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LETTERS

Does India really need fewer farmers?

WHY WE NEED FARMERS

Daniel K. Finn's recent article ("Why India Needs Fewer Farmers," May) exposes many realities about farming today but fails to center the autonomy of the farmer or prioritize solidarity with the farmer in the fate of global agriculture. The author explains how across the globe, as a nation's GDP increases, a decline in total agriculture employment follows. The author suggests that this is due to an economic factor, income elasticity of demand for food, and that it will be impossible to end rural poverty by supporting more agricultural workers. The solution is to help move farmers to other means of income generation, outside of farming.

What would this mean for the mostly rural spaces farmers inhabit and would presumably need to leave behind? Can we really afford to lose more productive and healthy soil to the unsustainable agriculture practices of "Big Ag"? And why should we laser in on the farmers' culpability?

The Indian policy changes ushered in by Narendra Modi in 2020 that set to abolish government-stabilized markets and promote exported agriculture eerily echo the Nixon-era changes instituted by Agricultural Secretary Earl Butz. Butz, who is well-known for his directive for American farms to "get big or get out," similarly prioritized production over all else with a plan to shift market attention to global exports. Such a mercenary strategy puts even mid- to large-size farms at a disadvantage and subjects them to the mercy of global markets and conglomerate food-supply companies that have achieved a near-monopoly.

The author does not mention the environmental implications of ceding to Big Ag and the alarming rate at which global farms are losing topsoil and relying on chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Small and human-scale farms are some of our last partners in land regeneration.

Focusing our political voice to call for antitrust enforcement and a food system committed to connecting farms to direct end-users is a better way forward. When governments choose to support markets for the underdog, small and human-scale farms are not just viable options for living—they are desirable jobs.

Ryan Haefke
Chicago, Ill.

GOOD FOR FARMERS AND SOCIETIES

Daniel K. Finn's conclusion about the number of farmers ends up pointing to corporate exploitation as the solution. The just and quasi-public solution is supply management and commodity-price parity, which would prosper and stabilize farm families along with rural regions. This changes the entire scenario away from what Finn takes as a given: a power concentration that sees desperate rural people fleeing to urban ghettos, which splits up families and fosters unnecessary social dislocation. Finn's paradigm is too small, his foregone conclusions false.

Jay Howe
Greenfield, Iowa

DIFFERENT PRIORITIES

As an old farm boy, I had some questions for Daniel K. Finn. Growing up on a small Wisconsin farm with thirty-five-head of dairy cows, 120 acres under plow, two acres of potatoes, an acre of varied vegetables, and culled livestock for meat, I am well aware that farm income does not translate directly to the ability to support a family. We cut firewood to heat our home and cut logs to build additions to the barn and house. Farmers, especially small

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— FR. JAMES MARTIN, SJ
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farmers, benefit from a substantial non-monetary economy. Finn's graphs of declining percentages do not necessarily indicate a decline in actual farm incomes or an increase in farm-family poverty. Perhaps declining percentages overlook essential economic facts. Perhaps we could sustain a large number of families on small farms, even if the national economy is growing faster in other sectors like tech and finance.

I also wonder if the declining share of agricultural GDP and declining share of income spent on food, described as "fundamental forces at work," reflect policy choices and consumer tastes that are less inevitable than Finn believes. The industrialization of agriculture is a policy choice that favors the transfer of farmland to fewer families using larger machinery to grow more monocultural commodities. We have chosen to favor large capital expenditures and to direct the largest share of government subsidies and disaster payments to the largest farms. Perhaps a more comprehensive agricultural policy would put greater value on keeping families on small working farms in order to sustain local community suppliers, business services, schools, and health care. Perhaps, also, it does not bode ill for small farms that people want to "spend a growing share of their food budget" on processed foods or prepared meals if those foods are grown by local farmers on small farms and the bread is baked at a local bakery on Main Street.

Lastly, is it really true that "no nation has been able to…maintain a large, stable proportion of agricultural workers and simultaneously ensure their long-term economic well-being"? Haven't Switzerland and France and the Netherlands been able to do exactly that by recognizing a diverse rural landscape and economy as a national and cultural priority?

Frank Schweigert
Saint Paul, Minn.

DANIEL K. FINN RESPONDS:

I am grateful to Ryan Haefke, Jay Howe, and Frank Schweigert for their responses. I share a number of their views. I agree that it's bad policy for U.S. farm subsidies to go mostly to large farms—but it is not only the owners of large farms who prefer this "dollar per bushel" approach. Many small-farm owners have declared they don't want "welfare" (subsidies for only small farms) but a "fair price" for everyone's crops. I also agree that there should be regulation of fertilizer and herbicide use to reduce environmental damage, but small farms are as likely to complain about this as large ones. Minnesota (where I live) passed a "Buffer Law" that requires perennial vegetative buffers of up to fifty feet along lakes, rivers, and streams to help filter out phosphorus, nitrogen, and sediment. Small farmers were as opposed as large.

At no point did I speak of "farmers' culpability" (contrary to Haefke) and I do not favor corporate farms over family farms (contrary to all three). A personal connection between consumers and farmers is a wonderful relation that my wife and I benefit from, but that is impossible (due to constraints of money, time, and distance) for most of the four billion people who live in cities around the world.

Yet the most fundamental difference between my view and theirs concerns the title of my essay: "Why India Needs Fewer Farmers." My argument was that like all other nations, India would find it impossible to maintain the current 50 percent of workers in farming and guarantee their economic well-being over the long term. Howe endorses "supply-management and commodity price parity," yet Canada, the main Western democracy employing those methods, has only 1.4 percent of its workers in farming. Schweigert points to Switzerland, France, and the Netherlands as examples (presumably for India to follow) because they have maintained "a large, stable proportion of agricultural workers" with a guarantee of their economic well-being. But farmers in all three nations make up less than 3 percent of the national workforce.

Depending on definitions, there are between 100 and 150 million farmers in India. In fifty years, there will be far fewer. The morally responsible approach is to admit this, encourage policies that will assist many—especially children—to prepare for gainful employment outside agriculture, and design national and local policies for economic and environmental sustainability.

CLASSIFIED

The End of *Roe*

Nearly two months after Justice Samuel Alito's opinion on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* was first leaked to the public, the Supreme Court officially issued its decision repealing the constitutional right to abortion. The ruling fell along the predicted lines, with Justices Amy Coney Barrett, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, John Roberts, and Clarence Thomas concurring with Alito; Justices Stephen Breyer, Elena Kagan, and Sonia Sotomayor dissented. The reasoning of the court's majority will be scrutinized and critiqued for years to come, while the ruling's implications for other court decisions grounded in the right to privacy are yet to be determined. But today, in considering both the immediate and potential consequences of the repeal of *Roe* nearly fifty years after it was decided, it is clear that the new ruling does not provide a final resolution to this country's fraught debate about abortion, and it would be a mistake for those who believe in the value of all human life to assume or pretend that it does.

"Trigger laws" in thirteen states will go into effect now that the decision has been handed down, and more states are expected to follow suit. Some ban abortion in almost all cases, including rape and incest. Many force women to carry nonviable pregnancies to term. Some make performing or helping someone receive an abortion a crime, even if it happens in another state where abortion is legal. Other states are preparing similar laws, and it is likely that roughly half the U.S. population will soon live under restrictions that would have been impossible before the new Supreme Court ruling. It is a grim irony that many of these states already rank among the bottom in terms of access to maternal care and possess some of the highest maternal mortality rates. Their severely underfunded social safety-net programs also make them some of the worst places to raise children. Of course, the effects of these laws will not be evenly felt. Women with enough money will still be able to get abortions or bear the costs of raising an unexpected child. Many poor women, especially women of color, won't. Meanwhile, a number of other states are codifying legal access to abortion, in many cases with minimal restrictions. Some states and cities are also declaring themselves "sanctuaries" for women seeking abortions, drafting laws to protect those who come from states where abortion is now illegal. The Biden administration is pondering executive actions designed to limit the impact of the court's ruling. If American opinion has long been split on abortion, now American law will be too—between states where it's banned or heavily restricted and states where it's broadly permitted.

It is not a contradiction to seek to protect unborn children and also to be concerned about these and other possible consequences of overturning *Roe*. People who believe in the sanctity of all life, including the unborn, can recognize that abortion law is a particularly complicated matter because of the competing goods it must balance: the life of a child, the health and self-determination of the mother. The state has an interest in protecting both. Restricting access to abortion is morally irresponsible if it's separated from fulfilling obligations to support women who are pregnant or might become pregnant. We should acknowledge the risks to physical and mental health that attend pregnancy, the financial and social stressors that accompany it, and the effects it can have on women's agency—and we should reject glib assertions that adoption, private charity, and access to crisis pregnancy centers are enough to address the challenges new abortion restrictions will create. We should advocate for policies reflecting the conviction that child-rearing and family care are not burdens to be borne by self-sufficient individuals but things for which the whole community shares responsibility. Bearing this responsibility in twenty-first-century America requires state and federal programs that meet the material needs of pregnant women, mothers, and their children. These include comprehensive, accessible, and affordable healthcare; paid parental leave; a child tax credit; a living wage; robust social safety-net programs; and affordable childcare options. It is telling that none of the trigger laws going into effect do anything to address the realities of carrying or raising a child. A society that requires women to bring pregnancies to term without addressing the burdens that can accompany motherhood demonstrates that it is possible—and all too common—to be anti-abortion without really being pro-life.

The U.S. bishops might try to keep this in mind. Speaking at Loyola University Chicago in 1985, Cardinal Joseph R. Bernardin reminded listeners that Catholicism sees human life as both sacred and social, and so "we must develop the kind of social environment that protects and fosters its development." But in their insistence on treating abortion as *the* "pre-eminent" political priority—which Cardinal-designate Robert McElroy of San Diego has correctly called a distortion of Catholic teaching—many bishops seem to have →

lost sight of this need. In their headlong pursuit to outlaw abortion by any means necessary, they tied the institutional Church to a political party hostile to the very policies that would help women and families raise children—a party now willing to abandon democracy in order to attain and keep power. Church leaders who use the Eucharist as a tool to enforce their single-issue politics alienate many ordinary Catholics, who understand intuitively that the legal and political dimensions of abortion are more complex and less certain than the moral issue. Recent polling shows that 63 percent of U.S. Catholics believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases—putting them in line with the overall U.S. population—and 68 percent believe that *Roe* should have been left to stand. Of course, the Church is not a democracy, and its moral teachings are not determined by opinion polls. But until the bishops succeed in persuading most of the laity, they should stop trying to strong-arm Catholic politicians by means of threats.

In 1973, weeks after *Roe* was decided, the editors of *Commonweal* wrote, "Now the Church must think through the implications of its defeat," warning that if the public "continues to view abortion in isolation from other social and moral problems, the anti-abortion cause will become the tool of the right wing." That, unfortunately, is exactly what happened. Now that *Roe* is finally overturned, the Church must think through the implications of its success. An issue that has dominated public discourse and reshaped American society for half a century remains far from settled—morally, politically, legally, culturally. Catholics ambivalent about abortion and discouraged by the Church's alliance with the Right will continue to tune out the bishops or even disaffiliate. Meanwhile, the Left's often cavalier dismissal of the moral status of the unborn makes productive debate on this issue increasingly difficult. With lawmaking on abortion returned to the state level, partisan divides and regional differences will deepen. Women will continue to seek out abortions, through legal and extralegal means, including medications delivered by mail. Abortion is likely to remain the subject of protests, sloganeering, and demagoguery. As we have seen across the decades—from the murders of abortion doctors and the bombing of clinics to recent attacks on pregancy-counseling centers and a death threat against Justice Brett Kavanaugh—some people on both sides of this issue are willing to resort to violence. Such violence is likely to increase in this moment of uncertainty.

In a pluralistic democracy like ours, the convictions of a minority cannot be made law against the will of the majority. This means that, for those opposed to abortion, there is no way around the hard work of persuasion and the necessity for compromise. But the Trumpified GOP with which most of the pro-life movement has aligned itself in recent years has no time for persuasion or compromise, and no interest in attending to the uneasy ambivalence many people feel about this issue. It's worth remembering that most Americans are both reluctant to ban abortion outright and willing to consider new restrictions that *Roe* made difficult or impossible. They are aware of the conditions unique to the one half of the human species who experience pregnancy, and supportive of measures that would make it easier for women to bear and raise children. It is hard to imagine the kind of compromise that might be acceptable to both sides of this ongoing debate, but what other option is there now that the court has returned this issue to our elected representatives? It will not be easy. It will require flexibility, imagination, and, yes, wisdom on the part of lawmakers at all levels of government. It will require a willingness to learn from the experience of other countries that have already had to deal with this issue legislatively. Finally, it will require that public intellectuals, the private sector, religious leaders, and ordinary Americans learn to treat abortion as a question of public policy rather than just a tribal marker in a culture war. Whether we are up to these difficult tasks remains an open question, but we can no longer dodge or defer them. With this Supreme Court ruling, one vexed era has ended, and another is about to begin.

An Extraordinary Case

On June 30, the Supreme Court ruled in *West Virginia v. EPA* that the Environmental Protection Agency cannot compel states to regulate their emissions through "generation shifting"—that is, by creating a system-wide cap-and-trade market to transition from coal and natural gas toward renewable sources of energy. Generation shifting was a key building block of the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan (CPP), but it prompted attorneys general in several fossil-fuel-producing states to sue in 2015. The CPP was never implemented—it was stayed by the Supreme Court and then scrapped by the Trump administration—and the Biden administration does not intend to implement it now, as its modest generation-shifting goals have already been met and exceeded by market forces. Yet the court took the case anyway, presuming that President Biden's EPA would propose a new set of more-ambitious standards that would justify the plaintiff's claim of injury.

The basis for generation shifting in the CPP was a catch-all provision in the 1970 Clean Air Act, Section 111, which authorizes the EPA to determine the "best system of emissions reduction," factoring in reasonable constraints of cost and health, and then to set an emissions standard based on what can be achieved by that system. The EPA under President Obama understood that the clearest, most cost-effective way to reduce emissions was to do so systemically, rather than just mandating upgrades at individual fossil-fuel power plants. No technological upgrades can improve the efficiency of a coal-fired power plant enough to meet the EPA's goals for curbing climate change. Reaching those goals would require states to reduce the share of energy generated by these plants, or to compensate for their emissions by using carbon capture and storage, installing new windmills and solar panels, or

purchasing emission credits in a cap-and-trade program. Such "outside the fence" regulation did not sit well with the Supreme Court's conservative justices.

In the majority opinion, Chief Justice John Roberts declares that this is not a case about climate change, but about the "major questions doctrine," a legal approach with virtually no basis in precedent before this Supreme Court term. The doctrine holds that, in "extraordinary cases," there may be "reason to hesitate" before concluding that Congress intended to delegate certain powers to an agency; without an explicit mandate from Congress, Roberts argues, agencies should not be able to regulate matters of significant political and economic concern. The definition of an extraordinary case, though, can be stretched to suit the whims of the court. This provides what Justice Elena Kagan, in a searing dissent, refers to as a "get-out-of-text-free card" that can "magically appear" when the court wants to ignore statutory language that might frustrate its goal of deregulation. While this ruling is ostensibly narrow, referring specifically to only one section of the Clean Air Act and generation shifting, its rationale has much broader implications not only for the EPA, but also for every other federal regulatory agency.

There is no solution to the climate crisis that will not involve great political and economic change. Any regulation sufficient to the scale of the problem could therefore be construed as "extraordinary" within this legal framework. Indeed, only extraordinary measures can extricate the United States from its deadly fossil-fuel dependency. With the EPA unable to fulfill the full scope of its mandate, the burden falls to individual states and to Congress, where the current Democratic majority is at the mercy of a senator from the coal-producing state that brought this suit. The best way to overcome a court determined to stymie regulation is to expand the Congressional majority this fall in order to pass climate legislation—but that, too, will require an extraordinary effort.

—Isabella Simon

Texas Migrant Tragedy

After the discovery of fifty-three deceased migrants in an overheated truck near San Antonio last month—the highest death toll involving migrants in recent U.S. history—Texas Governor Greg Abbott wasted no time politicizing the tragedy. "These deaths are on Biden," he declared on Twitter. "They are the result of his deadly open border policies. They show the deadly consequences of his refusal to enforce the law."

The Republican governor offered no such condemnation after a similar tragedy in 2017, during the Trump administration, in which ten people died. "Human trafficking is an epidemic that Texas is working to eradicate," he said then. Abbott's reasoning is also illogical. If the U.S.-Mexico border were truly "open," then the tens of thousands of migrants and refugees fleeing poverty, violence, and environmental devastation wouldn't need to risk their lives to cross—often paying coyotes and smugglers up to $10,000 for help doing so. And it's not as if Abbott and his fellow officials have better ideas. The enhanced "enforcement" approved by the Texas legislature—barbed wire along the Rio Grande, cops outfitted in riot gear, continued construction of walls, all at a cost of $4 billion over two years—has not stemmed the record flow of migrants across the border.

Yet none of this absolves the Biden administration of its own ineffectiveness in addressing the issue. True, some efforts, like Vice President Kamala Harris's "Root Causes" initiative, could take years to bear fruit. And Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas was right to launch an operation to disrupt the human-trafficking networks responsible for horrors like the one near San Antonio. But consider its response to the Supreme Court decision allowing the Trump-era "Remain in Mexico" policy to be lifted: rather than acting immediately, it says it will need several weeks to phase the program out. Nor has the administration signaled any plans to cease invoking Title 42, the pandemic-era public-health rule first used by the Trump administration to deport migrants, including asylum seekers, without due process. Yet the federal government *has* relaxed restrictions on air travelers arriving from abroad.

Perhaps calculating that immigration could be a losing issue for Democrats in the midterms, the White House has been less than compassionate in its messaging. "The fact of the matter is the border is closed," White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre recently asserted. Of course, that doesn't change the fact that migration along the southern border is only likely to increase. Rather than confront this reality with transparency and creativity, the Biden administration is falling back on the same tired approach of deterrence and victim-blaming, as Mayorkas inadvertently revealed: "We have said repeatedly, and we continue to warn people, not to take the dangerous journey." But migration along the U.S.-Mexico border is as dangerous as it is partly because our laws have intentionally made it that way. For more than three decades, U.S. immigration policy has relied on deaths—the more numerous and visible the better—to scare migrants into staying home.

It's clear that hasn't worked, and it's past time Biden said so, publicly and emphatically. Even though comprehensive immigration reform is impossible at the moment, the administration can still take meaningful action. It should end the "Remain in Mexico" policy and rescind Title 42 immediately. It should then partner with humanitarian and community organizations along the border to ensure that asylum seekers are treated humanely and that their claims are processed swiftly, in accordance with international law. Doing so would signal that Americans aren't as callous and indifferent to non-American, non-white people as we appear to be, and might even save lives.

—Griffin Oleynick

MOLLIE WILSON O'REILLY

False Flags

Can a Catholic school really support its LGBTQ students?

What does it mean to fly the Pride flag? Can a Catholic institution display a rainbow banner with integrity? The bishop of the diocese of Worcester, Robert McManus, says "no." I'm not sure I disagree.

To be clear, I am fully on the side of the Jesuit-run Nativity School in Worcester, Massachusetts, in its standoff with Bishop McManus, who demanded that the school stop displaying the Pride and Black Lives Matter flags or else forfeit its right to call itself Catholic. The flags proclaim the school's commitment to fighting injustice. They "remind our young men, their families, and Nativity Worcester staff that all are welcome here and that they are valued and safe in this place," as the school put it. "They fly in support of marginalized people."

Nativity's president made clear in a letter to the community that, while he and his team would never willingly abandon their ministry's Catholic identity, they likewise remained unwilling to abandon their students. "Nativity will continue to display the flags in question," he wrote, "to give visible witness to the school's solidarity with our students, families, and their communities."

I admire and am encouraged by Nativity School's display of solidarity with Black and queer people. But while the school and its leaders may indeed stand with LGBTQ people against oppression, McManus is correct that the Catholic Church itself does not.

Two years ago, I wrote in these pages, "The Church's condemnation of homosexuality isn't just an error that needs fixing. It is an obstacle that stops Catholics, leaders and laity alike, from speaking clearly about urgent moral crises and from being perceived as credible when we do." The conflict in Worcester is a perfect illustration. Defending an institutional prejudice against queer and transgender people leads men like Bishop McManus to pick fights over rainbow flags and to turn away from other marginalized groups who stand as allies to the LBGTQ cause.

That brings us to the Black Lives Matter flag, the other symbol McManus says is out of place at a Catholic school. In his initial statement to his diocese, McManus faulted the BLM movement for "instill[ing] broad-brush distrust of police and those entrusted with enforcing our laws." That is a political, reactionary response, not a doctrinal one. But since that first salvo McManus has found a sturdier hook on which to hang his claim that the BLM flag contradicts the teaching of the Church, because the BLM movement—like most justice movements—is "'queer affirming' and 'trans affirming.'" The Catholic Church McManus represents, meanwhile, is anything but affirming to queer and trans people, beyond a boilerplate assurance that "we are all God's children" (the slogan McManus suggests as an alternative to the rainbow flag).

The Church's head-in-the-sand attitude toward human sexuality has led us to this point, when bishops like McManus insist that Catholics cannot stand with the Black Lives Matter movement because BLM stands with queer people. That is where our Church is expending its energies at a moment when racist violence and white-supremacist politics are on the rise. Transgender people and their rights are under attack. Extremism is ascendant in the United States wherever Republicans hold power. Lives are literally at risk.

How should Catholics respond? We are called to stand with the persecuted, but our bishops are more likely to speak out on the side of the persecutors. That contradiction, that scandal, is why our Church must reform its teachings that condemn same-sex love and "gender ideology." Rejecting LGBTQ people aligns the Church with discrimination and political violence and ties our hands when it comes to resisting injustice of any kind.

Bishop McManus has his defenders. There are many self-consciously orthodox Catholics who are opposed to building a Church where LGBTQ people feel safe. They prefer to keep the Church a safe place for themselves. Loudly embracing orthodoxy gives them permission to reject and exclude

COURTESY OF NATIVITY SCHOOL OF WORCESTER

Flags flying at Nativity School of Worcester

people different from themselves and protects them from confronting uncomfortable truths.

At the same time, many more Catholics are shocked at the spectacle of a bishop forbidding Jesuits to pray the Mass, or even the rosary, with the low-income middle schoolers they serve. Are those Catholics scandalized because, as McManus suggests, they fail to grasp the message of the Cross? Or do they see the persecuted Christ all too plainly in this moment?

Bishop McManus may hope that his exercise of ecclesial authority will clarify the Church's teachings for his flock. My sense is that he has clarified instead the deep dysfunctionality of a Church divided against itself. As long as the Catholic Church is unwilling to examine its complicity in spreading anti-LGBTQ prejudice, it will keep finding reasons to avoid working for justice. Meanwhile, Catholics like the faculty and staff at Nativity School will carry on doing that work, but they shouldn't have to fight their leaders to do it.

MOLLIE WILSON O'REILLY *is* Commonweal*'s editor at large.*

BRYAN P. GALLIGAN, SJ

War, Drought, Flood

The many challenges facing South Sudan

Before a leg injury forced him to postpone travel, Pope Francis was scheduled to make an ecumenical "pilgrimage of peace" to South Sudan. He would have been joined by Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and Rev. Jim Wallace, moderator of the Church of Scotland. Together, the three faith leaders were hoping to build on momentum established back in 2019, when Francis and Welby hosted South Sudanese political leaders for a spiritual retreat at the Vatican. That event—in particular the poignant moment when Francis bowed to kiss the feet of each attendee—marked a turning point for the troubled African country, where civil war had been raging for six years. Not long after their visit to Rome, on February 22, 2020, President Salva Kiir and First Vice President Riek Machar, the opposition leader, announced the end of hostilities. It was an extraordinary development: while the South Sudanese peace process has been sluggish, and sporadic fighting has continued, this previously unthinkable display of unity signaled real progress.

Whenever their visit occurs, Francis, Welby, and Wallace should harbor no illusions about the brutality of South Sudan's recent history and the difficulties it poses for creating a lasting peace. The country has been split along ethnic lines since violence erupted in December 2013, two years after the referendum that formalized South Sudan's independence. Just hours after Kiir accused Machar of plotting a coup, Dinka soldiers loyal to the former stormed the streets of the South Sudanese capital, Juba, systematically rounding up, torturing, and killing members of Machar's Nuer ethnic group. Weeks later, Nuer militias responded by attacking the city of Bor, about 130 miles to the north, overwhelming government troops, raping and killing women in their hospital beds, beating men and children to death, and gunning down anyone who tried to escape. All told, some two thousand civilians were killed. Since then, hundreds of thousands more have died as a result of atrocities committed by both sides.

Internally displaced people in Yambio, South Sudan, September 2021

CNS PHOTO/SEAN HAWKEY

Compounding South Sudan's political divisions is the ongoing devastation wrought by climate change, to which the country's impoverished population is particularly vulnerable. Located where the Horn of Africa meets the semi-arid Sahel, South Sudan has long had a highly variable climate. Precipitation there is difficult to predict, as erratic rainfall patterns sometimes produce both droughts and floods in the same year. Historically, this variability made life difficult, but not impossible. Sedentary farming communities developed ways of preparing for and responding to unusual droughts and floods by stockpiling grain, while nomadic sheep and cattle herders traveled great distances in search of greener pastures.

But after many years of war, some of that traditional knowledge has been lost. And the strategies that do remain are not always useful. That's because climate change brings more extreme heat, shorter growing seasons, and increasing floods, imposing what the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change calls "hard limits to adaptation." Where people and ecosystems are already living precariously, coping with even incremental changes in climate becomes impossible.

Consider the experiences of South Sudanese communities historically affected by floods. These regions, like the vast Sudd wetland, have recently become even more crowded, filled with refugees displaced by war. Traditionally, when the floods arrived, residents built earthen dikes to protect their homes and crops. Then, they celebrated, with entire families using repurposed mosquito nets to capture all the fish they could.

But more and more, the floods bring fear rather than celebration. Higher water

levels can cause earthen dikes to fail after two or three days, destroying crops and forcing communities to scramble for alternative sources of food. Mud houses collapse and must be rebuilt. Cattle constrained to graze in standing water often fall ill and sometimes die after consuming rotting or infected food. Residents that remain must sleep without shelter, exposing them to diseases like cholera and malaria. Even humanitarian aid is more difficult to deliver. Today, hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese in need of food assistance remain cut off by road damage caused by last year's floods.

Options for migration are limited. Moving to higher ground carries serious risk, as neighboring communities find themselves competing for newly scarce land and resources. Disputes are regularly settled at gunpoint, forcing more internal migration to already crowded displacement camps. Last year, the population of one camp in Bentiu, Unity State, swelled from 100,000 to around 120,000 people in the wake of widespread flooding. The camp provides a measure of security, but venturing beyond the perimeter fence carries the risk of assault, rape, or worse. At least one local community has barred camp residents from accessing water.

Flooding isn't the only threat; a warming dry season brings a host of other ills. Since the 1970s, the mean annual temperature in South Sudan has increased by roughly 2.3 degrees Fahrenheit. Even more disturbing is the increase in extreme heat during the same time period. Between 1900 and 1975, temperatures exceeded 100 degrees only four times. Between 1975 and now, temperatures have spiked to that level twenty-one times.

This extreme heat is making life increasingly difficult for South Sudanese, especially when it comes to food security. Physical labor is more dangerous in the heat, preventing farmers, who make up more than 80 percent of the population, from working as much or as efficiently as they otherwise might. The longer dry season also gives crops less time to grow, leading to lower yields. High temperatures in South Sudan are also statistically correlated with an increased risk of armed conflict, which not only creates barriers to food distribution but also contributes to the abandonment of agricultural lands. According to the World Food Programme, the current drought is a driving force behind the deadly increase in hunger in South Sudan. Over 60 percent of the country's population is expected to face crisis-level food insecurity in the coming months. Some areas in Jonglei, Lakes, and Unity states are already experiencing famine.

South Sudan's deteriorating cycle of displacement, hunger, and violent conflict is neither natural nor inevitable. Much of the blame can be laid at the feet of wealthy countries in the Global North. It was British colonial policies, for example, that created and hardened the ethnic divisions and economic dynamics that undergird South Sudan's current political crisis. And the carbon emissions that threaten lives and livelihoods in South Sudan are hardly endogenous, either. With the highest rate of energy poverty in the world (only 7.2 percent of the population had access to electricity in 2020), South Sudan's carbon-dioxide emissions accounted for less than one-thousandth of one percent of the global total in 2021.

Still, South Sudan's leaders have had several opportunities to get things right in the nearly two decades since the 2005 ceasefire with the north. Plentiful oil and aid revenues, broad international support, and an initial sense of political unity could have been leveraged to create jobs and build infrastructure. South Sudan's leaders didn't just fail in their attempt at nation-building; from an outside perspective, at least, there is very little evidence they even tried.

Instead, South Sudan's leaders have created one of the most financially irresponsible and least transparent states in history. When the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) Army finally won a ceasefire from the Sudanese government after twenty-one brutal years of war, self-rule brought with it vast sums of oil wealth. Almost overnight, the SPLM Secretariat of Finance, which had been responsible for handling financial resources worth around $100,000 during the war, became a government ministry with $1.5 billion in annual revenue under President Salva Kiir. When independence came in 2011, that number soared to $3 billion. As soon as the first Sudanese pounds landed in SPLM hands, revenues turned into outflows with almost no accountability or information on where the money was going. Much of the money was funneled through the military, where it lined the pockets of corrupt commanders who artificially swelled the ranks of their units by adding nonexistent "ghost soldiers" and extracted bribes by threatening rebellion. Other cash disappeared abroad. In 2012, President Salva Kiir admitted that at least $4 billion in missing government funds, and possibly a much larger amount, had been transferred out of the country.

The obvious irony is that the crisis in South Sudan, in which climate change and armed conflict are intimately related, is exacerbated and perpetuated by a single commodity: oil. As the South Sudanese people contend with the pernicious effects of climate change, their elected representatives continue extracting vast amounts of fossil fuel and sending it abroad for refinement and combustion. The revenue from those sales props up a continuous cycle of corruption and violence, while increasing carbon emissions exacerbate the extreme heat, longer droughts, and more intense floods. In the months leading up to Pope Francis's postponed visit, peace activists launched a campaign calling on Kiir, Machar, and other South Sudanese leaders to "remember Pope Francis's kiss." Regardless of when Francis finally arrives, they would do well to make peace—with each other, of course, but also with the natural environment they share.

