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Cover: Artist Dustin Klein projects an image of George Floyd onto the base of a statue of Robert E. Lee in Richmond, Virginia.

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LETTERS

Pascal & the magisterium

THE 'THINKING CATHOLIC'

Paul J. Griffiths's "Under Pressure" (May) reintroduced me to a controversy that has long engaged my thinking. The struggle between Blaise Pascal's brilliant mind and his adherence to papal edicts has some resonance today. But I fear Griffiths's characterization of the pressure that "the magisterium" should place on the "thinking Catholic" belies some advances that have been made concerning matters of fact and questions of purported faithful adherence.

Griffiths poses the question of authority in the Church in terms of a *unitary* magisterium (my term) that collapses the teaching of "bishops" with papal decrees. Those supposedly doctrinal decrees occurred in a political context in which the actions of Popes Innocent X and Alexander VII were notoriously influenced by the machinations of Cardinal Richelieu, and then the young Louis XIV. Catholic thinkers interested in reform were backed into a corner by aristocratic politicians as much as by any papal authority (the state and Church being sickly intertwined until the French Revolution).

Defining the task of a "Catholic thinker" (a theologian perhaps?) as "recognizing that you are more likely to be wrong than the Church is" begs several questions that some reflection on important advances in ecclesiology might cast light on. Cardinal Newman's more expansive notion of the teaching office of the Church gave priority to the *schola theologorum* as an essential component of articulating what comprises the faith of the whole Church. Subsequently, theologians (many of them French) contributed valuable insights from the deeper theological tradition that ended up—despite their persecution by Roman magisterialists—making the teaching Church "think harder."

Much of the results of this thinking then led to Vatican II's doctrinal and moral teachings, which stood earlier statements of the so-called ordinary magisterium on their head. They did so because of theologians who thought harder about issues of fact: that humans have rights of conscience, that Judaism perdures as a genuine faith, that the Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in even non-theistic faiths. All of these developments occurred because theologians thought harder about the inadequacies of what popes (and bishops) had long held and proclaimed. This makes Griffiths's description of "the Catholic thing" not wrong, but just too one-sided.

Paul E. Dinter
Ossining, N.Y.

HIGHER STAKES

I found the article on Pascal to be an interesting and thoughtful exposition of a complicated situation. Yet nowhere did the author acknowledge that the whole dispute between Pascal and the Roman authorities was playing out against the background of the ongoing activities of the Inquisition in France. The chance of imprisonment and of being denied a Christian burial would have been a real component in Pascal's decision-making. For us, holding a divergent opinion in public simply means the possibility of being trolled on Facebook; for the French philosopher it could have meant being consigned to eternal damnation.

Michael Marchal
Cincinnati, Ohio

TEACHINGS CHANGE

Paul Griffiths provides an interesting survey of the ins and outs of magisterial teaching for Pascal and in a way for us, too. The heart of the matter is captured in his statement that you would be in trouble "if you find the Church teaching *It's not possible for women to be ordained to the priesthood* while you find yourself believing that it is possible." That is what I and many Catholics find the Church now teaches. We also believe that the teaching is neither infallible nor irreformable. Teachings of the magisterium have indeed developed and even changed over history and will continue to change. The list is long. One might start by survey-

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LETTERS

ing the very admirable changes in the Church's teachings about the study and meanings of sacred Scripture. And there is "no salvation outside the Church," which is still on the books, but does not mean what it seems to say.

Leo Gafney
Lakeville, Conn.

FOLD UP THE TENT

Paul Griffiths's piece on Pascal and the magisterium is a maddening blend of luscious prose, fine historical narrative, and ultimately flawed theology. If I correctly understand his point—brought home in his brilliant final paragraph—I am to consistently apply my God-given ability to reason out whether something is true or false, and diligently pursue that which is true. Fine. But if the Church disagrees with me because it invented evidence that simply doesn't exist (Jansen's "errant" texts, in this case), I am to fold my tent, concede my point, and abandon what I know to be completely, obviously, and patently true. Merciful heavens! I now better understand Martin Luther, and the millions of contemporary Catholics who possess at best only a nodding respect for Church authority. Please tell me I'm wrong, and that the truth still does "set us free."

Pete Taft
Hopewell, N.J.

PAUL GRIFFITHS REPLIES:

I'm grateful for these thoughtful responses to my Pascal essay. A few words to each are all I can offer by way of thanks.

To Paul Dinter: I don't think that he and I have any serious disagreements. He nuances the picture I gave of how magisterial authority works, but not, so far as I can see, in such a way as to call into question anything I wrote about the essential structure of the relation between magisterial authority and the thoughts and writings of those subject to it. Of course he is right that theologians have much to contribute to the Church's task of improving its understanding of the revelation it's been entrusted with; I wrote as much in my essay. Perhaps unlike Dinter, however, I'd rather be subject to the authority of bishops than theologians. Theologians (including myself) are, in my experience of them, altogether more dogmatic and less responsive to reason than bishops, perhaps because their careers depend on their capacity to communicate confidence in their own rightness. That makes for a problematic magisterium.

To Michael Marchal: Yes, quite right. The results of contradicting the magisterium in seventeenth-century France were rather more bracing than they are for us now, and it's good to remember it. I must confess, though, to thinking, with Pascal, that there remains something important at stake in disagreeing with the magisterium, even though the results of doing so are less likely now than then to lead to imprisonment and other such unpleasantness.

To Leo Gafney: Well, yes, the Church's teachings have developed over time, as they should. I rather think, however, that Gafney is overly confident in his own capacity to distinguish what's good from what's not in those teachings (note his use of "admirable"). I prefer a more modest position, being aware, as I am, of my own passions, limitations, and fallibilities. The most I can do when something the Church teaches seems mistaken to me is offer—humbly, but with as much clarity as I can muster—a doubt, under the rubric, as I wrote, of confidence that the teaching Church is more likely to be right than I am. I wonder whether Gafney shares that conviction?

To Pete Taft: Yes, the truth still does set us free, and that truth is Jesus Christ. But I think Taft has misread me. I didn't advocate tent-folding. I advocated, with Pascal's example before me, clarity about the nature and extent of my disagreements with papal teaching when they occur, coupled with refusal to pretend to take as true something I don't take as true and with a relaxed (difficult, that) sense, explicit when necessary, that I'm very often wrong and that the teaching Church is less often so. This, really, is the nub of the matter: Can we hold together a sense that we have good reasons for thinking *p* true, even decisively good reasons, with an acknowledgment that an authority we hold dear teaches clearly that *p* is false? I think I can. Does Taft?

‘Care, Not Cops’

Since the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25 and the nationwide demonstrations that followed, protesters and activists have focused attention on police budgets and how we conceive of law enforcement and criminal justice. Their calls to “defund the police” raise fundamental questions about what exactly we should expect the police to do and what we should prohibit them from doing. For many Americans, the old answers to these questions no longer seem good enough.

As others have noted, our society has become too reliant on the police to deal with too many kinds of problems, from domestic disputes, homelessness, and noise complaints to mental-illness episodes, curfew violations, drug offenses, and school safety. Many of these tasks would be better assigned to those professionally trained in addiction counseling, mental health, homeless outreach, and other fields, or to neighborhood organizations with tighter connections to the community. But an aversion to raising taxes to pay for these alternative approaches has left them chronically underfunded, even as lawmakers eager to look “tough on crime” direct ever more money to policing.

This trend began in the 1960s, when cities were faced with a choice between using social services to help combat rising crime or relying on policing and incarceration. The latter option won out. Since then, and more rapidly since 9/11, budgets for police forces, departments of corrections, and other parts of the criminal-justice system have grown, with municipalities spending between 20 percent and 45 percent of their discretionary budgets in these areas, even though crime rates have steadily declined since the 1990s. As social services are defunded, more of their work falls to the cops: “all urban policy becomes crime policy,” Harvard University historian Elizabeth Hinton has observed. For even the most minor disturbance or nuisance, often our only option is to call the police. And even these ordinary encounters have the potential to turn deadly—not only because of improper training, but also because the responders are all armed.

At the same time, police unions have continued to amass political power, wielding it to protect or increase funding for police, to sway elections, and to shield officers from legal action. Derek Chauvin, the officer who killed George Floyd, had eighteen misconduct complaints filed against him over the years. Only two of those complaints resulted in disciplinary action. And the record is rife with similar cases in cities and towns across the nation. Often the offending officers are protected under “qualified immunity,” an idea first established by the Supreme Court in 1967 that protects police from legal liability if they use force “in good faith and with probable cause.” In the decades since, this definition has expanded so that, in cases where an officer is accused of using excessive force, the officer almost always wins. Eliminating qualified immunity is just one necessary reform to policing. We also need to ban chokeholds; prohibit police unions from donating to elected officials like attorneys general and district attorneys; and require the police to report each time they use force. A reform bill from House Democrats calls for many of these measures, and also proposes the creation of a national database to track police misconduct. But a bipartisan plan will probably not be taken up before the election.

Important as such reforms are, we must also increase funding to social services that can reduce the number of interactions with armed officers and provide the resources without which people are more likely to turn to crime. Every state and municipality will have to consider its particular circumstances—a town of ten thousand people will have needs different from New York City. But in many cases it will make sense to shift certain responsibilities from the police to other agencies and groups, reducing police-department budgets and reinvesting in services that help the most vulnerable. “Care, not cops” has emerged as a slogan of the Black Lives Matter movement; it’s a call to prevent crime by meeting urgent social needs instead of reflexively resorting to arrest, prosecution, and punishment. What could such a society of care look like? Each of us can begin to answer that for ourselves and our communities. The spectacular cases of police misconduct are what make national headlines—and rightly so—but the discussions occurring every day in city-council sessions, meetings of local civic groups, and places of worship are the first critical steps in bringing about the change that’s needed. *July 1, 2020*

Disrupting the College Experience

Last month, after Cambridge University announced that all its student lectures would be online until 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic, Silicon Valley–based entrepreneur Balaji S. Srinivasan wondered whether the decision might set off a major disruption in higher education. "It's interesting that removing the in-person experience destroys the pricing power of colleges"—except that of the relatively few colleges and universities, like Cambridge, whose "brand" can survive the disruption.

Srinivasan speculated further: "You'd think [colleges and universities] were selling education or (more cynically) a credential. But they were actually in the experience business." The extensive luxuries of the modern campus—presumably the "experience" Srinivasan is referring to—are not essential to the university's educational mission. But is that all there is to the experience of college? Can all higher learning happen on Zoom?

Silicon Valley's doubts about the value of in-person education did not begin with this pandemic. Ten years ago, online prophets predicted that the rise of MOOCs (Massive Online Open Courses) would revolutionize higher education. Others advanced the idea that in-person learning is less efficient than learning via computer. In a 2008 interview, Elon Musk defined learning as follows: "You're basically downloading data and algorithms into your brain." Education, Musk suggested, would be better if it were more like a computer game.

Now is a crucial moment to defend in-person learning—going to a classroom, sitting at a desk, listening to a lecture, raising your hand to make a comment or ask a question, listening and responding to your fellow students, persuading them, being persuaded. This is generally the best method of learning, at any level of schooling, a method worthy of us as human beings.

Consider Musk's use of the computer as a metaphor for the human mind. Both can be programmed. A computer is programmed through a straightforward process that requires minimal interaction between no more than two parties—the programmer and the programmed. But is this really how human beings learn, as mere receptacles for information?

Another Silicon Valley luminary, Jaron Lanier, takes a view very different from Musk's. In *You Are Not a Gadget*, Lanier expresses his fear of a world in which human minds and computers become ever more like each other—and not because computers have advanced to the point of being as intelligent as humans. Instead, Lanier fears a future where "you can't tell if a machine has gotten smarter or if you've lowered your standards of intelligence to such a degree that the machine seems smart."

If Lanier is right, then Musk's model of education as "downloading" might work—but only by diminishing the scope of human intelligence. Musk's metaphor reduces education to learning rote tasks, processing data, and technical problem-solving. It does not encompass the nuances of humanistic learning, much of which happens through innumerable small gestures, indirect suggestions, arguments, and moments of thoughtful silence. Musk's model of education may describe how we learn to design a rocket ship, but not how we learn to discuss our motivation for doing so, or whether it is worth the huge expense. (Wernher von Braun, head of the Apollo program, once said that NASA needs philosophers as well as engineers. So does Musk's SpaceX.)

Despite its promise of interactivity, schooling via Zoom is closer to the downloading model of learning than the flesh-and-blood community of students and teachers that it threatens to replace. That community needs places where we can be wholly present to one another: classrooms, lecture halls, campuses. A screen can only simulate the presence of a community. It can complement the classroom but never replace it.

—Santiago Ramos

Protecting DREAMers

When President Trump ordered an end to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in September 2017, around 700,000 people who had grown up in this country were suddenly faced with the prospect of deportation. Under DACA, which was implemented by the Obama administration in 2012, many undocumented U.S. residents who were brought illegally to this country as children before 2007 would not be deported and could receive a work permit—as long as they first passed a background check, and had finished high school or served in the military. Former Attorney General Jeff Sessions called DACA an unconstitutional executive overreach that sidestepped existing immigration laws. President Trump said DACA recipients were stealing jobs from citizens: "millions of Americans" had been "victimized" by the program.

This June, the Supreme Court ruled five to four that the Trump administration's decision to end the program was "arbitrary and capricious," and that the Department of Homeland Security had therefore violated the Administrative Procedure Act. Conservative Chief Justice John Roberts joined the court's four liberal justices and wrote the majority opinion. Roberts has expressed concern that the Supreme Court is perceived as too partisan, but President Trump has no such compunctions: "These horrible & politically charged decisions coming out of the Supreme Court are shotgun blasts into the face of people that are proud to call themselves Republicans or Conservatives.…Vote Trump 2020!" he tweeted.

In fact, DACA is popular among both liberals and conservatives; one CBS News poll found that 87 percent of Americans support it. For better or

worse, DACA recipients have long been political poster-children, stereotyped as hard-working valedictorians. That portrayal, if not entirely accurate, is at least preferable to right-wing caricatures of dangerous DACA criminals.

Deporting DACA recipients, most of whom are now in their twenties, would be a logistical nightmare. They've been integrated into American society: they've purchased homes, earned college degrees, and gotten married. They are the parents of about 200,000 U.S. citizens. Who will care for those children if their parents are deported? The program's end would also be an economic loss. In 2017, 93 percent of DACA recipients were employed, paying billions of dollars in taxes. Nor do DACA recipients drain federal resources; they aren't eligible for programs like SNAP, Medicaid, and financial aid.

"The dispute before the Court is not whether DHS may rescind DACA," Roberts wrote in his majority opinion. "All parties agree that it may." In other words, the status of undocumented childhood arrivals remains precarious. To provide more permanent protection, Congress must move on the Development, Relief, and Education for Minors (DREAM) Act, various versions of which have stalled for nearly two decades. The bill currently under consideration would provide a path to citizenship, not just temporary work permits; it would allow a record of sustained employment to substitute for a high-school diploma; and it would make it easier for DREAMers to attend college by letting them receive financial aid and benefit from in-state tuition rates.

From time to time President Trump has signaled support for such legislation, calling DREAMers "terrific," and championing a "bill of love." But who knows if he would push for the DREAM Act against the wishes of his hard-line advisors? What we do know is that his administration has made immigrants scapegoats for all kinds of problems, real and imagined. It has presented immigrants as a threat to public health (potential carriers of "Kung Flu"), as criminals who require robust policing ("bad hombres"), or as leeches undeserving of a visa. They're so dangerous that they can be treated only with cruelty—denied asylum, kept out with a border wall, or deported to a country they left behind as children, a place that's never been home.

—Katherine Lucky

MAGA'd to Death

Gratifying as it can be to see a braggart brought low, it's best to note Donald Trump's whimper of a rally in Tulsa and sliding poll numbers with only the passing mention they deserve. Keep the focus instead on his malfeasance and corruption, and what it means for the American people. Let's start with the immediate crisis. The carnage about which Trump bellowed in his 2017 inaugural address is nothing compared to what has actually come to pass with the deaths of more than 125,000 Americans from COVID-19 since March. In all but decreeing that there will be no federal role in fighting a pandemic that has ravaged the economy and will have long-term negative effects on almost every aspect of American life, Trump has abdicated his responsibilities as chief executive. He has MAGA'd us so thoroughly that instead of flattening the curve the country now faces what one expert calls an ongoing "forest fire." On a day in late June when Italy reported 135 new cases, the United States reported 35,000; it was up to 45,000 a few days after that, a new record high. The CDC now estimates that our total number of actual infections is likely ten times as high as the official count of 2.3 million. Trump has spread misinformation, sidelined experts, and is ending aid for testing in order to keep the true number of cases from being known, because that would reflect badly on him.

But from day one, Trump has prioritized his personal, financial, and electoral interests—which are all intertwined—over those of the country. He's only grown bolder since his acquittal in the Senate on impeachment charges, dismissing inspectors general, exacting revenge on whistleblowers, and intervening in cases involving his cronies. He has seen to the hollowing out of federal agencies, replacing competent professionals with loyalists and lickspittles. This is all in addition to his administration's plainly immoral policies on immigration and the environment, his attacks on the electoral process, and his relentless and increasingly dangerous stoking of racial hatred. His only real legislative "achievement" has been a tax cut for corporations and the rich, designed to funnel still more wealth to the top.

Knowing this, does it still matter what former national security advisor John Bolton reveals in his long-awaited book about his time at the White House? Yes. Bolton is a warmonger and egomaniac; he refused a House subpoena and went public only after securing a publishing deal. But he has an authoritative, firsthand perspective on this presidency. Bolton details Trump's electioneering of foreign leaders, most notably Chinese President Xi Jinping: Trump pressured him to buy more soybeans and wheat from American farmers in red states, and supported his plans—on two occasions—to expand concentration camps where China's minority Uighurs are tortured and killed. Bolton also describes Trump's offer to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to end a Justice Department investigation in order to help the Turkish president. "I'm hard-pressed to identify any significant Trump decision that wasn't driven by re-election calculations," Bolton writes.

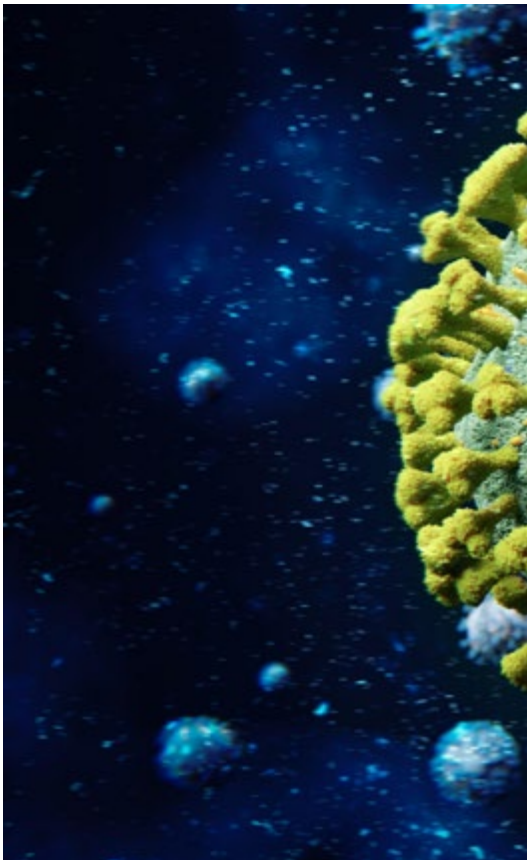
Among those still unwilling to condemn Trump, there is a tendency to justify his malignity as a necessary evil in pursuit of political and culture-war wins, or to treat it all as a joke. But now that it's clear to everyone paying attention that Trump is a man untroubled by widespread death and suffering, a man who appears content to let it all continue as long as he remains politically whole, his remaining supporters must ask themselves a question: Are tax cuts and conservative judges really enough to justify this vacuum of leadership in the White House during a national disaster?

—Dominic Preziosi

CATHLEEN KAVENY

Blurring Boundaries

The coronavirus reminds us that all of nature is connected.



The coronavirus pandemic has dramatically changed the way Americans live, both individually and collectively. But has it altered the way we think about the basic fabric of our lives? Not yet. I think it should, though—especially in ways that strengthen the vision of interconnected creation outlined by Pope Francis in *Laudato si'*.

Influenced by literal readings of Scripture as well as an implicitly Cartesian picture of the world, many Americans operate with three sets of sharp distinctions: 1) between living and nonliving beings; 2) between different types of living beings, arranged in a rigid hierarchy; and 3) between inert matter and vibrant mind or soul. But if we start to consider how viruses operate, all three sets of distinctions begin to dissolve, and interconnections take center stage.

What is a virus? It's an aggressive snippet of DNA (or RNA in the case of retroviruses). Many viruses operate by fusing themselves with the outer membrane of the target cell, and then working their way toward the nucleus. Once there, they take over the cell's genetic mechanisms, reprogramming the cell to make more virions (single particles of the virus) rather than fulfill its normal functions. Eventually, the virions overwhelm and rupture the host cell. Newly liberated, the virions go on to seek other cells to infiltrate, moving from cell to cell and from organism to organism.

Does that mean a virus is alive? That's a difficult question. Some scientists say no, they are more like chemistry sets. Unlike viruses, living beings autonomously consume, process, and expend energy. Moreover, a virus cannot reproduce on its own through a process of cell division, in the way a simple amoeba can. But others argue that a virus is alive, or at least intermittently alive. It may not reproduce itself, but it does actively organize its own reproduction. Maybe there is a middle ground: in a fascinating article in *Scientific American* (December 2004), Luis P. Villarreal argues there is a "spectrum…between what is certainly alive and what is not." Villarreal, the founding director of the Center for Virus Research at UC Irvine, asks us to think of life as "an emergent property of a collection of certain nonliving things."

Many people also assume there are rigid boundaries between various forms of living beings, whether that assumption comes from the first chapters of Genesis or a simplistic understanding of evolution. They think that bacteria are one thing, plants yet another, animals a different thing, and people something else entirely. They also assume that the development from simple to complex life forms is neat and linear, so that each more complex being that emerges includes everything in the category below and adds something new and bigger, like a set of Russian dolls.

But viruses show us that the development of complex life forms is itself staggeringly complex and even messy.

3D illustration of a microscopic green COVID-19 coronavirus molecule

DARRYL FONSEKA / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Villarreal notes that between 113 and 223 genes present in both the genetic makeup of bacteria and human beings are absent in intermediate forms of life, like yeast. He suspects that those genes did not disappear and then re-evolve, but rather were somehow inserted into both bacteria and human beings by the same virus. Evolution's traveling salesmen, viruses peddle their genetic wares near and far. They create surprising links between vastly different types of living entities, all of which are connected by their dependence on the same four building blocks that make up the DNA of all living things.

Finally, viruses challenge the idea that non-living matter is inert and static. Viruses may not be alive, but they are lively. And really, so is all matter. Inertness is an illusion. In the past century, we have learned that each atom of matter is full of motion and energy, as electrons circle the atom's protons, neutrons, and nucleus. Chemical reactions occur not only in lab experiments, but inside human beings. More broadly, we are increasingly aware of how our brain and body chemistry affects our minds and sense of self. Serotonin influences mood and affect. Rising and falling levels of estrogen and testosterone throughout life mark not only our physical shape, but also our dispositions and judgment. We are thoroughly embodied creatures, not minds trapped in inert matter.

We are thoroughly embodied creatures, not minds trapped in inert matter.

When Pope Francis published *Laudato si'* on May 24, 2015, he couldn't have known that five years later we'd be living through a pandemic. But that fact has only sharpened the encyclical's prophetic call to care for our common home, and each other. Its key theme is that "everything in the world is connected," from the well-being of the poor to the flourishing of the planet itself. Francis vividly expresses these connections when he calls the Earth our sister and our mother. Unfortunately, many people treat these images as mere metaphors, or dismiss them as instances of poetic license. But they are literally as well as poetically true, as the nature and functions of viruses help us see. Nature is not merely the setting for the drama of human existence. Other living beings are not merely part of the chorus. Even the scenery is not mere backdrop. Everything around us has an integral part to play in the story of creation.

MATT MAZEWSKI

Your Money or Your Life

What the debate about lockdown measures gets wrong

On the May 13 episode of the daytime talk show *The View*, one of the "hot topics" taken up by the panel was Sen. Rand Paul's questioning of Dr. Anthony Fauci at a Senate committee hearing the day before. During their exchange, Paul had declared that lockdown measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus had become too economically burdensome to be worth continuing, and that Fauci, who has consistently supported such measures, was not the "end-all" or the only voice to whom lawmakers should be listening.

After co-hosts Whoopi Goldberg and Sunny Hostin railed against the Kentucky senator for his lack of deference to government scientists and his apparent indifference to the suffering and death that would result if restrictions were lifted prematurely, their colleague Meghan McCain spoke up to defend Sen. Paul's basic point:

> I got more than a few phone calls from friends that are just absolutely despondent. Out of work, can't work, can't go anywhere, can't do anything, and are really looking down the barrel of being unable to pay their mortgage, being unable to feed themselves.… There are a lot of different ways to die from COVID. We're seeing suicide spikes in unprecedented numbers.… So I think we're going to have to come to some kind of middle ground because right now there's a lot of feelings of hopelessness.… We're going to be sheltering in place, not just to flatten the curve, but…until there are no deaths in America whatsoever. But at the same time we are going to bankrupt this country and not have enough ink and printers to have enough money to get us out of it.

It was a typical exchange for the show. *The View*'s center-left view du jour—in this case, that opposition to lockdown measures is mostly the result of right-wing naïveté and hostility to government authority—is ordinarily shared by all but one of the co-hosts, with the only objection to that view almost always coming from a self-described "Never Trump conservative" (usually McCain but sometimes stand-in Ana Navarro). This is especially frustrating when the basis of the objection is obviously true, as it was here. Millions of Americans are indeed suffering terrible economic hardship right now, not only because of the direct costs of the pandemic, such as medical bills or funeral expenses for loved ones who have succumbed to the virus, but also because of involuntary unemployment and loss of income caused by state lockdowns. It is entirely rational for people to resent measures that deprive them of their livelihoods.

