Religion, Politics, Culture

Commonweal

SEPTEMBER 2022

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LETTERS

Accessing the classics, symbols of inclusion, and solidarity with victims

A DIGITAL WORLD OF IDEAS

I share Zena Hitz's dismay about the decline of the physical book as a vehicle for encounters with ideas, including those involving the classics ("Human Fundamentals," June). However, I think she undersells the egalitarian possibilities of the digital world.

In India, where I live, the chances of even a privileged student encountering the classics through a physical book are slim. There are very few decent public libraries to speak of, and the second-hand book stalls which college students used to browse a few decades ago are dwindling. They might find a copy of Plato's *Republic* in a bookstore in one of the major cities, or in their college library (if they have one, and if their college education requires them to use it—neither of which one should take for granted). Of course, it would be on the syllabus of an undergraduate or master's course in Western philosophy or political thought, but often introduced via commentaries and expositions rather than the text itself.

On the other hand, the Penguin edition of the *Republic* is affordably priced on Amazon India for a middle-class Indian—less than about two cups of coffee in a decent cafe; print, still, but necessarily mediated through the digital. For the savvy, there is the vast world of pirated books available on sites like libgen, available to anyone with a mobile phone and a data connection.

There are many ways in which an intellectually curious person might come across the *Republic* in their wanderings on the web—a TED talk, an Amazon browsing suggestion, an article in *Aeon*, Twitter, Facebook, blogs, Substacks, freely available academic content on a massive open online course (MOOC).

Thanks to the web, students and autodidacts in India (not to mention academic researchers!) have access to a much greater world of intellectual ideas than they would have had even a decade ago, and this access is distributed more evenly than ever before.

Arudra Burra
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi
New Delhi, Delhi, India

LET THE CHILDREN COME TO ME

Kudos to Mollie Wilson O'Reilly for her column about the conflict between Bishop Robert McManus and Nativity School ("False Flags," July/August). I, too, disagree with the bishop's decision to require the school to drop its Black Lives Matter and gay-pride banners, and, when they refused to do so, to withdraw his permission to allow the school to call itself Catholic.

In his initial letter to the school, Bishop McManus rightly states that the Church teaches "that everyone is created in the image and likeness of God," and are thus equal in dignity and value in God's own eyes. But he objects to these banners because they have sometimes been misappropriated to signal "distrust of police" or the support of gay marriage. The irony here is hard to swallow. Perhaps the bishop should have his Catholic schools remove the crosses from their classrooms because that symbol has been so often co-opted to justify a host of sins over the past two millennia, including Crusaders' pillages, colonialist oppression, and white supremacy.

These banners stand for inclusion, equality, and the dignity of the human person regardless of race or sexual orientation. The abuse of those symbols by others should in no way obscure the truth of their intended message any more than the sins of those who abuse the cross should obscure its truth. The Church is obligated to not only respect and honor the meaning of these banners, but, as O'Reilly points out, to reach out to those who are marginalized, persecuted, and discriminated against in our society, or, as Jesus proclaimed at the start of his ministry, "to bring glad

tidings to the poor...proclaim liberty to captives and...let the oppressed go free." Instead of criticizing, we should all be congratulating the Nativity School community for so publicly living out our Lord's command to "let the children come to me," to stand for justice, and to love one another as he has loved us.

Bruce Daigle
Woonsocket, R.I.

TAKING THE VICTIMS' SIDE

Isaac Holeman's wonderful tribute to Paul Farmer ("An Antidote to Despair," May) put me in mind of something Henri Nouwen wrote some years ago in *Worship*:

> Compassion manifests itself in solidarity, the deep consciousness of being part of humanity, the existential awareness of the oneness of the human race, the intimate knowledge that all people, however separated by time and space, are bound together by the same human condition. Solidarity is more—much more—than the intellectual affirmation of shared humanity; it is the profound felt experience of human sameness.

In *The Plague*, Albert Camus talks of "taking the victims' side." Farmer understood what that meant more than most.

T. Michael McNulty, SJ
Marquette University Center for Peacemaking
Milwaukee, Wisc.

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Classifieds continue on pg. 77

Making the Rent

From May to June of this year, residential rents across the country saw their largest monthly jump since 1986. Asking prices in the second quarter were 23 percent higher than in the same quarter three years ago. The average monthly rent in Manhattan recently passed $5,000 for the first time ever, but rents are soaring just about everywhere: Austin, Texas; Boise, Idaho; Reno, Nevada; Spokane, Washington. As coastal metropolitan areas, already notorious for sky-high rents, keep getting more expensive, smaller cities that were once assumed to be affordable (Columbus, Ohio, among others) are suddenly far less so—especially if the local job market is strong. Not coincidentally, the share of renters behind on payments, typically lower-income and disproportionately people of color, is also on the rise.

Housing experts cite a range of reasons for skyrocketing rents: higher interest rates on mortgages, which keep prospective homebuyers in the rental market; pandemic-related relocations by higher-earning professionals; a jump in the number of investor-owned properties let out as vacation and luxury rentals; not enough construction of new housing stock. In short, the demand for affordable housing in this country far outstrips the supply. This has a significant impact on the overall economy since housing costs are a major contributor to inflation. But soaring rents have a rather more direct impact on the tens of millions of Americans who are struggling to make bigger monthly payments, facing eviction, or simply unable to find a place to live. And when the price of shelter is at a premium, people cut back on other things in order to keep a roof over their heads; food, medical care, transportation, and other necessities often take a back seat. This creates additional stressors for those already burdened by housing insecurity.