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PAUL ELIE

Closer Encounters

A conference in Rome brings clarity to one of Pope Francis's more elusive concepts

The term "culture of encounter" is used seven times in the English translation of Pope Francis's 2020 encyclical *Fratelli tutti*—and the word "encounter" and its cognates appear another forty times. Eighteen months after the encyclical's publication, however, "culture of encounter" is still one of the more elusive concepts of Francis's pontificate: less familiar than "mercy" and "mercy-ing," less vivid than the image of the Church as a "field hospital," less practical-seeming than "care for our common home."

But a conference held in Rome in late May set out to change that, and the three dozen of us participants were left with a robust sense of the meaning of "culture of encounter"—as well as the sense that we ourselves had been able to instantiate a culture of encounter through our three days of informal meetings, panel discussions, meals, and conversations.

The conference was organized by Georgetown's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs (where I am a senior fellow) and *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the Jesuit journal; it was held at the Villa Malta, where the journal is based, and hosted by its editor, Antonio Spadaro, SJ, who made opening remarks. Three Vatican dicasteries served as co-sponsors: the Pontifical Council for Culture, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. Georgetown's president, John J. DeGioia, welcomed conference participants with a reception at the Villa Malta.

The Rome conference extended efforts of intellectual and cultural conversation that have taken place since last year among several dozen scholars, clergy, faith leaders, and activists from six continents—Zoom meetings, videos, blog posts, and the like. And it featured keynote addresses by Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Holy See's Under-Secretary for Relations with States, and Arturo Sosa, SJ, superior general of the Society of Jesus. The whole undertaking has been funded with a grant from the GHR Foundation, whose CEO and chair, Amy R. Goldman, will receive *Commonweal*'s Catholic in the Public Square award in October.

So what is the "culture of encounter"? Pope Francis, quoting *Fratelli tutti* in an address to the Association of Saints Peter and Paul in January, put it this way:

> There is always movement in an encounter. If we all stand still, we will never meet. "Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter" (*Fratelli tutti*, 215). That is what life is: the art of encounter. Encounter is, as it were, the oxygen of life. And this is why we need a culture of encounter, because "we, the people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone" (216).

Earlier this year, my Georgetown colleague Thomas Banchoff, a vice president for global engagement and professor of government who also serves as director of the Berkley Center, distributed a paper to the group, setting out four crucial aspects of a culture of encounter: humility, generosity, realism, and patience. He traced the origins of the concept to Jorge Mario Bergoglio's training and experience as a Jesuit in Argentina. And he touched on its significance for the Church and the world: "as a key to understanding the ideas and actions of Pope Francis; for a Church that is internally polarized and faced with a credibility crisis; and for the global agenda in a world that is increasingly divided."

In Rome, DeGioia spoke of encounter as vital for any transition from a "bipolar" to a "multipolar" global order. "We have had many recent successes in dialogue, especially interreligious dialogue, but the consequences of our failure to encounter one another are global, and as we've seen in these last few years, quite catastrophic," he said in an interview with *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper. "So it requires new skills in discourse, even a new vocabulary. Encounter is about recognizing the responsibilities we have to one another and seeing things from the other's perspective."

The "culture of encounter" has deep roots in the approach of the Holy See in the postwar period. Pope John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council as an effort for the Church to encounter the modern world. Pope Paul VI, breaking with precedent, left Rome to travel to New York and address the United Nations. Pope John Paul II took more than a hundred apostolic journeys, at once making the act of encounter with others central to the papal office and having countless face-to-face encounters with heads of state, political leaders, and ordinary people on their home ground. Pope Benedict XVI, whose 1968 work *Introduction to Christianity* is framed around the encounter of believer and unbeliever, established the Courtyard of the Gentiles as a formal means for the Church to engage with unbelievers.

Pope Francis has made "the art of encounter" central to his pontificate. "The practice of encounter," Banchoff observes, "can be seen in the human scale of many of his dealings—through his one-on-one meetings with others, whether a head of state, a survivor of clerical sexual abuse, or a person with leprosy; in the letters he has written to people of all kinds; and in the simplicity of his speech and way of life."

Pope Francis greets people after a general audience at the Vatican, January 5, 2022.

CNS PHOTO/PAUL HARING

It was Francis's instinct for encounter that endeared him to so many people so swiftly after his election in 2013; it was his habit of encounter that made a man who was often taken to be gruff and unassuming during his time as cardinal archbishop of Buenos Aires such a hit with the world media as pope. All at once, press and public detected that his face-to-face dealings (done with cameras watching) were more than photo-ops; they were encounters on a human scale—a Gospel scale, some said. For moments at a time they showed the pope as one of us, in the middle of the road of his life.

The approach has seemed such a natural fit for Francis that it is easy to overlook how fully it followed the approach of his predecessors. John Paul's embraces with Lech Wałęsa and Mother Teresa, his visit to the grand synagogue in Rome, and especially his invitation to several dozen world religious leaders to come to Assisi in 1986 and pray together: those efforts were a kind of counterpoint to the vast outdoor Masses he pioneered (which did, after all, give many millions of people the chance to encounter the pope firsthand through the liturgy). And in the latter years of John Paul's pontificate, it was Cardinal Ratzinger—not just the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) prefect, but also a senior member of the Congregation for Bishops—who would meet the bishops of the world in small groups on their *ad limina* visits, practicing the art of human contacts in the episcopate as John Paul's health diminished.

In September 2016, Pope Francis went to Assisi to take part in the thirtieth World Day of Prayer for Peace. He was at the apogee of public adulation just then, and it was tempting to see the event as a signal expression of his pontificate. Here were leaders of world religions, mingling amicably, praying in groups distinct to different faiths and then coming together as one. Here was the pope of the Global South, a religious leader among others. Here was Jorge Mario Bergoglio at the spot Francesco di Bernardone had given renown as a holy place, such renown that Bergoglio on his election could suggest the direction he meant his pontificate to take—simple, outward-facing, attentive to the poor—just by making the saint of Assisi his namesake.

But the event wasn't just an expression of Francis or his pontificate. It was something like a capstone to a culture of encounter that had been developing in the Church, and the papacy, across several decades. At John Paul's behest, the Community of Sant'Egidio had carried forward the Prayer for Peace in cities worldwide. And in 2011, Benedict—who as CDF prefect had taken a firm line on Catholic encounters with other religions—had sent a message of blessing to the event that affirmed encounter as a vital and generative aspect of the life of the Church. He gave particular attention to people who struggle with reli-

A culture of life is not supported through negative prohibitions alone; more important is the positive duty to promote life to the maximum.

gious belief or reject it altogether. "Such people do not simply assert 'There is no God,'" he explained. "They suffer from his absence and yet are inwardly making their way towards Him, inasmuch as they seek truth and goodness. They are 'pilgrims of truth, pilgrims of peace.' They ask questions of both sides." He went on: "All their struggling and questioning is in part an appeal to believers to purify their faith, so that God, the true God, becomes accessible."

Pope Francis's rite of intercession at the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020 was likewise an image of encounter enriched by those that preceded it. Locked-down, I watched it on streaming video. It was a Friday evening. Italy was ravaged by the pandemic, and the streets of Rome were empty. Spotlights on St. Peter's Square showed a hard rain falling. Francis strode toward the piazza, holding a gold monstrance before him, and sought the Virgin Mary's intercession against the coronavirus. On one level, it evoked images of Pius XII, the prisoner of Rome, a figure set above and apart. On another level, it recalled John Paul at the Wailing Wall—a lonely man of faith carrying the heavy burden of Catholic anti-Semitism, which he sought to cast off, sometimes faltering. On a third level—the one proper to Francis—it showed a papacy transformed, with the pope, so long typed as God's vicar on earth, now appearing as a representative of a human family forced into isolation by the coronavirus.

Fratelli tutti was written in the ensuing months, and it's apt to suppose that its themes were sharpened by the coronavirus. The encyclical, in some ways a kind of anthology of Francis's main themes, is an urgent account of the ways our common humanity draws us into encounters with one another—and the ways those encounters, which bring out the fullness of our humanity, represent the best way forward for a world civilization in crisis.

Archbishop Gallagher affirmed the "culture of encounter" as a vital expression of the ongoing call to conversion that is at the center of Christian life. "The culture of encounter," he declared, "is a call to responsibility in an age of entitlement." Having returned from a diplomatic mission to Ukraine two days before the conference, he devoted his address to presenting the "culture of encounter" as fundamental to twenty-first-century diplomacy—in fact, as "the most adequate approach to viewing the future of the international community and humanity as a whole." Before taking questions from the audience at the Villa Malta, he again and again drew specific connections to the Holy See's approach to diplomacy—so many that in the course of his address he referenced the "culture of encounter" more than thirty times.

So to pose the question again: What is the culture of encounter? It's an idea, rooted in Catholic tradition, articulated by Pope Francis, that's now active in aspects of the Church ranging from spirituality to diplomacy to interreligious dialogue to culture and the arts. Unlike the idea of synodality, which is abstruse and Church-specific, the idea of a culture of encounter is broadly humanistic and straightforward enough that people of various backgrounds can aspire to it. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that the success of the Synod on Synodality set to take place in Rome next year will depend on whether a culture of encounter is present there. Here's hoping—and praying—that it is.

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DAVID ALBERTSON

American Idols

Uvalde & the culture of death

In April my family and I left Los Angeles to spend the summer in Berlin. Though the trip was planned a long time ago for my sabbatical, we soon realized that it would be an accidental spiritual tonic after the wearying confinement of pandemic life. Never have we lived so long without the stifling air of cars, television, and American politics; never have we spent so much time walking together through tree-lined streets and parks. We found a friendly Catholic parish in our neighborhood, sparsely attended but welcoming. While we temporarily lost touch with home and church, we have never felt as safe in public with total strangers. We let our school-age children walk alone to the bakery and ride the train unaccompanied. That would be unthinkable in Los Angeles.

The perspective of the expatriate is supposed to bring wisdom—Hugh of St. Victor counsels students to embrace poverty and discipline, but also exile. In our distance from the United States and enjoying our newfound, if temporary, safety, my wife and I have watched with horror the news of the latest massacre of innocents at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, followed days later by shootings in Oklahoma and Iowa. The murdered children in Texas are the same age as ours, the teachers the same age as we are, executed in a public school just like our own. As many have noted, this raises sharp questions for the NRA lobby, who long ago accepted child sacrifice as the cost of their greed, and for certain members of Congress, who paint their face with Christianity to conceal their lust for power.

Yet the massacres in Uvalde and elsewhere raise troubling questions even for

ordinary American Catholics, who greet the end of *Roe v. Wade* as a victory for what St. Pope John Paul II called the "culture of life." I understand why many do so, but prudence urges some reflection. Setting aside the enormous pastoral, jurisprudential, and political complications of that recent decision, Catholics still face difficult questions about the nature of our political commitments to a culture of life.

For unrelated reasons I found myself rereading John Paul II's 1995 encyclical, *Evangelium vitae (The Gospel of Life)*, during the weeks between the leaking of Justice Samuel Alito's draft opinion and the shooting in Uvalde. What is the meaning of a "culture of life," reexamined outside U.S. politics and apart from its usage as a culture-war cliché? What perpetuates a "culture of death"? Pope Francis has drawn criticism for reasserting an integral ethic of life—linking the climate crisis to the dignity of the unborn, for instance—and for resisting the reduction of political responsibility to a single issue. Many of Francis's detractors assume that John Paul II would have endorsed their current strategy: to trade support for Republican neoliberal economics in exchange for the appointment of pro-life justices, by anti-democratic means if necessary.

It turns out that the text of *Evangelium vitae* suggests something quite different. John Paul II offers a probing social analysis of the "culture of death," in the course of which he articulates some critical principles for a future politics of life. To be sure, the encyclical focuses rightly and above all on abortion and euthanasia. But only an inattentive reader could imagine that those are the only evils John Paul II was worried about. The encyclical offers a structural understanding of contemporary threats to human life, of which abortion is the signal, but by no means sole, instance. *Evangelium vitae* has many themes—too many to discuss here. But I would like to commend four of its insights to American Catholics contemplating our moral obligations in 2022. John Paul II's words have an arresting relevance in our era of gun violence, and they help expose the error of treating one kind of violence against the most vulnerable as scandalous, and another as business as usual.

The first insight: to perceive the extent of the culture of death we must move beyond individual morality and examine economic and legal structures. John Paul II explains that he needed to write this encyclical because times had already changed since the Second Vatican Council. While he names abortion as the gravest crime, his alarm is precipitated by four larger factors. First, new threats to human life have emerged from advanced technological techniques for causing death. Second, these tools are defended by legal justifications that employ a novel ideology of absolute freedom. Third, the victims killed by such violence are the most vulnerable: "such attacks strike human life at the time of its greatest frailty, when it lacks any means of self-defense." Fourth, they occur within the familial sphere of parents and children, which should be an environment of safety and nurture. These criteria apply to abortion and euthanasia. They also apply to massacres of elementary-school children with semi-automatic weapons—weapons purchased legally under laws passed in the name of "freedom."

On several occasions, John Paul II urges us to search beyond the "subjective responsibility of individuals" (12, 18, 59). Instead, to perceive the widespread culture of death, we should turn our gaze to the "structure of sin," which he defines as follows:

> This is the emergence of a culture which denies solidarity and in many cases takes the form of a veritable "culture of death." This culture is actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency…a war of the powerful against the weak (12).

The "culture" he has in mind is a moral reality, but one that is "actively fostered" by "economic and political" realities that demand our critical attention. "Today the problem goes far beyond the necessary recognition of these personal situations. It is a problem which exists at the cultural, social, and political level," and only at that level can we appreciate the full extent of the culture of death (18).

The culture of death strikes the most vulnerable and defenseless in society. Cain's question—"Am I my brother's keeper?"—appears today as a "lack of solidarity toward society's weakest members" and a cruel "indifference" to their survival (8). John Paul II defines the weak as "the elderly, the infirm, immigrants, children" (8). "Where life is involved, the service of charity must be profoundly consistent. It cannot tolerate bias and discrimination, for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good. We need then to 'show care' for all life and for the life of everyone" (87).

The culture of death, then, is sustained through economic and political structures, and it particularly attacks children and immigrants as well as the unborn and terminally ill. This is the second insight: the root of the culture of death is an economic system backed by a legal regime. The economic system is the commodification of human life, which calculates its value exclusively in terms of efficient profit accumulation (i.e. neoliberal capitalism).

John Paul II asks Christians to examine how goods are distributed in our society and who exerts power within that distribution. For example, he examines what links together not only the recent increase in abortion and euthanasia, but also technological investments in artificial contraception, artificial reproduction, and prenatal eugenics. The link, he concludes, is a certain approach to assessing the value of human life. If we read his analysis carefully, we can depict the main features of the ideology he describes: an excessive concern with "efficiency" (12), a reduction of human beings to disposable "biological material" (14), "the utilitarian motive of avoiding costs which bring no return" (15), and the lack of "fair production and distribution of resources" among countries (16). The goodness of life is reduced to "economic efficiency" and "inordinate consumerism" (23). Human dignity is replaced by "the criterion of efficiency, functionality and usefulness" (23). Human beings become commodities, "reduced to the level of a thing" among other things (34).

Crosses outside of Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, commemorate the students shot there in May.

In order to avoid equitable redistribution, the wealthy are even willing to embrace eugenic policies: "The powerful of the earth…are haunted by the current demographic growth, and fear that the most prolific and poorest peoples represent a threat for the well-being and peace of their own countries" (16). Hence we must "unmask the selfishness of the rich countries which exclude poor countries from access to development" and should in fact "question the very economic models often adopted by states" that contribute to "injustice and violence" (18). Accordingly, John Paul II exhorts governments to prioritize "greater opportunities and a fairer distribution of wealth so that everyone can share equitably in the goods of creation…by establishing a true economy of communion and sharing of goods, in both the national and international order" (91). Such global economic redistribution is "the only way to respect the dignity of persons and families" (91).

The culture of death is the eclipse of humanity following the eclipse of God, as John Paul II argues in this and other encyclicals. But *Evangelium vitae* also plainly blames neoliberal economics: unfair, underregulated competition; the drive to maximize profits and reduce labor costs without heed for human flourishing; the monetization of every aspect of human life; and, we might add, the ensuing corruption of politics. To struggle against this anti-Christian anthropology, which values human beings only in terms of their economic utility, the whole economy must change.

That brings us to his third insight: the legal regime resulting from this economic system misconstrues freedom as maximal autonomy from obligation to others (i.e. libertarianism). John Paul II teaches that "crimes against life" are now justified by invoking "the rights of individual freedom" (4). This false appeal to freedom stems from an equally false understanding of personal autonomy. John Paul II traces this back to "the mentality which carries the concept of subjectivity to an extreme and even distorts it, and recognizes as a subject of rights only the person who enjoys full or at least incipient autonomy and who emerges from a state of total dependence on others" (19). This is a "notion of freedom which exalts the isolated individual in an absolute way, and gives no place to solidarity." He concludes: "such a culture of death, taken as a whole, betrays a completely individualistic concept of freedom, which ends up by becoming the freedom of 'the strong' against the weak who have no choice but to submit" (19).

This perverse absolutizing of personal liberty makes neighbors look like enemy combatants and makes self-defense (standing one's ground) the primary legal question. "If the promotion of the self is understood in terms of absolute autonomy," John Paul II writes, "people inevitably reach the point of rejecting one another. Everyone else is considered an enemy from whom one has to defend oneself" (20).

Eventually, absolute freedom also includes freedom from the social bonds of truthfulness, or freedom to invent alternative facts. Once freedom becomes so debased that it justifies "the destruction of others," then "the person ends up by no longer taking as the sole and indisputable point of reference for his own choices the truth about good and evil, but only his subjective and changeable opinion or, indeed, his selfish interest and whim" (19). According to John Paul II, the erosion of truth itself is the final result of valorizing personal liberty, rejecting solidarity, and excluding the weak, sick, and poor from moral obligation by the rich and powerful. "At that point, everything is negotiable, everything is open to bargaining," he writes, and "social life ventures onto the shifting sands of complete relativism" (20).

In this situation, the state becomes a "tyrant" and democracy creeps toward "totalitarianism." Instead of providing a secure home in which all live together, the state guarantees "the right to dispose of the life of the weakest and most defenseless members" by taking the side of the most powerful partisans (20).

The culture of life—and with it, democracy and truth itself—can be sustained only when solidarity with "the weakest and most innocent" takes prior-

BOB DAEMMRICH/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ity above all else, especially an idolatrous claim to absolute freedom. This points to the fourth insight. A culture of life is not supported through negative prohibitions alone; more important is the positive duty to promote life to the maximum.

Throughout *Evangelium vitae*, John Paul II teaches that the prohibition of murder ("You shall not kill") defines only the outer boundary of Christian charity. Following this command of God demands far more from us. "Detached from this wider framework," he warns, "the commandment is destined to become nothing more than an obligation imposed from without, and very soon we begin to look for its limits and try to find mitigating factors and exceptions" (48). The commandment is stated negatively as the "extreme limit" of just action. Yet it implies "a positive attitude of absolute respect for life; it leads to the promotion of life and to progress along the way of a love which gives, receives and serves" (54). The commandment not to kill is a "no" from which one "must start out in order to say 'yes' over and over again, a 'yes' which will gradually embrace the entire horizon of the good" (75).

This duty is by no means restricted to what is convenient, limited in scope, or free of cost. The negative commandment against murder is a positive commandment to pursue the neighbor's good as my own, no matter what difficulties this may entail. If this project is to "embrace the entire horizon of the good," it must not set comfortable limits on love of neighbor. Such a project requires a politics of "dreaming" or Christian utopianism, as Pope Francis has suggested. Indeed, its devotion to fraternity extends in principle all the way to martyrdom. At the very least it should include the willingness to relinquish one's own cultural preferences and favorite ideologies—for example, so-called "gun culture"—if that is what will defend the life of the weakest and most defenseless.

John Paul II teaches that God has "entrusted the life of each individual to his or her fellow human beings." This sets up a reciprocal dependency that creates "solidarity" even at the cost of radical self-giving. The measure of this "law of reciprocity" is Jesus himself, on the Cross (76). "It is therefore a service of love which we are all committed to ensure to our neighbor," John Paul II writes, "that his or her life may always be defended and promoted, especially when it is weak or threatened" (77). John Paul II calls Christians to "heroic acts" of "selfless generosity," like donating organs or adopting orphans (86). Surely the banning of certain classes of weapons would be another such act, even if it impedes one's favorite outdoor sport.

Yet another mass shooting struck just in the last month, this time in Highland Park, Illinois, on July 4. Cardinal Blase Cupich, archbishop of Chicago, consoled the community during Mass at Immaculate Conception Church, the seats overflowing with mourners. "Gun violence is a life issue," he preached in his homily. "The right to bear arms does not infringe the right to life." Why do the massacres of innocents keep happening in the United States? What is it about our politics, our economy, and our self-image that makes our gun laws so resistant to change? As *Evangelium vitae* emphasizes several times, the most dangerous evils are those that are called by false names and maintained through self-deception. "In the present social context, marked by a dramatic struggle between the 'culture of life' and the 'culture of death,'" John Paul II urges, "there is need to develop a deep critical sense, capable of discerning true values and authentic needs" (95). If we take a step back from the personal morality of abortion and euthanasia, larger structures of sin can come into view: an economic system of extreme neoliberal capitalism; an ideology of absolute libertarian freedom; and a cultural habit of setting limits on how much we are willing to promote the life of the poor and vulnerable, through social welfare provisions and economic redistribution.

The recent decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* will not end the culture of death in the United States—far from it. New state restrictions on abortion without social provisions for women and children will not reflect a true culture of life in the holistic sense envisioned by John Paul II.

Catholics who advocate for the dignity of all human life still have a lot of work to do. They should be the loudest proponents for gun-control restrictions, for drastic measures to mitigate climate disaster, for expansive health-care and child-care benefits for working families, and for a return to the more progressive kind of tax code that prevailed before the 1980s. They should condemn un-Christian fictions about American exceptionalism or libertarian fantasies that prevent us from defending the lives of innocent children right in front of us. They should be the first to welcome a national "family policy" even if it means higher taxes. As John Paul II writes: "the cultural change which we are calling for demands from everyone the courage to adopt a new life-style…a passing from indifference to concern for others," so that our neighbors are "not rivals from whom we must defend ourselves, but brothers and sisters" (98). These words are a sharp rebuke to the blood-soaked gun culture of the United States.

To date the alliance between the Catholic pro-life movement and Republican politics has indisputably come at a grave cost. Over the past forty years it has taken billions in wealth from the poorest Americans and given them to the rich and powerful. It has exposed the weakest Americans to more precarious employment, health care, and legal status. It has inflicted still unknown and unfolding damage to the credibility of democratic participation itself and to the peaceful transfer of power. If now, instead of these evils, the culture of life were only to cost higher taxes and stronger gun regulations, will Catholics still celebrate it?

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My Mother's Honeymoon

Mary Gordon

I call it my mother's rather than my parents' honeymoon because he'd already had one, though she didn't know it. Perhaps he was afraid to tell her, fearing that, if he was divorced, they couldn't marry in the Church. But he was wrong; he married before his conversion, so he married as an unbaptized Jew. But he thought it best not to mention it. I found out when his stepson contacted me. My father had been dead for twenty years. I never told my mother.

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID SANKEY

Today is their seventy-third anniversary.

October 11, 1947. The war over only two years, but the war has nothing much to do with either of my parents. My father was too old—he was the right age for the First World War, but was deferred, I learn later, because he was the sole support of his mother and sisters. My mother's brothers were in the Navy, but I don't know whether they ever saw combat. If they did, it was never talked about. Their service seemed to make no impress on the family seal.

I am looking at their wedding picture, the only one I have, less than half the size of a traditional snapshot, yellowed, faded. Nothing like what one would expect of a wedding photo. Surrounding my parents are my mother's mother, her sister who is her maid of honor, my father's friend Jack, his best man, and the priest whom my parents loved perhaps as much as they loved one another.

My mother is not in white; she is wearing what I know to be a blue velvet suit, because it hung in the closet, never worn again. This blue suit rather than the white dress is not sad, as it might have been ten years earlier or later. Perhaps the residue of a military fashion, more women than I would have imagined (at least a few of my friends' mothers) married in a suit rather than a white gown.

My mother is holding a modest bouquet. Her arm is linked through my father's. She looks triumphant, ready to take on the world. He looks serene, perhaps a bit too calm. Hard to read his look: it could be many things—proprietary, resigned?

I think they look quite romantic. Because they did have a romance, maybe every couple does, at least at the beginning. He wrote her love poetry "Never in all the annals of recorded time / existed such sweet pretext for a rhyme." She defied her parents' disapproval to marry him. They were convinced that he wouldn't be "a good provider." My mother's father refused to come to the wedding. He disapproved of the marriage because my father was a writer and didn't have a steady job. As my mother got into her car to drive to her wedding, he handed her a card on which he had written, "you will work till the day you die."

Everything about their honeymoon finds its place in the capacious and flexible shape of their romance. As romances go, theirs was not one of the worst, not one of the least interesting, the least distinctive, the least original. Does it matter that it is legible, comprehensible, to almost no one but themselves? And perhaps to me.

The taking on of romance would have been natural to my father, who created a new identity for himself, made up largely of lies. He told everyone that he was an only child, and that he had studied at Harvard, Oxford, and the Sorbonne. In fact, he had two sisters and dropped out of high school in the tenth grade. And there was the never-mentioned first marriage. But my mother's romance was a triumph of will and imagination, since she came from a family that prided itself on being aggressively opposed to anything not of immediate and obvious use.

The country of my parents' romance was located in the territory whose borders were Rome to the East and Hollywood to the West. That is to say, it was nourished and colored by a particular kind of Catholicism and a particular kind of movie. And I mean to say *particular*: If you went outside the strict lines, there was no coherence, and nothing made sense.

The stars of the films my mother treasured were not the doomed tragic heroines: Garbo, Dietrich, or the hard edgy humorless Bette Davis or Joan Crawford. Her ideal: Claudette Colbert in *It Happened One Night*, Irene Dunne (a good Catholic, my mother always said with pride when her name was mentioned) in *The Awful Truth*, Myrna Loy, the perfect consort of *The Thin Man*. The heroes were hard drinking, ironic. They refused to play by the rules. But they were urbane fast talkers rather than fighters, their suits were well cut, their weapons not their fists or guns but their quick wits.

If there were a poet laureate, or a writer in residence, in the country of their romance it would have been G. K. Chesterton. He combined many of the qualities my parents treasured: a deep, traditional Catholicism, a sense of humor, a dislike of pretension, an abhorrence of Puritanism of any stripe. Perhaps most important for my mother: he wrote detective stories, to which she was addicted. These are the kind of sentences they would have liked: "The Catholic Church is like a thick steak, a glass of red wine, and a good cigar." "There is more simplicity in the man who eats caviar on impulse than in the man who eats grape-nuts on principle." "It is the test of a good religion whether you can joke about it." "Drink because you are happy, never because you are miserable." "Tolerance is the virtue of a man without convictions." "The first two things which a healthy boy or girl feels about sex are these: first that it is beautiful and then that it is dangerous." "To complain that I could only be married once was like complaining that I could only be born once." "Romance is the deepest thing in life. It is deeper than reality."

Unlike most of their cohort, what was not romantic for them was any kind of success in the eyes of the world. Like the bohemians whom they would have thought of as their antithesis, if not their enemies, they loathed conventional American optimism.

The genteel British anti-Semitism that keeps me from becoming a Chesterton fan would not have bothered my parents. My father was a self-hating Jew, his hatred stemming from the very qualities Chesterton pilloried. My mother, as she did with anything difficult, would not have allowed herself to notice.

They were serious Catholics, serious in that their Catholicism was absolutely at the center of everything they did and were. They devoted time to enriching, deepening, sustaining, and nourishing their religious life. An important part of their romance was that it was for them a protest against the more popular post-war romance: *the bad days are over, men can go back to work, women can stay in the kitchen, children will be happy and safe in an America which is the best place that has ever existed in the history of the world.* Unlike most of their cohort, what was not romantic for them was any kind of success in the eyes of the world. Like the bohemians whom they would have thought of as their antithesis, if not their enemies, they loathed conventional American optimism. If Chesterton was their hero, Norman Vincent Peale was, if not their nemesis, then the deluded dope who persuaded American boobs that there was power in positive thinking. Outsiders in post-war America, they had an appetite for the mystical, the transcendent, the miraculous.

Only recently I've realized that my parents were both part of a movement. the Catholic Revival, which began in the twenties and lasted through the mid-fifties. The Australian-born Frank Sheed and his English wife Maisie Ward were important forces. They aimed to publish in America the best of sophisticated Catholic thought (largely French). The goal was to wean Catholics from simpleminded piety in exchange for a deep exploration of Catholic tradition. Alongside Chesterton and Belloc, there was also a cohort of English women converts: Alice Meynell, Enid Dinnis, and Sheila Kaye-Smith, whose work blended an uncritical and sentimental appetite for a pre-Reformation past with a determination to weave the mystical and traditionally pious into a modern scenario.

I'm happy to think of my parents as part of something. It makes them seem less raggedy, less marginal, less odd, and less alone.

They were introduced by a priest, their first encounter at a convent called Mary Reparatrix on 29th Street in Manhattan.

My mother was there because she was making a retreat, which she did often: a central part not only of her religious life, but also of those lives within her circle of friends. It amuses me that the word "retreat," whose source was religious, has been repurposed by the corporate world. What it meant to people like my mother was a "retreat" from ordinary life, days or a week spent in a convent or monastery, silence punctuated only by prayer and conferences with a spiritual director, at that time always a priest.

These retreats were a great gift to women: married women, who could be freed from domestic responsibility for small slivers of time; and single women, who were given a place of honor where their unmated status was of no import, not even (for once) worth mentioning. The audience for these retreats was surprisingly wide. It included non-Catholics. The internet provides me with a 1952 article from *Glamour* in which a model who is interviewed insists that retreats are good for the complexion.

It was only by chance that my mother began making retreats. She had attended a business school in Manhattan and her best friend there, a woman named Kathleen Hogan, lived in Jamaica Estates (home, much later, to Donald Trump). Kathleen's parish was unusual in that it was not just a church, but also a monastery, run by an order who specialized in retreats. They were called the Passionists. I have to tell most of my friends not to laugh—*not Passionate, dear, Passionists, devoted to the Passion of Christ. His suffering and death*. The center of both my parents' religious imagination was most importantly a death: it included nothing that was not contained in Jesus' seven last words, words of anguish, abandonment, consolation, protection, resignation to the unquestionably greater power of the Father. The rest was soft food for those who had not yet cut their teeth.