But the conclusion that Sen. Paul and Meghan McCain draw from this—that the restrictions should be lifted as soon as possible even if it means the virus begins to sicken and kill more people—is completely wrong. For one thing, the tradeoff between public health and economic vitality implicit in this line of thinking is a false one. COVID-19 deaths are not like traffic fatalities, which we could eliminate only with economically intolerable policies such as a ban on all cars and trucks. As countries from New Zealand to Taiwan have already demonstrated, and as states like Alaska and Vermont are well on their way to demonstrating, the now-familiar toolkit of mask wearing, physical distancing, travel restrictions, widespread testing, contact tracing, and isolation of the sick can not only "flatten the curve" but can actually eradicate the virus. Places that have effectively ended transmission have certainly suffered economically, but they have also proved that it can be accomplished without destroying society.

Critics of the public-health messaging about curve-flattening, such as freelance researcher Yaneer Bar-Yam, have faulted this rhetoric for giving the impression that the best we can aim for is to slow the rate at which the disease spreads, rather than to stop it from spreading entirely. Instead, Bar-Yam advocates a strategy of "crushing the curve" (i.e. eradication), which would actually be less economically costly in the long run because it would avert the need to indefinitely accommodate an incredibly contagious and terribly lethal disease.

But those who claim that the economic costs of suppressing the pandemic would be too great make another faulty assumption—namely, that restrictions necessarily deprive people of their ability to survive and that many will ultimately starve unless they are permitted to return to their (possibly unsafe, possibly bankrupt) workplace. In reality, the government can step in to guarantee incomes for the duration of the crisis, whether through expanded unemployment insurance, universal payments, grants to businesses to maintain employees on their payrolls, or some combination of the three. As long as production of food and vital supplies can go on with proper safety precautions for essential workers, there is no reason why anyone must starve for lack of a job, or fear that the government will "run out of ink."

The steps the United States has taken in this regard have been underwhelming, especially when compared with the response in other countries. Denmark, for instance, agreed to spend approximately 13 percent of its gross domestic product to pay most private-sector workers in danger of being laid off three-quarters of their original salaries for three months. In this country, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and

New Orleans, April 13, 2020

CNS PHOTO / CARLOS BARRIA, REUTERS

Economic Security (CARES) Act did make some halfhearted efforts to pursue all three of the strategies outlined above, but none have proved adequate to the scale of the catastrophe we face.

The one-time stimulus payment of $1,200 (and $500 for each child) provided for by the CARES Act is better than nothing, but it's also barely more than the national median monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment. A temporary $600-per-week boost to unemployment insurance is set to expire at the end of July, and some states still have not yet implemented so-called Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), which expands unemployment-insurance eligibility to several categories of workers who do not traditionally qualify for benefits. The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), which was designed to encourage businesses to maintain payrolls, has twice run out of funds.

One of the most incisive comments on the defective economic response to the coronavirus has come from Columbia Law professor Jedediah Britton-Purdy, who wrote on Twitter in April that "pressure to 'reopen the economy' is the result of political failure to make the isolation period a socially supported joint effort. By leaving economic pressure to survive in place, we've made 'the economy' a battering ram against society."

In the short run, we need a much bolder policy response, including, for starters, larger direct payments to individuals that continue until the threat from the virus has truly abated. Congressional Republicans have dragged their feet every step of the way when it comes to providing real relief, and their Democratic counterparts have largely lacked the appetite to confront them as aggressively as they should. So far, the House majority has passed multiple coronavirus bills without insisting that any of them include direct aid to state and local governments to replace lost tax revenues. Absent such aid, devastating budget cuts will become inevitable.

But to really break out of this dynamic in the future will require a sustained political effort to shift our collective understanding of what the economy *is*. We must stop thinking of it as essentially a complicated machine that we all have to labor to maintain even when public health demands otherwise. We would do well to take on board the long Catholic tradition on these points, summed up in Pope Francis's pronouncement that "money must serve, not rule," and cultivate a sense that our current market-based economic system is not a fact of nature but a provisional means for distributing goods and services—one we have the power to supersede when, at times like this, it cannot meet our needs.

PAUL MOSES

Denialism Is Nothing New

How some Catholics chafed against the 1918 influenza restrictions

As the 1918 influenza epidemic was peaking in New York City in the fall of that year, the managing editor of the Brooklyn diocesan newspaper took note in his weekly column that "Catholic churches were closed on Sunday in twenty-one States for the first time since America was discovered." Then he recounted a conversation he'd had with a local woman that same day:

> We asked a lady if she went to Mass in the morning; she promptly answered in the affirmative; but, said we, "weren't you afraid of getting influenza?" "No," said she, "but if I stayed away from church I would be afraid of getting it." It was sound Catholic philosophy.

Patrick Scanlan was two years into his fifty-one of running the Brooklyn *Tablet,* which built a national audience drawn to his combative style. He was eventually considered the dean of the nation's Catholic press—the loudest supporter of Fr. Charles Coughlin when the radio preacher descended into his most obvious anti-Semitism in the late 1930s, and also of Sen. Joseph McCarthy during his rise and fall in the 1950s.

That is, Scanlan made a career out of trafficking in the politics of resentment. There's a glimpse of that in his objection to the temporary closings of churches during the extraordinary influenza outbreak: "To prohibit the people from congregating for a half hour or so on Sunday is to class the churches as a non-essential industry," he wrote in an October 19, 1918 column. A century later, President Donald Trump spoke similarly when he said he would push governors to reopen churches immediately: "I'm correcting this injustice and calling houses of worship essential."

This idea that the coronavirus pandemic and its restrictions on individual liberties are part of a conspiracy to undermine religious belief is seen in Scanlan's heirs in conservative and alt-right Catholic media, and in such church figures as Cardinal Raymond Burke, Cardinal Gerhard Müller and the conspiracy-minded Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò.

Fortunately, Scanlan's diocese has not followed suit during the coronavirus pandemic; officials at the Diocese of Brooklyn say temporary church closings were unavoidable. "Though there are many who doubt and even publicly speak out against the decisions made to close churches and maintain social distancing, please know that decisions like these have not been taken lightly," Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio wrote in his *Tablet* column. That was especially true for the Brooklyn-Queens diocese, which is "literally at the epicenter of the crisis in New York City, which is the epicenter of the United States. We have had to resort to these desperate measures to prevent the further loss of life and spread of disease. Life is God's great gift and we must protect it."

That is the heart of the matter; it's a pro-life issue. No one is denying the need for religious faith. Masses of New Yorkers sought consolation in worship after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack, and Catholic parishes performed their role admirably. But as much as one also needs Mass and the sacraments in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, as well as the sense of community and connectedness that the liturgy embodies, it would not be life-giving to risk other people's lives for it.

In the 1918 pandemic and now, dubious medical advice was used to buttress arguments that life can proceed without shutting down the places where large numbers of people gather. "The way to prevent yourself from getting it is to keep in good condition by going to bed early and rising early, sleeping with the windows opened, leading a regular life, eating regularly and simply, using cold water externally and internally several times during the day, and, above all things—taking long walks," Scanlan wrote in his *Tablet* column, basing this on the work of the nineteenth-century German priest Sebastian Kneipp, a precursor of the naturopathic healing movement.

But long walks and good hydration notwithstanding, even healthy young people such as soldiers were vulnerable to an epidemic that killed 675,000 people in the United States; Scanlan's predecessor as editor had died of influenza-induced pneumonia during his military service in the first round in March. Since there was no flu vaccine or antibiotic to treat secondary infections, isolation and quarantine were key to the response most health officials mounted.

Within two weeks of Scanlan's column, the *Tablet* was telling another story in an unsigned editorial:

> It may be that our Catholic people are not really quite aware of the awful scourge that is upon us. One reason for our blessed state of ignorance is in the fact of the sane attitude of action of our Catholic authorities.... Masses are curtailed—there are now no High Masses—and other services shortened. The authorities have been acting cautiously, sanely, afraid to spread undue alarm. In cemeteries there are delays of burials wisely unannounced. The esprit du corps has been admirable. Nevertheless, the scourge is upon us. Priests and nuns are dying.

Still, the paper denounced the temporary closing of churches in Islip, a Long Island community then within the Brooklyn diocese, as "a disgraceful transaction."

In 1918, as now, there was a range of opinion on whether churches needed to be closed. "The order of the Health Department closing the doors of the churches has already created much

"It is highly important that we should all work in this drive thereby showing our love for liberty."
—Cardinal Gibbons.

The Tablet

For God, For Church, For Country, For Home.

VOL. XV. NO. 31 BROOKLYN, N. Y., SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1918.

TWO MORE LOCAL PRIESTS DEAD IN EPIDEMIC

Revs. Thomas O'Reilly and Caspar Saladino Victims.

BOTHS DEATHS SUDDEN

Father O'Reilly Stationed in Corona and Father Saladino in Long Island City.

Two Priests in Queens Victims of Pneumonia

FIELD MASS TO BE CELEBRATED AT FORDHAM

Distinguished Gathering at Famous College Today.

FOR SOULS OF HEROES

Addresses to Be Delivered by Bishops Hayes and Julien; Conferring of Degrees.

REV. JOHN YORK MADE DELEGATE TO LABOR UNION

Rector of St. Brigid's Will Represent Catholics.

SELECTED BY BISHOP

Is the First Catholic Representative Since the Late Mons. White.

SUM IN DRIVE

Plans Comp lyn Ca to Add

A newspaper clipping about the 1918 Spanish flu from the *Tablet*

unnecessary alarm among the people," Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore told the *Baltimore Sun*. "It was wrong to close them. Going to church soothes and quiets the faithful and at the same time brings to them a feeling of tranquility."

Bishop Thomas F. Hickey of Rochester, New York, wrote in a pastoral letter that "in recognition of the word of duly constituted authority, we obeyed," and noted that "according to reports, our own city has suffered far less than other communities."

News of the epidemic was downplayed in most newspapers, where coverage of the frantic final weeks of the First World War dominated front pages. In the *Boston Globe*, the city's decision to close churches played beneath the more shattering news that saloons could not offer bar service. "'How Dry I Am' to Be Tune in Boston," the paper reported. "Churches and Bowling Alleys Also Closed by Epidemic."

The Catholic newspaper in Los Angeles, *The Tidings*, declared that the decision to close churches there "was entirely unnecessary and ill-considered.... However serious it was, the acute distress evident in other cities did not show itself here."

Of course, it is likely that the measures L.A. authorities took had saved lives. A 2007 study found that closings of churches, theaters, schools, and other gathering places early in the 1918 pandemic reduced the peak death rates by half. It found that church closings were ordered in many cities, including Washington D.C., St. Louis, Seattle, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Newark, New Orleans, and Philadelphia.

New York City is conspicuously missing from this list; to Patrick Scanlan's pleasure, the city's Board of Health decided against closing schools or churches. The health commissioner, Royal S. Copeland, focused on staggering business hours to reduce crowding on the subway.

Opponents of the closings in other parts of the country pointed to this frequently, because New York was known to have the premier public-health program. The 30,000 deaths suffered in New York fell short of a clear-cut success, but the rate compared favorably with other East Coast cities. Perhaps more important was that the city took early action to control shipping traffic.

As the second phase of the influenza pandemic wound down in New York and the Great War drew to a close in Europe, it took women religious to warn *Tablet* readers that more was to come. "During the influenza epidemic we witnessed such scenes in our hospital as never before," the Sisters of St. Joseph at St. John's Hospital in Long Island City, Queens, wrote. "Medical men warn us that we may have some new epidemic following the coming of many ships from the war-scarred zone of Europe. We have to do all in our power to have our hospitals ready."

It was sound Catholic philosophy.

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DAVID CLOUTIER

What the Experts Can't Tell Us

In the face of uncertainty, our leaders need prudence.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo speaking during a 2018 news conference in New York

CNS PHOTO / SHANNON STAPLETON, REUTERS

Back to normal by August? By fall? Whenever a vaccine is ready? Who can tell us? Only the scientists, we are told. But although the pandemic itself is a natural and therefore amoral phenomenon, our response to it is, and has to be, a moral one. For that reason, science isn't enough. We also need practical wisdom, otherwise known as prudence.

Both science and prudence tell us that a pandemic requires a *collective* response. We can't do this job individually, or in competing teams. (The board game Pandemic teaches this lesson well, by the way.) Once most of us grasped "exponential function" and "flattening the curve" and saw the example of Italy's outbreak, we witnessed collective action far beyond anything in my lifetime. That's great. Solidarity was imperative. When we needed it, it was there.

But now what? A while back, President Trump grabbed the headlines and played to his base by claiming the country would be "open by Easter," relishing the far-fetched prospect of packed churches. This led journalists to ask other politicians what they thought of this claim. Here's how Virginia Governor Ralph Northam responded: "It would be nice to say that this will be

behind us in two weeks.... That's really not what the data tells us. What the data tells us is this will be with us for at least two to three months and perhaps even longer." He added: "I think we have to use science, we have to use data...and really do what's in the best interest—in our case—of Virginians." More recently, New Jersey's governor, Phil Murphy, announced that "the data shows us we are ready" for a phased reopening, while down the road in Montgomery County, Maryland, Marc Elrich said stay-at-home orders would remain in place: "We will change the rules as soon as the science says that we can change the rules." These responses all suggest that science or "the data" can tell us exactly what to do. But "What should we do?" is never just a scientific question; it's also a moral one. The misleading identification of prudent public policy with attention to empirical data is deeply problematic in our present situation, for two reasons.

First, it obscures the uncertainty and provisionality of the data itself. Scientific research is a long, messy process of conjecture and refutation. Researchers propose interpretations of evidence and these either stand the test of time or are rejected as new evidence comes in. At an early stage of a public-health crisis, we are confronted by many incomplete and conflicting reports. But even when we have clearer findings, a second problem is that the kind of prudence politicians need in order to make wise decisions about the common good is a matter of judgment rather than measurement or calculation—even though measurement and calculation must inform it.

Let's talk about the science first. As with many other issues, the outsized effect of the Trump presidency on this discussion has been dismal. President Trump's imprudence is an obvious one: he believes (insofar as he has any settled beliefs) that moral language does not even need to take account of empirical data. Matters such as accuracy and consistency are subordinated to gut-level impulses. There are obvious and grave dangers when one substitutes bluster and magical thinking for basic scientific literacy. We're all witnessing that now.

The role of political leaders is both irreplaceable and irreducible to the different role of experts.

Yet an imprudent use of data can happen in other ways, too. Northam and other politicians who claim they are going to "follow the science" make that sound simpler than it really is. Research is moving quickly, with over 30,000 papers published on the virus since it was discovered. That may seem like good news, but it actually raises a host of difficulties for public officials. Good science tends to move slowly, requiring great care. In the current environment, labs are rushing publications out, journals are rushing peer review, and journalists report on not-yet-peer-reviewed preprints. Some theories and expert opinions will turn out to be wrong. We've already seen the recommendations of public-health officials dramatically change tack as new information becomes available: Are masks helpful? They weren't but now they are. Is Ibuprofen dangerous? First the answer was maybe yes, then it was probably no.

Just as importantly, given the failures of widespread testing, we still lack knowledge of many of the basic characteristics of the pandemic, like when it began, how many people have been infected, or the infection mortality rate. Recent studies indicate that daily public-health numbers suffer from erratic and inconsistent reporting, and that national data on even the simplest measure—the number of deaths—is murky. Moreover, without clear data, predictive modeling is even more uncertain. Much of this is what one would expect at the early stage of a pandemic: epidemiology is an incredibly complicated area of research. Because much of the science isn't settled—and because we can't always afford to wait until it is—governing officials must exercise prudence in their use of the available information. They cannot ignore it or wish it away, but they also cannot expect it to answer all their questions.

Even if we had perfect data, however, governing would still require more than just public-health predictions. Some leaders confuse political prudence with what we might call "bureaucratic prudence," or what Thomas Aquinas calls partial prudence: its error, Aquinas says, is to "take for an end not the common end of all human life, but of some particular affair." The good bureaucrat is an expert narrowly concerned with his or her own area of expertise. We need good experts—good economists and doctors and statisticians. But such expertise, however necessary, is insufficient to answer questions that are properly political, questions that affect the whole community. For that, you also need political prudence.

To call it "political" is to say it is "for the polis," which Aristotle defines as the "complete" community. What distinguishes the polis is that it is not a group or society aimed at some specific end, but includes all ends needed for human flourishing. This is why our political leaders need to be more than just bureaucrats, especially in a public emergency fraught with such uncertainty. Yes, they must listen to the relevant experts, and they must defer to real expertise as far as it extends. But they must not expect (or pretend) that any particular kind of expertise will automatically deliver prudent political decisions. That's because political leaders must decide how various public goods relate to the common good. Their role is therefore both irreplaceable and irreducible to the different role of experts.

To perform their role well political leaders must now ask some hard questions. Some examples: What to do about the fact that about half of COVID-19 deaths have occurred in long-term care facilities? Is the goal of lockdowns to "flatten the curve" so that we don't overwhelm the health-care system or to zero out new cases? Why was it that in mid-May, after more than six weeks of nearly nationwide lockdowns, we still had a million active cases? Was it because the lockdowns hadn't been enforced strictly enough? Or was it because they involved so many exceptions for "essential" activities? Does our definition of "essential" activity privilege elite "knowledge workers" who can work from home, and expose poorer workers to either infection or destitution? Paying attention to these questions reveals the unwelcome fact that crucial—and perhaps mistaken—prudential judgments have already been made. Whatever we say, we have never simply been following the science. We have been deciding what level of risk we can live with, and how the risks should be distributed.

Political prudence would recognize that any aggregate numbers—about health or economics—cannot capture what the common good really is. We have a bad habit of equating the common good with a simple aggregation of individual goods. Our choices are thus framed as individual conflicts: the economic survival of the small business owner versus the actual survival of potential victims of the virus. But the common good, as defined in *Gaudium et spes* (26), is not an aggregate; rather, it is a set of *conditions* for shared flourishing.

How does this look in practice? In his response to Trump's "aspirational" announcement that the country might reopen in time for Easter, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said, "You have to get the economy running and you have to protect every life that you can. I believe there's a more refined strategy than we are now talking about. I don't think it's binary." He went on to discuss "risk stratification" among different populations, and the conditions that might allow New Yorkers to resume at least some of their normal lives. The simplistic deaths-versus-dollars framework was thus rejected in favor of fine-grained judgments about how to balance various public goods. This was a step forward. Cuomo paid attention to the data, starting his presentation with numbers and charts, but he also made it clear by the nuances of his discussion that this was about more than data. At another press conference, he acknowledged a consideration that cannot be quantified: how we are living now does not promote flourishing. "This is not the human condition," he said, "this is all unnatural." These are the social and psychological realities of the shutdown, and they too need to be taken into account. The costs of stay-at-home orders are not only economic.

So what now? The prudence we need to answer that question well must resist impatience (the emergency doesn't end just because the public is getting restless or losing interest); it must also resist sentimentality and false or premature certainties. Science can help us minimize the risks, but not eliminate them, partly because there's always more than one kind of risk involved. Prudent politicians accept this. And so they accept their own political responsibility rather than trying to delegate it to the experts. They listen with all due humility to those who have spent their lives studying infectious disease and public health; they learn as much as they can about the facts; and then, with all due caution, they make decisions for the common good. That's their job. Of course, even the most prudent decisions won't usher in the Kingdom of God or guarantee perfect happiness or perfect safety or perfect justice. Even in much better times, those are not on the politician's menu. All a political leader can hope to do is foster the conditions for the common good. And that is challenge enough.

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M. SHAWN COPELAND

Breath & Fire

The Spirit moves us toward racial justice.

Pentecost came early this year: divine *ruah* broke through the walls of our here-and-now, interrupting racial oppression, instigating hope and action for change. In Hebrew, the word *ruah* denotes spirit, breath, and wind, and it is almost always connected with the life-giving attribute of God. Spirit-*ruah*—paradoxical, elusive, uncontrollable, absolutely free, repeatedly entering into human history—inspires, exhorts, reproves, prompts, animates, empowers, and sustains human persons in our active imaginative engagement with one another, and with the transcendent Triune God. The breath of Spirit-*ruah* rushes through our land. Can we hear it crying out in a dying man's words—"I can't breathe"? Can we feel the energy of Spirit-*ruah* rousing hundreds of thousands of people to protest the deaths of George Floyd and of so many others suffocated by white racist supremacy? Can we allow ourselves to be moved by the power of Spirit-*ruah* to understand what it would mean to be *able* to breathe freely in America?

The Gospel reading for the Feast of Pentecost is instructive for us in this moment. Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple report to other disciples that they found Jesus's tomb empty, yet Mary Magdalene declares that she saw the Lord (John 20:1–18). Wary and

Parliament Square, London

NEIL ATKINSON / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

unsettled, the disciples meet at the usual place, making sure to lock the doors of the house. Perhaps they are tense and fearful of reprisals, either from imperial or religious authorities: Did not Jesus predict that those who believe in him would be persecuted just as he was (John 16:2–3)? Suddenly, Jesus stands in their midst; he walks not only through walls and well-secured doors, but also through the fog of their anxiety and sorrow. He speaks a traditional Jewish greeting, "Peace be with you," then shows them the signs of his crucifixion. Anguish and shock give way to joy.

> "Peace be with you; As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:21–22).

With these words, Jesus gives his disciples more than the comfort of his bodily presence; he empowers them with the presence of the Spirit, sending them forth, just as he has been sent (John 20:21). In this passage, the Johannine writer uses the verb *apostellein*, "to send forth," from which we get the noun "apostle." Jesus *sends forth* the community of disciples as a whole, to continue his mission, to proclaim the kingdom of God. This sending forth calls the community of believers as a whole to humble openness and dependence upon the Spirit's differentiated gifts, or *charisms*. Moreover, these gifts are poured out not as personal entitlements or as privileges of institutional office; rather, the Spirit's gifts equip the assembly of God to further the mission of Jesus and to strengthen the common good. The Spirit knits the community of disciples together as "one body," irrespective of former religious or cultic practices, of culture and language, of socioeconomic and societal standing, of gender and sexuality, of ethnicity and race (1 Corinthians 12:12–13).

Yet, in carrying out the mission of Jesus, the community of disciples will face anxiety and suffering, and pressure to conform to the status quo. Hence, the gift of peace to which Jesus earlier refers (John 13–17), and the peace that Jesus gives us to oppose the peace of the world.

> "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives" (John 14:27; 20:19, 21, 26). "I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution.

> But take courage; I have conquered the world!" (John 16:33).

In the time of the fourth gospel, the peace of the world meant the *Pax Romana*, founded, in the words of Wes Howard-Brook, on the "twin pillars of lies and violence." The man Jesus of Nazareth, the Jew whom we confess as human and divine, the Son of God, Lord and Christ, Messiah and Savior of the World, was born, grew up, lived, and died in subjugation to the *Pax Romana*. Not surprisingly, this peace was experienced differently by people of different stations or classes. Like other provincial and urban elites within the empire, many families, rulers, and officials, especially those operating out of the Jerusalem Temple, accepted or tolerated the *Pax Romana*: some did so for the sake of survival, others for personal advancement, still others in misguided adaptation to the status quo. But to ordinary people, especially those in Galilee where Jesus grew up, the *Pax Romana* and the sycophantic schemes of the client king Herod Antipas made daily life nearly unbearable. Military intimidation and brutality, physical violence, and sexual assault were coupled with expropriation and economic policies that uprooted and displaced many from their ancestral lands, driving some into ruinous debt and forcing others into wage labor, starving their children, "enslaving the able-bodied, killing the infirm," as author and religion scholar Richard A. Horsley has described it. Not surprisingly, these ordinary people protested, resisted, rebelled, struggled for survival, for life, for flourishing. Yet, their resistance is drenched in *pathos*: history teaches that the attempts of disenfranchised and marginalized peoples to wrest freedom from occupying powers ends, most often, in their deaths.

In telling Pilate that his kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), Jesus distinguishes between the power of domination, the power of lies and violence, and the power of love, the power of truth and justice. The power of domination wraps itself in the falsified authority of divine mission to claim, to possess, to subdue; the power of love wraps itself in *agape* to yield, to relinquish, to embrace. Jesus exemplified the meaning of power to establish a kingdom, a peace brought about through self-transcending love.

> "Peace be with you".... And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:21–22).

The account of the descent of the Spirit as reported in the Book of Acts occurs on the Jewish Feast of *Shavu'ot*, which commemorates the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai. The coming of the Spirit is dramatic and startling, commanding public attention and bringing about public consequences. The Spirit inflames, animates, and drives the disciples to proclamation and action that both amazes and bewilders visitors, foreigners, and passersby, even as the Spirit opens their hearts and minds to the disciples' message. This description of the coming of the Spirit not only evokes the prophecy of Joel (Joel 2:28–29), it contests the hostile and arrogant demand for sameness characteristic of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9).

The tower-building people of Babel seek to make their city great; they brick themselves up in uniformity, not unity; in homogeneity, not diversity; in fear, not openness. Look closely: beneath their drive for sameness and safety lurk mistrust of difference, suspicion of strangers, discomfort at introspection, anxiety at change. Look even more closely: the people's boast to greatness and power displaces the name of the Holy One, and the stench of their arrogance reaches the heavens. God disrupts their idolatrous empire, confuses their language, disperses the people. No longer can they rely upon one language, take refuge in a single set of meanings through which to amass and hold on to power, and flaunt their exceptionalism.

Commenting on this story, French theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet writes: "God prohibits this sort of undifferentiation. God…separates, thereby, enabling all to breathe, to no longer be short of *ruah*, that is, to come to themselves as subjects in their difference." The scattering and separation of the people calls attention to their embodied difference, and that difference becomes the "salvation of humankind." Pentecost reverses and remedies Babel. "Pentecost makes clear that the salvation of humanity lies in respect for the difference," Chauvet writes. "Respect for the difference-holiness of God."

As a nation, we gasp for air as rage flames in nearly every corner of our country. We cannot breathe.

