. I remember walking into their home that day and noticing how dark and solemn it was. As my mother and I turned the corner from the entranceway into the living room, I saw Gertrude's fragile body lying peacefully in a large, cushioned box just inside the bay window. All I remember after that is sitting on a dark velvet sofa and turning to a woman sitting beside me, whom I mistook for my mother, and saying, "It looks just like church!" My mother overheard me from across the room and gently shushed me.

The next year, when I was six, my younger sister, Kathleen, died not long after her birth. I remember my mother's convulsive grief following her stay in the hospital, which was at the end of our street. The connection between a baby's death and my mother's sadness was too abstract for me to understand at the time, but my mother experienced it as an unspeakably painful rupture. The quick trip from crib to coffin was too much for her to bear.

Two years later my mother had another baby girl, her fifth daughter and eighth child. My parents named her Kathleen,

ALBUM/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

too. It was as if I always had two sisters named Kathleen: the one who lived as a shadow of grief and the one who flourished as a gift of grace. One sister brought my mother inconsolable sadness, and the other periods of great joy. The darkness of my sister's death hovered over my family like a shadow reminding us of our mortality. I could never escape the fierce reality that we live but we also die. As Jesus said, we "know neither the day nor the hour." We just know it is coming.

As a class officer at my Catholic high school, one of my responsibilities was to represent my class at any wakes and funerals associated with anyone at the school. My father, a public-school principal in the City of Worcester, held the same responsibility for his school. Together, my father and I attended countless wakes and funerals over the years. Without knowing it, my father taught me how to comport myself in an environment where grief is the order of the day and a dead body is near. One of the blessings of this experience is that I learned the great landmarks of a person's life are the people they loved.

In April 2014, my eldest brother, Brian, who lived with quadriplegia for twenty years, received the sacrament of the sick at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. This was the signal that he was on the runway to death. The progressive effects of muscular dystrophy, a disease that has ravaged so many lives—including those of a younger sister and brother—were too great to stave off any longer. With my family surrounding my brother, the hospital chaplain, a Catholic priest, blessed Brian with oil, prayed over him, and, at my request, absolved all of us for any sufferings we may have caused my brother. My request stemmed mostly from my father's inability over many years to accept my brother for who he was and had always been: a beloved child of a merciful God. Indoctrinated in the old church, my father was raised to associate a sickness of this magnitude with some kind of moral failing. To my father, a ravaged body manifests a lack of right relationship with God. Someone must be to blame. The roster of the accused is long and devastating: self, spouse, parent, grandparent, child, God himself. Who is responsible for this calamity?

My brother died twelve weeks after he received the sacrament. I was given the responsibility of telling my father, who did not hear well and was living in a skilled nursing facility. I remember having to say several times, with increasing volume, "Dad, Brian died." When my father finally understood, he reacted volcanically: cries pierced the late-afternoon solitude of the activity room.

Four years later, I was again responsible for telling my father of a death—this time my mother's. I bent down to tell him, but the words were lodged behind an avalanche of grief rising in my throat. I tried several times to speak, but no sound came out of my mouth. My tears forced me to surrender the task of announcing her death. A nurse, standing beside me, said to my father, "Helen has passed away." His grief was immediate and torrential. Two months later, my father died.

I continue to be surrounded by death as a chaplain working at a large urban hospital that serves patients from all over the world. The hospital staff bears witness to the full arc of human suffering. Every day, doctors, nurses, coordinators, therapists, and chaplains don their compassion-coated armor to tend to the wounds of body and soul. Amidst patients who are recovering from strokes, burns, heart attacks, sepsis, tumors, and every imaginable permutation of disease, I am frequently paged to attend to a patient approaching the final threshold of life: a fifty-seven-year-old cardiac surgeon dying of metastatic colon cancer, a twenty-three-year-old college student struck by a truck, a forty-six-year-old father felled by a broken neck. Our patients' pain is many-layered and their loneliness acute. Yet within the mystery of all this suffering, I experience glimpses of the Resurrection: people from all walks of life coming together to help those in need. So many of us—strangers helping strangers—come to see the world anew. Tending to trauma has created a resilient village where the deeply afflicted and we who accompany them transform heart-rending sadness into courage, hope, and joy. By coming together in a spirit of compassion and love, each of us—worker and patient alike—enables hope to take root. Whether it is hope for recovery or hope for peace in eternal life, it is hope that propels, consoles, and uplifts.

As I witness the endless procession of lives marching toward the heavenly banquet, I have come to embrace Death as a wise taskmaster and occasional friend. Its presence, sometimes welcomed and sometimes not, means life is changed, but not ended. Death has taught me that each of our lives is a thread in a consecrated tapestry of divine love entwined with sorrow and hope—a tapestry that survives our bodily surrender and endures forever.

Within the mystery of all this suffering, I experience glimpses of the Resurrection.

SHEILA CAVANAUGH *is a wife, mother of four children from Korea and Colombia, and a chaplain at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Dana Farber Cancer Institute, Boston.*

AT THE END OF THE DAY

Judy Brackett

Because I could not stop for air, I learned
that someone there is that doesn't love birdsong.
Even though I live in this pretty how town,
there's a fire somewhere else, not far from here,
or will be, and even though on the porch railing
there's sun tea brewing as gold as the runaway
St. John's wort that's strangled the wild clematis,
I know that articulated buses in Seattle are still taking
the corners like ambling geriatric caterpillars,
and the boy at the inn in Taxco is still sweeping
the dirt and watching the revolving flirty young girls,
and the green piñata spills broccolini, sugar peas,
and organic grapes on the baby's tears,
and the two-trunked oak threatens to split,
to send its wider leg crashing into the copse
of native dogwood, and day after day
the water's edge warns and invites.
When the robot neurologist via video asks the patient
to raise his arms, his right leg, his left leg,
the patient cannot,
and I picture Lewy bodies as other planets,
other stars that died dark years ago.
At the end of the day I go to sleep, except when I don't,
and last night star jasmine and linden blossoms
sweetened the air as one airplane, red lights pulsing,
and one satellite sailed north by northeast
on the open sky road.

JUDY BRACKETT *lives in the California foothills of the northern Sierra Nevada. Her poems have appeared in* Fish Anthology 2022, California Fire & Water, Epoch, *the* Maine Review, Commonweal, Midwest Review, Cloudbank, Subtropics, Innisfree Poetry Journal, *and elsewhere. Her poetry chapbook,* Flat Water: Nebraska Poems *was published by Finishing Line Press.*

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