At this monastery (called Immaculate Conception, whose feast my mother insisted upon for my cesarean birth), she met the priest who became

something of an obsession for her—the priest who would marry my parents and accompany them on their honeymoon.

The day he met my mother, my father was at the convent not for a retreat, but to meet another priest, who was the retreat master. He had written the priest a letter in response to an article the priest had written. My father had accused him of being too liberal.

On a whim, I google Mary Reparatrix, and find, remarkably, more than a few entries. I quickly understand that everything about the order would have been up my parents' alley. Because it had the unmistakable tincture of glamor. Even the nuns' habits were glamorous: sky blue as opposed to the utilitarian black, white, or navy of most nuns. The order's foundress, Émilie d'Oultremont, was a nineteenth-century daughter of the nobility. Her father was the Belgian Ambassador to the Holy See. (An inside joke: What did the Holy See see?) She had wanted to become a nun, but agreed to an arranged marriage, which turned out to be very happy, although she was left a young widow with four children. She then decided to follow her early calling to become a nun, which had remained with her through her marriage. Wikipedia tells me that "she had a mystical vision while at a ball."

In a later vision, the Virgin Mary told her she must found an order of contemplative nuns. Mother Émilie called the order Mary Reparatrix, the idea being that the nuns' prayers would make reparation for the sins of the world. They would take their place alongside the Virgin Mary, whose job it was to repair: Mary Reparatrix. One of the order's missions is to be involved in what is called Perpetual Adoration—that is to say, an attention to, an accompaniment of, the Host, the body and blood of Christ, bread not only symbolically but literally transubstantiated: a change in substance. The bread is no longer bread, or—and this is where it gets complicated—yes, of course it is still bread, but equally and more importantly it is now the Body of Christ. This is an idea people have killed and died for. The Host is placed in what is called a monstrance (from the Latin *monstrare*, "to show"): a gold sunburst on a pedestal, with a window in the center, where the Host is placed for maximum visibility. In joining this order of Mary Reparatrix, you are pledged to be part of Perpetual Adoration. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, two nuns (not just one—were they afraid of loneliness?…of falling asleep unnoticed?) must be kneeling in front of the monstrance.

Adoring. Perpetually. Who would not find this desirable? A life of perpetual adoration. How paltry other goals, other callings. How paltry other ideals: happiness, duty, success.

Perpetual Adoration. No suggestion of the adorer being adored.

How did it happen? What was the road from the meeting in the convent to the wedding Mass, to the marriage bed? Did he invite her for a drink? For lunch? For dinner? And then what? I will never know. I don't even know how long they knew each other before they decided to get married. When did they decide they were more than friends?

Someone who knew them said that she saw them kissing passionately, publicly. Right on the subway. On the way from the convent? Or to it? From where? To where? The dead are mute, determined to withhold their gossip.

The convent was razed in 1984, at which point my father had been dead for twenty-seven years and my mother had disappeared into alcohol-induced dementia.

And now the part of the romance whose source was Hollywood enters the story. The part where the romance takes on a comic tone (think screwball comedies), becoming, in the end, nothing but a joke. Whatever else they didn't share, they both had excellent senses of humor that enabled them to tell the story of their honeymoon (which they enjoyed doing) as an extended joke. The first part of the joke is that they set off on their honeymoon in the company of the priest who had just married them.

The priest was very handsome, with a John Barrymore dash, but without a hint of melodrama. He embodied, not only for my parents, but also for the circle of women who surrounded him, a particular kind of masculinity they yearned for. He was raised on a hardscrabble farm, the middle of seven brothers, in an unlovely part of New York state that abuts Pennsylvania. He was adept at all kinds of heavy manual labor: digging and carrying, climbing ladders, hammering boards. An odd detail: my mother had among her photographs a picture of him and his six brothers, probably between four and twelve years old, standing naked, their heads shaved. He must have given it to her, but I cannot for the life of me imagine why. He was my father's closest friend, his confessor, his spiritual director,

He was erratic and distractible, which she put down to his being an intellectual—and intellectuals were in no position to have pride of place when it came to driving cars.

the brother he never had. My mother was in love with him and he was in love with my father. After my father's death, she wrote to him for solace in her grief, and he replied, remarkably, "Do not speak to me of grief. You at least have a child of his loins. I have nothing."

My parents' wedding took place in Buffalo because the beloved priest was stationed there, and, the marriage being something of an embarrassment, the distance from the family home was a relief. The priest drove with them from Buffalo to Toledo. I like to think that they drove furiously to get to the Palmer House in Chicago, where the reservation was made, for the first time in the name of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon.

The story goes that my father was driving and this was unusual, because her car was a vital possession for my mother. It enabled her to be a peer of the other mobile ones, as she never was when walking. She had been stricken with polio at the age of three and could only walk a block or two.

It was a 1946 black Oldsmobile and the way she got it says a lot about her, her intelligence, her determination, her sense of the weight of her misfortune and its power to get her some things she was due because of it. One of her legs had no strength, and so she could only drive the kind of car that was then called a "hydromatic," which didn't require, as did a manual shift, the ability to use both feet at once. But after the war, there was a shortage of hydromatics, because preference was given to wounded veterans. My mother had a hard time getting the new car she needed. She wrote to the head of General Motors, explaining her situation. He arranged for her to get the black Oldsmobile she'd asked for.

When I think about that letter, I remember that I often fail to give my mother credit for some of the good things about me, preferring to assign them all to my father. In my narrative, he is the writer in whose steps I followed. But maybe I was following her too.

The black Oldsmobile was the source of another joke my parents shared, and I'm not sure it was a kind one. My father would say: "This is my wife's spiritual life. She prays for a black Oldsmobile and gets it." The tone could be admiring or contemptuous, perhaps it started as the first and changed into the second, or perhaps the tone changed depending on his mood or their immediate situation.

My mother was a very good driver, neither timid nor bold, but certain and never intimidated. She was excellent at parking. So much would have been lost for her if anything had happened to the car, even for a day, so I understand why she was generally reluctant for my father to drive it; she knew she was a much better driver. He was erratic and distractible, which she put down to his being an intellectual—and intellectuals were in no position to have pride of place when it came to driving cars. So, it must have been a kind of honeymoon miasma that led her to allow my father to drive the car, a move she regretted and would not repeat. Was her allowing him to drive the car a kind of pre- then post-coital swoon? The wife, no longer virginal, with a sense of an unpayable debt.

They spent their wedding night in the elegant Palmer House. On one Chicago trip many years later, I made it a point to spend the night there.

As I approach the hotel, I'm disappointed. The stores and restaurants in its immediate vicinity are not elegant: Chipotle, H&M, Wells Fargo, but once inside, I am enormously pleased at how pleased I can allow myself to be. It is a dream of an age of plenty, of excess, of ornament immensely easy on the eye: medallioned ceilings in blue, green, and pink, Tiffany chandeliers. I climb the grand, gold staircase, which my mother could never have done, but I'm sure she stood at the bottom and took it in. My own room, though perfectly serviceable, is nothing special. Certainly it could never be called elegant, and I want to believe that my parents had something more luxurious.

But I discover that the hotel has its own romance, that it was a wedding gift from Potter Palmer, one of the millionaires responsible for developing Chicago's Miracle Mile. His wife Bertha was twenty-three years younger, also wealthy, cultivated, devoted to all things French, and a friend, the story goes, of Monet. But like many romances, the hotel's is touched by darkness. Only days after its opening, it was destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire. But there is a happy end-

ing, made happier by the refusal to be defeated by the destructive power of the world. Palmer got a $1.7 million loan, reportedly with nothing more required than his signature. He rebuilt the hotel and gave Bertha carte blanche as to its decoration. Her eye was formed by the Impressionists she had befriended, but there was a place for many forms of extravagant display: a touch of Venetian splendor in the Tiepolo-like ceilings, and a willingness to make use of what was being made in America, like the Tiffany chandeliers. From the thirties through the fifties, all the greats—Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, Judy Garland, Louis Armstrong, Harry Belafonte—performed in the Empire Room, the hotel's supper club.

Supper club. The word shimmers for me with the kind of glamor my parents found the most desirable. I like thinking of them drinking cocktails in the Empire Room, listening to whoever was singing there in the fall of 1947. Or was that outside their budget? They never mentioned seeing anyone famous, and it was something that would have been part of the story.

The hotel website says that the Palmer House is the American hotel with the longest history of continuous operation. But the last entry says that the hotel is now in foreclosure.

Another romance brought to a close by insufficient funds. I mourn the loss of a way of life that fueled my parents' dreams.

Before I leave them (because to follow them to their bridal bed would be a horrible invasion), I want to speculate on what would have been called the trousseau.

I hope she had a trousseau, also known as a hope chest. What was she hoping for, and what did her suitcase contain? A lovely nightgown? What color? White, to make a point of her virginity, or black, casting her lot in the camp of allure? And what else might there have been? A wrap or kimono for the morning after? One of each, or many?

It worries me to think of what my father made of my mother's body the first time he encountered it as a lover. Because her body was not lovely in any sense that would be truthful and not wishful thinking. Her polio had left one leg six inches shorter than the other, half its width, and with a pitiful child-sized foot. And my father was a man of experience; not only had he been married to a woman whose photograph I once saw, a Zelda Fitzgerald–type flapper, pert, petite, well-made, but he also published a girlie magazine, the softest of soft porn, called *Hot Dog*. And someone who knew him in the twenties, when he was briefly prosperous on the earnings of *Hot Dog*, said he was one of what were known as the Cleveland playboys. But my mother was not without her physical allures. So perhaps these were enough: her matte white skin, dramatic against her jet-black hair, the large green eyes that could be dreamy, wrathful, mischievous or mocking, and what was known as "a million-dollar smile."

And maybe he never saw my mother's body unclothed, because she was shocked to discover late in life that married people had sex naked. Only savages, she believed, would separate love making from lingerie. I believe that things went well, as my mother would have said, "in that department." She was not a Puritan, and had only good things to say about sex in the context of marriage. Of course, outside marriage it was a sin, pitiable, easily forgiven, unlike the really bad sins such as blasphemy or communism. I remember her saying to me once, "You can work out a lot of things in bed."

At this point in my mother's telling of the story of her honeymoon, the comic takes over, although perhaps it was always folded in because my father arranged for their first evening out to be in a nightclub where Henny Youngman ("Take my wife—please") was performing. Everything goes wrong because my mother let my father drive. First, he forgot where he parked the car and they had to enlist the police to find it. Then, he backed the car into a police paddy wagon (The same police? Did they think it was a joke? That he was a joke? That they both were?). And then he came down with whooping cough.

And the honeymoon was over, along with most of their romance. Not all of it: the part that had its roots in Catholicism kept the rickety craft afloat. But the Hollywood part was finished. My mother didn't get to be the wisecracking heroine because you needed money for that. Nothing dissolves romance like money or, rather, the lack of it. And that would be the theme of their marriage, the basso continuo of my childhood: fights about money and my father's failure to get what we always called a "good job."

But on the long trip home—she driving, he the afflicted passenger—I think she still believed that they would prosper.

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Jacques Maritain shaking hands with Monseigneur Roques, Paris, France

‘Natural Enemies’ No More

John T. McGreevy

How Rome finally embraced democracy

Should Catholics promote democracy? The answer did not seem obvious in 1941. Exiled to New York City as the *Wehrmacht* occupied France, philosopher Jacques Maritain, the most important Catholic intellectual of the mid-twentieth century, asked his friend, Yves Simon, also exiled from France and teaching at the University of Notre Dame, for a favor. Could he run to the library and confirm that Thomas Aquinas understood “that consent of the people is required for the legitimacy of the state”?

1946 KEYSTONE-FRANCE/GAMMA-RAPHO VIA GETTY IMAGES

Simon supplied the citation. Bitterly. Both Simon and Maritain knew that many Catholics during the 1930s had admired Austria's Engelbert Dolfuss who had dissolved that country's Parliament in an effort to build a "Catholic" state. Other Catholics lauded Portugal's dictator, Antonio Salazar, a former church youth leader who declared the obsolescence of political parties based on "the individual, the citizen or the elector." In France itself, after the German occupation of the country in 1940, many Catholics had rallied to the banner of the authoritarian Vichy government.

To talk of Catholic democracy in this context seemed to Simon "only trash." The antagonism of Catholics to democracy "is the problem that we are asked to overcome."

Our own democratic crisis is prompting a scholarly outpouring. Investigators devote special attention to times and places where democracies reverted to dictatorships, such as Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. Harvard political scientists Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, authors of the superb *How Democracies Die,* confirm the diagnosis made sixty years ago by Maritain and Simon. They observe how a hierarchical Catholicism often stood aloof from a democratic politics of compromise, negotiation, and unpredictable outcomes. Some Catholic leaders—as in Belgium—resisted authoritarianism and expelled fascists from Catholic political parties. Other Catholics—as in Austria and Portugal—welcomed dictatorial (but "Catholic") regimes.

A longer chronological view complicates this story. Many Catholics in the early nineteenth century, especially in Spain and Latin America, urged republican governments. After helping draft the first constitution in Spain's history in 1812, some Spanish priests and bishops required it to be read out loud in Spain's churches. Their peers in Mexico City did the same with the first Mexican constitution when Mexico gained independence in 1824. When Alexis de Tocqueville shot to fame with the 1835 publication of the first volume of *Democracy in America*, he identified Catholics as the "most republican and democratic class in the United States." The equality of all believers within Catholicism, Tocqueville thought, predisposed Catholics to favor democratic government. He rejected the claim made by some radicals during the French revolution that the "Catholic religion [was] the natural enemy of democracy."

Some of the same Catholics, all educated male lay elites, favored representation within the Church, not just the state. They desired a say in the appointment of bishops—a process then largely controlled by governments, not the Vatican—and even in the appointment of parish priests. In Canada, the leading *patriote* of the era and a founding figure of Canadian nationalism, Louis-Joseph Papineau, demanded the placement of "notables" on parish councils so as to avoid "taxation without representation." Priests or bishops spending funds without accountability appalled him. "Can anything," he asked, "be more anti-national or anti-patriotic?"

In the mid-nineteenth century this nascent alliance between Catholicism and democracy unraveled. Pius IX, whose reign lasted from 1846 to 1878, retreated into a defensive stance after the revolutions of 1848. The need to defend the Church against liberal governments willing to expel priests and nuns or seize Church property seemed more pressing. Authority and justice became the Catholic keywords, not representation or voice. The job of laypeople became to obey priests, priests to obey bishops, and everyone to obey a pope defined as potentially infallible at the First Vatican Council in 1870.

Catholics in much of Europe and South America did form confessional political parties in the late nineteenth century. So famous was the German Center party (or Zentrum) and its leader Ludwig Windthorst, that German Catholic migrants named towns on the Saskatchewan prairie and in the Texas hill country after their hero. In Anglophone countries, especially, Catholics thrived in both local and national politics. One child of Irish Catholic migrants, Al Smith, ran for president as the first Catholic nominee of the Democratic Party in the United States in 1928. Another child of Irish Catholic migrants, James Scullin, was elected prime minister of Australia in 1929.

But Catholic theory lagged Catholic practice. When challenged on Church teaching supporting the unity of church and state, Al Smith famously responded, "What the hell is an encyclical?" A dominant pattern after World War I was for Catholic intellectuals and politicians to express doubts about democracy's future during a swirl of assassinations, chaotic parliamentary debates, and rotating chief executives. Of the twenty-eight European parliamentary democracies in 1920, thirteen had become authoritarian governments by 1938. Democracies weakened or collapsed in South America's largest countries, including Brazil and Argentina.

A hierarchical Catholicism often stood aloof from a democratic politics of compromise, negotiation, and unpredictable outcomes.

Democracy was the dog that did not bark in Catholic social thought. In 1922, Pius XI offered a condescending appraisal of "modern democratic states" that were "most exposed to the danger of being overthrown by one faction or another." Vatican officials withdrew their support from Italy's Catholic democratic party, the Partito Popolare Italiano, in the mid-1920s and decided to negotiate instead with Benito Mussolini. (The leader of the Partito Popolare, Fr. Luigi Sturzo, fled to London and then New York just ahead of Mussolini's security forces.) Munich's Cardinal Michael Faulhaber vigorously opposed the early Nazi movement, but Faulhaber viewed democratic politics with almost equal disdain. Dismayed by the absence of any recognition of God in the 1919 Weimar Constitution, Faulhaber advocated for monarchy over republican institutions in a famous debate with Zentrum leader Konrad Adenauer, then the young mayor of Cologne. Both men left the podium "with bright red faces."

This was the world Jacques Maritain sought to change. He was an unlikely reformer. In the first years of his philosophical career he saw little merit in democratic government. "The more I think about it," he wrote to a friend in 1914, "the more I am persuaded that we must have a political doctrine and that this doctrine can only be anti-revolutionary, anti-republican, anti-constitutional, and therefore monarchist."

In the late 1920s Maritain shifted gears. He published an essay arguing that Thomas Aquinas had favored democracy as a form of government, challenging his onetime mentor, the Dominican priest Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange, the world's most prominent neo-Thomist philosopher and a top papal advisor. Garrigou-LaGrange thought only "incompetents" ran for office in democracies. In 1940 Garrigou-LaGrange would support Vichy.

In his 1936 masterpiece, *Integral Humanism*, Maritain outlined his Catholic and democratic vision. The flourishing of the human "person" required respect for her embeddedness in communities such as the family, professions, and churches. Catholics should not translate theological categories directly into politics and should instead welcome pluralism. Democratic governments with universal suffrage followed from this distinction between religious and political authority.

Maritain promoted his version of democratic personalism through ceaseless writing and traveling. In Italy—where many Catholic intellectuals supported Mussolini into the late 1930s—Maritain's ideas thrilled a cadre of young activists disenchanted with Il Duce, including Fr. Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Paul VI, whose father had been active in the Partito Popolare. (Montini wrote an introduction for the Italian translation of *Integral Humanism*.) Maritain also sailed to South America. In Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, his lectures attracted the country's leading intellectuals. He persuaded the director of Brazil's most influential Catholic think tank to identify himself as an "open Catholic, democratic and reformist."

Exile in the United States deepened Maritain's democratic convictions. In 1941 he defended democracy as a system of government superior to any alternative. "It is necessary to show," he told Yves Simon, that "St. Thomas was a democrat, in this sense…the Gospel works in history in a democratic direction." In 1942 Maritain coordinated the drafting of a manifesto, "In the Face of the World's Crisis," signed by forty-three European Catholic scholars "sojourning in America," published first in *Commonweal* and then translated into multiple languages. (Some copies were smuggled into Nazi-occupied Europe.) It insisted that democracy was the "issue at stake in the struggle."

Pius XII himself may have drawn on Maritain's writings. In his 1944 Christmas address, after several caveats, the pope announced that "the democratic form of government" now appeared "to many as a postulate of nature imposed by reason itself." One of Maritain's friends, a Swiss theologian, archly noted "numerous coincidences" between the papal address and Maritain's prose.

Maritain's ideas helped underwrite one of the key achievements of twentieth-century political history: Christian Democratic parties. After almost a century of doubting the efficacy of democracy, at least in Europe and Latin America, Catholics became its guarantors. For all or part of the period between 1945 and 1980, Christian Democratic parties held power in Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Brazil, Chile, Venezuela, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. Even parties not formally identified as Christian Democratic—such as the Mouvement Républicain Populaire in France, the Democratic Party in Uganda, the Indische Katholieke Paritij in Indonesia or the Fianna Fáil in Ireland—adopted similar language as they pushed for family allowances, supported trade unions, and urged Catholics to participate in democratic governance.

Not only Catholics belonged to Christian Democratic parties, and they were never controlled by the institutional Church. Maritain himself never deigned to participate in a political party. But the lineage is direct. In Italy, partisans fighting during World War II read Maritain in off moments, amazingly.

By 1960, observers could compile a long list of Catholic presidents and prime ministers influenced by Maritain and the broader Christian Democratic movement. It included Konrad Adenauer (West Germany) and Alcide De Gasparri (Italy), leaders of Europe's most prominent Christian Democratic parties. It included Robert Schuman (France) who also served as head of the European Parliamentary Commission and Charles de Gaulle (France) who corresponded with Maritain while mobilizing Free French forces in London during the war. It included Léopold Senghor (Sene-

gal), raised in the French empire and Benedicto Kiwanuka (Uganda) raised in the British empire. It included Ngô Đình Diệm (South Vietnam), although Diệm's commitment to democracy was at best partial. By 1970 the list included Eduardo Frei (Chile), Rafael Caldera (Venezuela), and Pierre Trudeau (Canada). It did not include John Kennedy (United States), whose intellectual formation was innocent of Catholic social thought, but it did include his brother-in-law, Sargent Shriver, the first director of the Peace Corps and the War on Poverty and Minnesota senator Eugene McCarthy. It even included Joseph R. Biden, Sr., father of a future U.S. president.

Maritain found vindication at the Second Vatican Council, in part because his old friend, Paul VI, guided the discussion of the final conciliar document, *Gaudium et spes* (1965). The document sketched the importance of "all citizens" taking an active part in "public affairs."

This commitment to democracy was not abstract. Jonathan Earle and J. J. Carney have recently told the story of Benedicto Kiwanuka, the longtime head of the Democratic (and deeply Catholic) Party in Uganda. Kiwanuka studied law in London in the 1950s and came to see himself and his party as embarked on a project paralleling the Christian Democratic Union in West Germany or the Catholic party in the Netherlands. After Ugandan independence Kiwanuka was elected chief minister in 1961 and then prime minister in 1962. He welcomed the work of the Second Vatican Council. When the suspension of Parliament in 1966 plunged Uganda into strong-man rule, he protested. "A country's Constitution," he wrote, should not be "thrown away by a single person as easily as throwing a dirty handkerchief in a bedroom basket."

Idi Amin's leadership, beginning in 1971, propelled Uganda into disarray. Kiwanuka had cautiously accepted Amin's offer of an appointment as chief justice. (The two men and their families shared one Christmas dinner). Catholics were never a particular target of Amin's wrath, but independent sources of power were, and Amin soon embarked on a campaign against foreign influence in Uganda that extended to Catholics as pawns of a global Church. He expelled fifty-five priests from the country and arranged for the kidnapping and murder of Kiwanuka as he left morning Mass. (Amin may have pulled the trigger himself.) Amin later ordered the assassination of the priest-editor of the country's leading Catholic newspaper, in part for his investigation into Kiwanuka's death.

Outcomes in East and Southeast Asia were happier. Seoul's Cardinal Stephen Kim, appointed by Paul VI in 1968, became the titular leader of the resistance movement to the authoritarian government. Kim had grown up in a poor family, entered the seminary and then spent several years in Münster, Germany, obtaining a sociology degree and ministering to migrant Korean miners and nurses and their families. He expressed passionate support for the Second Vatican Council and saw it as his mission to cultivate the public engagement championed in *Gaudium et spes*. He regretted that the Church in South Korea had for so long been focused on "its own good while neglecting other affairs in the world." Myeongdong Cathedral in Seoul became a sanctuary for the pro-democracy movement in the 1980s and thousands of citizens and students camped inside and outside the cathedral. Kim informed government leaders that police attempting to arrest protestors would have to "trample on me first, priests secondly, and then sisters."

In the Philippines, the 1983 murder by security forces of Filipino senator Benigno Aquino, the leader of the opposition to Ferdinand Marcos, prompted Catholic leaders, notably Cardinal Jaime Sin, to turn to electoral politics. (The Manila archdiocese controlled the one radio station able to evade government censorship.) Sin openly supported the presidential candidacy of Corazon Aquino, the devout wife of the murdered opposition leader. Marcos's attempt to steal the 1986 election prompted Sin to mobilize crowds of up to two million people in a "people power" revolution that eventually overthrew the government, with pro-democracy Catholics such as Corazon Aquino at the center of the resistance. "If we did nothing," the bishops wrote, "we would be party to our own destruction as a people."

The most thrilling events occurred in Poland. Six months after his election in 1978, Pope John Paul II returned to his native country. The crowds packing every event—25 percent of the Polish population attended a papal Mass in person during his visit—signaled not only a disenchantment with the Communist regime but the role of Catholicism in articulating demands for democratic governance. This "most fantastic pilgrimage in the history of contemporary Europe," in the words of the secular activist, Adam Michnik, became a tutorial on nonviolent resistance to the Communist state.

John Paul II did not cause the formation of an independent trade union, Solidarity, a year later.

Maritain's ideas helped underwrite one of the key achievements of twentieth-century political history: Christian Democratic parties. After almost a century of doubting the efficacy of democracy, at least in Europe and Latin America, Catholics became its guarantors.

But the "awakened consciences" of Polish workers, in the words of a contemporary analyst, stemmed in part from the papal visit. Within a year, the Solidarity movement mobilized a stunning ten million workers. At shipyards in the port city of Gdańsk, the epicenter of the movement, workers celebrated daily Mass around an altar inside Gate #2. On the gate they pinned a large color photograph of John Paul II. Polish bishops sent out communiques invoking *Gaudium et spes* and the "right of workers to free association in unions which genuinely represent them."

The collapse of communist rule in Poland and Eastern Europe rested more on Mikhail Gorbachev's unwillingness to send tanks to Warsaw, Prague, and East Berlin than on efforts by Polish activists or John Paul II. Still, the Catholic role was vital. As the Polish economy crumbled in the late 1980s, desperate communist leaders permitted free elections and the political party formed out of Solidarity registered stunning triumphs. (The party did best in regions where Mass attendance was the highest.) In September 1989, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, friendly with John Paul II since the 1950s, a close observer of the Second Vatican Council and a founder of Solidarity, became the first non-Communist prime minister of Poland since before World War II.

In the 1950s intellectuals had questioned the capacity of Catholics to sustain democracies. By the 1980s scholars marveled at Catholicism's role in fostering them.

These late–twentieth century triumphs—Catholics demanding democratic governments and even, as with Benedicto Kiwanuka, becoming martyrs for that cause—now seem as if from another world. Isolated, inspiring figures, such as Sr. Ann Rose Nu Twang, photographed eighteenth months ago standing in front of tanks in Myanmar to block the arrest of pro-democracy protesters, or Hong Kong's Martin Lee, a leading critic of that city's repressive government, cannot obscure a wider malaise.

In Europe and South America, Christian Democratic parties have gone into eclipse. In the heavily Catholic Philippines, President Rodrigo Duterte ran roughshod over the constitution during his term in office. In Europe and North America some Catholic intellectuals speak admiringly of Hungary's Victor Orbán and his so-called "illiberal democracy."

In the United States, the most significant democratic crisis since the nineteenth century envelops the country. A few Catholic voices such as Chicago's Cardinal Blase Cupich have addressed the issue. But the overall response has been muted.

Why? Too many Catholics have forgotten what Maritain taught them. In the 1970s, skepticism about "bourgeois democracy" came from the left. Latin American liberation theologians, especially, chided Maritain and leaders of Christian Democratic parties for supporting "naïve reformism."

Now a far greater threat comes from the populist right. Many Catholics embrace the Republican Party because of its position on abortion, even as the party's candidates routinely deny the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election. One avowedly Catholic representative from Arizona, Paul Gosar, peddles the false narrative of election fraud at every opportunity. A recent Catholic convert and current Ohio senatorial candidate, J. D. Vance, called presidential candidate Donald Trump "reprehensible" in 2016. Now he professes his admiration.

Some of the same figures trampling on democratic norms in the public arena oppose the efforts of Pope Francis to reconsider representation within the Church. One of Francis's ecclesial antagonists, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, the onetime Vatican nuncio to the United States, called on Francis to resign and has released a series of unhinged letters and videos supporting former President Trump. Viganò feverishly connected a "deep state" with a "deep church." He recently praised anti-vaccination Canadian truckers. He justifies Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

Francis has made synods central to his papacy, picking up a thread left dangling by Paul VI. A synod is not a legislative assembly. Its participants are not elected and do not pass laws. But they exist as a mechanism for allowing a more diverse set of voices to participate in Church governance.

In the early nineteenth century, Catholic reformers drafting some of the world's first constitutions transferred ideas about representation and voice from the political to the religious sphere. They wondered how laypeople might be represented within a Church led by ordained clergy. Derailed in the nineteenth century, that movement was resuscitated at the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s and is now again taking center stage. National synods are underway in Germany and Australia, and the Germans in particular build on a long tradition of clergy, nuns, lay leaders, and bishops gathering for discussion. A massive synod is planned for Rome in 2023.

Francis believes that contemporary Catholics can develop new ways to discuss the problems and opportunities that confront them. Unlike some of his co-religionists in the United States, he has also been vocal in his support for democracy and democratic procedures. Perhaps the direction of the early nineteenth century can be reversed. Could the synodal experience in the Church lead to political spin-offs? In 1941, Jacques Maritain considered writing an updated version of *The Federalist Papers*, applicable to the "entire world." We could use such a document now, as Catholics ponder how to repair fractures within both Church and nation.

JOHN T. MCGREEVY *is the Charles and Jill Fischer Provost at the University of Notre Dame. This essay uses material from his* Catholicism: A Global History from the French Revolution to Pope Francis, *to be published in September by W. W. Norton.*

SUPERPOSITION OF GRIEF

John Moessner

Your father is stuck in the past, an oxbow lake
left behind in the curve of time's waste. Your grief
is anchored to his death, a line of memories unspooling
behind you as you drift forward in the river's searching.

Like water tipped from a cup carried to bed, or the splash
on the bathroom tile from a too-full tub, it is hard to gather
your sadness without spilling more of it, a measure
of a body bound only by the negative space it brims.

Each day is a new attempt to survey grief's coursing,
each food-triggered memory, each line of music heard
in his nobody's-watching voice. And it's impossible to tell
which life supplies your sorrow, his rigored past, or his future,

evaporated. You're living every day in new depths,
each waking a plumb line fed into the dark body
surrounding you. But to see how deep the river really runs,
you will need to be something other than the river.

JOHN MOESSNER's *debut poetry collection,* Harmonia, *will be published by Stephen F. Austin State University Press in April 2023. He received his MFA from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. You can find his work in* North American Review, Poet Lore, *and* Tar River Poetry. *He works as a legal writer at an immigration law firm.*

Can Sanctions Help Save Ukraine?

David Cortright

The 'economic weapon' doesn't always have the intended effect.