The advent of the Spirit in the Fourth Gospel is quiet, piercing fearful isolation and opening onto the joy of community. Jesus gives the gift of the Spirit through the most intimate necessity of life—breathing. George Floyd's last words were a plea for life: "I can't breathe." He, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks are the most recent victims sacrificed on the altar of the *Pax Americana*, established more than four hundred years ago on expropriation, genocide, rape, and enslavement. As a nation, we gasp for air as rage flames in nearly every corner of our country. We cannot breathe. White racist supremacy is suffocating us, choking the very life and breath of God out of us all, snuffing out the possibilities for embodied difference to live, to breathe.

During these soul-wrenching days, we do well to remember that the Spirit cannot and will not be made captive, that the Spirit will not and cannot be tamed. Just as wind blows where and when it wills, so too does Spirit-*ruah*. The Spirit animates dissent and protest against any and all refusals to acknowledge and revere the presence of the

divine in each and every human being, against any and all who stifle the breathing of others. The Spirit gifts those who grieve and hurt with comfort and consolation, those who strategize and plan with understanding and wisdom, those who march and stand and kneel with fortitude and courage.

We pray for the Spirit's gifts of peace, presence, and guidance for our wounded and divided nation. The Spirit's peace is neither acquiescence nor passivity in confrontation with injustice, neither defense of the status quo nor tolerance of the gross inequalities that our nation has institutionalized. The Spirit's presence rouses us to respect and embrace our differences as graces rather than insurmountable barriers, as opportunities for life-affirming encounter and engagement rather than as causes for exclusion and segregation. The Spirit's guidance leads us to deeper understanding of the systemic racist violence that ordinary black and brown children, women, and men endure each day, even as the Spirit frees us from the pretense of innocence in order that we might grapple seriously with the white racist supremacy that stifles truth and justice.

We need Spirit-*ruah* to breathe on us, breathe with us, and breathe through us so that we may turn away from indifference, suspicion, and hostility and turn toward openness, compassion, and solidarity. If we would be authentic disciples of Jesus, if we would witness to God's abiding love in our broken nation, if we would respond in concrete, practical, active love and solidarity to the terror and oppression the *Pax Americana* has inflicted, we must face the wind and fire Spirit-*ruah* breathes.

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POETRY

THE TIME THAT'S IN IT

Micheal O'Siadhail

No, we do not own our mother sphere,
We, whose role is steward and leasee,
In our greed are still so cavalier
Sundering our own nature's filigree.

Climates shift and beings all migrate
Shunning warmer parts from which they've fled,
Changing how we creatures all relate,
Passing unknown viruses that spread.

Still so much that no one understands:
Will there be more waves? Will it mutate?
Staying far apart and washing hands,
We relearn forbearance and we wait.

Nature shimmies now beyond our ken,
Teaching us humility again.

—

Disappointments, things postponed, chagrin,
Dreams we must for now at least let go;
It's what is, no point in living in
Past subjunctives of 'if it weren't so.'

How quickly isolation turns to hell—
Troubled, wanting it to end we miss
Moments that we might have savoured well
Conjuring perfections after this.

In our seclusion is there also peace,
Carefreeness of undistracted days,
Liberation from sideshows, release,
Time for being grateful and to praise?

What was and what will be life won't allow,
Even in confinement our sweet now.

MICHEAL O'SIADHAIL *has published sixteen collections of poetry. His latest,* The Five Quintets, *received the Conference on Christianity and Literature's 2019 book of the year award.*

Bad Traditionalism

Tara Isabella Burton

How I argued myself into a disastrous engagement, and how I escaped

The first time I got engaged, I did so because the alternative seemed worse. We had known each other for less than four months. There was a ring. There were diamonds on it. He got down on one knee in front of ten or so of my friends at a hotel piano bar we all went to, as a group, on Sunday nights, to drink cocktails very slowly and see who turned up. There was champagne. Somebody put it on Instagram before we paid our bill. A friend of mine made a face of such astonishment in the background that a photograph of our engagement I'd idly tweeted went viral. I got Facebook ads for detox shakes days later. We had an engagement party. I bought a veil, and a monthly membership to a boutique fitness class. We had conversations about letterpress invitations. I did not recognize myself.

Henri Simon Thomassin's *The Magnificat*

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART. GIFT OF HARRY SHAW NEWMAN, 1941

I had never wanted to get married. At least, I had never thought that social marriage, in that banal, heterosexual, letterpress invitations sense, was ever something that I would do. My mother was unmarried—she'd become a single mother by choice in her late thirties. My friends' parents were all divorced. None of my friends were straight. I identified, for the first half of high school, primarily as a lesbian; most of my first romantic partners were women; I was sixteen before I was comfortable with the idea that I liked men as well, settling into an inchoate queerness quieted in practice by the fact that I spent eight years with the same college boyfriend.

We had the same fight every week or two for the entirety of our relationship. He was Anglo-Irish, fond of country walks and pub dogs and quiet brandies in fireside alcoves. He wanted to get married young, have several children. He wanted to stay in Oxford forever, or at least live a few hours' drive from his childhood friends. He did not believe in abortion or divorce. He was Catholic. He was, he liked to say, *inconveniently* Catholic.

Whatever I was, it was not inconvenient.

I was a theologian by training, but I went to church only rarely. I never remembered when to genuflect. I was ethnically Jewish and baptized vaguely Christian; in practice I belonged to that vague class of coffee-hour Episcopalianism sometimes described as *moral therapeutic deism*: a neoliberal generality. I believed in being a generally decent

person, and largely doing what I liked—in listening to the call of my own heart and finding spirituality wherever seemed an interesting place to go and look. An interesting place, but also a convenient one.

It was not that I did not hunger for more. I read Tarot and I lit candles. I memorized poems. I dabbled in witchcraft. I fetishized transcendence. I confused it for experience. I did a lot of stupid things in the name of experience.

At times I wondered about becoming Catholic. I was curious, albeit in an aesthetic way, about Catholicism. But it seemed hideous to me then. It was, I thought, a religion by and for unhappy people, people who insisted on resisting all the comfortably liberatory notions of our enlightened modern age out of sheer perversity. All Catholics, in my mind, were secretly *Brideshead* characters like Lord and Lady Marchmain: despising one another, poisoning their children, refusing to divorce.

I moved back to New York, in my mid-twenties. My Catholic partner of eight years and I broke up. I thought this made me free. I tried everything I thought I was supposed to want, or that it would be poetic or bohemian or *interesting* for me to want, that it would be enlightened and liberatory for me to experience: Tinder, Dan Savage–sanctioned open relationships, consciously political lesbian polycules, dates where strange men promised to buy me diamonds, or tried to lick my face. It did not get me very far.

Hedonism wasn't the problem. My sins had never tended in that direction. Rather, the sin lay in how easy it became—on an app, in conversations with friends, at *brunch*—to convert people into anecdotes, to talk of *social capital*, or *sexual capital*. It was about networking coffees that people my senior secretly hoped were dates. It was about dates people my own age secretly hoped were networking coffees. It was about *dating up* and *dating down* and the idea that we were all *options* for everybody else, such that the present moment existed only in relation to an infinite number of unvoiced futures.

It was about how many parties I spent all day preparing for, and how many photographs I took of myself there, how little I remember of anything anybody said to me, and how relieved I was to order an Uber home. It was about Facetuning. It was about scheduling multiple dates on a single night, and what a joke that was for everybody involved. It was the acquaintance who would text me to find out what I was wearing a week before any social gathering, and who introduced me to the phrase "bride arms." It was the one who regularly committed to three or four conflicting gatherings on any given Friday night before selecting the most socially advantageous one to attend. It was about the first literary-world party I ever attended, when I was twenty-three and didn't know better than to say "oh, here and there," when a man I'd never met asked me where I'd been published, and how he did not let me finish my sentence before he turned and walked away.

I began to understand Catholics.

I do not have a good conversion story. It happened like death in a Greek drama: offstage. I'd try to go to church and then I'd give up because it conflicted with my Sunday morning workouts, and I would light more candles, and I'd scroll through Twitter and go to more book parties and try to ignore the fact that there was a fissure in the pillars of the world, and that every day, every time I scrolled or swiped, I was taking a pick to it, and then one day I could not ignore that feeling, and then the next time I tried to go to church I kept going, and then there I was.

I would rather, I thought, be a Lady Marchmain—however poisonous—than accept the world as it was.

Around this time I started dating someone new. He was not Christian, but he'd been raised Evangelical—homeschool, no evolution, lots of Kipling—and he told me he was interested in converting back. He'd specified on OKCupid that he wanted a girl who believed in God. He came to church with me. We talked about the sermons. We talked about marriage, and he told me all about how love was an expansion of your sense of self, and about how marriage was joining your single narrative to a shared narrative with another person, and about how people these days were so obsessed with their own individuality and their own narrative and their own strength and their own independence that they couldn't cope with actually, genuinely, in-the-flesh giving over your life and self to another human and *forsaking all others* and becoming *one flesh*—that maybe the most radical thing you could do in this dissipated modern world of ours, where we're all on Tinder all the time and constantly weighing our options and maximizing our social capital, was just to say *fuck it, yes* and get engaged to someone you've known only a few weeks, and get *married* in an honest-to-God monogamous, death-do-us-part sacrament. We were going to have two or three children. We were going to be—socially, sacramentally, officially—a *family*.

If I'd been raised by conservatives, I might have bought a motorcycle instead.

The year that followed was, in retrospect, a farce. We performed, in public, hysterical heterosexual happiness. We posted a lot on Instagram.

We booked a wedding venue, and spoke to our priest, and did not tell him that, an hour before our meeting, we'd been shouting at each other because he did not think that a proper engaged or married woman should ever travel abroad with her female friends, something I often did, and longed to continue to do. A *girls' trip*, he thought, would probably result in me cheating on him, that if he worked hard all day to be a provider and I went on vacation and cheated on him that would make him a sucker, and he didn't want to be one of those.

Perhaps, I thought, he was right.

After all, I thought, in this liberal, modern age of ours, where we're so obsessed with autonomy and individuality, perhaps there was something to be said for me learning to be less independent, less selfish, less insistent—so often my vice—on having my own *story*.

I cancelled a trip with my best friend.

I started wearing mostly skirts—it turned out that he liked women to dress *classy* and *feminine* and what he lovingly called *trad*; he did not, he told me, know what to wear himself when I was in one of my more androgynous jumpsuits. Better to *complement* each other, he said.

There were straight-up biological, evolutionary differences between the sexes, he said—like the way that men were naturally possessive, and even a little jealous, even though the feminists tried to obscure that with all of their jargon. The same brain centers activated, he told me, when men saw their wives, their houses, and their cars.

I agreed, after so many rounds of argument, to change my name. I could keep my maiden name, he said, but he'd never allow two last names on our apartment buzzer, nor a hyphenated one for our children.

We had to be *aligned*, he said. That's what marriage was. *One flesh*.

It was not about God. It was not *not* about God. I had read, back in the days when this was all abstract to me, feminist theology and queer theology and liberation theology, and I knew theoretically that this, *this*, was not the sacrament of *one flesh* as I had ever understood it. But, I thought, I had only two options, and one of them was New York and apathy and atheism and casual sex, and the other was letterpress invitations and trad skirts and our own pew at Mass.

It was not particularly good theology.

It was not, I think, uncommon.

There is a tendency, in certain corners of traditionalist Christian discourse, to valorize things as good because they are old. It is the sacralized version of the *Lindy effect*—the idea, popularized by the statistician Nassim Taleb, that a trend's predicted "life expectancy" should be understood in light of how long it has already survived. (Thus, in certain reactionary web circles, the use of *Lindy* as slang meaning both trad and good. Eating rare meat? Lindy. Keeping your maiden name? Not Lindy).

It takes Paul's directive—*be not conformed to this age*—and turns it inside out: if something is pre-modern; if something is nostalgic; if something is anathema to the prevailing discourse of *our sclerotic liberal modernity*, it is automatically good, because it is both ancient and transgressive. This goes double if the traditionalism in question is rooted in some sort of perceived biological reality: differences in sex, authentically prepared food. Trad skirts. Sourdough bread.

This is not, itself, new. Toward the end of *À Rebours*, the 1884 novel by the dyspeptic Catholic convert Joris-Karl Huysmans, the protagonist Jean des Esseintes (a dyspeptic almost-Catholic), who has spent the novel shutting himself up in a "refined hermitage" full of jewel-encrusted turtles and carefully calibrated liquor combinations, bemoans the artificiality and alienation that once fascinated him about *sclerotic liberal modernity*, circa 1884. He fantasizes instead about how much better things were in the Medieval era, the good old days when "Radegonde, Queen of France, used to make the altar-bread with her own hands; the days when…three fasting priests or deacons…kneaded the dough with pure, cold, water, and baked it themselves over a bright fire, singing psalms all the while."

For des Esseintes—tormented by the idea of artificiality, by the way that in the age of mechanical reproduction nature is little more than a "withered old crone" who "has had her day"—the fantasy of the Medieval and the fantasy of the authentic converge: the Queen bakes *with her own hands*. The escape from the technological, with its unsettling transformation of human beings into commodity machines, is found in the natural.

There is something to be said for the desire to reclaim authenticity: to look to the natural world and to creation as sources of wonder, rather than as resources to be mined. There is something to be said, too, for the celebration of the embodied experience, the embedded experience, the understanding—so much more difficult, when we live in an avatar age—of ourselves *as* animal creatures,

There is something to be said for the desire to reclaim authenticity: to look to the natural world and to creation as sources of wonder, rather than as resources to be mined.

But there was a part of me that did not just allow, but embraced, my collapse into subservience. It was bride drag: a parody of marital love.

subject to sweat and sickness and death. And there is something to be said for looking to what we have lost, in an era and an economic system that so often reduces us to numbers and words, from eras more conscious of bodily reality.

But there is a danger, too, in fetishizing its opposite: a nostalgia that mistakes the Medieval era, or postwar America, for the New Jerusalem. We find it in Michael Brendan Dougherty's nationalist-cum-Christian memoir *My Father Left Me Ireland*. We find it in Rod Dreher's increasingly Orbánist vision of a Benedict-Option-as-integralist-autonomous-zone, in which we take refuge from culture warfare. We find it in the vocal support of Bishop Robert Barron for masculinist self-help guru Jordan Peterson, who preaches a gospel of fleshly predestinarianism.

It is a nostalgia that conflates the joy we are called to take in human life *qua* life for the eugenicist's obsession with the right female fecundity. It is a nostalgia that tells us that our *real* selves are to be found in natural law, in biological determinism, in social expectations wedded to our sex. It venerates, in a distinctly pagan self, biology as law. Its vision of human relations is to actual self-giving love as clericalism is to genuine ecclesiastical shepherding. Heterosexualism, you might call it.

It is the revisioning of God's creation as blood and soil, in which there is decidedly male and female, Greek and Jew.

I was not fully conscious, at the time, of falling into this strain of traditionalist instinct. If you'd asked me then, I would have still said I understood myself as a queer woman, theologically orthodox and politically progressive, that I understood my faith as not just a tolerant but an affirming one.

But there was a part of me that did not just allow, but embraced, with stubborn Marchmain perversity, my collapse into subservience. It was bride drag: a parody of marital love.

I made excuses for my fiancé's outbursts, those public and those private. I learned to talk, as his mother did, about how men just needed to "slay dragons"; to blame his destructive anger on natural protectiveness, a desire to provide. I laughed off how my fiancé had called me a "pagan witch" once, and gotten blind drunk and smashed a window screen because I'd gone alone to a Persephone-themed party he disapproved of. *I guess New York is pretty pagan, huh*, I said, like the problem had been the theme, and not the fact that I'd gone to a party alone.

Maybe I took pleasure in such subservience.

Dan Savage would never.

But bad theology can take you only so far. And if there is grace in any of this, it is that I realized this nine weeks before the wedding. If there is grace in this, it is that I had help.

The people who intervened on my behalf in the weeks before I left my fiancé, and in the weeks after, were not all Christian, although many were. Some were atheists or agnostics. A couple were witches. All of them, though, spoke to me in language I knew how to hear. To break this engagement, they assured me, was not, would not be, some sort of selfish vision of *living my best life*, chasing personal happiness at the expense of responsibility, of the promise I had made. Rather, it would be actually, finally, choosing an actual vision of the good life—or, at the very least, the space to understand it—over its letterpress cutout.

We made a different kind of family that winter.

The Christians I knew prayed the Daily Office for me, and also bought me champagne. A woman I had dated with whom I was still close, who had staged an intervention for me in Central Park a week before I left him, showed up with her girlfriend at the apartment I'd shared with my ex to help me move. It turned out to be the day of the New York City Marathon, and we carted ten or so trash bags halfway across the city before we could find a taxi to take us to the storage unit.

I started wearing pants. I cut my hair short. I determined that I would never change my name.

People invited me to things so that I would not be lonely; they showed up to things I invited them to. They stayed out with me until three in the morning at one Halloween party so that I would not have to go home alone. They helped me paint my studio apartment walls bright teal, the doors bright red, the accents gold.

We went to the opera, this new family of mine. We went to Mass. People I knew from church made sure to go to Mass with me, now that I was going alone. We went to karaoke. We talked about faith, about God, about meaning, about the insufficiency of this scelerotic modern world, and we resisted it not with traditionalism but with love for one another. We stayed up too late and fell asleep in one another's beds to save us subway rides home. We wrote essays and talked about immanentizing the eschaton, and what that would look like, and wondered whether there would be art in the New Jerusalem.

"It's like I'm in college," one of my friends said that December. That feeling you get during a par-

ticularly good cast party. Like you still believe that what you do matters.

My fiancé and I had bought six Georgian daggers at a flea market outside Tbilisi for the groomsmen back when we were engaged. My ex had wanted his bachelor parties to be a celebration of the masculine virtues. He'd considered going axe-throwing in Brooklyn. Men, he said, *made things*. We were aligned on this much: we both found the tequila-doused notion of the bachelor party or the hen night (strippers; penis-shaped cakes; *goodbye to your sexual freedom*) repulsive. But it was also true that I had no idea what the complementary bachelorette party was supposed to be. I liked cooking. Throwing axes also sounded fun. I bought my bridesmaids earrings.

Anyway, the daggers had caused one of my ex's greatest outbursts—long story—when we were still together, and he had told me to get rid of them. But deep down I knew that I didn't want to, so I kept them in my mother's apartment until I finally had the courage to leave him. Once I did, I distributed them to each of my former bridesmaids at what was supposed to the bridal shower. Six Georgian daggers. Six shows of strength.

Instead of a wedding—my mother was paying, and the booze deposit was nonrefundable—we had a big party, where everybody I'd ever known was welcome to show up and laugh and dance and be with one another. Everybody but me wore white. Instead of gifts, people brought mementos of relationships they wanted to forget. They left them, anonymously, on a table, and took instead the trinkets of strangers, now given new stories and new life. A woman I'd only met twice—a vintage clothing specialist—dyed my reception dress blood-orange, and refused to let me pay her.

The queer communities I have belonged to often talk about *chosen family*. People who have been marginalized, who have, in so many cases, been cut off from their biological families of origin, who forge new ways of being in relation to one another. In a chosen family, you become mother and father to one another; you become siblings because you need each other, because people need you. All too often excluded from the traditional rites of your community, you create your own. You have your own Thanksgivings, your own Christmas dinners: places where "orphans" are welcome, where there is always an extra place.

So too the body of Christ.

We were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free. Thus Paul writes; thus the Pentecost Lectionary goes. *And we were all made to drink of one Spirit.* Thus, *one flesh.*

The faith I sought, in the aftermath of my disastrous engagement, was not the faith of the strong, nor of the settled, nor of the secure. It could not be the faith of the squarely paired or the appropriately fecund. It could not be the faith of trad skirts and cleaved roles, of dominance hierarchies that are little more than teleologies of oppression.

It could not be *Lindy.*

The faith that found me—yes—resisted whatever it was I wanted to resist about modernity, and Tinder, and the commodification of the human person. But it resisted, too, the notion that our only way out is *back*: that the answer to a hookup culture of disposability is to stop wearing jumpsuits, that becoming *one flesh* means becoming a cardboard cutout of femininity, of entertaining evolutionary psychology, of confusing Darwinism and natural law, as if God had never become man.

The Magnificat helped me: before I left, once I'd gone. Mary helped me. My fiancé had never liked her much. She's *just some girl*, he'd often said. *Just a mom.* But it is Mary who knows the truth in her body, the truth of her body, which is not some biologically determined generation but rather the utterly miraculous truth of virgin birth. There is something that happens in the body that is also not governed purely by blood, and that something is what makes the valleys high and the mountains low, and also makes a man who has died come back from the dead. That the proud are scattered; that the mighty are put down; that a virgin bears a child: all these are part of the same eschatological miracle of Christ. The social order of things—its hierarchies, its divisions—may seem inevitable; it is not. Christ's love breaks it open. Christ's love takes the body, takes the family, takes nature itself, and reveals how much more there is within them than we can ever come to comprehend.

To be *not conformed to this age* is not to succumb to nostalgia, nor to the golden-age rhetoric of social traditionalism. Rather, it is to recognize that transformative power of Christian life to create a body that transcends our understanding of flesh. It is to recognize that justice, that liberation, that the New Jerusalem, means tearing down *all* the oppressive structures that bind us: those uniquely *modern* and those *lindy*, too.

It is to recognize what miracles create, and what—in so doing—they destroy.

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Drinking Alone

Jonathan Malesic

Moving to a Rust Belt town taught me that real solidarity is harder than it looks.

One night in August 2005, just after I'd moved to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, for a job as a theology professor, I needed beer. To get to the distributor, I drove over a concrete bridge, its four pylons etched with words like "Perseverance" and "Industry" and topped by monumental eagles. Once there, I wandered through the pallets of warm cases trying to find a thirty-pack of PBR until the thin, gruff man behind the counter asked what I was looking for. I told him, he pointed to the right pallet, and I met him at the register.

He asked for ID, and I showed him my Virginia license. He looked me in the eye. "I figured you had to be out of state," he said as he handed it back. "The young people around here don't drink Pabst." I told him they did in Virginia. I didn't tell him it was because hipsters fetishized white working-class culture. I mentioned instead that I'd just moved here. "Oh yeah? For good?" "Yeah." "That's too bad. You should go back. Welcome to one of the worst drug havens in the country."

Andrew Hvozdovic at the North End Slovak Citizens Club in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, 2017

MARK PETERSON / REDUX

I told him I'd heard of the local drug problem. He then expanded upon his point, and began riffing on racist and misogynist themes. He told me there was no nightlife in town because the cops were always out waiting to nab you after you left the bar and tried to drive home. I stood impassively at the counter, hoping his rant would burn out if I didn't feed it with dialogue. "And the people!" he continued. "Some of the most ignorant, idiotic people anywhere. They're petty and vindictive, and they got no personality!" When I said I'd just gotten a job teaching at a local college, he told me to stay one semester, then get out. He was getting out, he said. "I might not be here next time you come in. I'm going to Arkansas." At that, I bid him goodnight, threw my beer in the trunk, and went home.

The next time I came back, weeks or months later, he was still there.

When I said I'd just gotten a job teaching at a local college, he told me to stay one semester, then get out.

Wilkes-Barre is in the middle of Northeast Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley, guarded by high ridges on either side of the Susquehanna River. Its nickname is the Diamond City, a reference to the "black diamonds" of anthracite coal once mined there. I came to the Valley in fulfillment of a longstanding dream. I had grown up in the suburbs of Buffalo in the years when industry was leaving. I went to college in Washington D.C., then graduate school in Charlottesville, Virginia, where I was initiated as a member of the bourgeois-intellectual class—a resident

of that archipelago of prosperous cities and college towns where people drive Subarus and subscribe to the *New York Times* but not their local papers. I never meant to come back to the Rust Belt. But I was committed to the academic profession, and Wilkes-Barre was the one place where I could practice it, because the college there was the one place that offered me a job. Graduate school didn't train me for life in cities where there weren't cafes filled with people reading or typing or grousing about David Brooks. Why should it? The brain drain is meant to carry people in one direction only, away from towns like Buffalo and Wilkes-Barre to towns like Charlottesville and D.C., not the reverse.

Hearing the beer-store clerk's plan to escape the Valley deepened my misgivings about moving there. After I brought my PBR home that night, I called my girlfriend, who had recently moved to Berkeley to pursue a PhD, and said to her, "Two years. I can stay two years at most. Hold me to that."

In the meantime, living in the Valley was too often synonymous with drinking. The local culture around alcohol is, shall we say, well developed. Every man I know who grew up in Wilkes-Barre in the 1970s and '80s has a wistful memory of being sent to the corner bar at an early age to pick up a six-pack for his father. Older men tell stories of their dads going off to work in the mines, metal lunch pail in hand, and returning at the end of the day with the pail full of beer. St. Patrick's Day is a two-week binge. The parades begin as early as March 3 and erupt into frequent brawls and occasional stabbings. One year, at Scranton's parade, some drunk picked a fight with a horse. When I ask a former student who left the Valley after graduation what she thinks the culture of the region is, her first words are "binge drinking."

Alcohol defined the contours of my social and professional life. After my first faculty meeting, the president of the college held a reception for us on campus—full bar. I ordered an Old Grand-Dad on the rocks. The bartender threw a few cubes in the glass and then filled it to the top: a triple, at least. As the semester continued, I often met with colleagues for happy hour at bars near the college that offered dollar drafts, and on Fridays, free pizza and pasta. On Sundays I went alone to a pizza place to watch football, drink twenty-two-ounce glasses of Labatt, and exchange epithets about the games with whoever else was sitting at the bar. At the end of my first year, I learned that the college always sponsored a kegger on the night before graduation. Graduates, professors, and parents played beer pong and ate pretzels out of paper boats, downing pitcher after pitcher. At one of these events, late in the night, the mayor, an alumnus, showed up with his entourage. One of his hangers-on, a beefy middle-aged guy in a nylon warmup jacket over his dress shirt, muscled past me to the head of the beer line to grab a couple bottles for him and His Honor.

My two years there became ten, then eleven. I applied for other teaching jobs, far away, without luck. Every year, I cursed the town. I got tenure. Friends who cursed the town right along with me got married, had kids, bought homes. The graduates I toasted at the keg party left and found their fortunes in the sort of places I wished I could be, places with bookstores and public transit. Places with, I don't know, a Whole Foods. Places where there was more to do than drink. At the same time, I felt guilty about wanting to leave. I had survived the academic job market's brutal caprice. Many talented friends from graduate school were not so lucky. Besides, I had grown up outside of a crumbling steel town. Who was I to turn my nose up at a crumbling coal town? And what did my enlightened liberal, democratic values mean if not that the clerk across the beer-store counter was my fellow citizen and brother?

My desire both to belong in Wilkes-Barre and to escape it reflected the conflicting cultural purposes of drinking. Alcohol is a social lubricant, easing conversation and widening circles of friendship. But drinking culture also reinforces boundaries around who belongs and who doesn't. It polices the barriers between us, including race and gender, sexual orientation and income. Most of us have a subconscious alarm that rings when we take a few steps into a bar that's the wrong place for us, where we'll be eyed suspiciously or harassed or worse. We know where we don't belong. And for reasons to do with my academic aloofness and the class distance I had traversed since leaving Buffalo, I found it hard to belong in the Valley. Partly, I didn't try hard enough. But it also wouldn't have mattered if I had lived there the rest of my life. In this city where many people leave but few move in, I would always be a newcomer, not from there. Of course, I didn't want to be from there. Still, it was where I lived, and I didn't want to be a permanent alien, either. I drank to fit in, and I drank because I didn't.

On a typical Friday afternoon during my time in Wilkes-Barre, after the curriculum-committee meeting adjourns, my friend G. and I walk across the street to a bar whose name is variously spelled Senunas', Senunas's, or Senuna's. The place isn't busy yet. We cross the ceramic-tiled floor and settle in at two stools at the corner of the bar. We're flanked by solo drinkers, men watching other men shout at each other on ESPN. The TVs are muted and closed-captioned to clear aural space for the jukebox, not that anyone has spared a dollar to make it play.

We each place a ten-dollar bill on the bar and order a lager. We don't say "Yuengling lager," because in this region, where it's brewed, that would be redundant. The bartender, M., is a student of mine. She pours our beers and slides our glasses in front of us—each of them an ounce or two short of a pint. She picks up our tens and then sets down a stack of bills and coins totaling $7.75 in front of each of us. The other men sitting at the bar—all of us white, paunchy except for G., and between thirty and sixty years old—have similar stacks in front of them.

G. and I talk institutional politics, and intermittently exchange small talk with a grey-mustached drinker sitting next to me. He says something, and we respond, but we keep him at arm's length. We're there to talk to each other.

Halfway through our drinks, M. sets shot glasses, upside down, in front of me and G. The grey-mustached drinker has just bought us a round, and the shot glasses signal what we're owed—and what we'll owe. M. pulls four singles and two quarters from his stack.

Now I have to talk to him. And not just through this round. Two rounds, because now I'm on the hook for one. I can't bail after I finish the one he buys me. At least, I think I can't. That would violate the way of things here. Owing him ties me to him. And I don't want that tie. I would much prefer to settle the debt immediately, or even to act as if I don't know how this economy works, say thanks as I get up off the stool to leave, and forget I owe him anything. Instead, I grit my teeth, buy him a round, and bear it. We make small talk: sports, work, where we're from. M. takes a few dollars and coins from my stack. I leave her the rest.

I never initiated this sort of exchange. On a different day, at a different bar, I would walk away without reciprocating. And, over time, I did that more and more. When I finally moved away to Dallas, Texas, miserable in my academic job and ready to follow the career of my Berkeley girlfriend, now my wife, I was several beers in the red.

Throughout my years in Wilkes-Barre, I believed the area had no culture. But I was mistaken. What I didn't realize was that drinking alcohol *is* culture. Much of what we know about ancient Greece, we know through designs on drinking vessels. Mesopotamian cuneiform documents the sale and storage of grain the Sumerians used to brew beer. Culture is also about unwritten rules, and there are a lot of them to do with drinking, from a Japanese office worker's duty to keep the boss's glass full to the Russian insistence that one take a bite of a pickle between vodka shots. All across Chicago, in straight, working-class sports bars and gay leather bars alike, the upside-down shot glass that weighed so heavily on me signals you're owed a round on someone else's tab. I once went to a bar in the Bronx where patrons grumbled that the new bartender didn't get the rule, never stated explicitly, that every third drink was a buy-back.

These drinking rituals are meant to help you identify with the people around you. The anthropologist Mary Douglas called those bonds "group." I pulled her 1970 book *Natural Symbols* off the shelf for the first time since grad school after I moved to Dallas, in an attempt to make sense of the rootlessness I felt in Wilkes-Barre. Douglas imagined "group" as one axis of a schematic for analyzing cultures. The other axis is "grid," which refers to the extent to which a typical person accepts the "prevailing classification system" of rules and ranks. A high-grid, high-group society is a tightly bounded hierarchy, like an army or the Catholic Church. The world of entrepreneurs, by contrast, is low-grid, low-group; in it, each individual is meant to advance their self-interest, convention be damned. Most drinking rituals reinforce the internal identity of already-existing groups: fraternities and sororities, teammates, circles of brunch friends. When you buy someone a round, you create a temporary club of two members; when they reciprocate, they pay their dues and inch closer to you on the grid. Douglas might have said my discomfort in the interaction with the gray-mustached man at the bar resulted from conflicting visions of the human world. He was inviting me into the group. As a bourgeois academic, I wanted to maintain my individualism, but nevertheless capitulated to my latent wish to belong.

Throughout my years in Wilkes-Barre, I believed the area had no culture. But I was mistaken. What I didn't realize was that drinking alcohol *is* culture.

The institutional Church is a high-grid entity, but the cultural Catholicism in Northeast Pennsylvania is as low-grid as the working-class drinking culture it meshed with seamlessly. I approached this nexus with my typical ambivalence. The church I belonged to in Wilkes-Barre, an exquisite Gothic cuckoo clock, held a pre-Lenten German Night every year, with beer, sausages, and oompah bands in the basement. I never went. I did go every summer to the church bazaar, where people wait an hour in line for potato pancakes to soak up their beer and where you'll see nuns walking around holding a bratwurst in one hand and a plastic cup of lager in the other. A friend who grew up in a conservative Evangelical community on the high plains came to the bazaar with me once. He knew church picnics, but the scene shocked him: free-flowing alcohol, games of chance, cliques of flirting teenagers. I regretted confirming every Catholic stereotype.

I've never had a beer at my new upper-class parish in Dallas, surrounded by office towers and condo complexes. The relative lack of binding customs in the urban brewpubs and $15 cocktail bars of this sun-blasted "global city" signals a thin, flattened-out drinking culture—of a piece with a thin, flattened-out culture here overall. In the sort of bar I go to now, straight guys don't buy rounds for other straight guys they just met. There's only one unwritten rule: leave each other alone. The smartphone helps enforce this taboo. It allows educated urbanites to go to bars and carry on conversations with their

closest friends—only they can't clink glasses by text message.

Academic and professional cultures get people like me to locate our identity within them, in part by separating us from people and place. The business scholar Gianpiero Petriglieri (Sicilian, married to an Englishwoman, teaching in France) calls his elite MBA students "a peculiar tribe. A tribe for people unfit for tribalism." To ease their careers in multinational corporations, they're tied to no country. They identify themselves by their skills, intellect, and work ethic, which they're always ready to take to their next job, wherever it might be. In the cosmopolitan ideal, you belong to the world, equally at ease in Berlin or Bangkok, knowledgeable of local customs, ready to join a conversation anywhere, with anyone. It's an ideal of connoisseurship. It's knowing to pronounce the Czech capital *Pra-ha*, not *Progg*, when you're chatting about Bohemian pilsners.

But it also means being equally ill-at-ease anywhere, including among citizens of your home country. The desire to belong is incongruous with the individualistic culture of America's elite. To live out the cosmopolitan ideal means you know someone everywhere but have close ties nowhere, because you've moved so many times for work. It means you never realize the dream of the *Cheers* theme song. There's no place you can go where everybody knows your name.

The flattened-out, low-group drinking culture in our large, cosmopolitan cities goes hand-in-hand with the power of capitalist exchange to smooth over the folds in our society. Hard valleys resist these trends, albeit to their economic detriment. Global capital either can't or won't come to Scranton and Wilkes-Barre—at least, not beyond the big-box stores, the warehouses along the highway, and the gas drills in the cities' northern hinterlands. Local politicians nevertheless kept proposing ventures that would bring the prosperous, cosmopolitan world into the Valley. The biggest was a complete backup system for Wall Street banks and brokerages that could keep the markets running in the event of another 9/11. The project's boosters pointed out that the region was safely beyond the fifty-mile blast radius of a nuclear explosion in Manhattan, but still close enough to conduct instantaneous transactions via fiber optic cable. Ten million New Yorkers could be reduced to shadow and cinder, but trading would continue. Finally, Northeast Pennsylvania would again have its moment.

The project was proposed in 2006. A report commissioned by the Department of Labor was optimistic that the local culture would learn to accommodate itself to the project's needs: "Perceptions are gradually changing within the region, which is beginning to envision itself as a high technology economy and beginning to understand the benefits of regional thinking." In other words, it will be assimilated. Needless to say, within two years, Wall Street had other priorities, and the project went nowhere.

The death of the region's economic hopes a few decades ago portended the deaths of its working-age residents. Like the beer-store clerk told me during my first week in town, drug abuse was a problem in Northeast Pennsylvania before I arrived. But over the subsequent decade, people living there began turning with alarming frequency to the solitary and dangerous escape drugs offer. The Luzerne County Coroner told NBC News in 2017 that as things continued to look bad economically in the region, "people have gradually gone from the corner bar mentality to 'I'm going to do some drugs' to escape the situation that they're in." The rate of death by overdose nearly tripled between 2010 and 2017 in Luzerne County, which includes Wilkes-Barre. The coroner could barely keep up with his autopsy caseload. As the morgue filled up, I heard longtime white residents blame "outsiders"—by which they meant black and Hispanic people who had moved in from New York, Philadelphia, or abroad—for bringing drugs to the Valley.

Mary Douglas saw antipathy toward an out-group as a common characteristic of the low-grid, high-group societies she called "enclaves," a category that can encompass both small, traditionalist communities and terrorist cells. In a lecture she gave a few weeks before her death in 2007, Douglas said that an enclave under threat will often put up "a strong moral wall against the outside. This is where the world starts to be painted in black and white, saints inside and sinners outside the wall. It is a strategy aimed at making exit seem frightening." With the mines shuttered, the Church weakened by attrition and scandal, and opioid deaths surging, the Valley's social classification system was in disarray. To preserve their group identity, those who imagined themselves as "from here" cast the outside world as impure, and they dug in.

As I struggled to find a place in the Valley's local culture, I turned my apartment into an outpost of the republic of letters. Magazine subscriptions—the *New Yorker*, the *Economist*, *n+1*—were my citizenship papers. At least at home I could decide who, if anyone, I drank with. I could try to form my own group. The building where I lived the longest was called the Wheelmen, named after the cycling club that built the three-story, seafoam-green-shingled Queen Anne mansion in 1897. An architect bought the building in the 1990s, turned it into ten units, and got it placed on the National Register of Historic Places. A perfectly conical roof tops a turret on one corner of the building. A deep covered porch wraps around it. I picture the Wheelmen sipping sherry on the porch in their wool coats and knickers after a ride. Beneath an archway, a wide set of stairs spills out from the porch to the sidewalk. In the bushes, you might find a used heroin needle, or empty bottles, or human shit. Up and down the street, well-kept townhomes alternate with boarded-up duplexes and triple-blocks. Several lots in the neighborhood are vacant. In a building two doors down, a single grandmother cares for half-a-dozen kids, who play and scream all day long in a tiny yard.

A few months after my wife and I moved into the place, we awoke to the sound of glass breaking outside. I looked out

the window and saw a firefighter standing on a roof of the triple-block home around the corner from ours, holding a hose and backlit by flames. The house adjacent to the triple-block had been vacant for who knows how long, and now it was on fire.

The Wheelmen's residents descended our grand staircase and went outside to see what was happening. Among us were a doctor, a chemist, a counselor, and various other professionals, some from the region, some not. We gathered on the porch, and the longer-term residents ran down a list of nearby houses that had burned down. One or another person would shuffle out to see the ladder truck dump sheets of water onto the burning house. A fire truck pulled into our parking lot to keep watch and make sure the flames didn't leap onto our building. We went around the corner to talk to the families who lived in the triple-block. They stared at their waterlogged homes, trying to console their kids and keep an eye on their dogs.

It was the first time I really met the other people who lived in my building. We pulled patio chairs together and talked. Someone brought out beer. Someone else, a ukulele. From where we sat, on the side of our building away from the fire, the burning house smelled like a campfire. At some point, it started raining. By dawn, the fire was just smoldering, and we went back inside, vowing to get together again more often.

The next day, city workers started clearing away the wreckage. They found two bodies. The victims were both fifty-two-year-old men, both veterans, both fathers of four. Their friends said both were hard workers. One had been a machinist; the other worked odd jobs. And both were described as homeless and having "a bad problem" with alcohol. Neighbors told the local papers that the house wasn't really vacant. Homeless people and drug users occupied it, they said. In fact, the month before the fire, police had found the machinist in the house, intoxicated. I don't know how the fire started. I don't know what the men were doing on the night they died. All I know is that they drank, too, but they didn't belong, and they couldn't escape.

In the summer following the fire, my neighbors and I started sprucing up the Wheelmen's porch so we could spend more time on it together. One woman set up a living room of cushioned, faux-wicker furniture on the corner of the porch that faced the street, like a *Better Homes and Gardens* spread. She put down a floral-patterned rug. In another corner, she set out a plastic dining table and covered it with a cloth. She hung plants from the arches. Someone else bought a grill and invited all the tenants to use it. I contributed a metal café table and chairs for the back end of the porch, where I would read during the day and serve drinks to friends in the evenings.

One wine-drunk night out there, a thin guy with a rough gray beard and a ballcap walked up to us off the street, squatted near our table, and told stories about when the building housed the Franklin Club, another private social venue for the managerial class that opened after the cyclists moved out. There were bowling alleys in the basement; there was great food upstairs. The guy said he had worked there decades before. When he wrapped up his story, he asked us for a drink. We demurred, and he got up, walked down the steps, and continued on his way.

Our economic system depletes communities, and you can gain wealth and status within it if you're willing to pull up your own roots again and again.

By this point, six years into my stay in the Valley, I had accepted that I would always be an exile, or possibly a missionary, from the world beyond it. I wasn't fully part of the culture of the place, but that also meant I was shielded from its miseries by my citizenship in the other culture. At some point in my early adulthood, after I left Buffalo, I had crossed a threshold that I could never cross back. Drinking PBR—or Lion's Head, the cheap Wilkes-Barre beer I've seen on tap in hipster bars in Brooklyn and D.C.—doesn't put you in solidarity with the working class. That's an easy mistake to make in places where bourgeois culture dominates, where you don't encounter working-class people or feel estranged from them every day. You may admire or long for their group identity—as, on some level, I do—but you made your choice. Our economic system depletes communities, and you can gain wealth and status within it if you're willing to pull up your own roots again and again, even living suspended in the air, while others, more firmly planted, wither together.

Over the course of that summer, everything we had put out on the porch got stolen: the metal furniture, the plastic furniture, the grill, the replacement grill we chained to the railing, the chain itself. The hanging plants stayed. When my neighbors complained to the building's maintenance guy, he blamed drug users and mentioned that the scrap yard down the street would buy anything metal, no questions asked. At a residents' meeting in the building's lobby following the thefts, a neighbor proposed tearing out the steps and closing off the porch.

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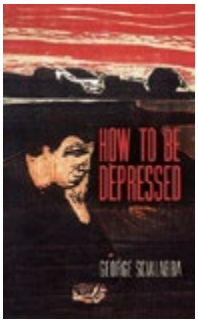
Muddling Through

Matthew Sitman

A depression memoir like no other

As I read George Scialabba's new book *How To Be Depressed*, I recalled that I'd been introduced to his writing almost a decade ago by a schizophrenic, manic-depressive homeless man. R. might have protested that term—technically, he lived in a small garage that a fellow parishioner at the church we all attended let him use. It was shocking to visit him there for the first time; nearly every square inch of the place was filled with musty stacks of the *New York Review of Books*, assorted newspapers, and books, leaving only a narrow path that led to a mattress. Before adding something to one of these piles, he'd open his latest acquisition and run his finger down its pages, searching for matches or "sparks" that might cause a destructive fire—a phobia caused by a traumatic incident in R.'s childhood.

My friends and I tried to look after R., taking him to dinner or paying his phone bill or letting him do laundry in our homes. I was drawn to R. partly because I couldn't help but see some of myself in him, and had a gnawing fear that his plight would one day be my own. He was, in his way, an intellectual, who actually read at least a few of the periodicals he collected and enjoyed arguing about politics. I'd often see him in the local used bookstore I frequented, and that must have been where he pressed Scialabba's *What Are Intellectuals Good For?* into my hands. "This is the good shit," he solemnly professed, and he was right. R. had been an alcoholic, and I'd gleaned that when he finally kicked booze the withdrawal caused a breakdown from which he'd never quite recovered. I knew I sometimes drank too much, too, and for the wrong reasons—enough to watch myself. We shared both hypochondria and a dread of visiting the doctor. I wasn't a manic depressive, but for much of the time I knew R. I was in the throes of the worst severe depression of my life.



HOW TO BE DEPRESSED

GEORGE SCIALABBA
University of Pennsylvania Press
$27.50 | 224 pp.

One feature of that depression was that I developed an acute fear of becoming homeless—deepened, I think, by my friendship with R. If you spend any amount of time actually getting to know homeless people, you realize how quickly a life can become undone: an addiction that spirals out of control at the wrong time; a mental breakdown without family and friends to sustain you; a bad decision followed by a bad break. The depressed mind, usually so lethargic, nevertheless manages to conjure up the most elaborate scenarios of doom. However ridiculous it might seem, I made a number of my closest friends swear on their honor to take me in if I got to such a point. That fear of falling came back to me when I read this passage from the notes of one of Scialabba's therapists:

> He now has multiple fears of losing control, which he fantasizes would result in his becoming passive, being unable to hold a job, going on welfare or into a hospital, and not being able to take care of himself.

Vincent van Gogh, *Sorrowing Old Man* (also known as *At Heaven's Gate*), 1890

ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Such consuming worry about "losing control," about being unable to keep it together, is a recurring theme in the literature about depression—not merely intense sadness, but the threat of personal dissolution. William Styron, in *Darkness Visible*, relays a conversation with a suffering friend who told him that his depression made him feel "helpless." An especially wrenching scene in Andrew Solomon's *The Noonday Demon* is when his father literally has to feed him. Depression makes ordinary tasks appear as looming impossibilities. Work suffers; social occasions become exhausting burdens; getting out of bed takes heroic effort.

This underlies one of the paradoxes of depression: it renders you unable to do what would help you tame your affliction. When I was depressed, I knew exercise stood a chance of minimizing my symptoms, but summoning the will to go for a jog or head to the gym was often beyond me. For years I resisted trying medication. The thought of finding a doctor, setting up an appointment, and then navigating insurance forms brought me close to panic. I only received treatment after bottoming out, nearly destroying the life I was keeping a tenuous hold on. One morning while lying in bed, not long after spending a night in jail, I had a brief moment of clarity: I crawled over to my desk and emailed my priest, telling him I needed help. Could he arrange for me to see a doctor? I still remember walking out of the doctor's office a few days later, prescription in hand, crying from relief. It would take weeks for the Lexapro to take effect; the point was that I'd finally *done* something. For the first time in a long time, I'd moved forward.

As I slowly, if unevenly, learned to deal with my depression, I begged R. to see a doctor too, and perhaps try medication. He refused, pointing me to an old magazine article that cast doubt on such pharmaceutical interventions, while hinting at darker conspiracies about the mental-health profession's role in our society. We argued and argued. I offered to set up an appointment with the doctor I'd seen, and gave him a blank signed check to cover the cost of his visit. He wouldn't budge. Depression can leave us not only unable to love, but unable to accept love.

Depression forces itself through the cracks of one's life, finding the weak spots particular to the person it inundates. Like consciousness itself, depression seems to dwell in that hazy realm where matter and spirit meet, and we turn inward to pursue its elusive essence. Exploring what caused a person's depression, however, what set it off on the particular course it ran, necessarily ends in an overdetermined tangle—one reason why the shelves overflow with depression memoirs. We keep trying to pin depression down, but fail again and again. Styron's depression set upon him when he was around sixty years old, likely "triggered" when he suddenly gave up alcohol and began taking a dangerous sleeping medication. But as Styron meditates on what happened to him, the chain of causation extends ever backward—he realizes three main characters in his novels kill themselves, a fact that suggests the storm had been gathering for many years. Then he presses on to childhood wounds. Would a man who'd led a different life sink into depression after he quit drinking? Styron gets to the end of *Darkness Visible* and confesses, "The very number of hypotheses is testimony to the malady's all but impenetrable mystery."

Of course, depression memoirs also try to express what depression *feels* like, the experience of being cut down by it. But there's something false about the very act of writing about depression in that way. Generally speaking, the people who write memoirs don't do so while they're strung out from an addiction, exhausted by chemotherapy, or enduring a family crisis—or while they're in the throes of depression. Memoirs are written by survivors, and survival imposes a retrospective sense of resolution on a person's depression that the actual experience of it entirely lacks. Scialabba agrees with William James's classic formulation: depression is an anguish "unknown to normal life," because, as Scialabba puts it in the book's moving introduction, no other pain feels "unlimited in both intensity and duration." Depression seems like it will never end; life becomes an eternal, excruciating present. Your life no longer has a narrative, which is precisely what a memoir needs.

What makes Scialabba's *How To Be Depressed* such a brilliant and unusual contribution to the literature of depression is the elegant solution he found to this predicament. He doesn't write about himself—other people do. Rather than produce another "memoir," he reproduces the notes his therapists and doctors took over the years. "They're a very distinct form of writing," Scialabba observes. "They're almost a form of anti-writing." This allows readers to encounter his depression from the outside; he relinquishes control of his story, sapping it of all dramatic pacing. There is only depression's pathetic waste, observed in pitiless detail over the decades.

This is very different from reading, say, Kay Jamison's memoir *An Unquiet Mind*. She writes of "moods and madness," and the reader first encounters her running around the parking lot of the UCLA Medical Center at 2 a.m., "trying to use up a boundless, restless, manic energy." In another book, *Touched with Fire*, Jamison connects manic depression to "the artistic temperament"—which can't help but lend the illness an air of intrigue and allure. Even Styron's account of his depression gives it a certain romance; the memoir's opening scene finds him in Paris, about to accept a prestigious literary prize. His depression, safely behind him by its final pages, becomes a dark, harrowing interlude that adds grit to an otherwise enviable life.

Not so for Scialabba. He circles around the same problems over and over, especially his break with Opus Dei, into which he'd been recruited while an undergraduate at Harvard—a decision that also meant leaving, though never entirely leaving behind, the Catholic Church. As one therapist reports:

> The overall problem he notes was that he was a very devout Catholic, part of a religious order, which he left at 21 during the summer between college and graduate school. He was so agitated he had to drop out of graduate school. Seemingly, the pieces of his life never came back together. He did not feel able to do any intellectual work, never resumed his life again.

Depression seems like it will never end; life becomes an eternal, excruciating present.

If these notes convey the futility of depression, they also fill in enough of Scialabba's story for readers to follow along. It might be "a story without a plot, without characters, without hope" as Scialabba claims, but a sketch of the man emerges: his Italian, working-class upbringing in Boston; confessions that he's buying too many books and records; his obsessive thinking, indecisiveness, and scrupulosity attacks; the ups and downs of trying to write.

I found this material oddly absorbing, though I came to it knowing that Scialabba is one of the best social critics of our time. (He's an occasional contributor to this magazine.) But that doesn't mean it's easy reading. Publishing his mental-health files was an act of self-exposure, and what's revealed is rarely flattering, especially when his complaints are rendered so unsparingly:

> Mr. Scialabba spoke of an incident that may have precipitated his last depression. He was having long and difficult dental work done and when he found the dentist unsympathetic with his pain, he abruptly terminated the dental work which he now regrets.

Or:

> Presently Mr. Scialabba has a number of male friends, writers and intellectuals with whom he constantly compares himself and to whom he feels inferior. He had opportunities to teach freshman English at Boston University and at Boston College this year, but was so anxious and agitated at the prospect that he declined. He felt that this disappointed his friends greatly, and certainly disappointed himself. Mr. Scialabba describes himself as a "dabbler" in intellectual history and politics who can impress people superficially but is lacking in depth, because he could not commit himself intellectually any more than he could emotionally.

How To Be Depressed does not end with an epiphany or a cure. The therapists' notes just stop as they get closer to the present, followed by an interview with Scialabba and a glossary-like "tips for the depressed." There is no grand, inspiring conclusion—just some hints about how decades of dealing with

depression have taught him to adapt his life to it and muddle through.

Many readers, especially those who have suffered from depression, will be fascinated by this final section of the book, which includes a list of the many medications Scialabba has tried over the years, and the details about his experiences with electroconvulsive therapy. (What depressive hasn't found themselves talking to a fellow sufferer and ended up comparing pharmaceutical notes?) I can say from experience that his suggestions for depressed people are quite useful: how to force yourself out of bed in the morning, what food to stock your refrigerator with, the importance of staying hydrated, and how to manage your money and remember to pay bills. For him, as for many of us, depression is always lurking, even if it is not always acute. But when the worst hits, when life becomes nearly unbearable, his advice amounts to saying: hang on until it passes, because it will pass, eventually, no matter how much it feels like it won't—and here's what might help until then.

What comes through these everyday tips, and what permeates Scialabba's entire book, is his deep compassion for those who share his plight. I keep coming back to these lines from one of his therapists:

> His affect was alternately sad and angry. He started to cry at one point, talking about his own compassion for suffering people and his wish that his own suffering would be treated with similar compassion.