Sanctions are one of the most frequently used tools of U.S. foreign policy and are serving now, along with military and economic aid for Ukraine, as the principal means of countering Putin's war of aggression. The international sanctions against Russia are the toughest and most extensive ever imposed on that nation. More than thirty countries, representing more than half of the world's economy, are joining in an unprecedented multilateral attempt to lock down the world's eleventh-largest economy. The sanctions have barred Russian access to the global financial system and frozen the foreign assets of its state bank and of hundreds of Russian oligarchs and senior officials. Global export controls are blocking Russian access to high-tech components and semiconductor products that are essential for economic growth and advanced weaponry. The United States and its European partners are embargoing Russian coal and oil and reducing imports of natural gas, jeopardizing the Kremlin's main source of state revenues. Hundreds of private companies have shuttered their operations and left the country, accelerating an exodus of Russian tech workers and further depleting the economy.

A protester in London, March 2022

VUK VALCIC/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The sanctions are imposing serious costs in Russia and may be constraining the military's ability to repair and replace damaged equipment. Still, whether sanctions can be successful in ending the war and reversing Russian aggression remains uncertain. What can we realistically expect from the use of sanctions against Russia? What are the moral and political implications of using this tool? Past examples may help us answer these questions.

The use of international sanctions in foreign policy dates back more than a century to World War I and the League of Nations. The modern era of sanctions and their emergence as a common instrument of international policy began in 1990 as the United Nations Security Council, freed from the constraints of the Cold War, reacted to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait by imposing an oil embargo and comprehensive trade sanctions against Iraq. This was followed by the use of Security Council sanctions in Yugoslavia, Liberia, Libya, and other countries to achieve various purposes: ending civil wars, countering terrorism, and preventing nuclear proliferation. My colleague George A. Lopez and I wrote about this period in our book *The Sanctions Decade*. Since then the United Nations has entered a seemingly permanent sanctions era. As of this writing, the Security Council has more than a dozen sanctions in place.

The United Nations has entered a seemingly permanent sanctions era.

Over the past two decades the United States has also greatly increased its use of economic sanctions: it now has more than 9,400 measures in place against individuals and entities in dozens of countries. The European Union has also become a major sanctions actor and is applying "restrictive measures" in many countries as part of its common security and foreign policy. The African Union has also attempted to use sanctions against states on the continent to uphold international norms and prevent military coups.

Despite their widespread use, however, sanctions often fail to achieve their intended purposes and are hampered by weak implementation, poor design, and a lack of international cooperation. They tend to stimulate corruption and the growth of illegal economies. They often inadvertently impede the work of humanitarian agencies and independent civil-society groups. In some cases, sanctions also cause severe hardship for vulnerable populations. They may be a form of collective punishment against ordinary people who have no say in decisions that violate international norms. Sanctions can generate a rally-round-the-flag effect that increases nationalist sentiment in affected countries. In Russia, Putin gained in popularity after sanctions were imposed, as the Kremlin blamed the United States and NATO for the hardships people were experiencing.

Nicholas Mulder's important new book *The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War* has arrived at an opportune moment, just as the West is urgently reassessing the effectiveness of sanctions. A historian of twentieth-century Europe and international relations, Mulder offers a richly documented and illuminating analysis of how sanctions emerged during negotiations at the end of World War I as a primary tool for attempting to prevent another military conflict. During the war, sanctions had been used as part of the Entente strategy of military attrition and economic blockade to defeat the Central Powers. The leaders who gathered at Versailles sought to transform this weapon of war into an instrument of peace, although tension between the two missions persisted through the interwar years. That duality continued into the modern era and is evident today, as sanctions against Russia are being used in combination with active support for Ukrainian armed defense.

At Versailles President Woodrow Wilson was the principal advocate of using sanctions to enforce international security. He considered sanctions a force more powerful than war, "a silent, deadly remedy" that would impose "absolute isolation" to bring "a nation to its senses." The Versailles agreement gave legal recognition to sanctions as an instrument of collective security in the newly formed League of Nations. Article 16 of the League's Covenant stipulated that, if any nation initiated a war against another nation, all member states would "undertake immediately to subject it to the severance of all trade or financial relations [and] the prohibition of all intercourse between their nationals and the nationals of the covenant-breaking State."

During the 1920s the League used sanctions successfully to prevent local disputes in the Balkans from escalating into wider war. Diplomats used the threat of sanctions to convince Yugoslavia to settle its dispute with Albania in 1921, and again in 1925 to prevent war between Greece and Bulgaria. These and other cases illustrated the power of the threat of sanctions, defined by Mulder as "deterrence through the threat of use." For a time it seemed that the League could use sanctions as a viable instrument for peace. When Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, however, no measures were imposed. When sanctions were imposed against Italy in 1935 for its invasion of Ethiopia, the major powers refused to include an oil embargo—the one measure that might have stopped Italy's army in its tracks, as Mussolini later admitted. The League did nothing to stop the Nazis and became increasingly irrelevant and powerless to prevent aggression and the growing menace of another world war.

Mulder agrees with most scholars that Western leaders should have taken stronger measures against the fascist powers. He cites the "duplicity of imperialist motives" in 1935, as Britain and France refrained from tougher sanctions against Mussolini while their foreign secretaries secretly agreed to divide up Ethiopian territory and cede most of it to Italy. He recounts the League's inaction in Manchuria and the British-French "surrender" of Czechoslovakia to Germany.

Mulder departs from the usual analysis, however, with his controversial thesis that sanctions during the 1930s accelerated the political and economic disintegration that led to World War II. He contends that sanctions aggravated international tensions and accelerated Hitler's aggressive expansionism. The Nazis were motivated by a fear of sanctions, he contends, which spurred their aggressive drive for control over external territories to gain access to oil and natural resources. This phobia of sanctions prompted a policy of *Blockadefestigkeit*, "blockade resilience," as Germany sought to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Vladimir Putin has had a similar motive for increasing Russian economic self-sufficiency through the policy of import substitution. The Kremlin launched the program in response to the partial sanctions the United States and other countries imposed after the takeover of Crimea and the initial Russian incursion into the Donbas in 2014. Putin's goal was to make Russia economically self-sufficient by strengthening domestic industries and reducing dependence on foreign imports of technological components. This quest to create resilience has been mostly unsuccessful, failing to overcome the chronic weakness and low productivity of Russia's economy.

Mulder's argument that the fear of sanctions is what motivated Hitler's drive for war is hard to credit. Why would the Nazi leadership have worried about such toothless measures? After all, they had watched as the League of Nations imposed partial sanctions against Italy in 1935, and these did not prevent Mussolini from conquering Ethiopia. The Nazis were emboldened when the West either did nothing or offered concessions to their aggressive moves in the Rhineland, Austria, and the Sudetenland. Hitler and the Nazi leadership had little to fear from sanctions.

Mulder gives away his argument when he observes that the German economy was in relatively good shape in 1939 and had achieved a "measure of resilience" against sanctions. That resilience depended on the absence of military mobilization, however. When Hitler's war preparations accelerated, economic needs grew. It was the militarization process, not sanctions, that generated economic needs that were to be met through conquest.

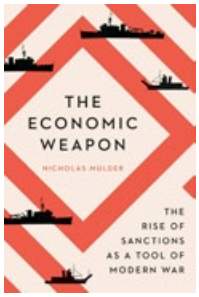
Mulder is on firmer ground in arguing that the U.S., British, and Dutch policy of imposing sanctions and an oil embargo against Japan played a major role in prompting Tokyo's 1941 decisions to conquer parts of Southeast Asia and later attack Pearl Harbor. Japan sought control of the region's oil and natural resources to sustain the voracious demands of its war economy. Still, as in Germany, military mobilization and imperial aggression created economic needs that prompted a war of conquest. Sanctions catalyzed the process but were not the fundamental cause.

Mulder applies his thesis to the present, arguing in the introduction to his book that sanctions today are "aggravating tensions within globalization." In a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, he points to the danger of sanctions prompting greater nationalism and intransigence in Russia and warns that the severe impacts of the current measures could cause global economic disruption leading to recession and destabilization. Sanctions could fail, he writes, "not because of their weakness but because of their great and unpredictable strength."

It is important to acknowledge the economic and social costs of sanctions and the risks of attempting to cripple one of the world's largest and most important economies. One of the significant drawbacks of sanctions is their potential for creating humanitarian harm. In his book Mulder reviews the horrific consequences of the blockades imposed during World War I and in the years afterwards. He cites scholarly research estimating that between 300,000 and 400,000 people perished in Germany and Austria-Hungary and 500,000 people in the Ottoman provinces of the Middle East as a result of the blockade imposed by the Entente powers. Sanctions were maintained after the war against Germany to enforce the onerous reparations provisions of the Versailles treaty. They were also imposed on the nascent Bolshevik government in Russia, where they compounded the effects of civil war and a famine that left millions dead.

A similar humanitarian tragedy unfolded in Iraq in the 1990s, when the combined effects of the UN oil embargo and general trade sanctions and the devastation caused by intensive bombing during the 1991 war led to economic collapse and massive social suffering. Malnutrition and disease spread widely, leading to a significant rise in infant and child mortality. Estimates vary widely, but it's likely that there were hundreds of thousands of preventable deaths.

Following the disaster in Iraq, the United Nations shifted to more targeted sanctions, including arms embargoes, travel bans, and financial sanctions. This shift reduced the negative side effects of sanctions but did not eliminate them. The United States has recently resorted to severe forms of financial sanctions, locking down banks and entire financial systems and blocking access to international financing. New research shows that system-wide financial sanctions are causing serious economic dislocation and social hardship in Iran, Syria, and Venezuela.



THE ECONOMIC WEAPON

NICHOLAS MULDER
Yale University Press
$32.50 | 448 pp.

The sanctions on Russia so far have not caused major humanitarian harm. Food and medicine are exempted from sanctions and Russia is self-sufficient in agriculture and food processing, so its people are unlikely to face greater hunger and disease. The bite of financial sanctions has led to greater inflation, however, and the effects of technology sanctions and the flight of private businesses are causing unemployment. Conditions for Russian workers will worsen the longer sanctions remain in place, and it is likely that beleaguered citizens will close ranks behind their government, blaming Europe and the United States for whatever harms they suffer. This is an argument for seeking an early end to the war through negotiations rather than pursuing a strategy of attrition through prolonged war and continuing sanctions.

Mulder calls attention to an important but often overlooked aspect of the early debate about sanctions: the provision of economic assistance. The founders of the League emphasized what they called "positive aid." They inserted language in Article 16 of the Covenant that committed member states to "mutually support one another in the financial and economic measures." The economist John Maynard Keynes was a strong proponent of this approach. He thought an offer of financial assistance would be an appealing inducement for sanctioned regimes to make concessions. He also believed that positive economic assistance would help to address conditions that give rise to war. He advocated a focus on "provision instead of deprivation."

In the end, the League did not adopt these ideas, but proposals for positive aid and economic assistance were incorporated into the Charter of the United Nations in 1945. Programs of economic and social development are major elements of UN policy and are recognized widely as an essential foundation for achieving sustainable peace and preventing armed conflict.

The offer of sanctions relief could be a catalyst for restarting negotiations. This would shift the emphasis from sanctions as a weapon of war to sanctions as instruments of diplomacy.

Social-science research confirms that higher levels of economic development are strongly correlated with lower risks of armed conflict.

Scholars recognize that sanctions work best when combined with positive measures. The economist David Baldwin insists on the importance of both negative sanctions and positive sanctions. He discusses restrictive measures that deny access to trade but also policies that offer assistance and opportunities for economic development. Combining the two can be the basis of diplomatic strategies to resolve conflict and enhance international cooperation.

The most attractive form of positive aid may be the offer to lift sanctions once certain conditions are met. Sanctions are not merely instruments of economic punishment and military containment. They are also tools for achieving diplomatic agreement and can be used as leverage for negotiating a political settlement. Offering an adversary such as Russia the opportunity to escape isolation, regain frozen assets, and resume normal commerce can induce political concessions.

Offers of sanctions relief have been used for bargaining leverage in a number of important cases in recent decades. In the late 1980s, the desire of South African leaders to escape international isolation and anti-apartheid sanctions was a factor in their decisions to negotiate a transition to nonracial democracy and to dismantle the country's nuclear-weapons program. Offers to lift UN sanctions were central to negotiations with Libya in the 1990s to end its support for terrorism. At the 1995 Dayton peace process, the promise of sanctions relief helped persuade Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević to end the war in Bosnia.

Perhaps the best-known recent example of this dynamic was the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, in which the United States and its European partners offered sanctions relief in return for Iranian agreement to establish limits on its nuclear program. Under the terms of the agreement, Iran reduced its stockpile of enriched uranium by 98 percent, shut down two-thirds of its centrifuges, significantly curtailed its enrichment capacity, eliminated its ability to produce plutonium, and accepted a comprehensive and intrusive weapons-inspection system. In return, the Security Council, the United States, and the European Union lifted proliferation-related sanctions. The agreement was successful: a dozen inspection reports by the International Atomic Energy Agency confirm that Iran fully implemented the terms of the agreement. The Trump administration reneged on this deal in 2018, but that does not change the fact that negotiations based on sanctions relief helped achieve nuclear nonproliferation for as long as the deal lasted. Negotiations are now underway to restore the agreement, based on the same formula of lifting sanctions in exchange for restrictions on Iran's nuclear program, although a final settlement remains elusive.

U.S. and British officials recognize the potential value of sanctions relief. Echoing a statement from U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss stated in late March that sanctions could be lifted if Russia removes its troops. The sanctions would "come off with a full cease-fire and withdrawal, but also commitments that there will be no further aggression," Truss said. The *New York Times* editorialized in support of this strategy, urging more intensive diplomatic efforts and the promise of sanctions relief as leverage to end the war. The *Times* called on Western leaders to specify the circumstances and conditions that would make it appropriate to roll back sanctions. These conditions should be communicated clearly and frequently to the Kremlin as an open invitation to halt their attack and withdraw their troops.

Putin gave the appearance of being interested in negotiations in the weeks prior to the invasion. Russian diplomats engaged in negotiations with Germany and France in the Normandy Format to address border issues in Ukraine, and Moscow held parallel talks with Washington on East-West security issues. Since the invasion began, however, there have been no negotiations other than humanitarian talks, and Putin remains uninterested in meaningful diplomacy. As Russian battlefield losses increase and the costs of sanctions grow, however, he may be willing to reconsider options for ending the war. The offer of sanctions relief could be a catalyst for restarting negotiations. This would shift the emphasis from sanctions as a weapon of war to sanctions as instruments of diplomacy.

Mulder may be right that the danger of sanctions lies not in their weakness but their strength, and in the overconfidence they may instill in the governments that impose them. Some observers seem all too sure that a combination of sanctions and Ukrainian military resistance will be sufficient to bring Russia to its knees. A strategy of maintaining sanctions indefinitely and prolonging the war until Russia is forced to admit defeat poses enormous risks, and will in any case lead to further loss of life and spiraling costs. If the priority is to stop the bloodshed and gain the withdrawal of Russian forces, as it must be, then the focus should be on diplomacy and the use of the peacemaking potential of sanctions to achieve a negotiated agreement.

DAVID CORTRIGHT *is Professor Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. He is the co-author with George A. Lopez of numerous articles and books on sanctions.*

ADVICE

Wilma Spellman

Every old lady should keep a hatchet handy.
Lots to chop!
Be sure the blade is sharp.

It's not about cherry trees.
It's those gnarly old entanglements
that don't leave an old brain alone.
It's the dishonest self-incriminations
and unjustified prides.
It's the already-forgivens.

It's the dead little cut-leaf maple
in the backyard, yes, that too—
(which still is not a cherry tree).
It's the head of the chicken, with apologies.

It's about the feel of the swing on the biceps.
It's about using a power tool that's uncomplicated.
It's about a gratifying weight to bear.
Especially for an old lady.

WILMA SPELLMAN *is a wife, mother, and grandmother who lives in Park Ridge, Illinois.*

ARTICLE

Lockdown Letters

Jack Miles & Mark C. Taylor

How the pandemic changed our lives, how it's changing them still

Friendship always matters, and during the worst of the 2020 pandemic it began to matter more than ever to millions locked down at home and wondering what lay ahead. Jack Miles and Mark Taylor, whose friendship began at Harvard University in 1968 and continues to this day, had been in the habit for years of exchanging almost daily email messages, often with extensive attachments. Both were widely published writers, but they had never collaborated for publication. When the pandemic erupted, Mark proposed to Jack that now might be the moment for them to attempt something together. Jack countered with the suggestion that they simply expand their existing epistolary habit, exchanging more serious letters at one a day and determining only after the fact what the longer exchange might amount to.

Mark agreed, and between March 15, 2020, and January 6, 2021, they produced an electronic text fully 475,000 words (1,700 pages) in length—the equivalent of several published volumes. A Friendship in Twilight: Lockdown Conversations on Death and Life *(Columbia University Press) is a substantial selection from what they wrote, offered as an invitation to enter their friendship as you might enter a private home and listen to the conversation around the dinner table.*

The following July 5–6 exchange occurred just after Mark's daughter, Kirsten, and son-in-law, Jonathan, joined Mark and his wife, Dinny, in the family home outside Williamstown, Massachusetts, bringing along grandson Jackson (6) and granddaughter Taylor (4). Later, Kirsten's older brother, Aaron, and Aaron's wife, Frida (born in Sweden), joined them with older granddaughters, Selma and Elsa. This was to be for the middle generation a break from working at home while also schooling at home. It became rather more than that. Jack's July 6 reply opens with reference to an earlier letter of Mark's before replying to Mark's July 5 letter. Kathleen and Brian, mentioned in the letter, are Jack's daughter and son-in-law. Kitty is his wife.

Balancing remote work and family

JESS RODRIGUEZ/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

July 5, 2020

Dear Jack:

Three weeks ago today Kirsten, Jonathan, Jackson, and Taylor arrived; one week ago today Aaron, Frida, Selma, and Elsa arrived. This morning both families left to drive back to Potomac (seven hours) and Chicago (fourteen hours). I wonder when, if ever, they will feel that it is safe enough to fly. With childcare responsibilities and Kirsten working in the barn, this is the longest time I've been away from my desk in years. [A repurposed barn has been Mark's office for decades.] With me trying to remain attentive to world events raging out of control and clipping articles as well as jotting notes to try to keep track of what's going on, keeping up with Jackson and Taylor has been more than a full-time job. No, that's not right—it was not a job, it was a delight. The opportunity to spend three weeks with Kirsten, Jackson, and Taylor was an unexpected gift of the pandemic. I doubt it will happen ever again. After we visited my parents with Aaron and Kirsten, my mother would always write how unbearably silent the house was without us. This afternoon, I hear that deafening silence.

Play and work combined to transform the past three weeks into something like fieldwork in the world now aborning. During the entire time they were here, Kirsten, Jonathan, Aaron, and Frida all retreated to a different room where they worked all day. They all have very high-powered jobs, which have become even more demanding since the pandemic broke out. Most days they were on their phones or Zoom 75 percent of the time or more. Dinny and I were responsible for entertaining the kids and preventing them from bothering their parents. Dinner-table conversation consisted of reports on their work that day and reflections on the deteriorating situation in the country. As you can imagine, between Alabama and Sweden, there was a broad range of opinions.

One of the things I found most surprising is that all four of them said that working remotely is going to be the new normal for them. They do not expect to have to be physically present ever again for more than one or at most two days a week. Even before the pandemic broke out, Kirsten's organization and Frida's company had already moved into smaller quarters and had eliminated personal offices and desks. If this represents a general trend, I think it would be a massive transformation with radical social, economic, and political implications. Since we talked about both the personal impact and broader significance of this change, I thought quite a bit about my last letter in which I tried to think through the implications of this trend for the analysis Sonia Shah develops in *The Next Great Migration*. You will recall that I noted that my parents were the first generation to leave the valley by moving away from the areas of Pennsylvania where the Coopers and Taylors had originally settled. I also argued that modernity and mobility are inseparable. This mobility has been both geographical and social. While countless immigrants left the Old World behind and moved to the United States, others who were already here left the country to move to the city. For both immigrants and emigrants, to be on the make was to be on the move. After the past three weeks, I am beginning to suspect that that important trend is going to change.

My reflections on this issue took an unexpected turn a few days ago when I received an email from a young South Korean researcher asking to interview me about a brief essay entitled "How the World Became a Real Fake," which I published in 2003. In all honesty, I had forgotten about this essay and had to do a Google search to find it. When I reread it, I was struck by its relevance not only for our discussion of migration and much else, but also for our dinner-table conversations about how work and family life are changing. The title of the essay was inspired by a brief chapter in Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols*—"How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable: The History of an Error." In the last aphorism of this parable, Nietzsche writes, "The true world—we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! *With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.*" I have already argued that Trump's fake news, alternative realities, and reality TV are quintessentially postmodern, and are symptoms of a new cultural disease that Nietzsche presciently diagnosed as nihilism. He offers his most concise and explicit formulation of this condition in his posthumously published *Will to Power*. If Trump and his Republican enablers read or knew anything about the history of philosophy, they could appropriate these lines as their governing manifesto.

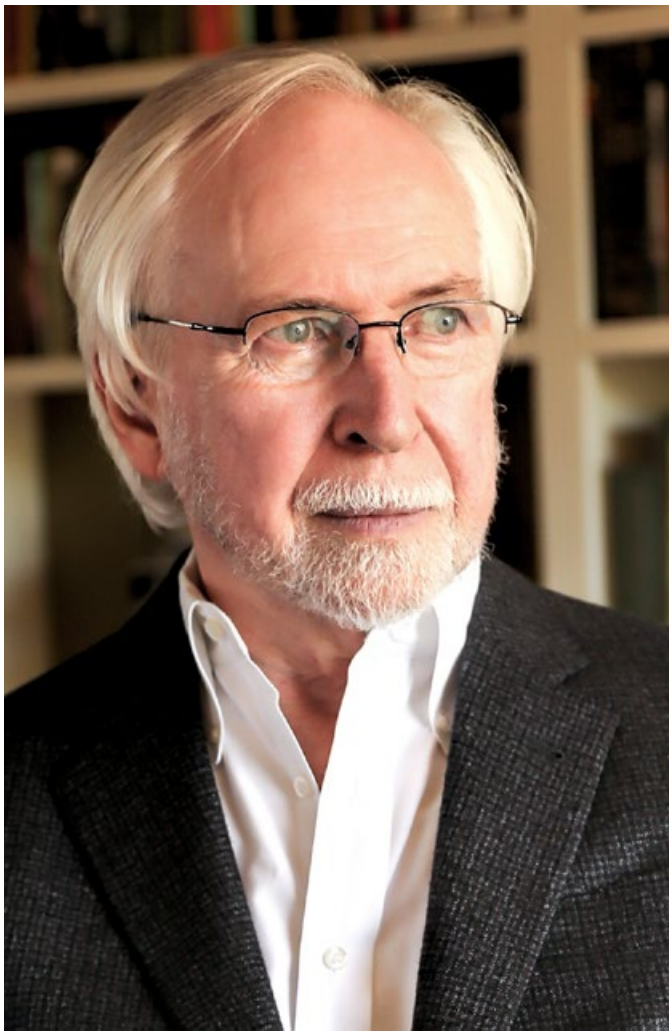
> Against positivism, which halts at phenomena—"There are only *facts* and nothing more"—I would say: No, facts is precisely what is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact "in itself": perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing.... In so far as the word "knowledge" has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings. —"Perspectivism."
>
> It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm.

When it's turtles all the way down and all the way in, nothing remains to check the ego's voracious desires.

What, you might ask, does all of this have to do with working at home and the next great migration? Well, it turns out, quite a bit. I am writing to you on July 5. Yesterday Trump ignored the advice of medical experts and defied the prescribed policies of his own agencies by holding large rallies on the sacred land of Native Americans in the Black Hills of South Dakota and on the lawn of the People's House he thinks he owns. Ignorance, incompetence, and defiance have created a toxic mixture that is disrupting every aspect of life. The raging pandemic is reversing the population flow from country to city that created modernity. According to real estate agents, people are fleeing cities for the suburbs and beyond to the small towns that generations of young people have been desperate to escape. As cities become ghost towns,

wildlife returns to reclaim territory that had been overtaken by an invasive species. A recent article in the *Guardian* reports jackals in Tel Aviv, mountain goats in Llandudno (Wales), sheep in Istanbul, deer in Nara (Japan), wild boar in Ajaccio (Corsica), horses in Kashmir, and buffalo in New Delhi. What if the next great migration reverses the centuries-long migration of people from the country to the city? What if the pandemic draws people back to the valleys where their ancestors settled and their parents still live? What if the pandemic revealed a silent disease that has been eroding the soul since the dawn of modernity?

Last week foodie author Deb Perelman published a provocative *cri de coeur*, "In the Covid-19 Economy, You Can Have a Kid or a Job. You Can't Have Both." (*New York Times*, July 2). She expresses a growing concern that deserves more attention and effectively captures much of what I have observed during the past three weeks.



Jack Miles

> Let me say the quiet part out loud: In the Covid-19 economy, you're allowed a kid *or* a job. Why isn't anyone talking about this? Why are we not hearing a primal scream so deafening that no plodding policy can be implemented without addressing the people buried by it?... I think it's because when you're home schooling all day, and not performing the work you were hired to do until the wee hours of the morning, and do it on repeat for 106 days (not that anyone is counting), you might be a bit too fried to funnel your rage effectively.

This is precisely the problem Kirsten has been working on late into the night for more than three weeks. Her three-hundred-page guide for school systems in all fifty states will be issued tomorrow.

Perelman states explicitly what most people know but no one wants to admit—school and childcare are inseparable. While advanced countries like Sweden, Denmark, and Finland have state-funded childcare beginning with infancy, half a century since the beginning of the feminist movement began, the United States still refuses to provide adequate support for children. With the pandemic, the consequences of this failure are pushing working parents to the breaking point. When young kids are not in school, someone has to take care of them and now must also teach them what they should be learning in school. After the past three weeks, I can personally testify to how demanding this is. Perelman also gives voice to another unspoken assumption. Several generations raised to believe that women do not need to sacrifice having a family to have a career are learning the hard lesson that when push comes to shove, Mom is expected to take care of the kids while Dad is working. The promise of, "You can have it all" has become "You must do it all," and it's not working. The pandemic threatens to undo more than fifty years of progress for working women. For anyone who is not in denial, it is obvious that a significant part of K-12 as well as college education is going to be online when school starts in a little more than a month. Most families will not be able to manage this situation for a prolonged time and there is no prospect for public or private support.

Williamstown is a small town (seven thousand people) located in what is affectionately called the Purple Valley. Other than working at Williams College, there are few professional opportunities in the area. When Aaron and Kirsten were growing up, we not only assumed that they would leave the valley, but actively encouraged them to do so. College, graduate school, law school, and their chosen professions have taken them far from the Purple Valley. As the years have passed, Dinny and I have become ambivalent about our advice and their success. When she took over as the head of Information Technology at Williams College, one of her colleagues gave her advice she never forgot: If you want to have a stable staff, find a well-qualified person whose mother lives in North Adams. She followed that advice and hired many such people. What most impressed her about these colleagues is the extraordinary networks of support they have—parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins. People whose pursuit of education and career lead them to leave the valley don't

LOUIS PESCEVIC

have these networks. In the past when Kirsten and Aaron have found themselves in a jam, Dinny has flown to D.C. or Chicago to help cover for them for a few days or weeks. But her time is always limited and now such short visits are no longer possible.

What if the increasing virtualization of work creates new possibilities? When you work remotely, you can be anywhere. Perhaps the next great migration will be back to the future. Families in search of support neither the government nor the private sector is willing to provide might reverse demographic trajectories and return to the valley. But the valley to which they return will not be the same as the valley they left behind—both the world and they will have changed. Wired valleys are undeniably connected so people know what's on the other side of the mountain. If a new migration is beginning, it will be axiological as well as geographical and social. Paradoxically, the virtualization of reality in which place no longer matters, might well lead to the recovery of the values and virtues of place. Social networks that once seemed confining might now appear to be liberating. It seems people are discovering that fetishizing disruption, mobility, and nomadism unsettle more than they settle. Perhaps modern disenchantment will be reversed through the re-enchantment of the natural and the local. Urban emigrants returning to places they once fled might hear new messages from gods who once seemed silent.

Mark C. Taylor

The best time of the day for me is early morning. For the past three weeks, I have shared these quiet hours with Jackson and Taylor; this morning Taylor came up first. When she came and crawled up on my lap, she was crying, "I don't want to go home and leave Selma and Elsa. I want everybody to stay here." A few hours later with both cars packed, Taylor and Jackson were crying, tears running down their faces, and everyone else was sobbing quietly. As both families pulled out the driveway, Dinny welled up and said, "I wish they didn't live so far away." So do I.

Mark

July 6, 2020

Dear Mark:

Where to begin? How to begin? Let me start with housing—with the apartment your son bought last week and the house my daughter did not buy. Aaron and Frida had been reluctant but finally yielded to real estate *force majeure* and made a purchase for $885,000 or so (I don't remember exactly). On Tuesday of last week, Kathleen and Brian made a bid on a house but then, after a visit, backed out. Kathleen virtually lives at her computer, and so finding a place with a suitable home office has been housing priority #1 for her. This house had only a depressing, closet-like space for an office, and at $1 million+, just wouldn't do. They are so very ready to leave their cramped apartment in a congested, down-market neighborhood that relief, once they pulled out, was blended with sadness. She phoned me with the news, facing up darkly to the reality that though she is a fiendishly hard worker and a relentless saver, she just could not get there.

Kathleen is as tuned in to what is going on in real estate both locally and globally as anybody I know. Before these latest troubles, she had sent me a link to an article in *Noēma* that, like every other article in that fat journal, she had edited, "Catering to a Contracting Middle Class." I read it, found it challenging, and said that I probably needed to read it more than once to really get it, but two factors I thought could well have been included were: 1) the place of foreign capital in the death of the prior market of private sellers and private buyers; 2) the goal of domestic as well as foreign capital to replace the erstwhile population of homeowners with a successor population of home-renters renting from big-time owners—owners with the capital necessary to buy en masse and functionally monopolize the housing market. There has been some coverage of this in the press but not as much as the subject deserves.

One reason it deserves more is that the arrival of venture capital in the real-estate market is among several factors

I used to live in the world. Now I just live in the little USA, and the littler California, and the still littler Orange County, and finally I live here, possibly for good, in "Catherine's Grove," as I call this acre of fruit trees.

that have led to a very short supply of houses coming available for private purchase and those few at exorbitant prices. Typically, a successful bidder bids over the asking price, and sales sometimes become like auctions. So, while still short of completion, this process is already driving thousands, probably millions, of would-be owners into the category of renters and taking countless houses permanently out of the homeowner-to-homeowner market. Meanwhile, as corporate owners raise rents, renters are driven into smaller and smaller accommodations, with more and more people crowded in, and, of course, at the bottom thousands are pushed out onto the street as America's endlessly growing homeless population.