He means especially compassion from friends and family, and it's a longing with which I'm familiar. To be depressed is to feel overwhelmed, that life is just too much. Part of his advice is to bluntly ask your loved ones to help you. "Don't hesitate to ask friends for material help: to shop for you, to cook, to drive you to doctor's appointments, to come over and watch television with you," he writes, "or just be there while you clean the house or do your laundry or pay bills, if you find those things too hard to do by yourself." I would add: don't hesitate to offend someone by asking if they need this kind of help.

I'm certain my own life never entirely unraveled because of the love of my friends. I now literally know the answer to the question, "Which friend would you call to pick you up at jail?" And I remember when J. arrived after I did just that, bringing me a coffee and telling me everything would be all right. I remember my priest finding me that doctor. I remember those who have forgiven my slights and shameful behavior, especially my friends who endured the worst of it—the times when it was those closest to me who I hurt the most. Perhaps not surprisingly, they were the friends who helped take care of R.; the friends who, after years of prodding and filling out paperwork, finally got R. a place of his own in a low-income apartment complex. These friends knew that real love is more than vague sentimentality, and that the people who need love the most rarely seem like the most deserving—indeed, they are often the most frustrating and difficult.

But Scialabba refuses to view such compassion only in private, personal terms, as if it could be discussed apart from politics and public policy. His might be the only book I've read that specifically mentions how important unions are for depressed people:

> I was blessed with an enlightened employer and—even more important—a strong union, so I twice got to take a three-month paid medical leave. I don't know what I would have done without them. This is one of many ways in which strong unions are a matter of life and death. There's plenty of data proving that poverty and economic insecurity increase depression and suicide rates. There's also plenty of data showing that the decline of (more accurately, the successful assault on) unions has increased poverty and economic insecurity.

Elsewhere, he rips into the One Percent, "who by the best scholarly estimates are hiding around nine trillion dollars in offshore tax havens." Shame on them, and the governments that allow it, he says, for hoarding money that "could relieve an awful lot of unnecessary suffering." A more generous and decent society, one that did not condemn those who get sick and fall on hard times to destitution or crushing debt, would be a society much better for the depressed. So would a health-care system that didn't consist of labyrinthine private health-insurance markets, with their reams of paperwork and out-of-network traps.

Scialabba never directly addresses the question, but one wonders how much his politics relate to his experience of depression. He is a man of the Left, an advocate of democratic socialism. Contrary to the assertions of many on the Right, such commitments aren't dependent on a naïve belief in progress or human perfectibility, an optimism about "human nature"—at least not in Scialabba's view, and not in mine either. Instead, such a politics can be based in human frailty, the understanding that we're less free than we want to admit, and that the illusions of "meritocracy" mostly just flatter those who have been more fortunate, or had the resources to evade consequences for their misdeeds and mistakes. This politics is democratic in the deepest sense: what we share most of all is our vulnerability to cruelty and chance, unexpected ruin or sudden defeat. It recognizes the unchosen limits and circumstances that mark our lives, which no amount of bootstrapping can overcome.

There are those who want to build a world where lives bend but do not break when sickness or strife hits, and then there are those who are serenely confident that their prosperity and position are the outcome of their striving, and that they are beyond the reach of such afflictions. Perhaps what puts someone on one side of that divide or the other is how much they can truly imagine losing. By sharing his struggles, Scialabba has provided not just a profound account of depression, but a reminder of how precarious our lives can be, and how much we need each other.

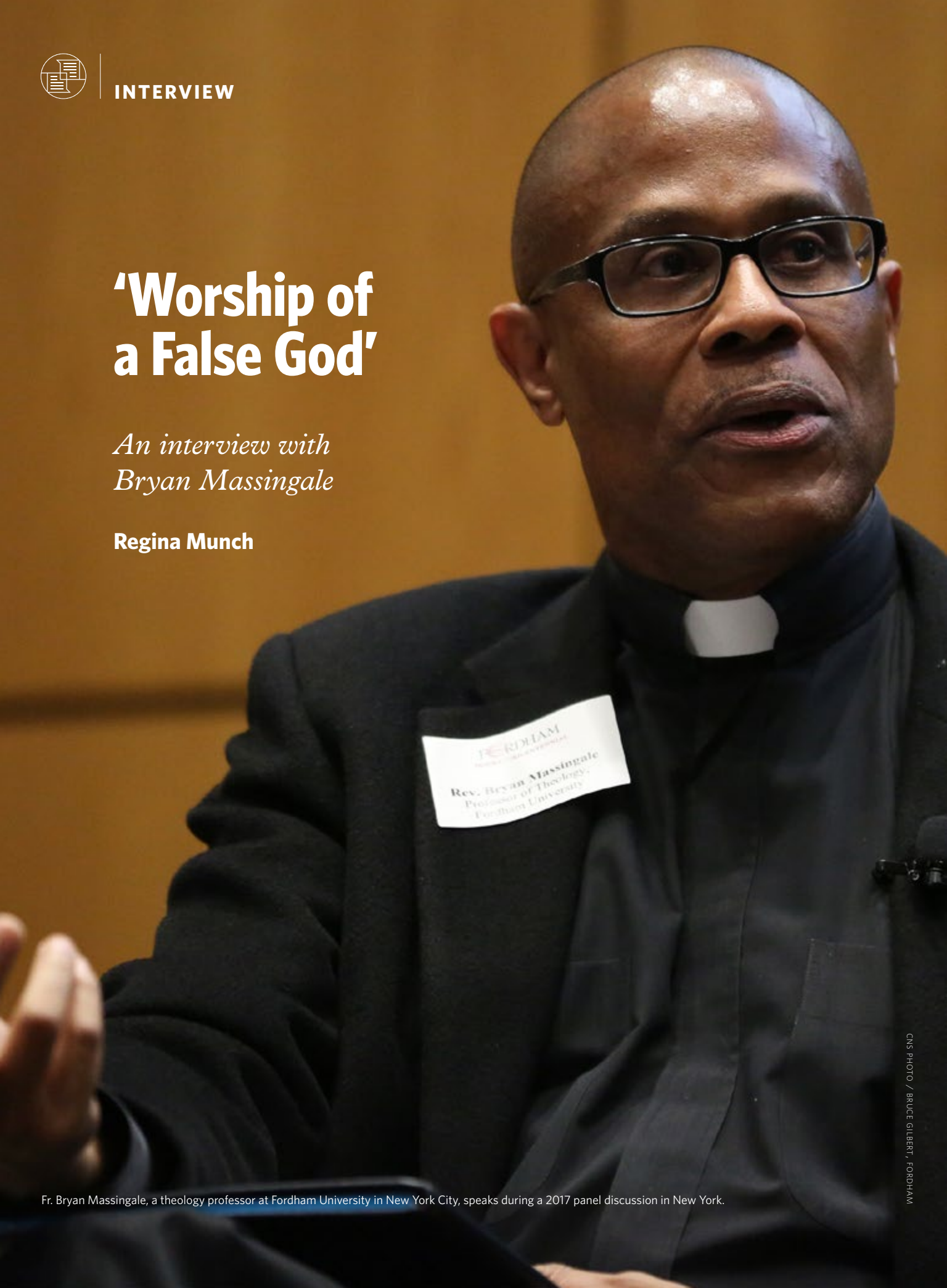
MATTHEW SITMAN *is the associate editor of* Commonweal.

INTERVIEW

‘Worship of a False God’

An interview with Bryan Massingale

Regina Munch



Fr. Bryan Massingale, a theology professor at Fordham University in New York City, speaks during a 2017 panel discussion in New York.

CNS PHOTO / BRUCE GILBERT, FORDHAM

Fr. Bryan Massingale is a professor of theology at Fordham University and the author of Racial Justice and the Catholic Church. *Assistant editor Regina Munch recently spoke with him about structural racism in the country and the Church for the Commonweal Podcast. Their conversation has been edited for clarity and length. The full transcript is available on the* Commonweal *website.*

REGINA MUNCH: As we speak, activists and protesters nationwide are demanding justice for George Floyd and an end to white supremacy. You recently wrote an article for the *National Catholic Reporter* in which you say that Amy Cooper holds the key to understanding racism in the United States. What did you mean by this?

FR. BRYAN MASSINGALE: Let me tell you a bit about how that essay came to be. It was Pentecost weekend, and even though people call me a progressive Catholic, I'm still old-school enough in my spirituality to believe in novenas. I was in the midst of the nine days of praying before Pentecost, and that Monday before Pentecost was when Amy Cooper, a white woman, called the police on an African-American man, Christian Cooper (no relation), who asked her to comply with the posted park regulations in Central Park and leash her dog. She told the police there was an African-American man threatening her. That same day was when the murder of George Floyd took place in Minneapolis, and the nation's attention fixated on that horrific outrage. That week as I was praying, I found I just could not pray. As I was trying, tears were falling.

And then it occurred to me: Amy Cooper held the key to help us understand what happened in Central Park. It tells us a great deal about what we mean by white privilege and white supremacy. We see a white woman who exemplified all the unspoken assumptions of whiteness. She assumed that she would be presumed innocent. She assumed that the black man would be presumed guilty. She assumed that the police would back her up. She assumed that his race would be a burden. She assumed that she could exploit deeply ingrained white fears of black men, and that these fears would keep a black man in his place.

It occurred to me that she knew exactly what she was doing, but also that we all know what she was doing. Every one of us could look at that situation and understand exactly what was going on, and that's the problem. Whether we want to admit it or not, we all know how race functions in America. It functions in a way that benefits white people and burdens people of color, and especially black people. That systemic advantage, that awareness that most white Americans have even if they don't want to admit it, means that they would never want to be black in America. We need to be honest about the centuries-old accumulations of the benefits of whiteness that make it easier to be white than it is to be a person of color. Until we have the courage to face that reality we're always going to have these explosions of protest, but we will never have the courage and the honesty to get to the core of the issue and to deal with the systemic ways in which inequality works in America.

RM: You've compared the way racism functions to a liturgy. How does that work?

BM: I got that insight from a sociologist named Joe Feagin, and he says that just as in a liturgy you have an officiant, you have acolytes, and you have a congregation, so too does racism. You have officiants, the people who are the obvious perpetrators of racial injustice. They're the people who pass policies that would disadvantage persons of color. Then you have the acolytes, who are, in a sense, the enablers—those who carry out those policies, or give approval. But then you have the congregation. The congregation are the bystanders—the people who see what's going on but who take no action to intervene.

When I talk about the bystanders, I ask people to think about going to their family meal at Christmas or Thanksgiving. You have the family member who tells a racist joke or who says a racist thing. What bystanders will often do in response is to say things like, "Well, your grandfather comes from a different generation," or, "It's a terrible thing that he said, but deep down he's a really good person."

Bystanders teach onlookers a very important message: doing racist things is okay because white people will let you get away with it. We create safe spaces for racism to fester, and it's out of that toxic atmosphere that more heinous actions take place, like the murder of George Floyd. We create the atmosphere that says when white people do terrible things, other white people have your back. Other white people won't call you out.

RM: Let's talk about racism within the Catholic Church. In 2018 the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops published the pastoral document *Open Wide Our Hearts*, which was meant to address racism in the United States after the events of Charlottesville and a rise in white nationalism. You've called the document a missed opportunity. Why?

BM: Yes, I've said that the document was a missed opportunity. But I now have to say that the document is so inadequate as to be virtually useless. It came, as you said, in response to the events of Charlottesville, when we saw white nationalism resurgent in this country in a way that we've not experienced in decades. We have open white supremacists marching in the streets of an American city with torches saying, "You will not replace us. Jews will not replace us." The bishops' document unfortunately fell far short in that it never named white nationalism as a social crisis in America. The phrase "white privilege" does not appear in the document. The phrase "black lives matter" doesn't appear in the document, despite the fact that this has been a major social movement in the United States since the 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman for the killing of Trayvon Martin.

The other thing the document does is that when it speaks of racism, it speaks of it in the passive voice. African Americans were excluded from opportunities, but it never says who did the excluding or why. In other words, the document was written by white people for the comfort of white people. It illustrates a basic tenet of Catholic engagement with racism: when the Catholic Church historically has engaged with this issue, it's always done so in a way that's calculated not to disturb white people or make white people uncomfortable. Even when the document talks about police violence, it does so in a very bizarre way. It says that we must admit that people of color experience fear in their encounters with police. But then it goes on to condemn violent language directed at police. It never condemns police abuse of power or police misconduct.

Whenever I give workshops on racism, sooner or later someone will ask a question that goes something like this: "Father, how can we talk about this in my parish or classroom and not make white people uncomfortable?" I challenge them to think about that question. Why is it that the only group in America that is never allowed to feel uncomfortable about race is white people? Doesn't that discount the real discomfort, the real fear, the real terror that people of color have to live with and endure because of racism? If white comfort sets the limits of conversation, then that means we will never face the difficult truth: the only reason for the persistence of racism is because white people benefit from it. That difficult truth is something that the Catholic Church in America has never summoned the courage or the will to directly address.

RM: Part of the reason for such accommodation for white people's comfort, you've said, is that the Church sees itself as white, for white people. Can you say more about that?

BM: In my book *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* there's one sentence that goes something like this: what makes the Church white and racist is the pervasive belief that European aesthetics, European music, European theology, and European persons, and only these, are standard, normative, universal, and truly Catholic. In other words, when we talk about what makes something Catholic, the default is always to the products that reflect a white cultural aesthetic. Everything else is seen as Catholic by exception, or Catholic by toleration.

One instance I could point to is when I went to celebrate a Mass at a suburban parish in Milwaukee. A priest friend of mine had suddenly taken sick and he asked me to say Mass for him. I showed up at church and I asked the usher to direct me to the sacristy. He looked at me, and wanted to know why I wanted to know. So I explained the situation, thinking that the Roman collar I was wearing would make it obvious. And he said, "You're a priest? Who sent you?" I explained the situation again. Then he said, "Well, next time, I hope he sends us a real priest." Now, we can get very upset with him and his individual insensitivity, his bigotry. But he's reflecting something that's very ingrained in the Church, and that is that we expect the person who's going to be the priest to be white.

Another example came during Pope Benedict's pastoral visit in 2008, when he celebrated Mass at the stadium in Washington D.C. The theme of the liturgy was celebration of the cultural diversity that's present here in the United States. The readings were done in a number of languages. The first reading was the classic account of Pentecost where the Spirit descended and enabled the peoples of the world to hear the Gospel proclaimed in the world's languages. The gifts were presented to the accompaniment of vigorous Gospel and Spanish singing, after which the commentator on EWTN opined—and I remember these words because they're emblazoned in my mind—"We've just been subjected to an overpreening display of multicultural chatter, and now the Holy Father will begin the sacred part of the Mass."

I note the disjunction between "multicultural chatter" and "sacred." "Sacred" had nothing to do with "multicultural." Being "sacred" means speaking in a white idiom, praying in a white idiom, using European hymns. It's this normative whiteness that's ubiquitous in the Catholic Church—which is its greatest hindrance to dealing effectively with issues of race.

People always ask me, well, how many African-American priests are there? Currently there are fewer than a hundred of us on active duty in the United States, out of tens of thousands. That's not by accident. It's a reflection of this normative whiteness that, to be blunt, is a form of idolatry—that God can be imaged and God can only manifest God's self through Europeans and European cultural products. Yeah, there is a normative whiteness present in the Church, but I would also say that it's a form of idolatry. It's the worship of a false god.

RM: You've talked about courage as a sort of neglected virtue. Why do Christians need courage? What happens when we don't have it?

BM: Courage, I discovered, is perhaps the least studied of the virtues. We say a lot about every virtue except courage. But Thomas Aquinas taught us that courage is the precondition of all virtue. Without courage, we're not able to be prudent or just; courage is that virtue that allows us to surmount the fear that comes with the following of the Gospel. To put this into the conversation we're having today: there are a lot of good white people who know what the right thing to do is. But they don't do it because they're afraid of the disapproval of their friends or family, or they're afraid of the consequences of speaking up. It isn't that people don't have the conviction, but they don't have the courage to act on those convictions.

RM: What does anger have to do with courage?

BM: That's a great question, because anger has gotten a pretty nasty reputation in Catholic catechesis. I think most of us of a certain age learned that anger was one of the seven deadly sins, that we were supposed to avoid it.

But again, let's go back to Thomas Aquinas. He says that we can incur the sin of anger in three ways. The first is by excess. That's when anger becomes wrathful, when it becomes out of control. He says the second way anger can be sinful is by an inappropriate object, or a misdirected anger. A trivial example would be if, say, I'm angry at my spouse and I take it out on my students or employees. But then he says the third way we can sin with regard to anger is by deficiency. And he's very clear here: we sin by deficiency when we're not angry when we ought to be, as in, he says, in the presence of injustice. What he says is beautiful: anger is the passion that moves the will to justice.

This is a great insight because it means that all too often injustice festers in our world because people aren't angry enough to do something about it. What allows racism to exist in our society, quite frankly, is that we don't have a critical mass of people who are angry. To put it more directly, we don't have a critical mass of white Americans who are angry.

There's a lot of concern about the violence that is a part of some of the protests. I want to be very careful here, because I think that we have a tendency to overstate the violence. Burning buildings and broken windows make for more compelling video and images than people who are peacefully protesting. And so I don't want us to get the idea that violence is what characterizes all the protests we were seeing.

Yes, violence can be an instance of misdirected anger. But that's too easy. People always say that there are better, more effective, more ethical ways of people making their point. I hear that, but I want to press them on that. If there are better ways for people to make their point, I wish they would tell me what they are. Because people of color, black Americans, have marched. We have demonstrated. We have organized. We have protested. We have voted. We have studied. We have taught. We have begged. We have cried out—for years, for decades, even centuries. The reason why these measures haven't proved effective up till now is that not enough white Americans want substantial change. And if people despair of a political solution to their legitimate grievances, we cannot be surprised when at times violence appears as an attractive option.

Martin Luther King Jr. said that most white Americans are neither unrepentant racists nor forthright racial-justice advocates. The majority of white Americans, he says, are uneasy with injustice but unwilling to pay a price to eradicate it.

So for those who would condemn the violence—and I think we all agree that nonviolence is the preferred way of making our grievances known—I challenge them to say, we've done that and we're still here. It's time now to not simply decry the violence, but to start looking at the legitimate grievances, and to summon the will in this country to do it.

LISTEN

Hear the full interview with Fr. Bryan Massingale on the Commonweal Podcast.
commonwealmagazine.org/podcast

POETRY

FACE TO FACE
For Zoe May

Nate Klug

You first-time snorkeler
head burrowed, missing much
riveted to the fact of water

You literal, now, assemblage of old hopes
hope can sharpen against

When we learned your eyes had unsealed
we stopped telling anyone your names

You spin cycle of sleep and hunger
You moon-print pressure
through the surface of her dress

knocking without asking
crazy for electric bass and basketball crowds

You pressing through
the surface of address

Papaya-sized, once a lemon, once a figment

Hazard to dip
one shoulder lower, then snake yourself
through the straits of bone

You wonder, roughened
You doubt, familiar

Ash swirled down the sky
blew back and forth
when you were just the crooked shelf I'd built
the calendar reminders when to try

Helicopters now
the thrumming almost constant
in Berkeley's raw-glare May

You yard of jewelweeds
you week of circled days

NATE KLUG*'s new book of poems,* Hosts and Guests, *will be out in September. He works as a Congregational minister and lives in California.*

Patio

Valerie Sayers

In these scary times, I try to remember the exercises we did as young actors to control the anxiety, to keep us in the here-and-now. I plant my feet beneath my hips, breathe from deep in my diaphragm, picture a string holding the top of my head. It helps, it does, but face it—I'm not always good at staying in the present. That nostalgic music blaring from the micro-speakers on every stretch of sidewalk doesn't help, either. This morning it drifts the twelve stories up to my balcony: too far to make out the melody, close enough to feel the disco beat. The eighties. I shiver.

I heard disco on every sidewalk in the eighties too, but back then it came from boom boxes as big as cartoon cavemen's clubs. The scene comes to me unbidden: a Sunday morning in spring. Two guys outside our first-floor windows, both wearing wife-beaters, hauling around competing boom boxes, one blaring "Stayin' Alive," the other "I Will Survive." That Sunday, even dissonant disco seemed like the fanciful background score for a movie musical. Crocuses were popping, dogwoods budding: in the bright light, moving to the bright beat, we laughed out loud. Spring in New York redeems everything. We thought we'd hurry the warm weather along by shopping for patio furniture.

Those were the days we thought we controlled the very seasons.

We drove to Manhattan, where Jean-Paul stood in Conran's surveying the wares as if he were surveying his estate holdings: metal chairs painted blue, red-and-white striped cushions, yolk-yellow umbrellas. He wore a look of such beneficent pleasure that I felt myself grinning. I hated shopping, but when it made Jean-Paul happy, that was enough to make me happy too. In the eighties, we shopped every weekend, all three kids along for the ride, bribed into a trip to Manhattan with the promise of John's Pizza or the Museum of Natural History or the Central Park Zoo.

We lived in Brooklyn: we'd rented for years in a neighborhood that was pretty funky when we moved in. By the eighties, though, it was crawling with yuppies. I couldn't bear the thought that we might have turned into yuppies too. It was true we'd finally scraped together enough cash for the down payment on a fancy-schmancy apartment, but we picked it up cheap during all the foreclosures. It didn't look cheap: it was a two-story, five-room slice of renovated mansion our children called *The Castle*. Back in the days of the Robber Barons, our gonzo living room had been the ballroom, so grand my cheeks flamed orange when friends saw it for the first time. We still had the original chandelier, big and gaudy as the disco ball at Danceteria, where Jean-Paul entertained the latter-day Robber Barons who were his clients now. We had fifteen-foot ceilings and a spiral staircase. We even had a patio, though that morning it was bare.

We meant, that Sunday, to cover our patio with primary-color furniture. A year before, Jean-Paul had made partner—okay, it was only a ten-person agency with five partners, but still, they were hot in the eighties. Jean-Paul was the liaison to production companies because he knew how to talk to directors and producers. At first I thought it would kill him, this admission that our acting days were over for good, but the fast-talkers he worked with convinced him that their boutique agency was not just creative but avant-garde. "Avant-garde corporate clients," I said. "Civilization advances."

Those were the days of 18 percent interest, but with Jean-Paul's promotion we had all the credit we needed. He convinced me that it was fine to load up the charge cards, that it was cheaper to buy now than in six months when stores jacked up prices again. We didn't have to pay a nanny the way everybody else in the building did. The first time I heard anybody say *nanny* was in the eighties, and I giggled at the Mary Poppins sound of it. Soon I spent more time with those nannies than I did other mothers, and usually I liked them better too.

How could I object to our new lives? Jean-Paul was the good father, working this gig to keep our children in BRIO railway stations and dolls with hand-painted features. He bubbled over with the pleasure of having money for the first time, having stuff, Spanish tiles and velvet pillows in exotic fruit colors suggesting future trips: Mango Paradise, Pineapple Sunrise. He bought shirts at Prada and picked up hammered-gold earrings for me. Maybe we'd been hippies not long before, but Jean-Paul felt no guilt about living well. He'd grown up polishing the brass in his family's café in Hell's Kitchen, and in the eighties he bought retail the way his father shook out a bleached napkin, with full mindfulness.

"You have to indulge yourself sometimes." He said it so generously that I indulged myself even as I missed the thrift stores of our youth, the temples of musty counterculturalism where the point was how cheap, how many times recycled. We'd met doing street theater against the war. Now we went

on buying sprees. In Conran's, we posed as if we knew how to play prosperous, surrounded by bright and shiny and new, but I saw Jean-Paul's shoulders tighten as he scoped out Gracie in picnic ware. She was leading Gabe around with a long string she'd tied to his overalls, as if he were a poodle. Paul, our oldest, plopped himself down on an angular settee to pore over his latest *Choose Your Own Adventure*. Jean-Paul was checking to see how far we stood from all of them. Far enough. Out of earshot.

"Hey, listen, I'm sorry." He put his arm around my shoulder.

"Sorry for what?" I thought he meant this wasn't the greatest patio furniture, though we could well afford it. Since Jean-Paul shook off his depression, we had enough money to buy what we wanted and even what we didn't.

He wasn't looking at me: he was still measuring our distance from the kids. "There's something I've been wanting to tell you."

I wasn't even worried at first. "What?"

"We're okay now, right?"

"Jean-Paul. Just go ahead and tell me already." But as soon as those words left my mouth, I didn't want him to tell me. We really were okay by then. I'd worked my way back from the fugue state I was in when life with small children overwhelmed me. Jean-Paul was still never home, but I was past the despair of isolated motherhood and we were both past the despair of not making it as actors. I wasn't Zombie Woman anymore; now I was Shopping Woman.

Even I could see, though, that he wouldn't be this tense about shopping. It had to be another woman. I'd always known he dreamed of other women: I knew because we came of age in the free-love days, because he was French, because his father cheated on his mother. I knew it when he stayed at work till all hours, when we shopped among the hip and hipper, when he fantasized. This time it wasn't fantasy, it was real, real enough to confess in Conran's where I couldn't make a scene. I didn't want to know, not when it started or if it was over, not who or why. What did it matter if it was some svelte actor in a music video or that sneering script supervisor we had dinner with last week? What did it matter if it was both of them? It was his turn, wasn't it?

Whoever it was, I couldn't blame him for what I'd done myself. Only I'd never confessed. I never said: *I was so depressed.* I never said: *I didn't mean to have an affair, Jean-Paul. He played the accordion in a punk-folk band. The accordion, for God's sake!* I'd met Iggy in the park, saw him again at a small neighborhood protest against the Grenada invasion. The baby wouldn't stop bawling. Iggy saw how frazzled I was, running after Paul, and rocked the carriage till Gracie fell asleep. He'd been in the Peace Corps—Nicaragua—and now he taught junior-high math. He sounded like such a good guy, I kept expecting him to say he volunteered in a soup kitchen. It went way too far with Iggy, but I never told my husband that I fell for a guy whose idealism reminded me of a past I was still trying to grab back. I looked at my children—my present—and came to my senses.

Now that Jean-Paul was about to confess his own affair, our marriage looked like the economic arrangement they told you about in junior-high social studies, when your hormones ran so high you couldn't hear a word. I'm listening now, Mrs. Scherzkopf. In the sixties, Jean-Paul and I crouched in tiger cages in Father Demo Square to protest torture in Vietnam. By the eighties we were old married people buying patio furniture we didn't even like, yuppies who had affairs as if we were in a drawing-room comedy.