Covid-19 is affecting African Americans and Hispanic Americans as heavily as it does not only and perhaps not even mainly because of their "front-line" occupations: after all, a great many of them are unemployed. It is affecting them disproportionately because they live crowded into spaces where quarantine and social distancing are impossible. One physician was quoted in the press saying, "You can't be in quarantine in a house with only one bathroom." Today, I had a Zoom consultation with my pulmonologist (I'm provisionally okay), and he told me that St. Joseph's Hospital, where I had my cardiac ablation, is "slammed" with Covid cases. As the skyrocketing rate of new cases devolves into mass death for Black and Hispanic people, the current rage over police violence could acquire a new platform. If Black lives matter, then mass Black death has to matter massively.

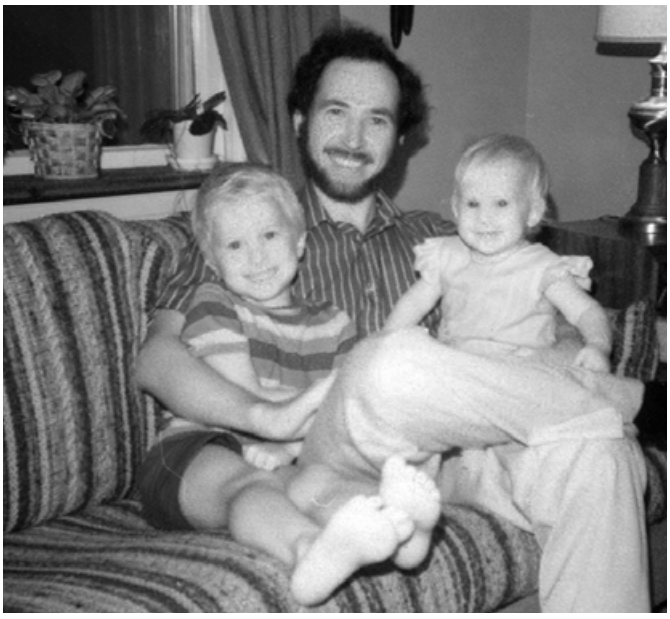
It may be that some well-educated young professionals like your children and their spouses may find it appealing to move from the cities to attractive smaller towns. The Getty employs a professional oral historian (I own a bound copy of the one he did with me); he chooses to live in Fargo, North Dakota, and just loves it. He'd be a good example of what you envision. But a huge proportion of our country's overall African- and Hispanic-American population is already in rural areas. In California, agribusiness in the San Joaquin Valley is overwhelmingly Latino. Look at the Covid map today in the *New York Times*: rural Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia are heavily Black. And then there are the many pockets of Hispanics in chicken-processing plants in Arkansas or pork-processing plants in Iowa. ("Mechanization or Mexicanization," I once heard the phenomenon described.) These small towns are not where the well-off white millennials will be heading, but the people who live there and live on the edge of dire want may be heard from when and if they are all pushed over the edge at once.

There is a good deal of overlap between your "How the World Became a Real Fake" and the view of religion that I sketch in the general introduction to *The Norton Anthology of World Religions,* but where you speak of real fakes, I speak of useful fictions—fictions recognized as fictitious but honored as useful, and indeed actively employed. And rather than speak of God or gods, I speak of our founding American political/religious fiction that "all men are created equal." It's true, of course, that some and perhaps most Americans fall short of recognizing that there is nothing "self-evident" about the assertion that all men are created equal. Many simply take that hallowed line as true without further reflection or, in your language, as a "real fake" unrecognized as such. But some do examine it without necessarily abandoning it. In today's *New York Times* Lucian K. Truscott IV, a descendant of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, proposes that the Jefferson Monument in Washington D.C. be taken down. Monticello, including the slave quarters, is both a better monument, he says, and all the monument needed. Or perhaps this temple of our civic religion could be retained but the towering Jefferson-idol within it correctively replaced by a statue of a Black woman. The ancient Greeks always made their god-statues larger than life-size, and that seemed as right and "natural" to them as our gigantic statues of Lincoln and Jefferson seem to us—or at least to the True Believers among us. Truscott's word will not be the last word, of course, but it is a legitimate word and perhaps part of a painful journey toward the condition that Herbert Fingarette formulates (and you warmly approved when I placed it near the conclusion of my little book):

> It is the special fate of modern man that he has a "choice" of spiritual visions. The paradox is that although each requires complete commitment for complete validity, we can today generate a context in which we see that no one of them is the sole vision. Thus, we must learn to be naïve but undogmatic. That is, we must take the vision as it comes and trust ourselves to it, naïvely, as reality. Yet we must retain an openness to experience such that the dark shadows deep within one vision are the mute, stubborn messengers waiting to lead us to a new light and a new vision.

But then does Black Lives Matter—which has stimulated this daring suggestion from a Black descendant of the Thomas Jefferson who penned the Declaration of Independence—not call us to an "openness to experience such that the dark shadows deep within one [national religious] vision are the mute, stubborn messengers waiting to lead us to a new light and a new vision"? I doubt very much that Lucian K. Truscott IV wants to call us away from the faith of "all men are created equal," but he doesn't want that line or even that faith to live on just as they have lived, perhaps not even as quoted by Martin Luther King Jr. He wants them to change their life (*Du musst dein Leben ändern*) and in the process to change ours.

The final scene you described—and described beautifully and poignantly, I must add—touched a chord or two with



Jack Miles with Mark and Dinny Taylor's now-grown children in about 1977

me. Kathleen always struck me as a pretty verbal little girl, not that I really had a criterion to measure her by. What I am remembering, though, was a wondrous short period in which she was richly verbal but still only early in her formation of a self/other distinction. The result was that at certain moments when she was mentally alone though physically with me—classically, in her car seat in back while I drove along unaccompanied in the front seat—she would talk and talk and talk, and it was just a window right into her little brain. One of her soliloquies was a vision of something like a big family party, though it could as easily have been a big party of friendly adults, all with kids. The kids were all running around and playing together and it was "so much fun," but a part of the fun was that the adults were also there sitting and talking and looking on happily. She definitely included the adults. There actually were a couple long-lasting, all-afternoon parties like this at a swimming club we sometimes visited that may have met this description. The mood she evoked brought me back to certain big family gatherings in my own past as well as to even bigger parish events that were a quintessence of happiness. But such also seem to have been these last days for your four grandchildren. Heaven is truly like this, I think, for a child, and so I can just all too easily imagine their tears at giving up your Stone Hill heaven, and your tears watching them. Paradise lost.

Years later, I told Kathleen that though it would be a financial stretch, if she wanted to apply to Harvard or another Ivy League school, we would make it happen. No, she said, instantly and adamantly. She had her eyes on Berkeley (which would become her alma mater), and with such a stellar option, why should she or we take on debt? But there was another factor. By going to college in California, she could build her childhood community into an adult community: a young adult hoping for a semblance of her girlish dream. If she went to Harvard, many of her friends and perhaps her partner would be from the East Coast, and that option was firmly rejected in advance: already considered, already rejected. Like her mother, another only child, Kathleen does not just make but cherishes her friends. A part of the appeal of the neighborhood where Brian and she almost bought was that they have friends there already and, casing it out, could imagine making more friends: the promise of a surrogate extended family. Choose a location and then plan to "be a neighbor to have a neighbor."

One last note on migration, and then I'm done. Because our iPhone 5s are about to become obsolete and unsupported, we masked up and gloved up and braved the cacophony of Best Buy to purchase two iPhone SEs and to get our respective phone contents migrated over. I just loathe that store. With its glaring lights, blaring night-club music, mural-sized product logos, hundreds of flashing screens wherever you look, and acres of latter-day electronic toys, it evokes for me the macabre Toyland in Carlo Collodi's original, long, picaresque but extremely dark novel *Pinocchio*. Collodi is no Disney; e.g. when Cricket (not "Jiminy") first chirps to Pinocchio about conscience, Pinocchio crushes the intrusive little bug with a brick. Anyway, we made our purchase, don't yet see any Covid symptoms, and the phones are working. Supplies were surprisingly short. One phone (Kitty's, I decided, and I was doing all the talking) can only be used in the USA. The other (mine) can be used overseas, but I know to a near certainty that I will never again leave the USA. That's one kind of big-to-small migration, no? I used to live in the world. Now I just live in the little USA, and the littler California, and the still littler Orange County, and finally I live here, possibly for good, in "Catherine's Grove," as I call this acre of fruit trees. Have phone, won't travel. But, hey, I'm not complaining: the oranges have never been juicier, and Kitty's tomato crop is also coming in with new fruit every day. Dinner tonight will be pasta with garlic, olive oil, and cherry tomatoes. Life goes on—at least through dinner.

Jack

JACK MILES *is professor emeritus of English and religious studies at the University of California, Irvine. A former Jesuit, he is the author of a trilogy about God in three classic scriptures, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning* God: A Biography *(1995), as well as the general editor of the six-volume* Norton Anthology of World Religions.

MARK C. TAYLOR *is professor of religion at Columbia University and professor emeritus at Williams College. He is the author of more than thirty books, including most recently* Intervolution: Smart Bodies Smart Things *(Columbia, 2020). His art has been exhibited at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art and the Clark Art Institute.*

Evolution & Revelation

Stephen J. Pope

Is belief more than just an adaptive strategy?

In *Why We Believe*, the anthropologist Agustín Fuentes has written a clear and concise account of belief in light of his extensive knowledge of human evolution. Fuentes, who has taught at Notre Dame and is now a professor at Princeton, has written several books and articles that strive to present a biologically informed but non-reductive account of human nature. While himself religiously unaffiliated, he has frequently worked with theologians and scholars of religion in various collaborative science-and-religion projects. For an evolutionary thinker, he has a remarkable openness to what can be learned from religious traditions, religious philosophers, and theologians.

His new book is intended to show that, while we are the product of evolutionary processes and belong to the biological world along with countless other organisms, our distinctive capacities for imagining, feeling, and thinking give us special responsibilities to shape our societies more justly than we have in the past. Fuentes wants to explain "why we believe" partly in order to correct what he calls the dueling "fundamentalisms" of, on the one side, religious people who refuse to allow their view of human nature to be shaped by the impressive and growing body of knowledge about human evolution and, on the other, secular intellectuals whose enthusiasm for scientific methods of investigation has led them to embrace "scientism"—that is, the assumption that science alone provides the kinds of explanations that count as real knowledge. Fuentes rejects the assertion of scientism that "beliefs" are mere subjective opinions that educated adults should not take seriously. He argues instead that, while the sciences do yield a vast array of insights into how things work, there are many other paths to knowledge that involve believing claims we cannot justify on scientific grounds. Most of what we think is true is not "immanently generated knowledge," as Bernard Lonergan points out in *Method in Theology*, and our reliance on the division of labor means that "belief plays as large a role in science as in most other areas of human activity."

Worshippers wave palm fronds before Palm Sunday Mass in Manila, Philippines, April 14, 2019.

CNS PHOTO/ELOISA LOPEZ, REUTERS

Fuentes appropriately begins his book by laying out what he means by "belief" and "believing." In popular discourse, the act of believing is often taken to mean affirming the truth of a claim without having any empirical evidence for it. Philosophers have produced an enormous body of literature debating whether there are necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for "propositional knowledge." A great deal of that literature is critical of the (purportedly) traditional theory of knowledge as "justified true belief." But rather than wading into these waters, Fuentes draws on Terry Eagleton's conception of believing as a state of being "completely in love with a concept, an experience, a knowledge." The capacity to believe is based in our distinctively human capacity "to imagine, to be creative, to hope and dream, and to infuse the world with meaning."

Believing is a pervasive part of human experience and by no means the sole preserve of the religiously devout. Fuentes distinguishes between our core *ability* to believe and our believing that this or that particular proposition is true. Here he unknowingly resonates with the Catholic vision of faith as comprising both *fides qua creditur* (the faith with which we personally assent to a truth) and *fides quae creditur* (the content of what we believe). Living faith, in the Christian sense, is not simply believing *that* God exists, but believing in, trusting, and loving God. This is not Fuentes's concern, but Catholics will have no trouble understanding his distinction between our capacity to believe and the particular ways in which we exercise that capacity in our lives.

Our ancestors transformed the world not only for transactional but also for transcendent motives. The formation of beliefs about how things could and ought to be proves central to our ability to improve our lot.

Why We Believe is divided into three parts: How did we as a species come to believe? How do we believe now? And what do we believe now? We came to believe because of the social, emotional, and cognitive resources that emerged in our primate ancestors. We evolved from intelligent mammals who were highly adept at cooperating and forming strong groups. Fuentes understands human behavior as embedded in particular "niches," which he defines as the "dynamic multidimensional space in which an organism lives." The distinctively human niche is not only material, biological, and ecological, but also "imagined, perceived, and constructed"—in short, "meaning matters" and therefore so do beliefs. Organisms shape their habitats and vice versa. Human beings have shaped their habitats according to what they believe.

Evolution has made believing possible. Fuentes explains that between 2.3 and 1 million years ago our prehuman ancestors underwent significant changes in nutrition, the structures of their bodies and brains, and practices of caring for their young, making tools, avoiding predators, and obtaining supplies of food. In the past half-million years, massive growth in communication and social coordination led to better ways of understanding the world, imagining better alternatives, and then acting to transform it. These developments eventually led contemporary humans to produce innovations in food acquisition and storage, the domestication of plants and animals, the establishment of large residential settlements, and the identification of specific places, times, and relationships as sacred. Readers of *Commonweal* will appreciate Fuentes's recognition that our ancestors transformed the world not only for transactional but also for transcendent motives. The formation of beliefs about how things could and ought to be proves central to our ability to improve our lot.

Part two of *Why We Believe* provides an account of how the human imagination enables us to combine cognitive and social resources to shape our world. "Believing is thinking beyond the here and now and investing to the extent that thinking becomes one's reality," Fuentes writes. Though he does not cite William James, his vision resonates with James's "will to believe." Belief is made possible by culture, a rich fund of meaning from which we constantly draw and to which our daily actions contribute. We are "not unique in having culture," Fuentes writes, but the human niche is "completely intertwined with language, socially mediated and reconstructed history, institutions, and beliefs." He insists that we not only "have" culture but actually "are" our culture: "literally, it is us and we it." The experiences, memories, and thoughts made possible by our collective cultural resources help form our very bodies through their "neuroendocrine systems."

Culture is obviously a necessary condition of mind—the set of "skills and processes that enable us to think and act"—and the distinctive core of the human mind is the imagination. Fuentes adopts the philosopher Anna Abraham's theory of imagination as operative in our powers of sensation and movement, emotions, memory, "novel combinatorial" (generative) capacities, and "altered states." The physiological structures of the human brain allow us to create symbolic and emotionally compelling mental representations of states of affairs that do not yet exist but could in the future.

Our evolutionary history makes such productive beliefs possible, but their particular forms are shaped by the distinctive cultures within which we live. This does not mean that our shared commitments and deeply held beliefs are in fact nothing but "mere" cultural constructs. "Cultural constructs *are real* for those who hold them," Fuentes writes. "That is the way the human mind works." Such a position allows him to take religions—and religious people—much more seriously than do some of his peers in evolutionary theory. The problem with the dominant evolutionary explanations of religion, he notes, is that they "largely ignore what the religious experience *is* for believers." Fuentes knows that third-person analysis is valuable but cannot fully capture religious experience that takes place in the first and second person—when, as Martin Buber puts it, an "I" encounters the absolute "Thou."

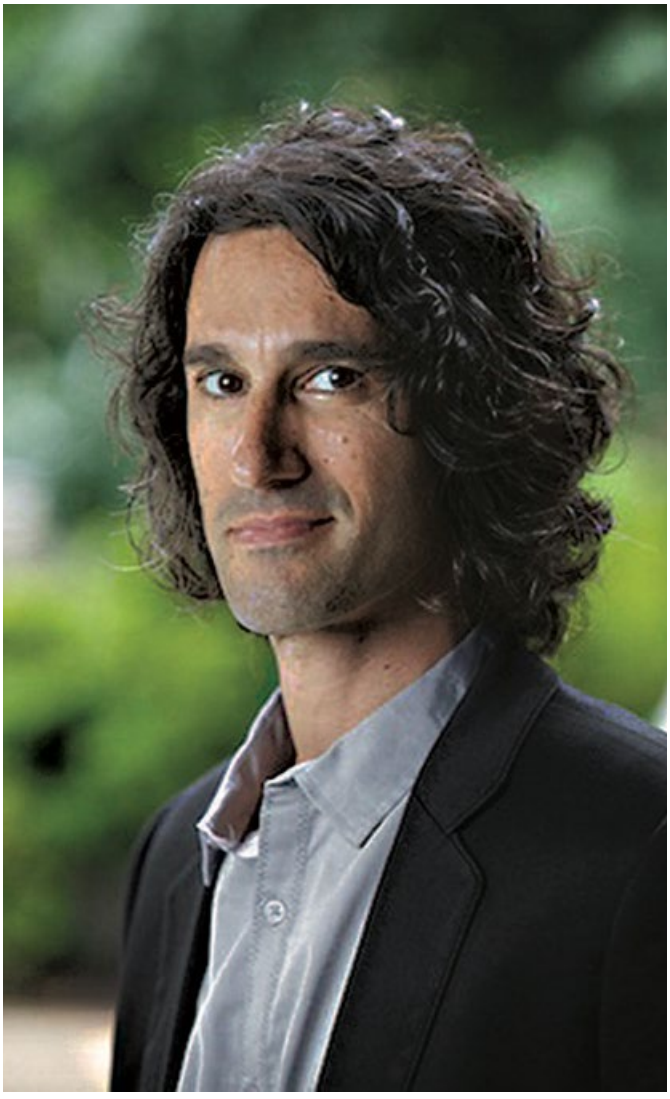
Part three of *Why We Believe* spells out the implications of this analysis for *what* people believe. Fuentes does not assume that evolution provides any help explaining the content of what people believe (e.g., why Presbyterians believe in double predestination or Catholics in transubstantiation), but he does think knowledge of our evolutionary past can shed light on why we develop religions, economic arrangements, and patterns of affiliation.

We can take the key features of his discussion of religion, economics, and love in order. First, Fuentes distinguishes religiousness from "religion" in general and particular "religions." He not only acknowledges that the vast majority of people describe themselves as religiously affiliated, but—with a laudable mixture of

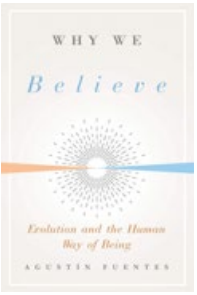
respect, intellectual humility, and genuine curiosity—wants to understand why they do so.

Fuentes describes "transcendence" as being "beyond the limits of any possible experience" but then refers to religiousness as an "experience of transcendence." "Transcendence" and "religious experience" are both notoriously vague concepts. There is a huge range in the different ways we experience going beyond the flow of everyday life. Such experience includes attending an exquisite musical performance, witnessing an extraordinary act of generosity, viewing a luminous work of art, and being awestruck at the birth of a child. All these experiences can be described as "transcendent" in at least three senses: first, they allow us to experience goodness, beauty, or truth in moments that surpass what we normally encounter in everyday life; second, religiously sensitive people often read these experiences as disclosing what is "most real" in human life; and third, these experiences can be called transcendent because they elicit feelings of piety, reverence, and gratitude for their divine source.

Agustín Fuentes



MARK THIESSEN/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE



WHY WE BELIEVE

Evolution and the Human Way of Being

AGUSTÍN FUENTES
Yale University Press
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Fuentes takes seriously the experience of particular persons and communities but, unlike William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Fuentes's book doesn't take into account the specific testimonies of such persons or communities. His underdeveloped and rather abstract references to "religious experience" are not particularly satisfying. It would have helped if he had incorporated what the philosopher John A. Smith calls the "religious *dimensions* of experience"—a more accommodating concept than Fuentes's "religious experience." Fuentes might also have considered what Karl Rahner called "the experience of self-transcendence" involved in any true act of knowing or loving.

Fuentes argues that early human beings evolved to become highly social, meaning-making animals, who at some point began to have beliefs about supernatural agents. These beliefs were later taken up and extensively developed by religious institutions that arrived with the development of complex, large-scale societies between four thousand and eight thousand years ago. Fuentes rejects the two dominant evolutionary theories of religion. One of these holds that religion evolved because it was biologically adaptive; the other views religion as an accidental by-product (a "spandrel" in the language of Stephen Jay Gould) of cognitive and social traits that were themselves biologically adaptive. Neither of these approaches provides a satisfying account of the centrality of religion in the lives of so many people. Religious experience and beliefs offer ways of addressing a human need. Once their basic material needs are met, human beings naturally strive to go beyond the mere here-and-now and to relate themselves to larger purposes and schemes of meaning. Belief in transcendent reality thus provides the foothold for the later development of institutional religions, with their rituals, codes, and practices.

Fuentes's own social and ethical concerns are on display in his chapter

on economics, which he defines as "an organized system of activity involving the production, consumption, exchange, and distribution of goods and services." Here he strongly challenges the assumption, common in modern and modernizing societies, that free markets are the most "natural"—and therefore the most rational and efficient—way to organize an economy. The dominance of free-market ideology is rooted in a widespread cultural acceptance of the myth of *Homo economicus*, according to which human beings are best understood as rational economic actors always seeking to maximize their self-interest. Fuentes reminds us that theories of behavioral ecology that describe "market competition" as pervasive in nature miss the richness and complexity of actual animal behavior. He worries that an uncritical acceptance of free markets as "natural" leads us to treat massive global inequality as "inevitable." Though some part of us may still believe that real human beings are more complex and less predictable than *Homo economicus*, this reductive model is now "deeply ingrained in [our] communal psyche."

The rise and growth of permanent large-scale settlements, cities, and then nations brought with it a shift from egalitarian to hierarchical social orders. Adam Smith argued that modern markets would produce a more extensive distribution of wealth, but today a global market economy coexists with massive inequality. Fuentes is not an economist and he does not propose his own alternative economic theory. His goal is simply to undercut the widespread view that human beings are *essentially* selfish, that free markets are the most "natural" way to organize economic systems, and that radical inequality is just the way things have always been—and always will be. Fuentes urges his readers not to passively accept current inequalities: "We made them, and we can change them."

The last chapter of *Why We Believe* focuses on matters of the heart. "Love" and related terms have many meanings even within the history of Western culture. Love has been identified with *eros* (desire), *philia* (friendship), *agape* (self-gift), or with some combination of these. The strongest part of this chapter is its discussion of compassion; the weakest, its treatment of sexual love.

Fuentes argues that the evolution of biological, psychological, and behavioral traits made possible the emergence of maternal-offspring attachment and therefore enhanced the likely survival of human newborns, who are exceptionally immature. He theorizes that the maternal-offspring bond eventually facilitated the pair bonds of mating couples, and then extended further to promote a broader array of social and physiological bonds within the larger group. Drawing on the work of the anthropologist Walter Goldschmidt, Fuentes argues that evolution has produced in us a strong "affective hunger" that leads us to form social bonds far beyond what we see in any other species. Our ancestors extended compassion not only to their own offspring but to other members of their groups. Archeological evidence indicates "the emergence of consistent caring behavior that kept at least some of the injured, sick, and aged alive and part of the community" and produced a capacity to care for others "unrivaled in any other species." Our strong in-group social cooperation, however, can sometimes be accompanied by hostility toward those outside the group.

Sex and marriage are the most controversial topics addressed in this book. We tend to draw sharp lines between sexual attraction, parental care, friendship, and other deep attachments, and often experience these kinds of relationship as fundamentally different from each other. But Fuentes claims that, "aside from slightly different hormone levels and other physiological responses related to sexual activity, romantic love is not biologically different from any other kind.... The idea that romantic love is distinct from other deep attachments is a product of cultural beliefs and worldviews, not our biology." Fuentes argues that a great deal of anthropological literature challenges the assumption that we are naturally ordered to form exclusive, lifelong procreative pair bonds. (Catholics might think here of Pope Paul VI's teaching about the "unitive" and "procreative" ends of sex.) According to Fuentes, sexual pair bonds are characterized by mutual sexual attraction that is preferential but not necessarily exclusive, reproductive, monogamous, or even marital. When he refers to marriage as "a recent occurrence in human history," he seems to mean the natural history of our species rather than recorded history.

Fuentes rejects normative traditions that confine sexual activity to marriage, though he would perhaps be willing to have marriage continue as one lifestyle option among others. This is the direction in which Western cultures have been trending for decades. These anthropological observations are valuable for underscoring the challenges faced by those of us who endorse monogamy and would like others to do so as well.

We might respond to that challenge by first asking how Fuentes moves from the "is" of diverse human social and sexual practices to the "ought" of moral standards. For most of recorded human history, there was no awareness of—let alone commitment to—human rights. These, too, are the "product of cultural beliefs, not our biology." Belief in human rights is also "a recent occurrence in human history." But rather than discount human rights for being of relatively recent vintage, we regard our belief in them as evidence of moral progress. Why can't we say the same about the development of monogamous marriage, especially since the historical record shows that polygamous relationships have usually allowed powerful men to dominate their wives (and concubines)? More fundamentally, the social and ethical norms governing sexual behavior cannot be derived from knowledge of either our evolutionary past or our contemporary sexual proclivities, many of which reflect the impact of market forces, consumerism, and social media. Fuentes's chapter on economics is sharply critical of the radical indi-

vidualism of free-market ideology, but his chapter on love seems to endorse a radical individualism in sexual matters.

The fact that we aren't hard-wired to be monogamists does not mean we shouldn't strive to be monogamous, any more than the fact that we are not hard-wired to be truth-tellers implies that we shouldn't strive to be honest. The Christian tradition appreciates the special goods afforded by monogamous marriage, including deep interpersonal intimacy, acceptance, and the trust born of lifelong fidelity. In religious terms, the Protestant description of marriage as a lifelong covenant of love and the Catholic and Orthodox account of marriage as a sacrament both pledge the couple to love each other so truly that their relationship offers a glimpse of Christ's love for the Church (Ephesians 5:30–31). Many of us are glad that civil marriage is now available to gay couples, and we applaud religious bodies that bless these unions. These developments extend the logic and benefits of monogamy.

Fuentes is strangely silent about families (both nuclear and extended), which seems odd for a thinker so attuned to our sociality. His criticism of belief in monogamous marriage does not mention the extensive social-scientific literature that shows that children raised by single parents are more likely to be poor, to have lower cognitive skills, to drop out of school, to have health problems, and to give birth outside of marriage themselves (see Kimberly Howard and Richard J. Reeves's 2014 paper "The Marriage Effect: Money or Parenting"). Fuentes cares about the poor and laments inequality, but he does not acknowledge that the decline of marriage seems to contribute to both inequality and poverty (along with other factors, of course). Between 1980 and now, the rate of births to single mothers has doubled, from 20 to 40 percent. We are engaged in a massive social experiment that does not seem to be benefiting children. Of course, Fuentes is not against biological parents living with, and taking responsibility for, their children, but he doesn't want society to put any pressure on parents to legally bind themselves to one another for life. Yet the legal and social bond of marriage is a stronger, more reliable form of commitment than the informal agreements of couples who cohabitate, and it is therefore a preferable arrangement for child rearing. Not taking into account the well-being of children is, at the very least, a significant oversight in Fuentes's analysis of our beliefs about love.

Still, the strengths of *Why We Believe* significantly outweigh its weaknesses. Fuentes ought to be appreciated by readers of *Commonweal* primarily for his open-minded, non-reductive and non-polemical approach to religious matters. He has the confidence to think about nuanced and complex matters of belief that are often grossly oversimplified by popular writers. The very title gives a clue to the book's tone: an aggressive secularist would be more likely to talk about "why *they* believe," not "why *we* believe." Fuentes does not say, "You (simple people) *believe* religion provides the path to God but we (scientists) *know* it is really nothing but a social institution constructed to serve certain social ends." His non-reductive attitude to religion contrasts sharply with what we are used to getting from Richard Dawkins and other New Atheists, who believe society can be divided between the "brights" (who inhabit the "community of reason") and the "dulls"—those incapable of rationality or invincibly ignorant.

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Fuentes's openness is remarkable. "Unlike many of my evolutionary explanation-oriented colleagues," he writes, "I'm fully comfortable leaving open the possibility that some form of transcendent revelation plays a role in a religion's particular beliefs." This intriguing statement is partly just an expression of disciplinary self-restraint: as a scientist, Fuentes can reject only those claims that run against well-established scientific knowledge, and so he will not dismiss religious truth claims that can be neither proved nor disproved. This kind of humility should be normal; because it is not, it requires real intellectual courage. It will be met with mockery by militant atheists, and with gratitude by religious readers. Fuentes's refusal to rule out the possibility that a religious tradition might really be shaped by divine revelation raises a host of questions, but these must be answered by theologians and philosophers rather than by anthropologists and evolutionary theorists.

Why We Believe provides a superb and very readable summary of one influential approach to our evolutionary past. Written in a graceful style, it briskly covers a vast amount of scholarly terrain in less than three hundred pages. And, like the best books in any field, it will leave the reader wanting to learn more.

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Down to the River

Valerie Sayers

A month after Putin invaded Ukraine, a retired Air Force colonel I knew flew her SUV into the Greenglass River. I didn't see it happen. I was stuck mid-pew, stalled by all the churchgoers in town for Parents' Weekend. When I finally escaped to the parking lot, a woman tugged at my sleeve to ask if I'd just seen a big white car flying in reverse. Bewildered, I shook my head no.

The woman who grabbed my sleeve was stout, with a too-short haircut and sensible oxfords. She was bewildered too. "It was Veronica. I watched her get in the driver's seat."

I didn't know Veronica well, but I knew that she was one of the first women to fly combat missions in Iraq. "My God. What happened?"

"She looked like a bird. Like a seagull."

I grabbed her forearm. "Is she still in the river?"

She waved dramatically with the other hand: "Swept away."

By then folks were scrambling down the bluff as they heard the news. Veronica had parked on a patch of grass over by the old residence hall. I'd parked back there myself once and never again, because just beyond the narrow strip of macadam is the steep bank down to the river, with no guardrail. When it's hazy or foggy—it's always hazy or foggy in this sad river town—it's hard to see where the road ends and the bluff begins. You have to cut the wheel sharply.

But come on. An Air Force pilot? It's the late Mass-goers who park back there, and a career military officer would not have been late. She would have picked the spot early. A pilot would have put her RAV4 safely onto the roadway, turned in the right direction, fog or no fog. She could have done it in her sleep. She must have known exactly what she was doing. She must have sat in back so she'd be the first out the door. Pressed her foot hard, aimed for the one open path between the scraggly river oaks and pawpaws. Because the bank drops so steeply, the SUV shot out as Veronica must have intended—but just before it descended, it lost speed and caromed off an uprooted trunk, then backflipped into the river.

The stout witness who told me all this looked unhinged. She'd run over to the riverbank as soon as she saw Veronica flying, but after she called for help, what could she do? Other stout women pulled out their phones to flood 911 with redundant reports of the airborne combat pilot at the controls of an SUV. Young assistant professors slid down the wooded bank, hoping to act the heroes. But the snow had been melting all week and the river was churning. The woman with sensible oxfords was right—the RAV4 was completely submerged, vanished.

I couldn't fathom, though, why she thought to say that SUV looked like a seagull. I suppose she was alluding to Chekhov; she must have known somehow that I teach Russian literature. She must have known that allusion would appeal to me, because it so conveniently removed me from the scene.

I'M ALWAYS SURPRISED TO FIND MYSELF IN THAT parking lot, much less that Mass. I'm not a believer. I feel some kinship with secular Muslims who fast during Ramadan and atheists who attend seders, who keep the rituals to connect themselves to their tribes. In a town filled with colleges, including a Famous Catholic University, mosques and synagogues and churches tend to have multilingual liturgies and cerebral sermons punctuated with

poetry. I suspect they have unbelievers like me lurking about, too. This church was on the grounds of the Catholic women's college, its pews sprinkled with nuns who founded health clinics in Uganda, who taught at the college, who visited prisoners on death row and met regularly with our appalling congresswoman to shame her into some action. They're a dwindling crew, aging themselves out of existence, but every now and again they sign up a novice, a student at one of their colleges in Bangladesh or Botswana, and then the whole order perks right up.

The other Mass-goers—I can't call them parishioners because it isn't, strictly speaking, a parish—are the kind of Catholics who, if they didn't have this community where they can count on someone to pray every week for union organizers or LGBTQ rights, might abscond to the Episcopalians, the kind of Catholics drawn to apophatic theology and social-justice movements, Catholics who have their doubts but just can't let go.

CAMUS SAYS IT'S THE ONLY QUESTION, WHETHER we choose life or death. A couple of my relatives have made feeble attempts at suicide and my cousin actually shot himself—dead, I mean. That's a story in itself, devastating to tell. That's all I'll say about that.

This is a town where no one else wants to talk about suicide, either. The paper treated Veronica's flight as if it were an accident on a foggy day. At the wake, women whispered that it could have happened to any of us, that the poor nuns were distraught. Every member of our creative nonviolence reading group showed up at the funeral home, wondering whether the family would sue over that missing guardrail.

We scrutinized the scant remnants of Veronica's family. Her brother was also retired, a naval captain wearing a pigeon-gray suit and a strange half-smile of regret. He introduced Veronica's daughter, who might have been in her twenties or thirties: "This is Ronnie, my sister's only child." The phrase made her blink. She had one of those haircuts, spiked here and buzzcut there, that could have signified her sexual preferences or meant she fancied herself some kind of free spirit. Despite the young people in my classrooms, I have trouble reading the cultural signposts.

I was surprised to see a daughter. I told Ronnie that I'd known her mother from a reading group, which was true. I also said that Veronica had mentioned her, which was not.

"I'm gobsmacked to hear it," Ronnie said dryly. "We haven't spoken in years."

Caught at the lie, I squirmed, hearing the bitter lines my mother and I once flung at each other. I went on compulsively: "It was a nonviolence reading group. We were intrigued to have an ex-military officer, but she was so private I never asked her about that. None of us did."

"Maybe she stayed in the Air Force for the pension." Veronica's daughter, looking judgy with her one raised eyebrow, turned away to speak to her next interrogator.

I FIND THAT I DO WANT TO TALK ABOUT SONNY'S suicide after all. Maybe I have to. I can't talk about the Greenglass River without talking about my cousin.

Sweet, tongue-tied Sonny. When he was still small, my aunt gave him a buzz cut that made him look like a miniature Marine recruit, as if she wanted to ensure he'd grow up to be a soldier. Aunt Tildy was a single mother with a studio apartment, so when Sonny came to our house it took him half an hour to close his mouth at the sight of our latest acquisitions. He played Final Fantasy on my brothers' new Game Boy, listened to Blue Öyster Cult on my new boombox. He defended me against my brothers, who called me Fatty Patty, and my mother, who barked if we sat too close.

When my mother asked where Sonny got that dirt mustache, Aunt Tildy answered: "I guess it's the grit in the river."

Mother raised herself off her kitchen stool for maximum drama. "You let him *go in the river?*"

Every child in town knew that the Greenglass was only placid until it wasn't. When it was angry or petulant or spiteful, it could sweep us away even if we were only wading, and besides, it stank of industrial waste. We weren't to go anywhere near the river unless we were in the company of sober adults, and Aunt Tildy was rarely sober.

"For crying out loud, Marlene, you think I could stop him? He's got enough sense not to drown. He just stands there to cool off."

But a dirt mustache meant Sonny wasn't just standing in the river, he was sticking his whole face in, swimming out into the swift current. I lost sleep, imagining him swept away. My mother paid Sonny's tuition at Our Lady of Mercy, where we were in the same class, but she was always threatening to stop writing the checks if his grades didn't improve. All through grammar school, he practiced spelling and multiplication tables with

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me; he knew the twelve-times long before I did but barely passed the test. His favorite assignment was memorizing a psalm: he picked *How long, Lord? Will you utterly forget me?* He had it down cold in five minutes and crowed it so many times that I learned it too, but when he stood to recite, he couldn't get past that first lament. From the back of the room I whispered: *How long will you hide your face from me?* but Sonny was too flustered to see.

My mother gave up on Catholic school and sent us to Greenglass Central High, but in freshman year she caught us in my bedroom making out, the one and only time we did such a thing, my blouse on the floor and Sonny so high he couldn't stop laughing. She banished him forever. I protested that I was the one who did the unbuttoning, so I was the one who should be banished.

My mother said: "Believe me, I'm tempted."

We were in different tracks at Greenglass Central but Sonny winked, passing me in the halls, and sometimes he reached out a hand to graze mine. He grew the buzz cut down to his shoulders.

Is it any surprise when boys who live with their mothers in one-room apartments drop out after junior year, or join the Marines when a war starts, or deal fentanyl when they get home? Sonny had finally passed his GED when the cops arrested him, in the parking lot of the technical college, his pockets full of pills, his gun in the glove compartment. He might as well have laid it out for them on the front seat.

After Sonny was paroled, I ran into him in the drugstore. I was guilty about not driving out to the bleak state prison after my one awkward visit, but I called his name and he loped down the aisle to squeeze me tight.

I said: "Can you imagine, the two of us back in this sad-sack town?" I heard how that must have sounded to him: me, back home with my PhD to be a professor at the Famous Catholic University; him, back on parole, loitering in the drugstore. Aunt Tildy had called him Sonny after the character in *The Godfather*, as if she knew how louche he would look that day: to me he was one of Isaac Babel's Odessa gangsters, slumming in the twenty-first century.

"Town looks good after that hellhole. Some of those motherfuckers were *mean*, man." The childish sound of *mean*, coming from a combat vet, confused me.

That very night, Sonny went down to the park and crossed over a footbridge to the little island where he could clamber down into the river. It must have been a shock, how much the banks had eroded while he was doing time, sycamores bending every which-a-way, the river churning. We had record heat that night and he stripped naked to swim out into the current. He didn't drown himself, though. He'd heard his parole officer was looking for him and he left his gun on the bank. After he hoisted himself back up, dripping and stinking of river water, the homeless guys who camped on the bank heard the shot—it only took one. The cops told Aunt Tildy that Sonny's hair was still wet when they got there. They also said a Glock was the weapon of choice for suicides.

"Sonny was always impulsive," my mother said. "Reckless."

I wanted to kill her.

DURING THE PANDEMIC, THE CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE reading group grew sick of Zoom meetings, and so we took a long break. By the time we were ready to meet in person, the war in Ukraine was already raging. The invasion had unleashed our most murderous instincts, so we decided to go around the circle in Zita's living room to express our darkest thoughts, as if that might get them out of our systems.

"I picture bombers strafing the convoys."

"I'll admit I fantasize about an assassination."

"I could engage in hand-to-hand combat right now." I felt there was special discomfort at my words, perhaps because these women knew how I loved Russia. In the summertime I often traveled with a group of students to St. Petersburg, where we'd read Dostoyevsky and stay up late in the white nights. I would tell them how guards had led the young writer out of his prison cell and tied him to a pillar to face the firing squad: a mock execution. My students could not fathom such cruelty, and

who can? I'd escaped my own death sentence from cancer and knew how miraculous every blade of grass looks when they untie you from the pillar. But I told my students that Dostoyevsky, for the rest of his life, would transmit despair through his writing the way a wire transmits electricity. We'd travel next to Odessa, to walk the back alleys where Akhmatova and Babel, no strangers to violence, were born. On we went to Kyiv, where Bulgakov witnessed his own war and dug the morphine needle into his vein. At night the students danced in Kyiv clubs to work all that darkness out of their systems. I don't suppose Putin ever stayed up late, reading Akhmatova. I don't suppose he ever danced his darkness away.

Most of us in the reading group have been trying to practice nonviolence for decades, standing for hours in slush and blazing sun, hoisting placards in witness against a long list of American wars. But every woman there believed that Ukraine had to defend itself—the only question was how that could possibly be achieved with nonviolence. We were powerless under the weight of our own study. I wasn't the only one anxious to hear what Veronica, with her eyewitness knowledge, had to say. When it was her turn to speak, though, she cast her eyes down and remained silent. Zita said: "Ronnie?"

She looked up at that. "I prefer Veronica."

Zita apologized and, after a long awkward pause, filled the void: "It's Hitler and the Sudetenland all over again. I mean, the challenge to nonviolence we thought we were finished with." That let loose a flood:

"We've had plenty of challenges. Syria? Burma?"

"Ethiopia. Yemen. The Uighurs!"

"Yes, but those weren't invasions of sovereign countries."

"Oh well then, let's not worry about the Rohingya."

"You know I didn't mean—"

"The just-war boys in my department are all rattling their sabers. I don't have the slightest idea how to refute them. Sanctions? Give me a break."

For this session, we'd read a highly technical academic book on smart sanctions. Now, like our students, we left the text behind. We grew angrier than we'd been when we started. All the while Veronica sat, eyes cast down, silent and still. She'd made good contributions to the Zoom meetings: about the training that desensitizes combat pilots, the tonnage of bombs dropped in Iraq, the number of civilians killed. She never told us why she'd joined our reading group. It was entirely unclear whether she was distressed by her combat experiences or curious about nonviolence or eager to have her career choice ratified by our ineffectual gestures.

That afternoon at Zita's was the only time I ever spoke to her in person, though I'd seen her in church and of course on Zoom, where she spoke with authority, her ruddy cheeks devoid of makeup or humor. A group of smart women reduced to sputtering shouldn't have shut her down, so after we rose for a coffee break, I made a point of hanging back to say: "It's so hard to know what to do."

"Is it?"

She already had one arm in her coat sleeve and left without saying goodbye to anyone, including me.

WHEN SONNY DIED, I HADN'T STEPPED FOOT IN A church in twenty years. Not to get married, not while I was going through chemo, not when my husband left me. I expected no solace from a funeral Mass, but I had to say goodbye to Sonny. As the family waited on the steps of Our Lady of Mercy for the other mourners to be seated, my mother said: "He was never the same after Iraq." This was the same woman who said he'd always been reckless, but short of running down the church steps screaming, I had no way to escape. I squeezed in the front row between her and Aunt Tildy, who'd taken a nip or two of Scotch to get through the Mass.

I twisted around to look for sympathetic faces, but the sparse mourners in the pews behind us looked like they too were avoiding their parole officers. I faced front again. When I was a child, I'd loved staring at the big crucifix above the altar, pondering Jesus' acceptance of nakedness and torture. Now I could not raise my eyes. My mother's contradictions echoed. *Never the same. Always reckless.*

Aunt Tildy trembled beside me, but she wouldn't cry. I was the one who wept, before the Mass started and straight through to the final blessing. I could see Sonny's dirt mustache clear as if he appeared in a PowerPoint slide projected on the altar. I watched him clamber down the low crumbling bank to the brown Greenglass. He honked at the bleating geese, unbuckled his grimy jeans, stripped naked. In the bright day I conjured, he was pale as moonbeams, wiry and perfect. Sonny, liberated from the one-room apartment, from classroom recitations: he was every man detained by the Indiana Department of Corrections, wading into the restless water. I

I kept showing up—full of bemusement, resentment, and a generally bad attitude—but present, at least in the flesh.

began to sob with such abandon that my mother put her hand to my shoulder, but I shrugged her off, furious still.

In the months after, I found myself wandering into Masses all over town until I found the Sisters. I don't know what I was looking for and I don't know what I found, except maybe those familiar gestures, that poetry punctuating the sermons. Then I kept showing up—full of bemusement, resentment, and a generally bad attitude—but present, at least in the flesh. Veronica showed up too, but after the blessing she was out the door like a shot, as if she were afraid someone would talk to her, as if she were afraid someone would say: *It's so hard to know what to do.*

THE PRIEST WHO SAID VERONICA'S FUNERAL MASS looked like a character out of Tolstoy, copious wires springing from his ears, large black mole painted mid-chin, white vestment hovering uneasily on his stooped back. When it was time for his sermon, he began: "Once we would have denied a suicide a requiem," and because the congregants were used to provocations—the nuns chose which priests to invite—no one blinked. He pushed harder. We all knew it was a suicide, he said. It was no use pretending. It must have been his insistence that caused rustling in the pews.

It was another small gathering, studded with military uniforms. Only an ancient priest would ramble on like this about suicide in front of the family. That was when I realized Veronica's daughter wasn't sitting in the front row with her uncle: he was the only family member present, a civilian now in that pigeon-gray suit. From my oblique angle I could see his strange half-smile.

I panicked that the priest might want to explain why Veronica had killed herself, might list causes delivered incontrovertibly as the times tables. Rational reasons, as if there were any, to fly an SUV into the river. I was having more and more trouble making out his quavering voice: static buzzed in my left ear like electricity and in my right I heard different words entirely: Akhmatova's "Requiem." *How long till execution?* I didn't feel removed from the scene, I felt submerged. *How long, Lord?* I felt again my mother's hand on my shoulder. It weighed a thousand pounds. *How long must I carry sorrow in my soul?*

The static now droned in both ears. I rose and women all around me—women from the nonviolence reading group, women who taught at the college—turned in curiosity. I retreated with as much dignity as I could summon. As soon as I pushed open the back doors, I flew past the vestibule, through the parking lot, across the narrow roadway. The snow had melted away but still I slipped and slid my way down the bluff, the leaves underfoot slick with decay. A goose at river's edge, hearing my clumsy descent, puffed himself out and hissed. I unbuttoned my peacoat and tossed it on a broken limb. The suffering in Ukraine was unfathomable. I wanted to pour Akhmatova down every Russian soldier's ear. I wanted Putin to see what he had wrought. I wanted to drive through the bleak Indiana countryside to the prison. I wanted to see Sonny's face and I wanted my mother to see it too.

From above I heard someone call. I twisted my ungainly body to see the woman with sensible oxfords who'd witnessed Veronica's suicide, the stout woman—though, let's get real, I am stouter still. I couldn't make out a word but I could see her broad gestures, dramatic as my mother's. I knew her, without her name, and she knew me.

But I hadn't reached the bottom yet, and the river held a cold allure. *How long till execution?* On the placid surface of the Greenglass I saw a host of soulful Ukrainian faces born under the boot of the Russian empire, and there in front were my darlings: Ahkmatova, Babel, Bulgakov. Sonny, floating along behind them, winked in my direction and regarded my writers with wry forbearance.

Veronica's eyes, above the steering wheel, focused on the river in her rearview. I heard myself moan, but it wasn't enough to silence the sounds of dozens of stout bodies struggling down the riverbank. I didn't need to twist around to know it was an army of women, come to rescue me.

VALERIE SAYERS, *Kenan Professor of English Emerita at the University of Notre Dame, is the author of six novels and a story collection.*

AUGUST, FRIDAY, GRAND AND CLEAR

Spencer Hupp

Where we're going isn't far,
Nor is it fair.

Ain't no bigtop with a round
Of outhouses and sand,

Nor needlenosed sky-height
With pilot-light

Or flares.
No, nor anywhere.

Where we're going has been thatched.
It lets in such light

(Its hayseams must be spare as a tomb)
That it recalls a sitting room

Where we grieve in mist, and must and most
Of someone once here: thee, o Christ.

SPENCER HUPP *is a poet and critic from Little Rock, Arkansas. His poems, essays, and reviews appear in the* Sewanee Review, Raritan, *the* Los Angeles Review of Books, Literary Matters, *the* New Criterion, *the* Honest Ulsterman, Mantis, *the* Cortland Review, *and the* Times Literary Supplement, *among others. Hupp was most recently named a semifinalist in the 2021 92Y Discovery Poetry Contest. He currently serves as an MFA candidate and graduate instructor in the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University.*

'Blessed Happenstance'

An interview with Ange Mlinko

Anthony Domestico

In a 2019 piece for the New York Review of Books, *the poet-critic Ange Mlinko quotes from Karen Solie's "Fables of the Reconstruction": "Do we impose pattern / or rehearse it in our being?" Mlinko declares this question "the perfect agnostic's conundrum," and it's a conundrum that Mlinko returns to, again and again, in her own poetry. Do we create pattern or do we recognize it? Does rhyme, the calling out of one word for another, reveal something deep about language? Or does it just reveal what Wallace Stevens calls our "blessed rage for order"? Does our perception show, as Mlinko writes in her poem "Death in Venice," "a design still hidden in things"? Or does it show, as that poems continues, not so much design as "masqueradings," "rococo masks" that we all assume for ourselves and place upon the world? Mlinko doesn't answer these questions in her essay on Solie. Nor does she answer them in her poems. That's okay. It's not in the nature of a conundrum to be solved. Mlinko's sixth collection,* Venice, *was recently published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. The following interview was conducted by email.*

ANTHONY DOMESTICO: As you wrote in an earlier book, "Discipline / is stylish," and there's plenty of stylish discipline in *Venice*: poems in terza rima, sonnets, sonic and visual rhymes that are inventive and outlandish. (In "Moth Orchid," for instance, you rhyme "moon-tones" with "cojones." Ha!) What new formal challenges gave you the most pleasure in writing this book?

ANGE MLINKO: It's really always about the rhymes, which I think of less as a musical device than a conveyance: it propels the movement forward, creating a staircase to further floors and mezzanines. I don't think there's a poem in the book that isn't beholden to it, and even "Whisper Networks"—which looks like an odic, sprawling thing—has a hidden skaldic rhyme scheme.

The other formal challenge was to ring changes on the theme of "Venice" through the book, with a play on "Venus" as well.

AD: The collection's title refers most explicitly to the Italian city of Venice, with its "canal steps troubled by centuries" and vaporetti. But it also refers to Venice, Florida—a city on the Gulf Coast where, you write, it "rained so hard all summer long, / every field was canalized / by overflow." In this book, you also consider Naples, Italy (both the real place and the city as memorialized by Elizabeth Bishop) and Naples, Florida. How do Florida, where you live now, and Italy, where you so often remember or dream of being, resemble one another?

AM: Not at all, except that both are sunny peninsulas built on porous limestone (I had Auden's "In Praise of Limestone" in the back of my head while I was seesawing between the two places.) Florida appeals to the primitivist; it's a place to start from scratch. I have a horror of the Crusoe fantasy, so I

gravitate to a place with thousands of years of history. I'm not one to paddleboard with the alligators. Maybe I was trying, in this book, to feel more at home here.

AD: Your previous collection, *Distant Mandate*, has a poem, "What to Read This Summer," that begins with the pronouncement, "Terrible are the rose names," before offering a litany of them "Grande Amore," "True Love," "Buttercream," and so on. In *Venice*, the Don Juan rose, mentioned once in *Distant Mandate*, comes up in several poems. What attracts you to this rose and its name? To naming roses generally?

AM: James Schuyler said you must learn the names of roses, but then you must forget them. I take him to mean that nothing about roses, or memory, is permanent. But in fact I planted a rose called the Don Juan and it was extravagant: gorgeous and fecund. The canes grew taller than the house, it was in bloom for most of the year, and pruning it was a gladiatorial event. It began to seem as though it had the outsize personality of the man of legend. I'm a huge fan of Mozart's opera as well as the Byron poem, so I couldn't escape those resonances either. I hadn't explicitly thought of this till now, but I suppose I think greediness is a natural state—the state of vegetation, which is invasive, and the state of men, with their invasions and incursions—and it's up to poetry to remind us that constraint is not natural, yet it makes us more beautiful.

It's up to poetry to remind us that constraint is not natural, yet it makes us more beautiful.

Ange Mlinko

DAVID A. BROWN/DABFOTO CREATIVE

AD: You've said that you were raised Catholic but have "long since lapsed." How would you say your thinking—about time, form, figuration, atonement—has emerged from this background? In "The Mysterious Barricades," you describe "a retrieval / of standards and emblems, the use / of symbol, allegory, amulet, // the team colors you cannot refuse." I'm wondering to what extent Catholicism remains your team colors.

AM: Certainly it's the most aesthetic religion, this side of Eastern Orthodoxy (my maternal grandparents were Orthodox), and maybe if it had retained Latin it would still have me! (I can't stand mundanity in sacred spaces.) I am, yes, alert to my favorite artists who were either Catholic or gravitated to it. I've been returning to Dante periodically since I was nineteen.

I benefited enormously from the philosophical and theological grounding that Catholicism gave me; it provided some of the only real intellectual stimulation I had as a child. It prepared me for the iconography and architecture and musical structures of Western art. Now, as a professor of creative writing, I see where the disdain for philosophical tradition has gotten us as a society—a lot of canned language about wellness and trauma, a narrow frame of cultural reference, and little access to transcendent experience, romantic or otherwise. I'm sad for my students.

AD: One of your favorite poets, Marianne Moore, writes that "to explain grace requires a curious hand." That word, "grace," comes up in the new book, and it's come up in previous collections, too. How do you see the relationship between poetry and grace?

AM: Poetry is the intersection between two kinds of grace—the quality of being graceful (agile, courtly) and blessed happenstance. Because one can't simply write a great poem, or even a great line, on command, one of the mysteries of poetry continues to be its provenance. Why isn't it simply a skill one

DUCKS

Ange Mlinko

After the olivine waves of Marina di Torre del Lago,
we drive between colonnades of umbrella pines …
It is 7:30 p.m. and the midsummer sun has just descended
below the treeline … Lorenzo laments that the days
are getting shorter now. I think this is premature.
By our separate doors we leave the Fiat together.

The roadside broom and bluets seem to go together,
but past the threshold of the estate nothing is allowed to go
to picturesque ruin, and nothing runs riot. Mature
magnolias line the long approach to the villa, spines
of stiff-leaved groundcover bristle; it's hardly paradise,
but I follow the gravel path to the single palm descended

from its paradisiacal prototype … The yard is scented
with thyme, and classical music as if from the ether
sounds from a distance; speakers might have risen to a dais,
but now there are speakers in the trees! Not long ago,
I would have been enchanted; yet even as one who pines
for the absolute, I don't want to make a premature

assessment of the villa's charms before I make a tour
of its offerings. It faces us as a goddess who condescended,
once upon a time, to face the photographers. Lorenzo opines
that Puccini was always hunting something, with either
rifles or leitmotif … Eventually we pass – *Prego!* –
through a portal, our uneasy little pas de deux

crumbling as we transition in a kind of sultry daze
from the vacant frontage with its orchestral imprimatur
to a backyard soundstage, a top-forty number and a gogo
troupe of girls dancing in synch. Mothers have descended
on the place with aunties, nanas, sparsely seated together
in rows of ordinary folding chairs hard on lower spines.

Lorenzo is galvanised by the sight. He pines
for something less abstract—where are the does
of yesteryear? … I wander off, aware of being thrust together
under artificial conditions. I'm bored with this amateur
production … It is an ennui so blank and open-ended,
it derives more from film and poetry than ego.
Ergo the pines, descended into premature darkness
under a spot of smelted apricot in the west. We bid adieux
together to swanhead spigots. And a wall of fig leaves…

First published in the London Review of Books. *Used by permission.*

learns? Why does it depend on being hit by lightning, as Randall Jarrell put it? You can't plan for it, depend on it, or demand it. (Like love, I suppose.) That's why the Greeks spoke of Muses and Rilke spoke of Angels.

AD: You open *Venice* with an epigraph from the Florida chapter of Henry James's book of travel writing, *The American Scene*. "In the Nursery" contains another James reference. Is he an important writer for you? How has he shaped your thinking about the relationship between life and art? I'm thinking particularly of his famous claim from a 1915 letter: "It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance."

AM: Yes, I couldn't agree more. *Portrait of a Lady* is one of my favorite novels, and his stories about artists, particularly "The Figure in the Carpet" and "The Aspern Papers," have worked their way into my poems. The conundrum of *making* is always presenting itself. Which is to say the conundrum of fiction, of representation, of simulacra. The old question: What is it our fictions add to nature? I'm endlessly interested in this. Why am I not growing vegetables instead? Wouldn't that be more practical?

AD: Your poems so often emerge from travel and the kinds of contact it enables. As a lover of travel, what have the last two years been like for you?

AM: Yes, I thrive on motion, so it has been grim. The pandemic shutdowns forced me to reckon with staying home, or rather, traveling strictly through the library: I'm working on a manuscript on the influence of Florida on the stylistic imaginations of Stevens, Moore, Bishop, Merrill, and Harry Mathews. But that's prose, so it hardly counts!

ANTHONY DOMESTICO *is Chair of the literature department at Purchase College, and a frequent contributor to* Commonweal. *His book* Poetry and Theology in the Modernist Period *is available from Johns Hopkins University Press.*

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RAND RICHARDS COOPER

Suspense in Real Life

The films of Asghar Farhadi

The unsettling start of Asghar Farhadi's 2016 film, *The Salesman*, shows the residents of a Tehran apartment complex frantically evacuating as the building begins to crack and sway. It's no earthquake but a collapse caused by shoddy design and a nearby construction project that has undermined the structure's stability. This ominous event prefigures the fate of the film's central couple, Emad and Rana, whose life is about to crack open, thanks to an unexpected crisis that finds a fault line in their marriage and exerts seismic pressure.

Farhadi's films, unlike that apartment complex, are extremely well built—closely observed studies of marriages and families under duress. In the past decade and a half, the director has emerged as a celebrated chronicler of life in his home country, Iran, winning an array of awards including last year's Grand Prix at Cannes for his most recent film, *A Hero*. His work resonates with professional critics and popular audiences alike. Fellow director Mike Leigh, interviewing Farhadi in November for the British Film Institute (BFI), introduced him as "one of our greatest directors," praising his "extraordinary ability to put real people on the screen in a real way."

The image of Iran in the United States remains shaped by the long-ago hostage drama and our preoccupation with the mullahs. In fact, Iran has a large, educated middle class, and the tensions and paradoxes posed by a theocratic regime ruling over a cosmopolitan populace have informed such contemporary Iranian filmmakers as Majid Majidi, Jafar Panahi, Dariush Mehrjui, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, and Farhadi himself. Assessing the director's work in a 2014 book, critic Tina Hassannia described a "documentary-like social realism" that addresses "the complexities of everyday life in contemporary Iran, with a particular focus on the ways in which diverse perspectives are embedded within social structures such as class and gender."

While the complexity of contemporary Iran lends material to Farhadi's films, it doesn't account for how his innocuous domestic stories gather such propulsive power. During the BFI interview with Farhadi, Mike Leigh compared the Iranian director to Hitchcock. "Actually, *you* are the master of suspense in real life," Leigh said. "We sit on the edge of our seat in all your films." Those films are all of a piece; you can jump into Farhadi's oeuvre pretty much anywhere and get the physics of it, a universe structured by suspicion and doubt, and maintained through interrogation and blame.

His starting point is typically one of settled marital acrimony, with festering disagreements that play out beneath the judgmental eye of children. It's rare to see a kiss between spouses in Farhadi; the intimacy he explores is not affection but argument—vehement skirmishes in the enclosed spaces of cars, apartment kitchens, and offices. A surly teenage daughter casts a pall over the breakfast table; a distressed mom locks her unruly four-year-old in his room as he pounds away at the door: the sympathy on offer in his movies arises from an acute rendering of the maddening pressures of family life. You recall the many times as a parent that you wanted to tear your hair out.

Into this familial volatility Farhadi throws the lit match of a complicating event—an altercation with a home-care worker, a lost or stolen handbag, a break-in—that starts an implacable undoing. In the director's vision of things, chaos rumbles beneath the surface of our lives; any stability in a marriage, family, or community is an illusion readily demolished by an irruption of evil—evil, in the Shakespearean sense of malicious fateful event.

Farhadi won attention in 2006 with his first international release, *Fireworks Wednesday*, a disconcerting study of an anxious woman convinced, rightly or wrongly, that her husband is having an affair with a neighbor. But it was with *About Elly* (2009) that he achieved his breakthrough. The film follows a group

PICTORIAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Saleh Karimaei (left) and Amir Jadidi (right) in *A Hero*

of recently graduated law students—three couples, plus one newly divorced friend—headed for a holiday at the shore, taking along their gaggle of little kids as well as a young acquaintance, Elly, invited as a date for the divorced friend. The high spirits of a larky group idyll evaporate when Elly vanishes on the second day. Did she drown? Run away? The mystery is compounded, and the distress amplified, when the friends learn that Elly is engaged to someone else, that her presence there was a betrayal of him, that the woman in their group who invited Elly knew it all along, and that the group must now contact the fiancé about her disappearance.

Farhadi, who as a young man failed to gain admission to film school and attended drama school instead, has described theater—Ibsen and Chekhov in particular—as his first love, and *About Elly* proceeds theatrically, as the friends heatedly scrutinize every action that could conceivably have contributed to Elly's disappearance. *You* left the kids alone with Elly! *You* chose a villa by the water! Did *you* do something to offend her and make her run off? Why did *you* invite Elly in the first place? Farhadi is a master of the group meltdown; part of the power of his movies lies in the incremental way he pushes a couple, family, or group of friends from bewilderment to irritation and doubt, then to accusation, and finally to raging rancor.