Jean-Paul was wearing his two-hundred-dollar linen shirt and flip-flops. He'd always been the good-looking one and I'd been the one surprised he was attracted to me in the first place. I was the funny-face, the one cast in daffy comedies. Now I wasn't even fit for screwball, my hair gone lank, my skin straining to cover all the flesh accumulated with three children. No wonder he took up with someone in calf-stretching stilettos, while his dowdy wife brooded over a miserable affair by then long over. Shielded by his children, in sight of all the goods he could still possess, he decided this was the moment to let me know he loved someone else.

I don't know when he lifted his arm from my shoulder. I braced myself on a wobbly blue patio chair and watched the walls of Conran's slide away, stage flats on gliders. Beyond, the city was still filthy and dangerous, but bursting again with glad-handers and hucksters, bond traders and investment bankers patting themselves on the back when they threw dollar bills at the homeless guys on the sidewalk, fat music-video directors with slicked-back hair—I'd had dinner with those directors—pronouncing which twenty-year-old models were has-beens. I hated the eighties with all my heart.

What did some trifling affair even matter with a chorus of *Gimme gimme gimme* ringing out all over the city? Maybe this was just my penance for singing *Gimme* too. Maybe I wasn't afraid that he loved someone else. Maybe I was only afraid he'd move someone thinner into our ballroom, someone who made her own money and wouldn't make fun of the obscene chandelier. I watched Paul, the one who always worried I'd say something sharp. He read furiously, eyes racing, shoulders hunched like an old man's. He wouldn't look our way.

Jean-Paul saw too. "We'll talk later."

I'd heard that line before. If there was one thing Jean-Paul had mastered in this marriage, it was the art of not-talking. The Confession with No Sins Named concluded. I went to wrest Gabe the Poodle out of Gracie's grasp, to cancel the trip to the Central Park Zoo. If we went to the zoo, we'd only stare at neurotic, pacing creatures like the creature I became when I stopped auditioning. Now I just wanted to get my children out of the store and out of Manhattan, away from all the caged animals, all the credit cards, all the stuff.

I said: "I know, let's go to Brighton Beach," but I heard myself playing Bouncy Mom Whose Heart Is Breaking and toned it down. "I want to smell the salt air."

Jean-Paul made a face. He never went to Brighton Beach in the eighties: he couldn't abide all the trash, all the needles washing up. All the lumpy bodies.

BACK IN THE APARTMENT, HE PLAYED EXEMPLAR OF Paternal Virtue, his children cuddled with him on the couch as he read Tolkien aloud, a fantasy to console them for canceling this week's bribe. In the eighties, Jean-Paul rotated three roles with the children: Absent Father, Yelling Dad, and Indulgent Papa, the last reserved for times I looked ready to blow. I heard his good deep cadences exuding kindness as I descended the spiral and saw that even wary Paul, who sometimes kept his distance, was curled up close. My bitterness knew no bounds.

Our bedrooms were on the *ground level*, the realtors said when they showed us this place, but really they were in the basement, where the mansion's servants must have slept. *Basement* suited my spirits. In our room I slid the door open and stepped outside, onto our peasants' allotment of concrete. This was the so-called patio we'd promised ourselves to jazz up this weekend.

I was still trembling, and not from the cool damp air. I tried deep breathing, did my old Alexander exercises. I couldn't make my heart slow. I tried to envision that children's theater co-op I was always threatening to start, but all I could see was a fatherless family smushed together in a single gloomy room. I don't know how long I'd been out there hyperventilating when I heard the sliding door groan behind me.

Jean-Paul stuck his head outside: "Paul started his homework."

I didn't answer.

"Can we talk now?"

He was always accusing me of jealousy and now when my worst fears were about to be realized, I could afford to wait. My ribs clattered against my lungs. Jean-Paul stepped outside. Hours, days, months passed, but I kept my back to him and heard him take a deep cleansing breath. Actors. Here it came, his soliloquy.

"She wants me on Prozac."

I let out a great shuddering breath. *She* was his shrink. In acting class, everybody used to talk about their shrinks while Jean-Paul and I raised one amused eyebrow apiece. Who could afford therapy? We couldn't even afford three meals a day back then. We opened a can of soup for our dinner. Now Jean-Paul couldn't get up in the morning without his shrink. I recognized *Prozac*: it was new then, but everybody'd heard of it. I wanted to say: *We used to believe in something. Now we just take a pill.* I said: "For God's sake, Jean-Paul, try the Prozac."

But when I turned, finally, I saw from his furious blinking that Prozac wouldn't save us. So was it an affair? Or did he know somehow that I still pined for Iggy? I forced myself to look at my husband—how strange, that word *husband*. He'd stopped blinking but now his eyes were unfocused, angry, frightened. This wasn't some stupid affair—that was the guilt I'd have to carry forward all by myself. This was something else. He looked so strange I was a little frightened. Jean-Paul had a terrible temper.

He clenched and unclenched his fist and I thought he might, for the first time, hit me. "You never," he started, but he couldn't finish the sentence. He swiveled and punched the brick wall. I waited for him to cry out or raise a cracked knuckle but he choked out: "You never want to."

I waited and waited.

"You never want to hear what's wrong."

Every nerve ending stung as if he had, after all, socked me. I never wanted to hear? He was never here. I was trapped with small children in this imaginary castle, this mansion, this repository of all the worldly goods that signified our rise above the bit parts of young actors on the make, playing at poverty and struggle.

I knew somehow to hold my sarcastic tongue for once. After we both stood there trembling long enough, it all came out. They'd laid off a receptionist and a messenger. No one would say it yet, but the agency was going to fold. Maybe they'd last three, six months. He didn't know how he'd pay the mortgage. Agencies were closing up all over town. He'd have to beg a job from his father, the *father* he never got on with, the father who cheated on his mother. In the eighties, Pascal's Café had become Bistro Pascal: even that had gone yuppie.

"We can't charge one more thing," he said. "That's what I was trying to tell you." I looked around at our empty concrete rectangle, picturing yolk-yellow umbrellas, and somehow found the grace to laugh.

"The kids like it empty anyhow." It was true, they liked to bring their action figures out here to stage knock-down drag-out fights, marathon battles.

I was the one who'd cheated, who lost herself to despair and spread it to Jean-Paul as if it were a new virus. Now I had nothing to say to comfort him. In a rush of tenderness I reached my arms up but he pulled back before he relented. Then he burrowed his head onto my shoulder, where he sobbed scalding tears. He'd always been the shameless weeper in the family. The first set of tears came over his philandering father. We married not long after, when my mother said we couldn't visit while we were *living in sin*. "Nobody even says that anymore," I told my mother, "*living in sin.*" Now *sin* sounded kind of like a useful word.

I could see the future unfurl like a magic carpet. I'd stop being so sarcastic. Already I dreamed of finding thrift stores. Maybe Jean-Paul would be the one to cook in a soup kitchen—it was probably too much to dream he'd take up the accordion. We'd have to move deeper into Brooklyn, into a working-class neighborhood of ugly attached houses with grubby plastic siding. At first we'd be devastated, the children bewildered. But soon enough we'd remember what life was like when we biked all the way to Brighton Beach just to smell the air, when waves of new immigrants, Pakistanis and Belarusians and Nigerians, came rolling in to show us how to hustle, what it meant to really struggle.

MY VISION OF THE FUTURE WASN'T SO FAR OFF. Jean-Paul's agency did fold. We did have to move deeper into Brooklyn, into a vast, shabby building. Our children were frightened, leaving The Castle. They

didn't find it funny that we called our new neighborhood Charmless Brooklyn. They didn't like squeezing in together or sharing the elevator with blind old ladies cuddling little blind dogs. But they did like being up high, overlooking the city, so when we first moved in, we went out on the balcony, the grim little apartment's one good feature, pointing out the sights as if our kids were tourists.

We could see from the Verrazano Bridge to the World Trade Center and beyond. For years, though—since 9/11, since the Towers went down—it made us too sad to stand out here. We used to have spectacular sunsets but lately we see strange burning smears behind scrims of rain. The hum of the Ocean Parkway autonotraffic down below us is disconcertingly uniform. And there's that oppressive music on every sidewalk.

Today's rare glimpse of sun makes me glad for the balcony all over again. I'm out here remembering a sunny day in the Eighties, watching the rivers cut new channels. Already the mammoth glass towers of the Hudson Yards list toward Jersey. Down on Essex Street lately, you have to wade through hip-deep water to get to the dry-goods stores, which makes for a sorry pun.

Jean-Paul's out this morning, organizing to stop AutonoAssist homes from moving into the neighborhood: they want to bring in robots to care for the blind old ladies who used to live on their own with the help of their little dogs. The robots will be coming for all of us one of these days. I was out, too, at the crack of dawn, parading my "Stop Killing Somalians" sign for the ProtectAll cameras hidden atop all those blaring speakers.

Now the afternoon spreads out before me the way the city spreads at my feet. We'll pour a half-glass of wine to go with our soup, then write more protest letters. We'll each do deep breathing, on and off, through the hours ahead: it gets us past the aches, the frustrations of two willful people in a small enclosed space. We won't stop the inevitable afternoon rain, but maybe we'll stop robo-assist for now. If we make ourselves focus on the present the way we used to when we were young, maybe we'll get ourselves through the afternoon and into what remains of life on earth.

VALERIE SAYERS *is the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of English at the University of Notre Dame and the author of six novels.* The Age of Infidelity, *a collection of her short stories, was published in June by Slant.*

POETRY

FAMILY

Nikia Leopold

Walls of narrow streets
were neighbors,
facing windows borrowing
light, shade.
From our balcony
I noticed a bowl of fruit
emptying, filling
on the table opposite.
Each night, over the sill,
a dishcloth, worn,
was spread to dry,
red stripes long faded.
Its people could
afford a new one,
but touch, close use,
had made it family.

Years later, unable to sleep,
I remember how carefully
the cloth
was offered to the air.

NIKIA LEOPOLD *writes poetry.*

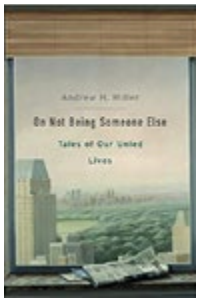
What Might Have Been

MORTEN HØI JENSEN

Theodor Fontane's great novel *Effi Briest* (1895) tells the story of a seventeen-year-old girl who is persuaded to marry a man more than twice her age—the principled, unimaginative Baron von Innstetten, a senior civil servant in a remote town on the Baltic Sea. Though kind and well-meaning, Innstetten is hardly an ideal husband; his many years of bachelordom have dulled his sexual passions, while his career often means leaving Effi on her own to care for the couple's newborn daughter. Lonely and unfulfilled, Effi is eventually seduced by the womanizing Major Crampas, an old acquaintance of Innstetten. Their brief affair—so trivial that Fontane never describes it—is not discovered by Innstetten until many years later, when he stumbles on an old batch of love letters. Shocked, he immediately informs his friend Wüllersdorf of the affair and his obligation to defend his honor. Against both Wüllersdorf's advice and his own reservations ("I feel no hate, much less any thirst for revenge"), a duel is arranged wherein Innstetten kills Crampas. He then divorces Effi and takes custody of their daughter.

Though the reader's sympathy is always with the life-giving Effi, the pages in which Innstetten reflects on the antiquated social conventions that led him to kill Crampas and divorce his wife are deeply moving. "I don't want blood on my hands for the sake of the happiness that's been taken from me, but that, let's call it that social something which tyrannizes us, takes no account of charm, or love, or time limits," he tells Wüllersdorf. "I've no choice. I must." In the end, Innstetten realizes that it would have been better if he'd simply burned the letters and never told anyone about the affair. Another life would have been possible—not necessarily a happier one, but a life in which Effi was still his wife, and Crampas still alive. "There are so many lives that aren't real lives," he sadly reflects, "so many marriages that aren't real marriages…happiness would have gone, but I wouldn't have had to live with that eye with its questioning look and its silent, gentle reproof."

Few words in any novel have haunted me as much as these. They rise from the page like steam, as surely Fontane meant them to; his novels often hinge on the speech of a character that lifts itself from the page and seems to address the reader directly. (Fontane, who spent time in London, was steeped in Shakespeare.) And something about Innstetten's words gets to the heart of the elegiac nature of fiction itself, that unique ability it has of revealing to us the contingencies of our existence. Since life is all anticipation and recollection, we resort to narrative to make sense of it. In this respect fiction is quite real; our lives are lived in what the Spanish novelist Javier Marías calls "the realm of what might be or what might have been," which is the realm of fiction. No matter how real our lives may seem to us, no matter how tangible, they always have an imaginary, shadowy side to them. We are always haunted by fiction's questioning look and its silent, gentle reproof.



ON NOT BEING SOMEONE ELSE
Tales of Our Unled Lives

ANDREW H. MILLER
Harvard University Press
$29.95 | 232 pp.

Effi Briest is not mentioned by Andrew H. Miller in his excellent new book *On Not Being Someone Else: Tales of Our Unled Lives*, but it breathes the same speculative air. Like Fontane, Miller is haunted by what might have been—or, to be more precise, by *who* he might have been:

> Asked to describe myself, I might say many things. I might say I'm a teacher or a writer, I might describe my habits or my looks, I might mention my family or the town in

which I live, or the town from which I came. In any case, I would probably talk about who I am. But sometimes I think about myself in a very different way, focusing not on who I am but on who I'm not. I think about the lives I might have led, the people I might have become, had things gone differently in the past.

Thinking of oneself in this way, Miller concedes, can seem a little too bland or obvious to merit intellectual scrutiny—"a making much out of nothing." For most people, it's a primitive thought that comes quite naturally, abetting our feelings of envy, ambition, desire, and regret. Who has not, at some point in their life, entertained the thought of being someone else? Or looked back at some forking moment when an important decision was reached, and wondered whether it was the right one?

Philosophers and psychologists have long been drawn to such questions, yet one of the central claims of Miller's book is that they are more intimately understood by novelists and poets. Our unled lives, he argues, "trouble the way language ordinarily works—trouble our pronouns, our diction, our syntax, the tone and cadences of our phrases—and writers find opportunities in our trouble." Though Miller gives respectful nods to relevant thinkers, his book is not a philosophical inquiry into questions of selfhood, causation, or free will. He is not interested in making rigorous claims; he wants to linger, instead, in the "ambiguity and resonance of literature":

> Maybe I can put it this way: the stories devised and dissected by psychologists teach me things; the stories that matter most to me teach me nothing. At least, that's not why I read them. They make meaning for me, with me. It's a process that takes place at a different rate, with a different rhythm. I linger and return, seeking again that state of spirit in which I'm in the presence of meaning but not in its possession, where I might find out what matters to me and how it matters, find it once or find it again.

For Miller, imagining who we might have been or once were, or who we might yet become, is anything but frivolous. "The need for a meaningful life comes before any calculation," he writes, "and contemplating lives we haven't led is an especially powerful way of making or finding that meaning." In spirited and incisive close readings of texts like Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," Carl Dennis's "The God Who Loves You," and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (among many, many others), Miller pursues this slippery, elusive meaning and the many questions it leaves unanswered. How should one be a person? What does it mean to have only one life? Why did I turn out to be this version of myself and not another?

James McNeill Whistler, *Reading by Lamplight*, 1859

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART. BEQUEST OF JULIA H. MANGES, IN MEMORY OF HER HUSBAND, DR. MORRIS MANGES, 1960

While I don't envy anyone publishing a book at the present moment, especially a work of rather speculative literary criticism, the idea of unled lives could hardly be more resonant. For millions of people, life over the past few months has been acutely unlived—a grim suspension of our daily habits and accustomed free-

doms. We have become unwilling spectators of the lives we thought we would be leading this spring and summer: going to work, meeting friends, eating out, traveling abroad. Years from now, we might remember 2020, in part, as a year of unrealized possibility, a year of what might have been.

It will hardly surprise Miller that many people have discovered a renewed pleasure in fiction during the shutdown, taking to social media to participate in virtual readings of *War and Peace* or *Anna Karenina*, or locating in Camus's *The Plague* a chilling guide to the current pandemic. What is this hunger for fiction if not a hunger for the lives we are not currently living? "To imagine other paths down which I might have travelled," Miller writes, "is to imagine *more* life for myself: this *and* that, $n + 1$. I see another world within this world, a world I can almost touch, almost taste. It's part of this world as shadows are part of things, as memories are part of perceptions, as dreams are part of day." The lives we didn't lead this year will continue to linger, casting their rueful shadows.

The nature of Miller's book—he is, in strictly literal terms, writing about nothing—can make it difficult to summarize, while his propensity for serial quotation means that every chapter reads like a sequence of vignettes alternating between literary analysis and a kind of thinking-out-loud. Open this book at random and you will find Miller quoting John Cheever, then quoting Hilary Mantel, then quoting Robert Musil, then quoting Virginia Woolf. He brings up one poem only to move on to another, as though inviting us to work out his ideas with him. Yet how many literary scholars today write so engagingly? (On Thomas Hardy: "Hardy sharpened his feelings on the steel of their contingency.") Miller's voice is unabashed and free-flowing—excited, you sense, by its own happy discoveries, yet always willing to concede ignorance or puzzlement. Because his exploration of unled lives is also an exploration of his own interest in the subject, he tends to write suggestively rather than forcefully, content to let his insights dangle rather than bind. He thus risks letting his narrative grow a little unfocused, as though what we're reading is the author's notebook and not the finished text itself. In this sense, ironically, *On Not Being Someone Else* feels slightly unrealized, but in a way that heightens the poignancy of its subject.

Yet a narrative spine does, gradually, begin to emerge. Early on, Miller posits that the notion of unled lives is a distinctly modern preoccupation, one of the great themes of modern literature. He quotes the psychologist Adam Phillips: "The death of God is the death of someone knowing who we are." It is no accident that the rise of the novel form occurred in tandem with the decline of traditional religious authority. With the death of God, a certain understanding of ourselves died also, or at least came unstuck from its central position. In an inscrutable and silent cosmos, where no answers about the meaning of our lives are forthcoming, human beings are forced to try and discover those answers for ourselves. And one of the most effective vehicles for doing so, it turns out, is the modern novel. Recall György Lukács in his *Theory of the Novel*: "The novel is the epic of a world abandoned by God."

But there is also a social and cultural dimension to the fascination with unled lives. The novel form rode on the great wave of market capitalism from the late-eighteenth century onward, which saw the expansion of individual autonomy and the rise of middle-class culture, in which a new conception of the self was forged. "The elevation of choice as an absolute good," Miller writes, "the experience of chance as a strange affront, the increasing number of exciting, stultifying decisions we must make, the review of the past to improve future outcomes: they all feed the people we're not."

One of the consequences of modernity is this proliferation of unled lives, the countless possibilities made available to us, whether realized or unrealized. In this sense the modern understanding of identity is thrillingly destructive. For if who I am is also who I am not, then it makes it impossible for me to say *this is who I am* with any real certainty. Suddenly I am changeable, fluid. Miller does not say so, but this may help us understand the atavistic temptations of identity politics, religious fundamentalism, and various nationalist movements. They purport to resolve that fluidity by returning to a more fixed identity, a more rooted notion of self.

It is no accident that the rise of the novel form occurred in tandem with the decline of traditional religious authority.

But our ability to see ourselves as other than we are, to imagine different lives for ourselves, is not merely destructive. It is also what allows us to imagine what it is like to be someone else. It is the engine of our moral imagination. If telling stories is one way of testing our attachment to who we are, then it is also a way of exploring our connectedness to others. Fiction lifts us away from our singular selves. "We're all exceptional and anybody," Miller writes; in other words, we're all separate, but we're separate together, in the same way.

Miller leaves the questions he explores daringly unresolved; fittingly, his book is written in the spirit of negative capability, which is the proper realm of fiction and poetry. "In our lives," he writes, "we often don't know what has happened to us, much less what hasn't; so much has been hidden from us along our long, meandering path." Rather than transcending that ignorance, telling stories is a way of making it meaningful, a way of affirming our contingency instead of escaping it. We are destined to remain the unreliable narrators of our lives.

MORTEN HØI JENSEN *is the author of* A Difficult Death: The Life and Work of Jens Peter Jacobsen *(2017). He has contributed to the* New York Review of Books, *the* New Republic, *the* Point, *and the* American Interest, *among others.*

Life of the Party

HANNAH GOLD

Reading Vivian Gornick's *The Romance of American Communism* for the second time in a little more than a year, I noticed that the same lines jumped out at me. They're all from the interviews she conducted with dozens of former Communist Party (CP) members, whose recurring roll call is her oral history's very flesh. Diana Michaels, a lawyer in Philadelphia, says, "being a Communist made me better than I was. It was the great moral adventure of my life." Paul Levinson, decades after struggling with anxiety over dating and paying a visit to the "party psychoanalyst" (I want to read *that* book, too), is working as a copywriter in the suburbs, where he's taken up analysis again, plus canoeing. Inevitably, he has some insights, the most striking of which is, "I couldn't tell [people in the party] anything about what we call my 'personal life,' but I felt an intimacy with them I also know I'll never feel again with anyone else." Marian Moran, well-preserved in Los Angeles with her two thousand books, says that the years she spent as a CP member organizing farm workers in California "were the very best years of my life. Nothing since has even remotely touched them." And then, "That's not exactly true, is it? The dailiness is what you are, and there is always the danger that you will become what you are…isn't there?"

Each of these comments carries in it the seed of a shared romantic idea (and it's also an artistic one): that a life contains many versions of itself, brandished for a time, then put away. Gornick's subjects are both the people they are (average, alienated, rote) and the people they dream themselves to be (the intuitionist, the adventurer, the comrade). It's the expression of this tension rather than its resolution that characterizes *The Romance of American Communism*, the tension of stories stretched thin over so much hope and disappointment they're longing to break. And then something else will happen.

THE ROMANCE OF AMERICAN COMMUNISM

VIVIAN GORNICK
Verso
$13.96 | 288 pp.

Becoming what you are—the dailiness—is the line that gnaws at me. The phrase recalls a fate so solidly packed nothing can grow in it, or ambition hardening into ambivalence. Surely Gornick, who spent much of 1974 crossing the country collecting interviews for her monumental work—first published in 1977 and reissued by Verso in April—could not withstand its connotations, even as she drove her reporting project to the precipice of ecstatic disappointment. The Communist Party USA, as anyone in her book will tell you, was formed in 1919, attracted seventy-five thousand members in its prime (the '30s and '40s), was worn down in the McCarthy era, and virtually neutralized in 1956, the year Nikita Khrushchev denounced Joseph Stalin and detailed for the world the extent of his predecessor's crimes. Within weeks of the speech, thirty thousand people had left the party and, as Gornick puts it, "the affective life of the Communist Party in this country came to an end."

Suspicions had already alighted upon party practice by that time, many of them frenzied reactions to Cold War anti-Communist sentiment in America. Internal tribunals excommunicated many members from their political community on the flimsiest of charges. Gornick interviews several people linked to those trials in some capacity: defendants, prosecutors, passive witnesses, and people who claim not to remember. Arnold Richman did not protest his own mother's expulsion from the party (against his wife's objections) on charges of "white chauvinism." Later in his interview he reveals to Gornick something of the filial logic that led to those actions:

> You ask me how I feel about the Communist Party. Do I love it? Do I hate it? Am I anti-communist? That's like asking me do I love my mother, do I hate my mother. What's the difference whether I love or hate her? She's my mother. I am bound to her by ties stronger than love or hate.

Others were forced so deep inside the delusion (the sordid underside of hope) that they accepted orders from

Demonstration of the Communist Party in Boston, 1933

SUEDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG PHOTO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

above to go underground, leading fictional lives in strange towns for months, even years. Nettie Posin tells Gornick she went into hiding in 1951 trusting the party's line that "fascism was coming, and that we—certainly as a party and most of us individually—would be wiped out." The set-up has the makings of a torrid affair carried out under cover of night, yet in those four secretive years, Posin says, "my life, and the purpose of what I was doing became a dark and mysterious burden." The remark intimates Gornick's own words of caution that she saves for the end of her book: "To see that the self is in fact *not* developing, but rather is being stifled? When it *feels* exactly the opposite? That takes a lot of living, a lot of living."

Gornick herself was raised a Red Diaper Baby in working-class, cooperative Jewish housing in the Bronx. Her father worked in a dress factory; her mother ran their local Tenants' Council until 1935, when Gornick was born. She was at least a decade or two younger than her interview subjects in *Romance*, or the age many of them were when they were active in the CP. (She writes in her superb 1987 memoir, *Fierce Attachments*, that her mother would tell her stories about going down to the Communist Party headquarters in Union Square "the way other mothers told their children Mary had a little lamb.") Gornick's exploration of these ex-Communists' psychic dramas never springs from a cold eye, but from sympathy, even intimacy, with her subjects.

That *Romance* was a work of sensitive ethnography did not mean it could be mistaken for an exhaustive academic book—freighted with dates and opposition research—but it was an astoundingly good one, which tempted lofty critiques from the time of its release. When Irving Howe reviewed it for the *Nation* in 1978, he declared the work lacked discipline, that Gornick had relented to idealism and nostalgia in overidentifying with her subjects' plight. "It could have been a first-rate book," Howe wrote. "Alas, where her book should be dry, it is damp; where hard, soft." What the dry, hard part of him was ill-equipped to say is that the book was designed for Gornick's satisfaction, not his own. And, really, in some crucial respects she tells the story straight, as straight as one can without being dry. *Romance* is organized into three main sections: her subjects' early experience that precipitated party membership, their years in the Communist Party, and who they became after its dissolution—or as she puts it in her introduction, "encounter, performance, and consequence." (A rare moment where she *does* sound like a milquetoast professor.) Any history book might progress chronologically,

but the slicing and dicing of her subjects' interviews into a single "life" of the party highlights the art, rather than the inevitability, of piecing together the story of a movement after the fact. *Romance* more closely resembles a novel told from multiple perspectives, like a game of telephone. The message first intended—of a glorious revolution just around the corner—gets lost, but the language of comradery becomes more layered and intense.

As for the prose that binds these accounts, it is forcibly balanced, like a slap on each cheek to set your whole head buzzing. It's not balanced in its politics or pitch, but rather in its preoccupation with sentences that repeat with variation, keeping the scale of the feeling wide and grand. Gornick will write this sort of thing about her Communists: "the gift for political emotion highly developed; the gift for individual empathy neglected, atrophied" or "just as they came from everywhere…so they have gone back into everywhere" or "Being and becoming. At the heart of the Communist experience is always the question of being and becoming." They're loud, persistent sentences engineered to be spoken before a crowd, or to sell out a show that's already left town. With diametrically clashing adjectives she can even make Communism sound like a trip to Cirque du Soleil: "The passionate experience had streamed through the Communists, like fire and ice, burning and freezing, permanently altering."

But I suspect balance affects the text at a more profound level, too. Speaking of her days covering radical feminism for the *Village Voice* in the 1970s, Gornick recently told *Affidavit* of her early reporting work:

> The task for me was to decide on the proportions, the degree to which I was in the story. Most personal journalists failed at this because they started writing about themselves, confessionally or therapeutically. That was the fashion of the time, and still is. They didn't realize that the game was that you use yourself just enough to tell the story.

This suggests to me that the Herculean balancing act of Gornick's prose has something to do with her desire to stay in the story, a desire furiously weighed against her longing for narrative absence. It's the quandary of the organizer, who wishes to mobilize the masses, as well as the author who writes to move and woo them: how to rarify and promote one's self enough to redescribe the world in one's own terms, yet remain generous and self-effacing enough to let someone else inhabit it. So she'll use a cogent, demanding word that everyone knows and reads differently—like "passion," "adventure," "romance"—and bravely stitch it through many personal narratives like a flag that waves only for her comrades. She'll tell her own story just the same, in a voice that breezily permits accounts to vary and conflict while still remaining integral to the whole. If she doesn't strike the most delicate balance in *Romance*, I tend to prefer what she comes up with instead, the broad strokes with which she renders the manic sprint to romantic maturity folded and stored neatly away behind the soulful eyes of an ex-Communist, prolonged (or set right again) by the recognition of someone raised in that fold, one of their own.

A reigning imperative of Gornick's writing is to explore what it means to retread old ground. She's done it with her own life, producing excellent memoirs like *Fierce Attachments*, but also one I enormously disliked, *The Odd Woman and the City*. (Unfortunately that was the first book of hers I read, putting me off the rest of her work for a while.) She did it again in February when she released a book of essays, *Unfinished Business*, comprised of literary re-readings (Lawrence, Bowen, Colette). Writing savagely of James Salter in her review of *All That Is* for *Bookforum*, Gornick posits that, "Certainly, it is true that most writers have only one story in them—that is, as Flannery O'Connor put it, only one they can make come alive. Then again, it is also true that it is the writer's obligation to make the story tell more the third or fourth time around than it did the first." I doubt many writers would agree with this assertion—there are the maximalists, the satirists, the self-tinkerers—but it's Gornick's way. Each book in its unspooling tells of passion turned on by engagement with family, text, bodies. It's her coming-of-age story, into every age one might venture. The radical subjects that populate her writing don't tell stories merely to live, but to change their lives forever. In *Fierce Attachments* she writes about one of her mother's stories, a fairytale of sorts. A girl of seventeen, the daughter of a neighbor, came down with pneumonia. In accordance with an old superstition, her mother agreed to ritualistically buy the child from her family to expunge the illness. "Jews believed that if someone you loved was in danger you sold them and that warded off the evil eye," her mother said. "If they weren't yours what could happen to them?" The girl recovered and afterward always referred to Bess Gornick as "Mama." Decades later, Gornick reproaches her mother:

> "Ma," I say, "you knew this was a peasant superstition, an old wives' tale, and still you took part in it? You agreed to buy her?"
>
> "Of course I did."
>
> "But, Ma! You were both communists."
>
> "Well, listen," she says, "We had to save her life."

As the epidemic and its pageant of unbearable inequality demonstrates again, fantasies of possession can do nothing for us, neither save our lives nor give them meaning. The distance between dailiness and wanting something that seems nearly impossible is still the field of struggle where hearts and movements grow. Gornick's distillation of this perfervid psychic territory over decades of writing about radicals, and literature, and daughters, serves as a reminder of what can be awakened there. Of what simply must be awakened. A lifetime of talking and thinking will necessitate its own story; through Gornick, it transmits a dream.

HANNAH GOLD *is a writer for* The Cut *at* New York Magazine. *Her criticism has been published by the* Nation, *the* New Republic, Jezebel, *and others.*

Socialism or Feudalism

FRANK PASQUALE

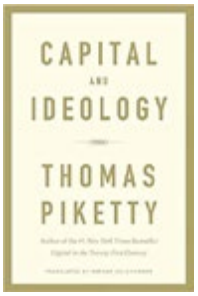
The most comforting narrative of contemporary economics is a story of equilibrium and diminishing returns. If a firm becomes too profitable, mainstream scholars tell us, enterprising competitors will undercut it. There are diminishing returns to scale, because no firm can consistently dominate fields remote from its core competences. And even massive fortunes dissipate over time, as heirs proliferate.

Thomas Piketty rocketed to global prominence with *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2013), which told a very different story, one of increasing returns. When the rate of return on investment consistently outpaces economic growth, the rich get richer far faster than the rest. In 2018, Jeff Bezos accumulated roughly $150,000 per minute, as his net worth grew by $78.5 billion that year. While health economists routinely decry doctors' salaries in the United States, almost no physician earns in a lifetime what Bezos accumulated in one day that year (about $213 million).

Far behind Bezos in the wealth sweepstakes lie a growing number of "ultra-high net worth individuals"—those with investable assets exceeding $30 million. Assume that the poorest, most risk-averse members of this elite conservatively invest their portfolio in bonds with an average annual return of 2 percent. They would accumulate $600,000 per year. Even if their consumption and taxes amounted to $550,000 per year, they would still be able to save $50,000 annually. That's almost as much as the median 401(k) balance of Vanguard investors over sixty-five years of age (about $58,000), which most earned over a lifetime of work.

Piketty's latest book, *Capital and Ideology*, is a prolix yet engaging effort both to contextualize and to defamiliarize agonizing figures like these. The context is an exhaustive survey of the history of inequality and its justifications. Analysis of slavery, feudalism, casteism, colonialism, and far more is balanced with a synthesis that compares these diverse methods of assuring that some human beings permanently enjoy more privileges and power than others. For example, Piketty explains that:

> Compared with trifunctional societies, which were based on relatively rigid status disparities between clergy, nobility, and third estate and on a promise of functional complementarity, equilibrium, and cross-class alliances, ownership society saw itself as based on equal rights.... Everyone was entitled to secure enjoyment of his property—safe from arbitrary encroachment by king, lord, or bishop—under the protection of stable, predictable rules in a state of laws, not men.



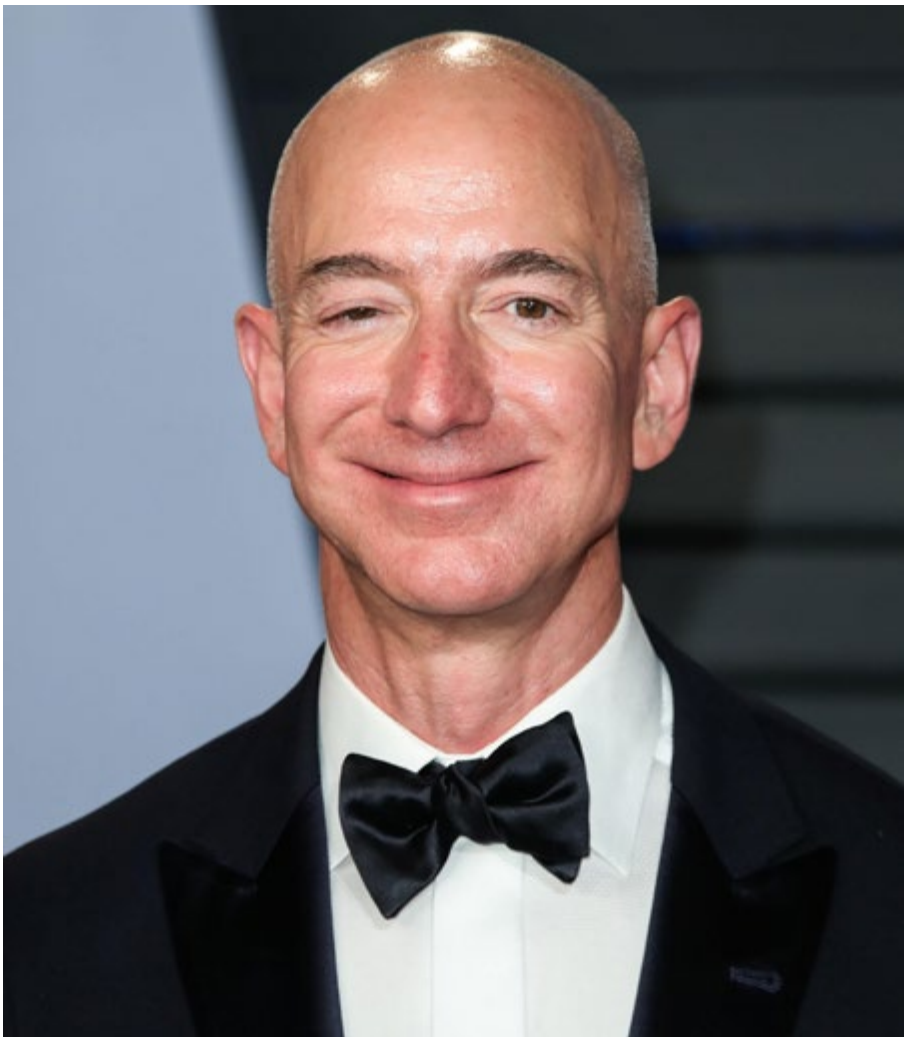
CAPITAL AND IDEOLOGY

THOMAS PIKETTY
Harvard University Press
$39.95 | 1104 pp.

A shared conception of divine right or natural order legitimized feudalism and caste systems, while ownership society promised a fair set of "rules of the game."

But by the time we reach contemporary "hypercapitalism," this simple trajectory of historical progress becomes significantly more complex. Fortunes accumulated in ownership societies have grown to the point that their owners can twist laws to their will. Frank Wilhoit once observed that "conservatism consists of exactly one proposition, to wit: There must be in-groups whom the law protects but does not bind, alongside out-groups whom the law binds but does not protect." Certainly the very wealthy are, in all too many circumstances, one of these "in-groups." Even worse, the increasing returns on their wealth unleash similar dynamics with respect to their power. They have pushed for lower taxes for decades; they use the gains from this tax-cutting to further influence politicians (a process expertly described toward the end of *Capital and Ideology*); success there wins further windfalls to underwrite further influence. How many New York elections will be corrupted by the $170 billion real-estate-developer tax windfall tucked into the CARES Act by Chuck Grassley and friends?

Former George W. Bush speechwriter David Frum recently observed that many United States senators from "red" states do not really "represent their states. They represent, more often, the richest people in bigger, richer blue states who find it more economical to invest in less expensive small-state races" than in their own states. Russian intervention in the 2016 presiden-



Jeff Bezos, oligarch

IMAGE PRESS AGENCY / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Capital and Ideology's ambitious agenda for "participatory socialism" is a welcome blueprint for slowing down the conversion of power into money, and money into power.

tial election presages an international land grab among oligarchs eager to take advantage of a rotting U.S. electoral system. A famous cartoon from the late nineteenth century titled "China—cake of kings and emperors" depicted Queen Victoria, Wilhelm II, and other leaders carving up land only formally controlled by the Qing Dynasty. In hypercapitalist "democracies," oligarchs jostle to conquer policy space. It is relatively easy to block change, and when enough interests are aligned, they can knock their taxes down a few more percentage points.

This is where Piketty-style historical parallels are supposed to jolt us into defamiliarization ("*Sacre bleu!*—are we really that feudal?"), deep disappointment, and a resolve to change. *Capital and Ideology*'s ambitious agenda for "participatory socialism" is a welcome blueprint for slowing down the conversion of power into money, and money into power. But Piketty also presents another, all-too-plausible path: that more nations will follow the siren song of nationalism and xenophobia to racialize feudal orders. Harsh discrimination and caste boundaries are functional for capitalism: they inculcate the horrific but highly profitable idea that some lives are simply worth less than others, and deserve less pay from firms and care from the state.

The critical question now for those alarmed by hypercapitalism's massive inequalities is how to rally public support for a more egalitarian social order. Ursula K. Le Guin once remarked, "We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable—but then, so did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings." I don't know if Piketty's stunningly erudite new book will convince the disaffected to resist hypercapitalism's assertive and extractive royalty. But I do take comfort in the intrinsic importance and interest of this work to anyone seeking to understand how far we have fallen from the most basic standards of social equality and universal material well-being.

FRANK PASQUALE *is Piper & Marbury Professor of Law at the University of Maryland, and a board member of the Association to Promote Political Economy and Law (APPEAL). His book* New Laws of Robotics: Defending Human Expertise in the Age of AI *will be published by Harvard University Press this fall.*

The Black Legend Lives

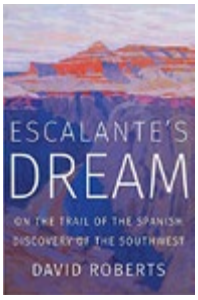
JEREMY BEER

Almost a hundred years ago, the eminent historian Herbert Bolton complained that standard narratives of U.S. history left out the Spanish story almost entirely. Every schoolchild knew about Lewis and Clark; few if any, even in the schoolhouses of the West, knew of the equally, if not more, impressive expeditions and explorations of Junípero Serra, Juan Bautista de Anza, or Francisco Garcés. Furthermore, what little was taught about the *entradas* of the Spanish pioneers was inevitably colored by the Black Legend of their depredations and iniquity—a legend popular in the Protestant English-speaking world for centuries.

Bolton's response to this state of affairs was to undertake one of the most impressive scholarly projects in American intellectual history. In dusty, often disorganized archives scattered throughout Spain, Mexico, and elsewhere, he uncovered long-forgotten, never-translated manuscripts. Among them were documents related to Coronado's conquest of New Mexico; the memoirs of the great Jesuit Eusebio Kino, charismatic missionary to the peoples of Baja California and New Spain's northern frontier; the reports filed by Anza, Father Garcés, and others about the trails they had blazed into California and the unmapped wilderness north of Sonora; and the diary of Fr. Garcés's Franciscan contemporary, Fray Silvestre Vélez de Escalante, which tells the story of the nine-month journey he and his companions made from Santa Fe into today's Colorado, Utah, and Arizona.

Bolton was no armchair historian. He retraced the paths of each of these explorers, often on horseback and under difficult conditions, the better to see the terrain through their eyes and to understand and more truthfully tell their stories. His 1951 book on the Escalante expedition draws on such firsthand knowledge. It is one of very few books devoted to this remarkable journey.

Enter David Roberts, journalist and author of two dozen books of exploration and Southwestern history. His *Escalante's Dream: On the Trail of the Spanish Discovery of the Southwest* offers a contemporary reinterpretation of the Escalante expedition. In 2017 Roberts and his wife retraced the expedition's winding path through the arid, still largely unpopulated intermountain West. It is an interesting book, but it ultimately reveals much more about Roberts and the prejudices of our time than it does about Fray Escalante and his companions.



ESCALANTE'S DREAM
On the Trail of the Spanish Discovery of the Southwest

DAVID ROBERTS
W. W. Norton
$26.95 | 360 pp.

The expedition for which Fr. Escalante served as a diarist left Santa Fe on July 29, 1776. It was headed by Escalante's Franciscan colleague Francisco Atanasio Domínguez and included just eight other men. The goal was to find a more direct path to the new Spanish settlement in Monterey than the only one then available—a route that led southward along the Rio Grande to El Paso and fairly deep into Mexico before swinging northwest through Sonora, crossing the Colorado River at what is now Yuma, Arizona, bearing west until reaching the recently founded mission of San Gabriel (east of today's Los Angeles), and finally heading north more or less along the coast to Monterey. It was a goal that Escalante and Domínguez insisted must be accomplished peacefully. Despite the frequent presence of marauding Apache and Comanche warriors in the lands surrounding Santa Fe, no soldiers marched from the capital in their company, and no one in their group was supposed to trade with whatever Indians they encountered. Escalante and Domínguez wanted the natives to know they had only one purpose: to inform them of the Gospel and to extend its earthly reign—a reign protected and promoted by King Carlos III.

With respect to its main goal the expedition was spectacularly unsuccessful. Although they had established Santa Fe almost two centuries earlier, the Spaniards knew very little about the area north and west of that remote outpost. Monterey was much farther away than they thought, and the high, canyon-gashed, mostly dry country of contemporary Utah and Colorado was nearly unnavigable. The company got as far as contemporary Cedar City, Utah, before giving up its quest. The return trip, which forced the men, nearing starvation, to cross the as-yet-unnamed Grand Canyon and ford the Colorado River, was incredibly arduous. But all members of the party survived.

Cedar City is less than halfway to Monterey. Yet the expedition succeeded in ways perhaps dearer to the friars' hearts. Virtually every notable feature of the landscape through which

they passed was now named after a saint. They had preached the Gospel to a number of new tribes. And they had successfully scouted out sites for potential missions. Most importantly, the venture had been peaceful, steering clear of any violent encounters.

That was no small achievement, for by 1776 the New World's native peoples had suffered for more than a quarter millennium from Spanish violence—violence that had led to the extermination of entire tribes, violence frequently deemed to be unnecessary and excessive even by contemporary observers. In New Mexico no less than elsewhere, the price of resistance to Spanish colonialism could be high—as in 1541, when Coronado slaughtered more than a hundred Tiguex Indians whom he had convened under a flag of peace. During that atrocity, Franciscans had looked on and said little. During others, they did much worse. In 1656 a sadistic priest murdered three Hopi men who resented and threatened to expose his sexual sins. He was soon exonerated and made custodian of the entire province.

Fortunately, Domínguez and Escalante left no such legacy, precisely because their endeavor was more firmly rooted in their theological commitments. An author wishing to reconsider their journey today might therefore be expected to know something not just about the legacy of Spanish cruelty in the New World, but also about Christianity itself. But reading *Escalante's Dream* is like reading a biography of Mozart by a writer who is fascinated by Viennese street patterns and folkways but hates and knows little about music. As Roberts admits to his wife midway through their journey, "I don't believe at all in the padres' cause. Converting the savages. Cramming Jesus and the Gospel down the throats of polytheistic Indians." The only excuse for such inexcusable behavior is that "in 1776, cultural relativism hadn't yet been invented." Dark times indeed.

Roberts seems generally unconcerned about the limitations his lack of sympathy for, and knowledge of, his principal subjects' worldview might place on his understanding of their expedition. He avails himself of the expertise of Southwestern historians and Harvard archeologists to illuminate his subject, but he never thinks to turn to a Christian theologian for insight into the missionaries' motivation. His bibliography does not contain a single book written from an explicitly Christian viewpoint.

Ultimately, Roberts comes to respect the expeditionists' bravery. But if he thinks Christian missionaries ever could have had anything of value to offer the Pueblo, Paiute, Hopi, and other Indians encountered by Escalante's group during their expedition, he never admits it. He also cautions us not to place much stock in Escalante's accounts of natives occasionally listening patiently, even happily, to the friars' preaching. How far we have come from Bolton, the Methodist scholar who believed that, despite the atrocities committed by the Spanish Empire, the diseases it unwittingly introduced, and the instability it fomented, the civilization—including the religion—the Spanish carried with them were nevertheless positive aspects of our collective inheritance.

Needless to say, that opinion is now out of fashion. Some would reduce the entire Spanish legacy in the Americas to nothing more than genocide. Roberts doesn't go that far, but he would presumably assent to the now-conventional view that the Spanish—soldiers, friars, and settlers alike—are best understood as brutal, power-hungry, fanatical, and corrupt. The Black Legend is alive and well.

The irony is that no pre-Christian Indian would or could judge the Spaniards in the same ways Roberts and many other contemporary historians do. Indians in the Southwest may have considered the Spaniards implacable enemies for any number of justifiable reasons—including their lust for gold, their slave-taking, and their expropriation of land on which the Indians had lived—but the Indians would not have accused the Spanish of violating their human rights or committing war crimes, for these concepts are part of our Christian heritage. Some native peoples would likely have seen the Spaniards as great warriors who possessed unique influence over cosmic forces, perhaps sent by the gods as punishments for their own or their enemies' misdeeds. And what the Spanish did to the Indians, warring tribes had long been doing to each other. Neither war nor genocide were introduced to the New World by the Spanish.

America's Spanish heritage is a complicated one, and the Jesuits, Franciscans, and Dominicans who participated in the conquest and colonization of the Southwest have things to answer for. But we cannot adequately evaluate their legacy if we do not at least try to escape the imaginative restrictions, scholarly biases, and moral self-satisfaction of our own time.

WITOLD SKRYPCZAK / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Mural commemorating the Dominguez-Escalante Expedition in Delta, Colorado

JEREMY BEER *is at work on a biography of Francisco Garcés, the Franciscan missionary and explorer who was martyred in Yuma, Arizona, in 1781.*

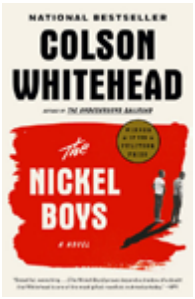
What's in the Dirt

IAIN BERNHOFT

"The dirt looked wrong." So begins *The Nickel Boys*, the latest Pulitzer Prize–winning novel by Colson Whitehead. An archaeology student stumbles upon an unmarked graveyard at a recently shuttered Florida reform school for boys, and an excavation of secrets ensues—the "fractures and cratered skulls, the rib cages riddled with buckshot."

"You can hide a lot in an acre, in the dirt," Whitehead writes, but people have little enthusiasm for sifting through it. Before the skeletons were discovered, the site of Nickel Academy had been marked for redevelopment as an office park. "Now they had to start a new inquiry, establish the identities of the deceased and the manner of death, and there was no telling when the whole damned place could be razed, cleared, and neatly erased from history, which everyone agreed was long overdue."

To what extent anything can be razed, cleared, and neatly erased from history is the central concern of the novel. In more ways than one, *The Nickel Boys* is an archaeological enterprise. It literally excavates a story of institutional and human cruelty—one based on real-life headlines in 2014 concerning Florida's Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys, a reform school with a hundred-year track record of allegations of corruption, physical and sexual abuse, even murder. Whitehead's thinly fictionalized version of this history draws heavily on the testimony of a survivors' group called the White House Boys, named for the shed where boys were taken in the night for brutal whippings.



THE NICKEL BOYS

COLSON WHITEHEAD
Doubleday
$19.99 | 210 pp.

Into Nickel Academy comes Elwood Curtis, an idealistic boy growing up in Tallahassee in the early 1960s. Elwood's upward strivings for an education and civil rights are interrupted when he is arrested on false charges of carjacking and sent to Nickel Academy. A devotee of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Elwood's principled notions of justice and right action are swiftly and severely tested by the cruelty he encounters. Beneath its rhetoric of

Colson Whitehead

MADELINE WHITEHEAD

character formation and its fine-looking buildings, the institution is rotten to its core. The boys' labor and their few possessions are pawned off to local businesses under the table; supervisors sexually prey on their wards; boys are carted off in the middle of the night to "the White House," where an industrial fan drowns out their screams as they're whipped. In rare cases, a boy is taken "out back," code for that secret graveyard dug up in 2014.

How ought a soul to survive in such a place? Elwood disputes this question with his new friend, Turner, a boy who prides himself on his cynical understanding of how the world really works and who seeks to disabuse Elwood of his MLK idealism. Their friendship forms the core of *The Nickel Boys*, and neatly (perhaps too neatly) encapsulates opposite answers. Turner's answer—keep your head down and your guard up—doesn't satisfy Elwood, who views such submission as degrading to one's humanity and dignity. Only love will prevail, Elwood believes, but his attempts to stand against wrongdoing repeatedly prove his undoing. The ideals he has memorized from his *Martin Luther King at Zion Hill* record seem so at odds with the way of the world as to be almost useless.

The novel's plot moves forward efficiently through sharply sketched scenes. Part One of *The Nickel Boys* introduces Elwood as diligent student, hard worker, and budding civil-rights activist, saving for college before his arrest and internment. Part Two unfolds over a year at Nickel—a whipping and hospitalization, community service with Turner, a boxing match, a Christmas party—as Elwood's life "slow[s] to an obedient shuffle." In Part Three, chapters alternate between a plot he has hatched in 1964 and scenes of an older Elwood Curtis in New York City in the following decades.

Stylistically, Whitehead sticks to a register called "terse" and "lean" in glowing reviews and "simplistic" in unfavorable ones. In both plotting and prose, *The Nickel Boys* stands in stark contrast to Whitehead's other novels, which explore similar concerns—the continued presence of the past, the human capacity for good or wickedness, the peculiarly American legacy of slavery and racism—with far more breadth, indirection, and irony. *The Nickel Boys* offers none of the novelistic ambition or bravura of *Zone One*, *John Henry Days*, or *Sag Harbor*. Instead it is deceptively straightforward, earnest in a way Whitehead once mocked in a *New York Times* essay on the staples of contemporary fiction. ("Southern Novel of Black Misery—Slip on your sepia-tinted goggles and investigate the legacy of slavery that still reverberates to this day, the legacy of Reconstruction that still reverberates to this day, and crackers.") At times, key themes and ideas arrive almost pre-highlighted, as if already distilled for the SparkNotes that are presumably even now being written.

The Whitehead novel that *The Nickel Boys* most closely resembles is *The Underground Railroad*, his Pulitzer- and National Book Award– and Oprah Book Club–winning 2016 novel. Both works are, more or less, about attempting to escape the legacy of slavery, and the degree to which such an effort can ever end—and how much hope can be preserved from the dark maw of history and the behavior of humans.