Still from *About Elly*

The blame game turns *About Elly* into a classic falling-out among thieves.

And yet, what crime has this group committed? Farhadi's movies focus less on events themselves than on repercussions. *Homo accusator*: being human, he seems to say, means existing in permanent readiness to offload guilt and angst onto others by lashing out. Taken together, his dramas pose something like a theology of blame. The rampaging recriminations of his mostly secularized protagonists exist in implicit contrast with the certitudes of the pious, God-centered society around them. *If you hadn't done this, we wouldn't be here!* Lacking a transcendental answer to the problem of evil, his flailing protagonists double down on human agency.

The director has credited *About Elly* with helping him discover falsehood and deception as central themes, and from that film onward he invariably brings his protagonists to a point at which they must lie in order to get themselves out of a hole they have inadvertently dug. Almost without fail, they only dig the hole deeper. This fateful action amplifies suspense by drawing us into a queasy recognition. Farhadi's films pose nightmares of culpability of the kind that you are always relieved to wake up from, and that give his seemingly pedestrian scenarios their tinge of dread.

Farhadi consolidated these motifs and preoccupations in a pair of Oscar-winning films remarkable for their stealthy power. The first was *A Separation* (2011), his quietly harrowing study of a domestic incident that spirals out of control. A surprise hit, the film earned $25 million at the global box office, helping it become the first Iranian movie to win an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

A Separation charts the travails of Simin and Nader, a Tehran couple bitterly torn between her wish to restart their life abroad and his commitment to caring for his Alzheimer's-afflicted father. Caught in the middle is their daughter, Termeh. When Simin files for divorce and moves out, Nader hires a young woman, Razieh—pious, poor, and several months pregnant—to care for his father. The old man is prone to wandering off, and one day when Razieh slips out to do an errand, she restrains him by tying his wrist to a bedpost. Returning unexpectedly to discover his father tied to the bed, Nader berates Razieh, in the process accusing her (falsely, it turns out) of stealing money from the apartment. In the ensuing argument, he attempts to shoo her out the door—whereupon she falls down several stairs, and later suffers a miscarriage. Thorny questions arise. Did Nader actually push Razieh, or did she stumble? And did he know about her pregnancy? The contretemps sets off a conflict with Razieh's hotheaded husband, and

PHOTO 12/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

eventually results in criminal charges against Nader.

A plot summary of a Farhadi film sounds like melodrama—yet it doesn't feel that way when you watch. Admirers invariably call his movies "nuanced," and part of his skill lies in tempering melodramatic plots and ethical dilemmas with subtle character portrayal. In Farhadi, selfish characters do unexpected good deeds, and solid ones stumble. This is melodrama without heroes and villains, and skillfully camouflaged by a social realism that offers a finely detailed look at family life. Small things win our sympathy in *A Separation*: Nader's frustration at trying to use the washing machine for the first time; Simin's furious aggravation at a stuck zipper on a suitcase as she is trying to leave. Farhadi is interested in the opposite of grace under pressure. He is the chronicler of basically good people doing small bad things that then require other, bigger bad things.

This cascading calamity gives *A Separation* its almost shocking force. For Nader, a small lie deployed to protect himself as he recounts his argument with Razieh leads ultimately to the threat of a lost job and livelihood, forcing more lies. Upping the stakes are the financial and emotional stringencies of marital separation in a world where people are just barely making ends meet. There is no room for error in these lives. One stupid little thing, and soon Nader's world lies in ruins. *A Separation* is a finely calibrated pressure machine; halfway through, I had to take a break from the sheer intensity of it.

The director's exploration of calamity continued with *The Salesman*, another taut marital drama resting on a web of dire happenstance. Emad and Rana are a childless couple starring in a community-theater performance of *Death of a Salesman*. When their apartment building is condemned, leaving them in urgent need of housing, a friend finds them a flat whose tenant has precipitously moved out for unknown reasons. A few nights later, Rana, home alone and showering, is assaulted by an intruder who leaves behind car keys and a cell phone when he flees. The movie records the reverberations of this seemingly random attack. Rana is traumatized, while Emad—an even-tempered high-school teacher—goes digging into the assault. Things grow sinister when he pieces together that the former tenant was a prostitute. Bit by bit he grows obsessed with discovering who attacked his wife—and when he finally does, the discovery takes him to a still darker place.

The Salesman teems with things said or done in the heat of the moment and soon regretted. Reviewing the film for the *New Yorker*, Anthony Lane called Farhadi "a master of disorientation," and the contending perspectives he builds into his narratives defy our wish for a definitive take on his characters or their fateful decisions. When the identity of the intruder is finally revealed, we feel loathing for the man…followed by pity at his cringing miserableness… followed by doubt about our own pity… followed by second thoughts about the harshness of Emad's treatment of him. It's exhausting.

Part crime mystery, part marital drama, part ethical seminar, *The Salesman* arrays characters in a thought experiment designed to raise abstract questions—about judgment, righteousness, responsibility, truth. Farhadi has spoken of his conscious desire to "trigger discussion and debate" in an audience. When, if ever, is it acceptable to lie about something in order to effect good? At what point does justice become unseemly revenge? In film after film Farhadi structures ethical inquiries without cost either to the credibility of his stories or the humanity of his characters. His genius, and the subtle power of his movies, reflect his ability to be, cinematically, both mind and body—to present abstract ideas fully fleshed out in engrossingly real lives.

Anyone familiar with Farhadi's work will know that the title of his newest film, *A Hero*, can only be ironic. Whatever the virtues of his flawed and flailing characters, they are never quite heroes. The new movie explores not the character of a hero, but the manufacturing of one.

The fable-like setup follows Rahim, a young man staying with his sister during a three-day leave from debtors' prison, where he's being held for failing to pay off a sizable debt to his churlish ex-brother-in-law, Bahram. Rahim's girlfriend, Farkhondeh, welcomes him with a handbag she has found—its strap broken—in the road by a bus stop. Its contents include seventeen gold coins. Rahim goes to a gold dealer to sell them; but offered a sum less than half his debt, he declines. Back home, after his sister discovers the bag and—worried he has stolen it—interrogates him about it, Rahim decides to do the right thing and find its owner. He posts notices around the bus stop, and the next day a woman materializes and, with weepy gratitude, claims the bag.

As always in Farhadi, these happenstance events trigger fateful consequences. They begin when administrators at the debtors' prison decide to publicize the good man in their midst: a man who owed money, yet gave up money nonetheless. "What you did was beautiful," the prison director says. "It was a noble gesture." They call the press, and TV and magazine stories follow in short order. A local charity takes notice, organizing a fundraiser to help pay Rahim's debt, and later—at a public ceremony where Rahim sits beatifically beaming—offering him a job. The pariah has become a paragon.

Then trouble begins. The second half of *A Hero* undoes Rahim's redemptive act, weakening it from within and chipping at it from without. In interviews, the hero begins to embroider his story in ways that accentuate his selflessness. Meanwhile, rumors spread on social media—possibly spurred by his creditor, Bahram, who is being pressured to forgive the debt. Did prison authorities gin up the whole story to burnish their image following the recent suicide of another inmate? Did Rahim actually have the gold coins before he said he found the handbag? Was the woman who claimed them herself a thief, some-

Leila Hatami and Payman Maadi in *A Separation*

how in cahoots with Rahim? "He made up this story to fix his reputation," Bahram asserts, "and that's all this is."

Is it? Behind his marquee good looks and a gleaming smile that alternates with hangdog glumness, Rahim remains opaque, and this opacity conduces to speculation regarding his motives and, well, his heart. When a fellow inmate berates him for helping the prison authorities "cover up their shit," we too wonder, why *did* he decide to give the money back? What's he trying to get? Personal questions provoke philosophical ones. As Rahim receives first accolades and then a job offer, redemption becomes compensation, and his seemingly impulsive act of goodness begins to look shrewd. Does this change its meaning? Are good deeds vitiated by ulterior motives? Bahram, in turn, bluntly raises the question: Should Rahim be celebrated simply because he refrained from stealing the gold? "Where in the world are people celebrated for not doing wrong?" Bahram asks, exasperated, when the charity urges him to forgive Rahim's debt. And then there are Bahram's own travails. He discloses that in order to pay off the loan shark Rahim owed money to, he had to sell precious family jewelry. "Now he's a hero and I'm the bastard creditor? What about *my* goodness?"

Where most contemporary directors subsume the ethical into the psychological (take Maggie Gyllenhaal's recent *The Lost Daughter*, for instance, in which the theft of a child's doll has no ethical dimension at all, serving only to illuminate the inner struggles of the protagonist), Farhadi once again keeps ethical considerations front and center. Bit by bit, meanwhile, Rahim's redemption falls apart, as suspicions are fed by social-media rumors, and the same players who opportunistically manufactured his redemptive story now run from it. Lionization becomes vilification, leaving us to sort out the truth. That's never easy in a Farhadi movie, where even the basics of what happened in any event, let alone the workings of the human heart, remain inscrutable. An hour into *A Hero*, we may begin to doubt what we saw at the start. What exactly *did* happen, for instance, when Rahim took the coins to the gold dealer?

In his interview with Mike Leigh, Farhadi discussed the discovery, early in his career, of how "details can cause a

disaster." What he meant was a disaster of interpretation—the way a small utterance or action, innocuous-seeming at the time, may loom large in light of a subsequent crisis. While only some of his films portray an actual crime, *all* his films are investigations: of actions committed in the heat of a moment, of half-truths and evasions, of feckless attempts at undoing damaging errors. What's both riveting and unsettling in these relentless inquiries is how we ourselves are implicated. There are plenty of directors—from Lars von Trier to Neil LaBute to Todd Solondz to Michael Haneke—who have built their cinematic visions on misanthropy. Not Farhadi. I'm hard-pressed to think of a director who portrays his characters this sympathetically while judging them this balefully. Eventually in *A Hero*, Rahim must either prove his bona fides to the charity group by producing the woman whose bag he returned, or lose his job offer. Unable to find her, he undertakes a fraudulent pretense. When the ploy goes south, our emotions go with it. The result is the opposite of catharsis; it is a sickening feeling of complicity. Forgiveness in Farhadi's movies is rooted in this queasy recognition. His characters may be errant, fearful, and self-serving, yet we are never allowed to pile on. Instead, we find ourselves steered back again and again into the large murky zone where so much human action and intention reside. We don't judge them because we *are* them.

Discussing the origins of *A Hero*, Farhadi has cited his reservations about "the tendency to create heroes in a society," calling it "a way for people to run away from their own individual responsibilities"—a carefully couched comment likely to resonate in a self-proclaimed revolutionary society like Iran, where a repressive regime cloaks itself (and its widespread corruption) in moral righteousness and a culture of public heroism. Up against the zeal of a rigidly dogmatic theocracy, Farhadi's films implicitly offer a brief for the values and habits of liberalism: skepticism, ambiguity, and the humility of withholding judgment in the face of how little we know.

A Hero lacks the sharp focus on family and marriage of Farhadi's other films, and as a result I found it less emotionally involving than *A Separation* or *The Salesman*. Yet it has a single-minded power. Exuding the timeless quality of a scriptural parable or philosophical dialogue, the movie juxtaposes the simplified narratives of virtue put out for public consumption—Rahim actually has a Certificate of Goodness, issued by the charity, that he carries around with him—with the tangled network of unknowables that is reality. In its obsession with motive, *A Hero* goes questing for the Great White Whale of Goodness, plowing through waves of opportunism and hypocrisy in search of a single disinterested deed. In the end, as if sick of mixed motives, including his own, Rahim decides on an action that is morally correct but that guarantees he will have to return to prison. The tradeoff makes for a downbeat ending, and as our disgraced hero shuffles ignominiously back to jail, it's hard not to see him as a kind of sacrifice tossed on the movie's ethical pyre.

It would be irresponsible not to close the discussion of *A Hero* with the absurdly germane backstory of the film itself. As has been widely reported, Farhadi is currently embroiled in a legal dispute over his film's source material. In 2015 a young filmmaker named Azadeh Masihzadeh made a documentary film, *All Winners, All Losers*, based on the real-life story of a man who returned a bag of money he found while on leave from a debtors' prison in Iran. Masihzadeh's film stemmed from an assignment she got in a filmmaking class that Farhadi was teaching. Six years later, when *A Hero* appeared, Masihzadeh charged plagiarism, and sued for copyright infringement—whereupon Farhadi countersued for defamation. The defamation case was recently dismissed, but elements of the plagiarism case currently remain under litigation.

Both cases center on the question of whether the initial idea for the story came from Farhadi or was dug up by Masihzadeh herself. If this were a Farhadi film, we can imagine how things would go from here. Did the teacher know about the original source, even if he claims not to have? Did he and his student meet at a café somewhere and discuss it? And might we—or someone—be privy to the one damaging detail that can cause disaster? It would be very ironic if a court somewhere found the detail that would either implicate or exonerate this most forensic of directors. But life doesn't always imitate art, and as any student of Farhadi's intense, elusive, and ambiguous films will tell you, we may never fully know.

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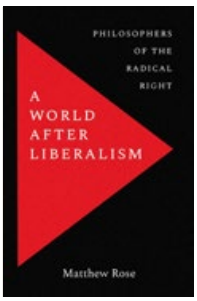
Oswald Spengler, 1922

Christianity's Postliberal Critics

JEET HEER

In the past few years, several murderous racists have shown a strange interest in demarcating their complicated relationship with Christianity. Payton S. Gendron, who was arrested for shooting ten Black people at a Tops Friendly Markets store in Buffalo in May, raised the issue in his heavily plagiarized manifesto. In a "questions and answers" section, he takes up the question "Are you a Christian?" According to Gendron, "No, I do not ask God for salvation by faith, nor do I confess my sins to Him. I personally believe there is no afterlife. I do however believe in and practice many Christian values." It's the issue of "Christian values" that makes Gendron's affiliation with Christianity more complex. For the manifesto makes clear that Gendron's racism includes the belief that "Christian values" are a significant component of "White culture." He also accuses Jews of being demonic.



A WORLD AFTER LIBERALISM
Five Thinkers Who Inspired the Radical Right

MATTHEW ROSE
Yale University Press
$20 | 208 pp.

Gendron lists an array of other killers as his inspiration. They include Brenton Tarrant, who killed fifty-one Muslims in New Zealand in 2019, and Anders Breivik, who killed seventy-seven people, mostly teenagers, in Norway in 2011. Both men also defined themselves as unbelievers but cultural Christians, acting to defend the faith against secular and infidel (largely Islamic) foes. In his manifesto, Breivik told his followers that they "don't need to have a personal relationship with God or Jesus to fight for our Christian cultural heritage."

These three murderers are a new breed of crusaders: political Christians who kill on behalf of a faith whose tenets they don't believe in. They are the most extreme and violent manifestations of an upsurge in white Christian identitarian politics throughout the lands formerly known as Christendom. Their savagery shouldn't disguise the fact that they share a set of concerns with a broader radical Right that is

SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG PHOTO/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

worried about declining white fertility rates, mass immigration from the Global South, and the weakening hegemony of cultural Christianity in the West. Anxiety about demographic change is a staple of the rhetoric of politicians like Donald Trump and Viktor Orbán, and of pundits like Tucker Carlson and Ann Coulter.

It's one of the many merits of Matthew Rose's *A World after Liberalism: Philosophers of the Radical Right* that it helps answer the question of how a figure like Breivik could both disavow Christian belief and claim to kill on behalf of "our Christian cultural heritage." Rose is concerned with thinkers rather than killers, but these are intellectuals who anticipated and shaped the broader shifts on the Right that gave us not only Trump and Carlson but also Gendron and Breivik.

A frequent contributor to *First Things*, where earlier versions of some of this book's chapters originally appeared as essays, Rose is familiar with the many sides of American Christian conservatism, which in recent years has been a house divided against itself, as the older postwar conservative synthesis has been challenged by an insurgent radical Right. For many decades, the religious Right was part of the coalition of fusionism, a conservative synthesis developed in the 1950s by *National Review* editors such as Frank Meyer and William F. Buckley Jr. Nominally, fusionism was a common ground where Christian traditionalists, free-marketeers, and foreign-policy hawks could all rally behind a program of domestic anti-statism and global anti-communism. But in practice, fusionism often meant that traditionalists got the short end of the stick, receiving only rhetorical support from the conservative movement while the business elite got rich from tax cuts and militarists enjoyed unquestioning support for endless wars. In essence, fusionism was always just right-wing liberalism, with a few words about family values thrown in as sop to the theocrats.

Fusionism was already in crisis with the end of the Cold War, challenged by paleo-conservatives who complained that popular right-wing agitation had been exploited and co-opted by the Washington elite. The slow disintegration of fusionism quickened with events at the turn of the century: George W. Bush's failed wars in Iraq and Afghanistan discredited the neo-conservative program of a global crusade for democracy imposed at gunpoint, the economic crisis of 2008 made unvarnished capitalism unappealing even to many on the Right, and the election of Barack Obama intensified racist and xenophobic fears that the dominance of white Christian America was coming to an end.

With the fusionist synthesis in disrepute, activists on the Right started looking for answers among strange new gods. Concluding that fusionism was in theory nothing more than nineteenth-century liberalism and in practice often compromised by alliances with twentieth-century liberalism, young right-wingers started looking for solutions outside the stifling confines of respectable ideas and wandered into the realm Rose calls postliberalism. Rose offers an informed picture, obviously based on firsthand knowledge, of this new cohort of postliberal activists, noting that they want "a political right prepared to dismantle liberal institutions, not simply manage their decline." Further, "they foresee a revolution in conservative thinking. National solidarity and cultural identity, not individual liberty, will be its principal themes—a conservatism focused on public goods, not private interests."

The list of contemporary postliberal thinkers that Rose provides makes for dizzying and confusing reading since they have such varied commitments, ranging from Curtis Yarvin (an anti-democrat who has professed a kind of monarchism) to Peter Thiel (the libertarian plutocrat) to Adrian Vermeule (a Catholic theocrat) to Steve Sailer (a "scientific racist" of the Charles Murray school). Do these thinkers have anything in common aside from a hatred of modern liberal democracy?

The concept of postliberalism gains clarity in Rose's profiles of five major thinkers from the last century. Again, it's a seemingly heterogenous crew: Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), the German cultural morphologist who prophesized the crisis of Western "Faustian" civilization as it confronted challenges from the rising non-white world; Julius Evola (1898–1974) the Italian fascist artist and philosopher who maintained that the esoteric code of anti-egalitarian and irrational traditionalism was superior to liberal modernity; Francis Parker Yockey (1917–1960), the American fascist adventurer who lived a strange furtive existence and came to conclude that the United States was so dominated by Jews that the only hope for European rightists was an alliance with a post-communist Russia; Alain de Benoist (born 1943), a French theorist who deployed post-structuralist celebrations of difference in order to shore up the idea of a European identity that needs to be preserved from immigration and globalization; and Samuel T. Francis (1947–2005), an American pundit who argued for a radical Right that would break with traditional conservatism by harnessing the anger of middle-American whites against a managerial elite.

The heterogeneity of this group makes it hard, at first, to see them as forming any kind of shared pantheon. Part of Rose's achievement is that his deft series of profiles makes clear the common threads linking the members of this motley crew. Spengler, the only truly original and important thinker among them, is the ur-father. In his book *The Hour of Decision* (published in German in the fateful year 1933), Spengler saw beyond the political crisis of his native land to a wider problem he feared would alter the world. As Rose summarizes,

> Near the turn of the millennium, the West would confront the "colored world-revolution," the rise of "colored" nations into positions of increasing parity with the "white world." The revolution will not arrive by

If Christian faith generates liberalism and socialism, what path remains open for the radical Right but a recasting of Christianity away from faith into a tribal identity marked by historical, rather than transcendental, allegiances?

force of arms, he cautioned. It will arrive as Asian, African, Latin American, and Middle Eastern peoples, equipped with Western science and technology, realize that the era of global white supremacy is over.

With the rise of the non-white world, Rose observes, "Spengler feared an outcome more deadly than military defeat, economic loss, or demographic decline; he feared a fatal crisis of identity."

The old adage remains true: for the privileged, equality feels like persecution. What these thinkers of the postliberal Right have in common is that they experience the prospect of equality with the non-white world as a terrifying destruction of their core identity. In response, they indulge in a variety of fantasies: Spengler conjures up dark visions of a declining West receiving only a temporary reprise from new Caesars; Julius Evola takes refuge in mysticism; Francis Parker Yockey loses himself in political conspiracies that brought him into contact with both the fascist underground of post-war Europe and communist intelligence agencies; Alain de Benoist hallucinates about Europe recovering its core "pagan" identity; Samuel Francis works to stir up a new class war aimed at overthrowing managerial capitalism and restoring white dominance.

The white "identity" that the postliberals wish to defend has an uneasy relationship with Christianity. On the one hand, postliberals acknowledge that Christianity has been an essential formative influence on European civilization. As Rose notes, "Spengler regarded Christianity as the finest creation of the European soul." Spengler and subsequent postliberals, however, were also troubled by the fact that Christianity birthed the very egalitarianism and universalism they saw as destructive of white identity. According to the radical Right, in Rose's gloss, "Liberalism is a secular expression of the Christian teaching that the individual is sacred and deserving of protection. Socialism is a secular expression of Christian concern for the poor and downtrodden."

If Christian faith generates liberalism and socialism, what path remains open for the radical Right but a recasting of Christianity away from faith into a tribal identity marked by historical, rather than transcendental, allegiances? We see this Christian nationalism in its most vile form in the manifestos and actions of an Anders Breivik. But a more common version can be seen in the way many American Christians have formed an idolatrous cult around Donald Trump, surely the most profane and Biblically illiterate of all American presidents. Trump is the leader of the Religious Right you get when Christianity ceases to be a religious creed and instead becomes only a tribal identity.

As a Christian conservative, Rose has written his book as a warning against the temptation of Christian nationalism. It's an exceptionally smart map of an important and understudied intellectual tradition. Crisply written and well researched, it is also fair—perhaps too fair—to its subjects. If the book has a fault, it's that it often gives postliberals too much credit. Much of the anti-liberalism of these thinkers seems crude and unmoored from reality. Only Spengler counts as a thinker of real rank; the rest are publicists, agitators, and popularizers. The "new conservatives" who emerged in Germany after World War I, including Spengler, were more compromised by Nazism than Rose allows. Even if they disliked some aspects of National Socialism, they helped pave the way for Hitlerism. Of Yockey, Rose writes, "But if he is guilty of bigotry and worse, Yockey is innocent of shallowness." Rose adds, "Yockey was an anti-Semite of a particularly virulent and innovative kind." In fact, Yockey's views about Jews were simply a rehearsal of the familiar myth of Judeo-Bolshevism. There's little or nothing in his anti-Semitism that couldn't be found in earlier writers such as Louis-Ferdinand Céline. Even Yockey's turn toward Russia was anticipated by Spengler.

Rose also tends to overemphasize the distinction between respectable conservatism (of the *National Review* variety) and postliberalism. Spenglerian themes echoed in the pages of *National Review*, which in its early days often gave space to figures like Revilo Oliver, a Holocaust denier and cofounder of the John Birch Society. Samuel Francis's racism owes much to the work of respectable right-wingers like Willmoore Kendall and James Burnham.

In trying to fend off the appeal of Christian nationalism, Rose concludes his book with a strange chapter trying to deny that Christianity is deracinating. Drawing on early Christian thinkers, he advances the idea of a "Christian race." This seems a wholly unnecessary concession to a repugnant faction. The fact that Christianity challenges and undermines all earthly allegiances and identities is nothing to apologize for; it is truly one of the glories of the faith. There is nothing in the thought of postliberals that should cause a believing Christian to alter her commitments by one iota.

JEET HEER *is a national-affairs correspondent for the* Nation *and the author of* In Love with Art: Françoise Mouly's Adventures in Comics with Art Spiegelman *(2013) and* Sweet Lechery: Reviews, Essays & Profiles *(2014).*

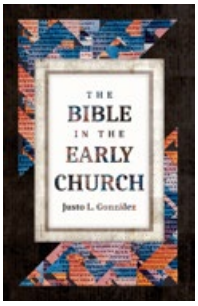
Work of Human Hands

LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON

Over a long career, Justo L. González has written prolifically and responsibly in the field of historical theology, and in his eighty-fourth year offers a brief but deeply informed introduction to the formation and interpretation of Scripture as the Church's book. His target readership is the mythical educated layperson rather than fellow professionals. His prose is correspondingly free from scholarly affectation, his tone that of the patient expositor. He grinds no axes and airs no grievances. And while he does not touch on everything an interested neophyte might want to learn, he manages to convey a considerable amount of information in less than two hundred pages.

A mosaic of Jesus Christ Pantocrator in the Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey

IMAGEBROKER/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



THE BIBLE IN THE EARLY CHURCH

JUSTO L. GONZÁLEZ

Eerdmans
$19.99 | 204 pp.

The book has three parts that treat, respectively, the shape of the Bible, the use of the Bible, and interpretation of the Bible. González focuses mainly on antiquity but some of his discussions move into medieval and even modern times. An extensive "cast of characters" at the back of the book provides thumbnail sketches of the authors González discusses in his text.

In his discussion of the Bible's "shape," González deals primarily with the material dimensions of Scripture, beginning with its contents. What were the cultural contexts and languages employed in the writing of the Old Testament, and how did Hellenistic Judaism's Greek translation (the Septuagint), which was adopted by the first Christians, lead to two distinct canons that even today distinguish Catholic and Protestant versions of the Old Testament? What were the factors at work in the formation of the New Testament canon? While the points he makes are historically responsible, and are certainly helpful to readers totally ignorant of such matters, I found it puzzling that González gives no attention to the kind of prior questions that most demand consideration: What sort of experiences among the tiny and insignificant people of ancient Israel led to the production of such breathtakingly original and compelling writings in the first place? And what sort of experiences impelled the followers of a failed messiah to compose the writings that make up the New Testament, the most tension-filled religious literature ever written?

Christianity appealed to Scripture as it stood against the idolatrous claims of empire.

Concentration on the material aspects of the Church's book continues through the remainder of Part One, as González treats in turn "the physical appearance of early Christian Bibles," "chapters and verses," "the transmission of the text," and "from manuscripts to printed Bibles." In these discussions, each of them well informed and instructive, González considers mainly the physical evolution of the New Testament through the centuries, making the simple but important point that the printed and translated Bible that is held and read by present-day Christians did not fall from heaven but is, down to its very punctuation, a "work of human hands."

In Part Two, González takes up some of the ways in which the Bible was used in the ancient Church, beginning quite properly with its use in worship. Here, the time he spent on the material aspects of the Bible shows its pertinence: before the invention of printing, the experience of Scripture was necessarily liturgical. For most believers, Scripture was not read but heard, and such an oral/aural engagement continued for some fifteen hundred years. González notes the importance of the reader as an ordained position in a largely illiterate population, and the significance of preaching as the primary site of patristic theology. He shows how the shape of the Christian liturgy built on the practice of the synagogue, but he could also perhaps have devoted some attention to the way in which the classic forms of the Eucharist also drew their very language from the Old and New Testaments, so that Scripture was embodied and enacted in the practice of prayer.

As González goes on to show, the liturgical enactment of the Bible is found especially in the communal singing of the psalms, a practice that goes back to the very beginning of the Christian movement. The practice was then extended from common worship to the monastic practice of chanting the psalms, and also to private reading among those with access to texts (or who memorized the psalms through constant repetition). Every observation González makes on this topic is pertinent, and it is legitimate to draw the conclusion that abandoning the practice of such communal singing of the psalms has led to the loss of what can be called a "scriptural imagination"—that is, the capacity to imagine the world as the psalter imagines it, a world porous to the presence and power of God.

From this liturgical starting point, González shows how, despite the paucity of manuscripts and the scarcity of literacy, the private, devotional reading of Scripture was by no means unattested among believers in the patristic and medieval periods. Such personal reading was not the invention of Protestantism and the printing press, although those ideological and technological revolutions can serve to obscure their more modest precedents. Similarly, the Bible was the essential tool for efforts to shape a distinctively Christian education, one that drew from the riches of Hellenistic culture while simultaneously subverting and transforming that culture. An essential element in this education was a vision of a righteous social order drawn from the Old Testament and New Testament alike. As a young sect, Christianity appealed to Scripture as it stood against the idolatrous claims of empire; as the authorized religion of the empire, it made Scripture the basis for social teachings and practices that ameliorated the complexities and corruptions of the establishment.

Part Three deals with interpretation of the Bible. González first shows how the New Testament continued the Old Testament's practice of rereading earlier texts and events, in three modes: the prophetic (statements made long ago find their "fulfillment" in the present), the typological (events of the past anticipate and find expression in present events), and allegorical (texts bear not a single meaning but several levels of meaning). By showing how these modes are found in the New Testament itself, González makes the subsequent use of these modes by Christian interpreters appear less innovative or even alien.

The payoff of all this patient exposition is found in substantive chapters devoted to the patristic interpretations of three "crucial texts"—those concerning creation, the exodus, and the Word. In these discussions, González displays his impressive command of early Christian literature as he elucidates the issues in the texts with which the ancients struggled, notes the variety of opinions found among diverse authorities, and identifies the points of agreement among them. These discussions serve to show less-knowledgeable contemporary readers that intellectual struggles with Scripture are not new, that the Church's tradition has included a diversity of opinion even on "crucial texts," and that Christians today have much to learn from such ancient conversations.

In a succinct final chapter, González draws three lessons: first, we would not have the Bible at all without the countless believers who not only preserved Scripture but shared it; second, as we observe the errors that entered into the process of transmission, we need to learn humility in our own handling of Scripture; and third, we ought not to be fearful of further transformations in the appearance of the Bible. The Word of God can speak as well in a laptop as from a manuscript: "The Bible is the Word of God not because of its format or appearance but because God speaks to us in it."

This small book is a gift from a seasoned scholar that combines great learning, clear prose, and rare wisdom.

LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON *is emeritus Woodruff Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University, and a frequent* Commonweal *contributor.*

Who's It For?

EVE TUSHNET

A man at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting tells a story woven from clichés, every beat and twist as familiar as the refrain of a popular song.

A follower of Francis of Assisi tells the story of the night Francis ordered Friar Leo to tell him that his sins were so grave that he deserved "the deepest hell." The baffled but obedient Leo opened his mouth to proclaim his beloved Francis accursed, but God filled his mouth instead with praise for the good works the Lord would do through Francis, who would surely attain paradise.

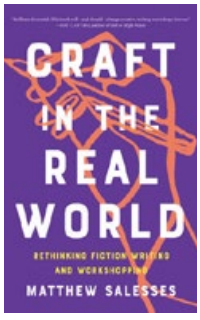
A classic Chinese author tells a story through a series of melodramatic episodes adorned with digressions and repetitions. The episodes are linked not causally, but by themes and associations.

None of these stories were intended for the audience of a contemporary American writing workshop: the place where students in MFA programs learn what it means to write well. Matthew Salesses's recent book, *Craft in the Real World: Rethinking Fiction Writing and Workshopping*, argues that most writing workshops would label work modeled on these examples as "bad writing." Salesses's foremost concern is the way that the behavioral and artistic norms of writing workshops suppress or distort the voices of writers of color, but his deeper purpose is to suggest that the question "What makes a story 'good writing'?" can't be answered until you know who the story is for.

Salesses is himself both a product of the fiction-industrial complex and embedded deep within it. He has a PhD in Literature and Creative Writing, and an MFA in Fiction; he teaches creative writing in the MFA/PhD program at Oklahoma State University. And *Craft* bears the hallmarks of good teaching: it's curious and exploratory, it makes sure to explain things from several different angles, it understands itself simultaneously as an intellectual endeavor and as a professional act of service. Like the Asian literary traditions Salesses often cites as a counterpoint to Western models, *Craft* is multivocal and episodic. Salesses even offers "Four Things to Grade," because he knows that writing teachers who make dramatic changes in their approach to workshopping fiction will still need to present certain products to their employers at the end of each term.

GRACE SALESSES

Matthew Salesses



CRAFT IN THE REAL WORLD
Rethinking Fiction Writing and Workshopping

MATTHEW SALESSES
Catapult
$16.95 | 256 pp.

He opens with the fairly intuitive argument that "'Pure Craft' Is a Lie." Different audiences create their own cultures of good and bad craft, and if a writing workshop doesn't know the tradition in which an author is working or the audience to whom she intends to speak, their ability to improve or even understand her craft will be sharply limited. Workshop culture often requires the author to stay silent while everybody else critiques the story (or parades their own intelligence), making it harder for authors to explore aspects of their stories that their peers don't immediately grasp. Members of minority literary cultures find themselves translating, warping, or discarding the stories that make sense to them in favor of a whole new set of values and expectations. Meanwhile, the majority are writing for an audience much like themselves, which is defined as the normative audience: Salesses is scathing on the practice in which workshop participants attribute

their personal judgments and preferences to "the reader," as if there's only one kind. A writer working within a literary tradition that is dramatically underrepresented in workshops, whether that tradition is Chinese literature or genre fantasy, will find herself criticized in terms designed to make her work more intelligible and familiar…to majority-culture fiction workshoppers.

This is an acute alternative to the standard complaints about the rise of "program fiction." Mark McGurl's ambivalent 2009 *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* argues, "The rise of the creative writing program stands as the most important event in postwar American literary history." As more and more of the authors we know come from these Play-Doh Fun Factories, everybody tries to define what makes "program fiction" recognizable. But these laments usually overstate their case, whether they focus on broad characteristics ("program fiction" experiments with point of view; programs turn writers into joyless darling-murderers), psychological damage (programs breed narcissists and trauma-mongers), or prose tics (my own least favorite is the weird adjectives hitched together by a series of "and"s: "Her smile was thin and raw and ritualistic"). Salesses cuts deeper because he's assessing the process and its norms, rather than generalizing about the products.

He isn't interested, at least not here, in challenging classroom education as the dominant model of fiction apprenticeship. This is not a book attacking the Follow Your Dreams industry. But he does highlight narrative structures, themes, and interpretations of experience that American fiction instruction disregards or discredits. He argues that current norms in fiction training are still deeply influenced by Aristotle's *Poetics*, which was arguing with the tragedians of Aristotle's day. Salesses traces the precept that action should arise "from a character's internal struggle" from Aristotle through E. M. Forster and into his own discovery of the narratives of adoptees like himself. He reminds us that this norm, which contemporary students learn as settled consensus, began as Aristotle's "dissent."

It's striking just how many critiques of contemporary fiction norms turn out to be critiques of individualism. Salesses doesn't swerve all the way into "the CIA invented modernism to sell more Dole bananas" territory, but he does suggest a subtler influence of American consumer-capitalist norms on our fiction. Leslie Jamison's insightful 2018 memoir/study *The Recovering: Intoxication and Its Aftermath* contrasts the narrative traditions she was learning in Alcoholics Anonymous with the norms of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she learned her craft. Jamison discovered that AA was choral, tradition-minded, aggressively uninterested in the unique. AA didn't care about your backstory, the barroom crowd of reasons behind all your bad decisions. AA mistrusted linear narrative, climax and denouement. For all the talk of "hitting rock bottom," everybody in AA knows that sobriety is as cyclical as addiction, every sunrise beginning your "one day at a time." Then there are those clichés—irritating, lifesaving, the opposite of and antidote to your individual freedom of choice. The image at the beginning of this article of the man whose clichés become a song is from *The Recovering*. The narratives you're trained to tell in Alcoholics Anonymous often include a very literal *deus ex machina*. You are the protagonist of your own life, but not the primary actor. You are responsible (Salesses has a nice riff on redefining "plot" as "acceptance or rejection of consequences"), but you are not the agent of your own rescue.

The idea that what happens in your life is the result of your own character implies a certain level of control that few of us experience. Literary norms may frown on coincidence and catastrophe, gods and fate and socioeconomic structures, but most of us have experienced life-shaping interventions from at least one or two of these strange forces. To go further than Salesses does, I'm not convinced it matters if authors know "how much of the conflict [their characters] face is a matter of fate or free will." I go to confession when I suspect I've done something wrong more-or-less freely, but really I just guess why I did things, like everybody else.

Fate and coincidence are central to fictional depictions of ancient slavery, from Plautus to the late Roman novel. The ideal slave was thought to be an extension of the will of the slave-owner. In such profound denial of not only political but existential freedom, fate and coincidence became ways of expressing the longings of enslaved hearts. Salesses notes that some groups develop narrative norms and tropes that spotlight forces beyond our control:

> In America, coincidence and fate have long been the domain of storytellers of color, for whom the 'naked' force of the world is an everyday experience. In the tradition of African American fiction, for example, coincidence plots and reunion plots are normal. People of color often need coincidence in order to reunite with their kin.

And he adds, "Adoptee stories also frequently feature coincidence and reunion. Maybe that is why I am drawn…to non-Western story shapes."

This is a book studded with throwaway insights. You could organize a whole study of genre around Salesses's redefinition of "believability" as two questions: Who believes that this is happening? Who is shocked by it? Even claims I might quibble with interested me: Is it true, as Salesses argues, that the common critical observation that the setting of a story "is its own character" is "often a veiled way of praising work from, or, even more so, *about* minority communities, if that work is considered evocative by a white audience"?

Craft is that rarest genre of literary criticism: a humble rebuke.

EVE TUSHNET *is the author of two nonfiction books, most recently* Tenderness: A Gay Christian's Guide to Unlearning Rejection and Experiencing God's Extravagant Love, *as well as two novels,* Amends *and* Punishment: A Love Story.

Frank Bidart in his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 2017

KEITH BEDFORD/THE BOSTON GLOBE VIA GETTY IMAGES

Escape from History?

PAUL FRANZ

Reading *Against Silence*, the eleventh collection by the American poet Frank Bidart, I was more than once put in mind of some lines from "Legend," the opening poem of Hart Crane's *White Buildings*, a modernist masterpiece from nearly a century ago that also finds its ethic in the recurrence of desire:

> It is to be learned—
> This cleaving and this burning,
> But only by the one who
> Spends out himself again.

What brought Crane's lines to mind, however, was not so much their theme as the two poets' shared interest in a particular grammatical construction, found in both the "Legend" of Crane's title (from the Latin *legenda*: "things to be read") and in the first line just quoted: "It is to be learned." In Latin, this is called a gerundive: an adjective derived from a verb that typically expresses necessity or obligation. Its English equivalent is an appropriate construction for a poem in which Crane does not just tell us how his book is to be read, but also—what is much the same thing for him—how one must live.

Both projects for both poets are fraught with the romance of danger: the moth's prize for pursuing "the still imploring flame" is to be consumed in it. Yet the ordeal is a heroic one, a "legend." Only in Bidart does the same interest in erotic danger take on a distinctly moral cast—one scarcely concealed by his career-long fascina-

AGAINST SILENCE

FRANK BIDART
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
$16 | 80 pp.

tion with figures of conspicuous moral depravity, embodied once and for all in Herbert White, the serial killer whom Bidart made the subject of a dramatic monologue in his 1973 debut collection *Golden State*. For, as the poet and his protagonists know all too well, necessity licenses everything.

Bidart's work has long been drawn to the blurry boundary between need and compulsion. This duality is present in his habit—one that he shares with contemporary internet slang—of rendering erotic desire as "thirst." (*Desire* and *Thirst* are titles, respectively, of a 1997 collection and a subsection in Bidart's *Collected Poems*.) Thirst for what sustains life and for what intoxicates are not to be distinguished on the basis of their intensity; indeed, the latter often exceeds the former. What is "moral" lacks this compelling force. When one poem's speaker marvels at "a friend who says / that he has never felt a conflict / between something deeply wished or desired, / and what he thought was 'moral'…," the implication seems to be the Blakean one: that the friend's desire is weak.

In Bidart's latest volume, his first since the publication of *Half-light: Collected Poems 1965-2016*, these fascinations are given a new and sharply political setting in the poem "The Moral Arc of the Universe Bends Towards Justice"—an axiom of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. favored by former President Barack Obama. The poem's first line declares this to be "an illusion." The italicized lines that follow begin with a gerundive-like construction: "*What had to be built we knew instinctively must be built / without // asking permission of the ignorant doing the building.*" Who this "*we*" is we do not need to be told. The question is, rather, how it and the volume's other collective speakers—such as the inhabitants of Bidart's childhood California, who "were born into an amazing experiment" and are left declaring, bitterly, "We are sons of the desert / who cultivate the top half-inch of soil"—are to be understood in relation to the maker of these poems. Bidart's work has long made use of italics and capitalization for emphasis; in "Moral Arc," this typographic signature takes on a new complexity. At first, the italics seem to distance the words from the poet, as when the poem gives voice to the oppressor: "*But natural / pity / soon ends / when what pity unleashes / is CHAOS, is / horror.*" Soon enough, however, a closely related thought appears in Roman type: "If you do not become a master / you are a slave."

In case we had failed to grasp the poem's particular historical inflection, its closing lines make explicit the connection to American race-based slavery and the revanchist regime of Jim Crow:

> The voice of *What had to be built* leaves certain
> words bodiless. The Lost Cause, strange
> Fruit, was lost, for us, in a song about
> lacerated flesh.

These lines, in turn, prepare for the collection's most bitter reflection on the rule of ostensible necessity, which is never stronger than in the realm of fear. Like so many other lines in this book, these are haunted by the logic of Thomas Jefferson's letter to John Holmes on slavery, in which Jefferson declares that "we have the wolf by the ear, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other." Or, as the poem puts it:

> When a master stares at himself in the future
> What he fears is that the world will do to him what
> he did to the world when he was the world.

Fear as the rationale for subjugation, defense as the motive for offense: these compulsions are as old as Marcus Cato's declaration in the Roman Senate that "Carthage must be destroyed" (*Carthaginem delendam esse*), one of the most notorious uses of the gerundive on record, and one that echoes in the 1973 book *History*, by Bidart's mentor Robert Lowell. How to escape from this dreadful logic? On this point, Bidart's new poems are equivocal. Like much art of the Trump era—the shocked liberal response to which it documents—*Against Silence* looks out, through our many screens, on a present that seems to be compulsively reenacting a past many had assumed was safely behind us. The risk in its attitude is that of fatalism—as if, confronted with the unexpected persistence of past evils, we had no choice but to view them as eternal recurrences.

In fact, the book does imagine an escape from such fatalism, albeit in a poem of considerable abstraction, whose title, "Coda," warns that it may be located beyond worldly experience. Subtitled "(Neither master / nor slave)," it participates, like several other poems in Bidart's corpus, in the originally medieval genre of the dream allegory, a genre whose touchstones for Bidart are Dante's *La Vita Nuova* and Percy Shelley's "The Triumph of Life," to which it adds strong echoes of Plato's allegory of the cave. Even by those standards, "Coda" is strange:

> Think of the earth—matter, the mind's
> ground—as an enormous mirror
> across whose impenetrable surface the individual
> soul fears that it merely appears and disappears
> without weight, another among multitudinous
> chimera, without identity or consequence.

This vast reflective surface, evoking the illusions of art and the phenomenal world, is also a vertical wall, a mirroring obstruction. The poem's climax tells how the soul, coming up against this barrier, reached out a finger and "with its one knife-like / nail // deep as you could // dug into it. Almost in / delirium, you scratched the screen with a jagged scratch." Such mark-making seems like an emblem for art, albeit one that is hostile to art's traditional function of mirroring or mimesis. Then again, the "enormous mirror" that the finger scratches no longer reflects the world, but *is* the world. A few lines later, the poem appears to comment on this act of scratching:

> Before it happened,
> it was never going to happen.

After it happened,
it was always going to happen.

This formulation might seem to reintroduce, in the context of art, that necessity on which Bidart has already cast such a skeptical eye, suspecting that it harbors a complacent belief in either the inevitability of human progress or its inevitable failure. But such complacency is just what the paradox in these four lines means to overcome. What "happened," the poem implies, was a free act, not to be inferred from what preceded it. And yet, neither is it entirely arbitrary: having happened, it transforms the starting conditions so that it seems to be their logical end. The free act briefly overcomes necessity; but if successful, it, too, will seem necessary in retrospect, making a new kind of sense of all that came before. Still, as imagined here, it remains something cryptic, almost without significance, a scratch.

Against Silence is a collection of poems, not a philosophical treatise; we should no more expect it to adopt a single attitude than we'd expect its author to hold to a single mood. "The Fifth Hour of the Night," the continuation of a sequence Bidart began in the 1990s, flirts at its close with a Nietzschean affirmation of the sun, revealer of the visible world and multiplier of desires and distinctions. Other poems, no less typical of the book, are more qualified in their affirmations. "Coda" itself ends by imagining not a resolution of its central dilemma, but a means of holding it in suspension: "Mind returns the intolerable in art / as brilliant dream." The slash mark here is part of the line itself, not a line break. It is the graphic representation of a paradox that obsesses the poet: the seam that is also a crack.

Rilke imagined art's task as answering the world's desire to be internalized and remade, "an invisible rearising in us." Such tenderness feels remote from the spirit that here declares: "*We needed to rewrite in revenge the world that wrote us.*" Yet the "against" of Bidart's title is more than just adversarial. Often, in this collection by an eighty-two-year-old poet, the preposition suggests something closer to "beside," "close up against"—a chilly nearness that can also suggest loving proximity to what lies beyond the grave. The lovely final poem, borrowing from the poet Kaveh Akbar a Farsi phrase meaning "Your place is empty," imagines a table set for absent friends. The book's last act is one of supernatural hospitality.

PAUL FRANZ *'s criticism and poetry appears in the* Nation *and the* New York Review of Books, *among others.*

POETRY

BOOK OF HOURS 32

Jerry Harp

Digging dandelions summer by summer—
I regard them, hundreds by now, thousands,
but my work doesn't do any good, our yard the same
as when I started, steely roots clutching earth.

In the Desert Sayings, a monk weaves baskets
day after day, and every year gathers
them into a pile he consigns to flames,
the weaving more about his hands
forming mantras than any useful work.

JERRY HARP *has published four collections of poems, most recently* Spirit Under Construction *(2017). His poems appeared or are forthcoming in* Boulevard, december, *the* Cincinnati Review, Hubbub, *the* Kenyon Review, Image, *the* Iowa Review, Pleiades, *and elsewhere. He teaches at Lewis & Clark College.*

CLIFFORD THOMPSON

Keep Looking

Jamel Shabazz: Eyes on the Street

The first thing you see when you enter the exhibit *Jamel Shabazz: Eyes on the Street*, at the Bronx Museum of the Arts through September 4, is a video of the African-American photographer being interviewed in 2007 by members of the museum's Teen Council. You may be tempted to skip the video and go straight to the photographs, but there is a payoff for getting comfortable on the bench first. What this caring, charismatic man says about his work provides context for understanding it, perhaps nothing more so than his observation that humility is necessary for what he does. It may be his own humility that enables him to subtly document, even when photographing the most extroverted of his subjects, the varying degrees of humility that life in New York City—maybe life anywhere—forces most of us to adopt.

Eyes on the Street comprises color as well as black-and-white photographs taken on the streets and subways of New York's five boroughs between 1980 and 2020. Black, Latino, and white people, especially Black people, not necessarily poor but decidedly not rich, gaze at us, or at one another, or at things we can't see. Each subject is the center of the photograph but not of the world in which the picture is taken. In one photo of an outdoor basketball court, two bare-chested young men stand side by side with arms crossed, one smiling, the other looking defiant, both regarding us; meanwhile, some in the distance look at us while others play ball, oblivious to the viewer as well as to the foregrounded figures. Another photo shows a young man sitting on a stoop with only his head and hands visible, the rest of him blocked from view by an enormous poster-portrait of Malcolm X. In yet another, three girls are seen through the window of a subway train, standing, two smiling, the third—in the center—wearing an unreadable expression, while behind them all a balding, mustached man gazes sideways at us, unimpressed. In still another, a boy with close-cropped hair, wearing a bowtie and a jacket several sizes too large, looks into the camera with a serious expression and salutes as other, blurred figures stroll on the sidewalk behind him. In all the pictures, people act out the story of being themselves, in the brief moments before the camera moves on to someone or something else.

COURTESY OF THE BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS

Jamel Shabazz, *Rush Hour 1980*

Shabazz, who was born in Brooklyn in 1960, was a graffiti artist before he began taking photographs at fifteen, inspired by a book on black-and-white photography that his father owned. His father did not think much of Shabazz's photographs but showed him techniques related to light, composition, and developing film. (Using his camera, he says, helped him overcome a stutter.) At sixteen Shabazz dropped out of high school (he later obtained a G.E.D.); soon he joined the military, returning home at age twenty. As he recalls in the Teen Council interview, he was "impacted" by the sight of prostitutes in his neighborhood and talked to them to learn their stories. Empathetic by nature, he was saddened by the gang violence around him, since the participants were people he knew well, sometimes members of rival gangs—who, he came to realize, often refrained from attacking one another out of respect for

It may be his own humility that enables him to subtly document, even when photographing the most extroverted of his subjects, the varying degrees of humility that life in New York City—maybe life anywhere—forces most of us to adopt.

Shabazz. He worked sixteen-hour days at the jail at Rikers Island, getting to know and like the detainees, for whom he obtained books and arranged contact with lawyers; concerned about the young people in his neighborhood, he talked to them in his off-hours about avoiding drugs and prison, while they, in turn, told him about what was going on in the streets. (A refrain in his interview is his sadness over what drugs, particularly crack, have done to neighborhoods in New York. "Crack made people hard," he says.)

Meanwhile, Shabazz took his camera everywhere, snapping pictures of people he encountered. His work began appearing in *The Source*, the hip-hop magazine founded in 1988. By the time Shabazz approached the book publisher powerHouse with his images, they already knew who he was. They agreed to publish his first book of photographs, *Back in the Days* (2001), which quickly sold out its first run. Four other books followed. Since then, Shabazz's work has appeared in more than two dozen solo shows and has been seen internationally.

The photos of people in *Eyes on the Street* add up to a collective portrait of New York over the decades. Flared pants, bygone makes of cars photographed at intersections, long-gone storefronts, and

Jamel Shabazz, *Son and Father*

COURTESY OF THE BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS

Jamel Shabazz, *When two worlds meet*

Afros puffing out from under police hats abound. Speaking of intersections: in shots crowded with people, cars, and buses, some vehicles are cut off, suggesting that activity extends beyond the edges of the pictures—that there is so much more of the humble slice of life we are seeing now. Speaking of police: in one image, four officers, three men and one woman, smile at the camera while standing in front of what appears to be an abandoned building; the building is covered in graffiti and signs that read "We Love Our Youth!" and "Jobs Not Jails." And speaking of graffiti: in the video interview, Shabazz lamented that he had not shot more images of graffiti-covered subway trains, thinking they would "be around forever," but there are quite a few such images on display, with the graffiti serving as backdrop to the glimpses of humanity at the center. In one, two young women wearing matching blue blouses and white pants—friends? sisters? fraternal twins?—hold onto a subway pole. In another, a small boy rests his head on the thigh of a somewhat bigger boy. The tenderness of that scene can be found elsewhere in the exhibit. In one black-and-white photo, a young boy in a white dress shirt and jeans holds a trombone vertically, the instrument reaching his chest; surrounded by adults, gazing not at us but into the distance, he may be looking for someone—anyone—he knows.

One color photo in *Eyes on the Street* stands out as the funniest—or, depending on one's point of view, the saddest, or the most hopeful, or poignant. Two men sit on a wooden park bench, separated by a black metal armrest. The man on the left, who is Black and dressed in white clothing, has settled comfortably on his half of the bench, with his arms spread on the top, a notebook sitting at his left, a bottle of water and a pair of sunglasses on his right. The man on the right, who is Hasidic, wears a white shirt and dark blue jacket and pants; he is perhaps leaning away from the other man just a bit, and he appears to be cupping something, we cannot see what, in his hands. Both men wear hats with brims. On the expanse of grass behind them, the shadow cast by a tree appears to connect the hats. And each man is looking at the other, unabashedly: the Black man's brow is wrinkled in skepticism, and the Hasidic man's eyes are narrowed in wariness. Neither man seems to fully understand, or trust, the presence of the other. But in this frozen image, they keep looking; if they do so long enough, just maybe they will see.

CLIFFORD THOMPSON *is the author, most recently, of* What It Is: Race, Family, and One Thinking Black Man's Blues.

Whose Voices Will Be Heard?

A dispatch from the listening phase of the synod

GABRIELLA WILKE

It's the Sunday after St. Patrick's Day, and I'm on the wooded campus of Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, to learn how to listen. The all-male Saint John's has a partner school six miles away, the women's College of Saint Benedict. I'd been up here a few weeks before to walk around St. Benedict's "brother campus" with a girlfriend. We both had some loose ties to the place but still felt like outsiders visiting as we walked around on our own, lamenting the structural inequalities and other issues that can make it hard to see ourselves remaining part of the Church.

But today is different. I've come to Saint John's for a reason. The call came from the *Central Minnesota Catholic*: "Pope Francis Wants YOU! To be a Listener for the Synod." When I arrive, a student at the front desk invites me to walk through the center door of St. John's Great Hall, a hulking old Romanesque church that, like a tomb, seals out the cold air and muffles my winter boots. I proceed along the grand and empty corridor, thinking to myself that in this building's former life, I'd be walking straight through to the tabernacle.

In the oversized meeting room I find a dozen or so others who have also responded to the call. Soda and cookies have

A synodal listening session in Philadelphia, April 4, 2022

CNS PHOTO/SARAH WEBB, CATHOLICPHILLY.COM

been set out on a side table—something to keep us energized through the long afternoon to come. Deb, a hospital chaplain dressed in purple tie-dye, invites me to join her table. Already there is a soft-spoken man in a coat and cap named Herman, who I'd later learn is a staff writer for a local farming paper.

Also among us is theologian and ecclesiologist Kristin Colberg, a member of the U.S. synod commission. She was in Rome in October 2021 when the synod opened, and she contextualizes our gathering by emphasizing that this is a radical process of listening together. She tells us that Pope Francis wants everyone involved in a Church of motion and emotion. That the synod is about closeness, and bringing us onto the same path. In her telling, Pope Francis says: Think of the ecclesiology of Vatican II. How do we hold ourselves accountable for living out Vatican II? What do we need in the Church to be the most authentic version of ourselves?

When we do introductions and talk about why we're here, I'm the first to answer. But I make the mistake of speaking politically. "I think I can reach some on the margins," I say. I'm thinking of the people in my life who've become disaffected with the Church—those who've been made to feel less-than because they are women, divorced, gay, other. Someone else seems to respond in kind, mentioning Bishop Barron and Eucharistic coherence. To be a better listener, I write down these reminders:

- Do not trap people into this process
- Maintain neutrality
- Learn how to focus a conversation
- Ask: Did I get this right?

Colberg, as a teacher of Church history, also imparts this lesson: each council is both a beginning and an ending, raising new questions that are to be answered and lived out in the Church. Here's how we're living out the synod: each of us signed up to be one-to-one listeners, but first we'll practice in small groups. We're invited to practice with people we don't know, and yet Jim, a deacon and the only face familiar to me, joins my table from the other side of the room. Herman and Deb join in too, as does Vince—the one who mentioned Barron. We go around in a circle, listening to the person to our right, speaking to the person on our left. It's a human effort. I fumble with my notes as I try to take in what Herman is saying. And even though I can see Jim's earnest effort at listening as I speak to him, I still don't quite feel heard.

During a break, Jim and Vince bond over the message they grew up in the Church with: pray, pay, obey. For so long, church has only been a matter of obligation. I think about this relationship to obligation. Some of the people closest to me feel caged by it, or belittled by its demands. Obligation is a difficult thing to embrace. Jim turns to me and asks me to weigh in on women priests. It's not an issue I want to weigh in on, but I tell him that when it comes to decision-making, it matters who's at the table.

Soon, Herman begins to open up. He tells me he was approaching the age at which he could become an altar server when the Second Vatican Council started. The council delayed his training. His teacher, Sr. Benedict, told him there was no way the Mass would be said in English when it had been in Latin since the time of Jesus on the cross. The bishops are all talk, she told him. But then, of course, he lived through what followed, the transition from Latin-only to Latin and English and finally to English alone. I think about that liminal period of Mass in dual languages. Is that where transformation happens?

We pair off in different corners of the room to practice a one-to-one conversation. I choose a seat by a window, and look up to see Deb has followed me there. We begin with the first prompt: Share a dream, vision, or hope you have for the Church. I offer an image. In the parish I grew up in, the Christmas Eve Mass is a bright spectacle. There are banners and trumpets and a young couple dressed as the Holy Family; three kings process down the aisle atop camels (in fact, dads elaborately costumed as camels). It's the only day of the year the church is so crowded. I missed it this year, but received pictures from two close friends who were there, sitting with their families in the same sections they sit in every Christmas Eve. What brings them there now is a sense of family obligation—to use that word. But I wish, someday, we could all bring ourselves, our *whole* selves, there. To be at ease in this Church as women, divorced, gay, other.

When we reconvene after the one-to-ones, people begin to raise some of their concerns about the synod. What happens after the listening phase? Whose voices will make it into the report? What, if anything, will change? One woman expresses what I wanted to share at the beginning, my unspoken thought: *There's a very good chance the Church will mess this up*. And yet. We still believe in the possibility of this moment. The possibility that this can lead to something transformative.

After the training, I wander around the campus for a bit. It's quiet, and hardly anyone is around. A student is giving his parents a tour, talking to them in Spanish. Two men from my session walk through the monastic gardens, despite a sign reading "Private, do not enter." I go down to Lake Sagatagan, frozen over and covered in snow, and take in the view. It's open and empty, white on gray.

Just up and across the road is the cemetery my grandparents will rest in. My grandfather is a university alum—a Johnny—and my grandmother worked for many years in the St. Ben's business office. My grandma was emphatic about this gravesite view, how beautiful it is out here, how nice to be on a lake. For now, we can laugh about it: "Mom, you won't care about the view when you're dead," says my mother. But looking over the frozen lake in that dead season of March, I can see what my grandmother did for us. It's a gift for us visiting outsiders. It tells me and my siblings and all the rest of my family who don't belong to this place, a place so special to my grandparents, that we are in fact part of it. That this connection, like the synod itself, can be lived out in unexpected ways. After all, we have a view.

GABRIELLA WILKE *is the marketing and audience development director at* Commonweal.

REGINA NICOLARDI

RIVER RIDER, 2022

Regina Nicolardi

Professional sea kayaker Chevaughn Dixon approaches the George Washington Bridge in New York City as he completes the Hudson Valley Challenge, a three-hundred mile journey along the Hudson River estuary between Albany, New York, and the Statue of Liberty. The trip was designed to inspire urban youth to become leaders in their communities.

Dixon directs the Hudson River Riders, a program that provides youth and people of color with outdoor access in Yonkers, New York. Besides drawing attention to the rich ecology and biodiversity of the Hudson Valley—which he helped preserve by cleaning up litter along the way—Dixon's feat aimed to raise awareness of the river's indigenous Lenape heritage and fraught colonial history.

"Ultimately, outdoor recreation is about building community," Dixon said. "And I'm glad to know my expedition did just that."

REGINA NICOLARDI *is a freelance photographer based in Bend, Oregon. Her work has been published by* National Geographic, Outside, Canoe & Kayak, *and the Appalachian Mountain Club.*

Commonweal CONVERSATIONS

Monday, October 17, 2022

Pier Sixty at Chelsea Piers | New York City
6:30pm | Reception with Featured Guests
7:30pm | Dinner & Award Presentation

Our Featured Guests: —*more to be announced soon*

Paul Baumann
Matthew Boudway
John Carr
Rand Richards Cooper
Dylan Corbett
Katie Daniels
Kim Daniels
Anthony Domestico
Paul Elie
Massimo Faggioli
Rita Ferrone
John Gehring
David Gibson
Brett Hoover
Natalia Imperatori-Lee
Elisabeth Johnson, CSJ
Patrick Jordan
Cathleen Kaveny
Paul Lakeland
James Martin, SJ
Fr. Bryan Massingale
Timothy Matovina
Alice McDermott
Steven P. Millies
Paul Moses
Regina Munch
Mollie Wilson O'Reilly
Griffin Oleynick
Hosffman Ospino
Michael Peppard
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Valerie Sayers
Matthew Sitman
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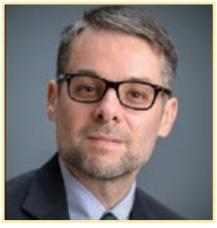
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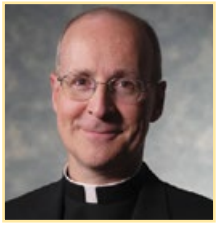
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