The Nickel Boys also resembles *The Underground Railroad* in that both novels reveal, toward the very end, a devastating plot twist—one that forces us to recalibrate all our previous assumptions about the possibility of escape and the nature of hope. Much of the novel's seeming straightforwardness has been a ruse. What the compositional simplicity allows for is the possibility of tragedy: the endings of these novels are deeply affecting in a way that his earlier, technically superior works cannot be. There, Whitehead's ironic stance and meticulous control precludes a full range of emotion.

The tragedy of *The Nickel Boys* is that, to quote Faulkner, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." When Elwood sees the news report of the secret graveyard in 2014, "The clutch of cedars over the TV reporter's shoulder brought back the heat on his skin, the screech of dry flies. It wasn't far off at all. Never will be." Note the verb tense.

For the boys, this means they will never truly leave the place: it will always be etched on them, body and soul. But the novel also suggests that the depredations Elwood and Turner endure must be understood not in isolation but as the continued residue of slavery. While the cruelty, exploitation, and disavowal that define Nickel Academy are universal, the particular place is simply a new construction on slavery's lot. To understand how a place like Nickel could exist, the novel suggests, look in the mirror: as Turner recognizes, wickedness is part and parcel of human nature. But to understand why these events unfold in the particular manner they do, look to the plantation. The moral outrage coursing through the story is that, on some level, just about everyone already knows what's in the dirt all along, but that the way of the world is to turn away, forget, choose to neither look nor listen.

Hence the novel's fundamentally archaeological understanding of history as a sedimenting thing. Time doesn't change one's coordinates; it just makes the place you're in look different. Scrape away at what's on the surface, and you'll find what was there before is still there and always will be.

What's startling about such an archeological conception of history is how deeply *un*-progressive it is. The language of progress implies movement: traveling forward in time, turning to look back, having "come so far." In *The Nickel Boys*, the passage of time is no such thing. It's not a journey to some new place. The novel ends with a return to the Tallahassee location in which it opened. Everything looks different, yet nothing can be left behind. And so in place of catharsis we are left with a question: Are you going to come to terms with what's below the dirt, or not?

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Immune to Science

JOHN FARRELL

John P. Slattery is a senior research associate with the Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion Program of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Founded in 1995 by the AAAS, the program's avowed purpose is to facilitate communication between scientific and religious communities. I met the author briefly in 2017 at a conference at Notre Dame devoted to the writings of Fr. Ernan McMullin, and at the time Slattery was keenly interested in an overlooked period of tension between the Vatican and Catholic scientists who were first coming to grips with Darwinian evolution at the end of the nineteenth century. As Slattery's excellent new book reveals, this period is far more consequential for the checkered history of the Vatican's relationship with science than the often-overhyped saga of Galileo and the Copernican Revolution.

Slattery's book focuses on the career and fate of Fr. John P. Zahm (1851–1921), a priest of the Holy Cross at Notre Dame. Zahm's initially cautious interest in Darwin's work expanded into an enthusiastic embrace of the idea of biological evolution. This culminated in Zahm's widely read 1896 book, *Evolution and Dogma,* in which he argued that the accumulated evidence of the biological evolution of species over the course of the planet's history in no way presented a challenge to Catholic faith. Quite the contrary, as Zahm wrote:

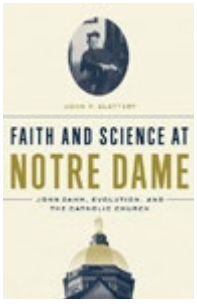
> My sole, ardent desire, has been to show that there is nothing in true science, nothing in Evolution, when properly understood, which is contrary to Scripture or Catholic teaching; that, on the contrary, when viewed in the light of Christian philosophy and theology, there is much in Evolution to admire, much that is ennobling and inspiring, much that illustrates and corroborates the truths of faith.

This was a message that had great appeal to many American Catholics at a time when the U.S. Church was in a period of confident expansion. Notre Dame owed much of its growing reputation as a major Catholic university to Zahm's tireless efforts. As the university's vice president he helped expand the school's library and museum. As a teacher, he traveled around the country giving lectures about the importance of science for Catholics and the compatibility of science and faith.

But not everyone was as enthusiastic about evolution. The success of *Evolution and Dogma* brought Zahm into direct conflict with the Vatican's Office of the Index of Prohibited Books, which in 1899 compelled Zahm to withdraw his book from circulation and to cease writing on the topic. These were humiliating demands, but Zahm agreed to them in order to avoid a public censure and keep his book from being placed on the Index. He spent the last two decades of his life traveling around the world and writing more broadly about science, but he never discussed evolution again.

To read Zahm today is to be astonished by the innocuous nature of his claims, and by the utter unwillingness of his critics to consider the scientific case for evolution. It's worth recalling that when Zahm's book appeared there was less support than there is now for Darwin's theory that natural selection was the engine of evolution. This was before scientists knew anything about DNA, before there was any consensus on how traits were passed from one generation to the next (Mendel's work had yet to be rediscovered). Since Zahm was one of those who dismissed natural selection, he was never really a Darwinist in the strict sense. The primary complaint of his critics was that he dared suggest Adam and Eve were not the result of a special act of creation but were, like all other living animals, the descendants of prior species—in this case, primates.

But, as Slattery shows, Zahm's critics were already predisposed to be hostile to any claim for evolution regardless of the scientific evidence in its favor, because their conservative theology was underpinned by a commitment to nineteenth-century Neo-Scholasticism. Slattery delves into the emergence of this movement and its key figures, including the Jesuit Joseph Kleutgen, who had a profound



FAITH AND SCIENCE AT NOTRE DAME
John Zahm, Evolution, and the Catholic Church

JOHN P. SLATTERY
University of Notre Dame Press
$27 | 292 pp.

influence on Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* and his encyclical *Dei filius*, as well as on Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni patris*. These three papal documents all anchored reason in the scholastic tradition that grew out of the work of Aquinas.

This tradition wasn't a blanket adoption of Aquinas's thought, but rather a new attempt to create an impregnable intellectual system, a form of theological rationalism that could resist all forms of innovation—in philosophy or science. As Slattery describes it:

> First, the leaders of the Neo-Scholastic movement insisted on a singular philosophical structure for all Catholic scholarship that was both objective and universal, for doctrine could not exist in a world where the roots of philosophy were being forever debated. Second, the Scholastic interpretation of the philosophy of Aquinas was to be revered as the model of this universal structure, over against any philosophical systems based on Descartes, Kant, Locke, or anyone else in the modern world, *as well as* over against the theological interpretations of any other theologian, such as Augustine, Bonaventure, or Scotus. Third, Neo-Scholastics argued that by relying on Aquinas and other medieval philosophers, contemporary Catholic philosophy could be constructed as a single objective whole. Fourth and finally, Neo-Scholastics resisted anything resembling a historical approach to philosophical or theological development, for if doctrine could be changed over time, it would be impossible to test its veracity.

Adam Naming the Animals by unknown artist

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

It's difficult to overstate how much damage this bunker-mentality approach to philosophy and theology caused Catholic scholars over the ensuing decades, right up until the papacy of Pius XII when the Church finally accepted, albeit with reservations, the study of human evolution. The disconnect is beautifully demonstrated by a new translation of the *Syllabus of Errors* that Slattery provides in an appendix. The *Syllabus* laid the groundwork for *Dei filius* at the time of the First Vatican Council and established the narrow boundaries within which all Catholic scholarship was expected to proceed.

Slattery's account of Zahm's work provides a much-needed bridge between this reactionary era in the Church's recent intellectual history and the more open era of Catholic thought that preceded the French Revolution (a period well described in Ulrich L. Lehner's *The Catholic Enlightenment*). *Faith and Science at Notre Dame* is an indispensable addition to this history.

JOHN FARRELL *is the author of the book* The Clock and the Camshaft: And Other Medieval Inventions We Still Can't Live Without *from Prometheus Books.*

Francesca Momplaisir

Seeing the Expendable

NICOLE-ANN LOBO

The Kreyòl phrase *kay manman mwen* translates in English to "my mother's house," which is the title of Francesca Momplaisir's debut novel, set in the Ozone Park neighborhood of Queens. The house in question is a haven for immigrants, predominantly Haitian, who refer to it in shorthand as KAM, and who gather there to socialize, get legal advice, search for work, and eat the food they know from home. But behind its communal façade, KAM hides crimes and secrets sinister beyond belief—events so dark that the house is compelled to "take" its own life through self-immolation. Amid the flames we hear its anguished cries of *difé!—fire!* And it is there that our story begins.

Or rather, returns to a time before the blaze, when we meet KAM's aging owner, Lucien, one of this novel's three third-person narrators. (Another is Sol, who arrived in America from the Yucatán Peninsula, "where the corners of Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico fused and confused the nationalities of their inhabitants," and an object of Lucien's sexual pursuit; the other, in the author's semi-successful stab at surrealism, is KAM itself.) Back in Port-au-Prince, Lucien worked as a pimp in a local bar while pursuing Marie-Ange, a teenager nine years his junior. He marries her after her family is "disappeared" during a failed coup, then brings her to the United States, where he hustles for work, struggles to help raise their three daughters, and battles the ghosts of his past. Through it all Lucien and Marie-Ange also study American law and institutions, eventually mastering the convoluted inner-workings of the immigration system before starting KAM to help other immigrants in exchange for fees and favors. Now, a decade after the death of Marie-Ange and estranged from his grown daughters, Lucien is fixated on rescuing some of his possessions from KAM before it faces demolition.

With Lucien, Momplaisir crafts both a victim and oppressor, a man deserving of pity and contempt. There is something evil about his womanizing and hoarding—which are not unrelated. His frantic materialism stems from his own fears of being discarded, like the "dejected, unloved wretches" who once owned the spoils he collects on late-night drives through New York City streets. "Hollow and corroded," he is trapped between past traumas and the harsh realities of life in twenty-first-century America, where a system whose fault lines are drawn along divisions in income, immigration status, and skin color drives people to desperation, and threatens to break them. In jolting moments of self-awareness, dwelling on the pain he's both suffered and inflicted on others, Lucien recites a three-word mantra: *I am nothing*.

Yet America has allowed Lucien a chance at self-creation, even if only superficially. He invents stories about his past, brags of the wealth and style he possessed back home, boasts that

MY MOTHER'S HOUSE

FRANCESCA MOMPLAISIR
Knopf
$26.95 | 304 pp.

MICHAEL LIONSTAR

Marie-Ange married him not out of desperation born of calamity, but for his good looks. But decades after arriving in New York, Lucien still drives a taxi, and is forced to rent rooms in KAM for extra income. As for Marie-Ange, the myths of meritocracy and attaining success through hard work alone prove equally hollow. She endures workplace hostility from jealous white coworkers conspiring to get her fired, then comes home to face an abusive Lucien.

Momplaisir deftly renders the immigrant experience in all its complexity and variety, especially as it plays out in the particular milieu of Ozone Park. Not so long ago a stronghold of second- and third-generation Italian Americans (it's where notorious Mafia boss John Gotti operated from), the neighborhood is now home to Haitians and other arrivals from primarily Catholic Caribbean and Central American countries, who also increasingly fill the pews of local churches. She zeroes in on the gender dynamics at play in the community: men face the cultural pressures of breadwinning, but women bear just as great a burden in making ends meet, even while dealing with constant domestic and sexual demands. And she examines how white societal expectations of assimilation take a toll on the non-white men who fail to meet them, men who fear being seen as something less than masculine and so compensate with toxic cruelty. (After long shifts driving a cab, Lucien seeks amusement in the "simplemindedness" he sees in women, thrilled by "how easily he could manipulate them.") Momplaisir also depicts how anxieties over "belonging" manifest in conflict between groups of non-white people. Whereas Lucien's light skin was celebrated in Haiti, in America he finds it to be "merely a superficial veil thrown over distinctly African features." On the subway, Marie-Ange notices the mutual hostility between a Haitian immigrant and an African American: "envy and resentment on both sides.... America's native sons clutched their tenuous citizenship with the power of a vise grip, as if immigrants could somehow purse-snatch their hard-won privilege."

And what about that house of secrets, which suffers so much it sets itself on fire? Momplaisir uses KAM as a kind of morally conscious character intimate with real-life horrors that have unfolded from Port-au-Prince to New York City. It knows the crimes and human-rights abuses of despotic Haitian president Papa Doc Duvalier—whose nominally anti-communist regime received economic and military aid from the United States during the Cold War—and the crimes committed by "self-proclaimed rescuers of the people," the American soldiers stationed in Haiti. It feels the brutal attack on Abner Louima, the Haitian cab driver beaten and sodomized with a broken broomstick by New York City police in a Brooklyn precinct house in 1997. It mourns the 1999 murder of Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallo by New York City police, who fired at him forty-one times as he stood outside his Bronx apartment. And yet, the house observes, "at least in America there had been a semblance of justice painted in the media. Even if it wasn't real, the gesture had meant a lot to those who could never have hoped for the same in their native country."

And indeed, there is hope, especially as seen in Lucien and Marie-Ange's three daughters. They are the community's role models, winning full scholarships to prestigious universities based on their academic work and talent. Momplaisir herself has followed a similar trajectory, having been born in Haiti and going on to study at Columbia, Oxford, and New York University. Her debut reads as both an unsentimental tale of resilience in the face of struggle and a particularly modern thriller. But it also arrives as a timely depiction of the wages of structural racism, exhorting us to see the people whose lives are treated as expendable.

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Donnafugata Dilemmas

Randy Boyagoda

Burt Lancaster as Don Fabrizio in Luchino Visconti's 1963 film adaptation of *The Leopard*

KEYSTONE PRESS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's 1958 novel *The Leopard* fooled me twice when I recently read it. First, I thought what mattered most about the novel was the story of how it came into existence rather than what it was about. Lampedusa was an Italian aristocrat whose forebears held royal office in Sicily before Italy's reunification in the latter half of the nineteenth century. He wrote the book in his final years and failed to find a publisher for it before he died in 1957. Almost immediately after his death, his book found a publisher. It fast became a modern Italian classic, selling millions in multiple editions, and has since been translated and published around the world. Most recently, the author's experiences inspired an eponymous novel-cum-homage, *Lampedusa*, in which Canadian novelist Stephen Price artfully imagines Lampedusa's life as he writes *The Leopard*. The story-of-the-story, in other words, has long been more accessible and popular than the story itself, insofar as it's a universal consolation and promise to every frustrated author. The second way the novel fooled me has to do with its opening lines: "*Nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen*. The daily recital of the Rosary was over. For half an hour the steady voice of the Prince had recalled the Glorious and Sorrowful Mysteries; for half an hour other voices had interwoven a lilting hum…"

Catholic novel! Catholic novel! Modern-literary-classic-little-known-as-actually-a-Catholic-novel! The lizard part of my religio-literary brain began throbbing at this discovery, but this was a mistake. From its Hail Mary start to its ramshackle reliquary finish—replete

with family chapels and village churches and assorted priests, bishops, and even cardinals—the book features a thick and rich (if not healthy) vein of Mediterranean Catholicism that's braided into its larger account of personal and public life. That said, Lampedusa discloses the main matter of the novel in its second paragraph, which describes the situation after the family finishes reciting its daily rosary one afternoon in May 1860: "Now, as the voices fell silent, everything dropped back into its usual order or disorder." The keyword is "usual." Don Fabrizio, the middle-aged Prince of Salina, which is part of greater Sicily, presides over this world, whose deep-set patterns are about to be permanently unsettled. Within a few weeks, Garibaldi and his Redshirts will land in Sicily; thereafter he will lead military and political campaigns to help bring the lands of Sicily and Naples out of their Bourbon monarchical autonomies into what became, by 1870, the geographically unified modern nation-state of Italy (minus Vatican City).

The Prince, modeled on Lampedusa's great-grandfather, is an ambivalent, self-preserving, and self-defeating actor in these developments, which pose clear risks to himself and his family. The prospect of change also calls into question the nature of his responsibilities to the many people in his greater household and lands who have long depended on his laissez-faire leadership and largesse, whether gratefully or resentfully. As the novel begins, he wanders with melancholic languor around his house and properties, all marked with variations on the family's leopardine coat-of-arms. He spends his days and nights eating with his seven children, sleeping with his wife, sleeping with his mistress, hunting, dabbling in astronomy, chatting up his loyal Great Dane and long-suffering family priest, receiving peasants bearing meager gifts in place of payments for what they reap on his land. Lampedusa makes it clear that the Prince, like the princes before him, has always lived like this and can't imagine his descendants living otherwise—but now he has to decide how to respond to the approach of a new world in which this way of life can no longer be taken for granted. I can't think of another novel that provides such an intimate and fine-grained sense of what it means for a family man of public standing to confront the pressures of modernity increasing day by day, visitor by visitor.

Lampedusa evokes this pressure through the novel's most famous line, when the Prince conferences with Tancredi (his charismatic, hustling nephew) about Garibaldi's encroaching presence and the greater implications for the Prince's life. Tancredi tells him: "'If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change. D'you understand?'" He does, and he doesn't, and the novel movingly presents the Prince's attempt to understand and live out a relationship between continuity and disruption he struggles to accept, whether it has to do with supporting family members' marriages to new-money people with vulgar mores, or deciding whether—and then how—to vote in a plebiscite about Italian unification or join a new Italian Senate. Given the Prince's standing, his participation legitimates the very thing that delegitimizes that standing, some portion of which he might be able to preserve if he joins a greater popular movement that seeks to deny his hereditary primacy altogether.

Lampedusa brilliantly captures the Prince's dilemma in a sequence where he and his family journey to their palatial holding in the town of Donnafugata. The trip takes place a few months after Garibaldi's initial landing and a couple of weeks before Garibaldi and his men take Naples, the decisive event in this stage of the Risorgimento. It's a tense time, and the Prince looks forward to a kind of stability and reassurance otherwise increasingly imperiled: "'Thanks be to God, everything seems as usual,' thought the Prince as he climbed out of his carriage" to be greeted by the mayor, the local monsignor, assorted civic leaders and dignitaries, and the rustic masses. All of them watch in respectful silence while "according to ancient usage" the Prince and his party process into the cathedral for a *Te Deum*. Pro-Garibaldi slogans are painted on nearby walls: they're fading, but they're there, and the Prince can't help but notice them. Following prayers in the cathedral, he returns to the town square and warmly invites everyone there to visit the family in its palace after dinner that night. "For a long time Donnafugata commented on these last words," Lampedusa writes, "And the Prince, who had found Donnafugata unchanged, was found very much changed himself, for never before would he have issued so cordial an invitation; and from that moment, invisibly, began the decline of his prestige."

Beyond the romantic story of when and how it was published, the novel's appeal could be attributed to its beautiful prose (obvious even in translation), to its languid pacing, and to how it unfolds the many layers of intrigue and fidelity within a family and between a family and the people around them. But it's *this* moment—the beginning of the Prince's decline, and its rationales and causes—that makes *The Leopard* more than just another underappreciated classic. It's this moment that makes it speak to the kinds of concerns we each have to deal with these days in our personal, professional, and faith lives.

There is far more at play in the Prince's Donnafugata dilemma than obvious irony and poetic social justice. Taken in the context of the whole novel, it is a superb evocation of what it means to be a serious person out of step with one's time: it means being a person with responsibilities that conflict with one another because the longstanding arrangements of a larger world—one in which those responsibilities did *not* conflict—have been fractured, and won't be repaired or replaced anytime soon. In the version of this situation Lampedusa offers us in *The Leopard*, the results of the Prince's response are a slow and decorous self-destruction amid greater familial and institutional decline.

Reading this novel today, we can sympathize with the Prince and even identify with some of his dilemmas—whether in family or work or faith life—because these are ours as well,

even if we're not downward aristocrats. In fact, we each face countless Donnafugata dilemmas in our daily lives. These dilemmas happen at home: cultivate in your children a respect for authority and obedience to their teachers, and then you have to decide either to affirm or to undermine that respect and obedience when your children come home seized with ideas that run counter to your family beliefs. These dilemmas happen at work: interrupt a late-day meeting presentation that's going on for too long because you know the others in the room also want it to end, whether to go home to their families or just get on to other things, and be accused of workplace incivility (by the people you were trying to help!). These dilemmas happen at church: become an active lay contributor to parish life because you're not happy with what you're seeing, and then risk sowing division when you propose alternatives to routine practices or, worse still, never show up for the meetings because you're always stuck at work (see above). These days, such dilemmas are only intensified and exacerbated by the ongoing impacts of COVID-19: accept limitations on daily life and liberty, yes, but also preserve a willingness and capacity to discriminate between those situations in which we must adjust to a "new normal" for the greater good and those situations in which we should resist the normalization of temporary arrangements in view of the resumption of personal and public life beyond the pandemic.

What matters in each of these situations is accepting that you need to act for the greater good while also accepting the permanent possibility of a Pyrrhic victory. The temptation, as with Lampedusa's Prince, is to retreat and give in to passive egoism, but that can only contribute to the erosion of the very thing you seek to conserve, defend, and renew. After the Prince dies, late in Lampedusa's novel, what's left of a once-grand family and public institution are aging, eccentric, and ineffectual descendants shuffling around the decrepit husk of a big house, clinging to outmoded symbols of authority, and barely humored by occasional guests.

Most contemporary readers won't agree with the Prince's general approach to life and will rightly reject the embittered passivity that wins out over his better qualities. He is an example of someone at work and play in the modern world who gets a few things right and many things wrong. But his struggle can help us think about our own daily decisions a little more, and a little differently. It can help us reflect on how we relate to the institutions that matter most to us—how we enact our loyalty to them. This matters as much for the health and well-being of the institutions as for ourselves and those we care about. Making small, sincere contributions in difficult situations creates the conditions for others to join us and do likewise. This is often the most we can do; sometimes it is even enough—even if it's just reading a novel and telling someone else the story.

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No Justice, No Peace

ANN KILLIAN

"Peaceful protest"—these words dominated headlines as thousands of American citizens took to the streets in cities across the country demanding justice for George Floyd. Every commentator, from Barack Obama to local faith leaders, urged the protesters to remain peaceful. Their warnings made me think of the college students I regularly teach in a course called "Peace and Protest," where we read texts defending and critiquing nonviolence. My students' reactions make me question why we're always so intent on "keeping the peace."

For many Americans, of course, the ideal peaceful protester is Martin Luther King Jr. But even King's nonviolent tactics weren't always universally applauded. His "Letter From a Birmingham Jail," written in 1963, recalls how local officials described King and his fellow black Christian leaders when they traveled to Birmingham to join demonstrations against segregation: "outside agitators." Southern white religious leaders likewise criticized King and his allies for their civil disobedience, on the grounds that such tactics provoked violence. Those same critics also praised the police for maintaining "law and order"—even as officers unleashed violent attack dogs and beat nonviolent protesters after arresting them.

My students find a lot to admire in the 1960s civil-rights activists, whose courage and willingness to suffer police brutality without retaliating are certainly inspiring. Still, they are also persuaded by Ta-Nehisi Coates's skepticism regarding nonviolence. In his book *Between the World and Me*, written just after the acquittal of the officers who'd killed Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Coates recalls growing up as a black boy in 1980s inner-city Baltimore. He remembers seeing videos of civil-rights "heroes"—black people knocked down by fire hoses and beaten with clubs in the streets. "Why were only our heroes nonviolent?" he asks. The morality of nonviolence, he concludes, is only—and unfairly—expected of people of color.

Coates's question exposes a double standard that we see playing out again today. The American public demands peaceful conduct from citizens, even as they protest the extrajudicial killing of unarmed black men and women. These same protestors belong to communities oppressed for decades by police brutality, racism, and white supremacy. Handling the protestors—ensuring that they remain "peaceful"—are police and National Guard forces, armed with military-grade assault weapons, firing into crowds with rubber bullets and tear gas, and physically wrestling unarmed people to the ground.

Supposedly, these violent tactics are justified by scattered instances of property damage. But there is an undeniable power differential here, and an obvious hypocrisy: this country demands respect for private property—which symbolizes its capitalist economy—while training and arming police to use lethal force against private citizens. In the eyes of the American state, in which capital is backed by military force, the lives of black and brown citizens are deemed expendable, less worthy of protection than storefront windows. The White House has made this cruel logic explicit: President Trump has threatened to send "thousands of heavily armed soldiers" to "dominate the streets" and "protect the rights of law-abiding Americans." The very law-abiding, white citizens who, mere weeks before, brandished assault rifles and handguns outside state capitals to intimidate public officials trying to save lives in the midst of a pandemic.

If peaceful protest is to be more than a byword of the white power structure in this country, all Americans must hold our elected officials and police forces to a rigorous standard of peace-keeping that does not harm, threaten, or intimidate. We cannot simultaneously demand nonviolence from the oppressed while also allowing law enforcement officers—deputized by the state—to commit murder in the name of public safety or "law and order." If we are to speak credibly about justice and peace, we have to practice what we preach, as Jesus did. Openly carrying arms bears false witness to our Christian commitment to peace—and to the inviolable dignity of human life.

There are immediate actions we can take to address the national unrest over police brutality and racism, and they do not include deploying the National Guard. Bringing charges against former officer Derek Chauvin and his three former colleagues, all responsible for George Floyd's death, is a good first step. But systemic problems are larger than these four individuals. Justice demands that police training be overhauled in favor of nonviolent conflict resolution. Stand Your Ground laws must be overturned. The Black Lives Matter movement is right: we must defund—and demilitarize—the police.

Undertaking these reforms is our responsibility not just as American citizens, but also as people of faith. Our tradition, through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, proclaims our duty to practice nonviolence without equivocation or compromise: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again." The protestors are right: "No Justice, No Peace." May we commit ourselves anew to building a just peace—and bringing about the Reign of God—through our witness of nonviolence.

ANN KILLIAN *is a novice with the Dominican Sisters of Peace. She holds a PhD in English Language and Literature from Yale University.*

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SCENE FROM A PROTEST
Lamont Roberson, 2020

I took this photo in early June as hundreds of people gathered at City Hall in Santa Clarita, California, to peacefully protest racist policing following the killing of George Floyd. It shows how these issues affect our children. You can see the pain and the confusion in this child's face—but also strength and hope. In a sense, we are doing this for him.

LAMONT ROBERSON *was born and raised in Los Angeles, California, where he now works as a freelance photographer. You can follow him on Instagram at @lamontphoto.*

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