There is a simple solution to the problem: increase the supply of affordable housing. But various factors—cultural, political, economic—make it difficult, if not impossible, to increase supply adequately in the short term. Among the biggest obstacles are the stringent zoning regulations that many municipalities have on the books. Though typically associated with post–World War II suburbanization, some of these date back to the 1920s, when they were often enacted as a way to keep Black people and immigrants out of "good" neighborhoods, and thus to protect property values. In tightly limiting density as well as the type, size, layout, and location of new residential buildings, such restrictions effectively prohibit the construction of affordable multiunit or multifamily dwellings in or near places where people want to live—that is, where schools are good, crime is low, transportation is convenient, and the overall quality of life is appealing. This happens to describe a number of cities and towns in coastal blue states, and indeed these are some of the places most resistant to affordable-housing proposals and most effective in preserving the status quo. From enclaves in suburban Westchester and greater Boston to the tech communities of Northern California, an increasingly well-heeled NIMBYism holds sway. Buoyed by the wealth accruing from their own homes, residents in these areas do whatever they can to limit new housing, often by means of such innocuous-sounding methods as environmental-protection and historical-preservation initiatives. Consequently, though demand for affordable housing may be high, little if any gets built (though high-end residential development continues apace). It's hard to square this obstructionism with the progressive values many voters in these areas claim to hold.

But NIMBYism isn't the only problem. In states where demand for affordable housing is highest and proposals have been approved, there aren't enough construction workers to do the job—a job that also often pays less than work on high-end residential and commercial projects. Lingering supply-chain shortages and high material costs have also hampered building efforts. As for helping low-income Americans move into existing housing, Section 8 vouchers can bring the price of monthly rent within reach; qualifying families spend 30 percent of their income on rent, and the government pays the balance. The trouble is that Section 8 is not an entitlement program like food stamps or Medicaid, which anyone eligible automatically receives, and Congress simply doesn't allocate enough money for it. Indeed, only about 20 percent of poor households receive federal housing assistance. Encouraging relocation to regions where affordable housing is more plentiful, meanwhile, means asking people to leave their jobs, their extended family, and their local friends—itself a very high price to pay.

Amid these dispiriting realities, there are some bright spots. The Biden administration has reinstated a 2013 Obama-era rule aimed at eliminating race-based zoning discrimination, which Donald Trump had suspended on taking office (and which the *National Review* claimed would "abolish" suburbs). Federal rental-assistance measures implemented during the pandemic could provide a roadmap for developing longer-term relief policies. There's also the continued rise of the YIMBY ("yes in my backyard") movement, which works in opposition to NIMBYism by welcoming the development of affordable, multiunit housing in desirable neighborhoods. What the *Guardian* once called a "radical solution" pushed by "angry millennials" has become mainstream, with YIMBY groups and allied politicians working on legislation to get affordable housing built in California, New York, Idaho, and elsewhere. None of these remedies is a panacea. But if we understand housing to be a human right—no less so than adequate nutrition—then we need to eliminate as many barriers to affordable housing as we can. It shouldn't be so hard for so many people to find a place to call home.

Lock Him Up?

On the morning of August 8, while former president Donald Trump was away at an event in New York, FBI agents executed a federal search warrant at his residence at Mar-a-Lago. They left with more than a dozen boxes containing eleven sets of documents, four marked "top-secret," the rest highly classified.

The precise content of the documents remains unknown. Some of them may pertain to Trump's pardons of political operative Roger Stone and former national security advisor Michael Flynn. More ominously, a few of the documents are thought to contain information related to nuclear weapons. We'll know more when the affidavit used to obtain the search warrant—showing probable cause for the crimes of obstruction of justice and the removal of documents, as well as violations of the Espionage Act—becomes public. For now, the unprecedented "raid," authorized by Attorney General Merrick Garland, represents the Justice Department's most serious effort to investigate Trump for potential crimes committed during his presidency.

Echoing the fury of the MAGA base, Republican leaders have reacted with predictable outrage. Trump himself led the charge, moaning about his "broken safe" while spewing misinformation about planted evidence, Barack Obama, and Joe Biden. Trump left it to others, like Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, to mention Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server: "Maybe someone here can remind me about when they did a search warrant at Hillary's house in Chappaqua," DeSantis mused at a campaign event in Arizona.

Other Republicans, like House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, went further, claiming that the FBI had reached "an intolerable state of weaponized politicization." Such inflammatory rhetoric has already provoked violence. An Ohio man armed with an assault rifle and a nail gun attacked the FBI's Cincinnati field office before being chased and killed by police. Meanwhile, Judge Bruce Reinhart, who authorized the search at Mar-a-Lago, has been the target of multiple threats.

For now it still seems unlikely that Trump's mishandling of classified documents will result in an indictment. This is sure to disappoint many Democrats, who have been waiting for years to see Trump held accountable for his lawless behavior. What about the other ongoing investigations into Trump's alleged malfeasance—in Congress, in Georgia, and in New York? It is still too soon to say, and there also remains the possibility that the Justice Department has turned up something much more serious than a mere mishandling of documents. In that case, Garland will have to decide whether to go after a former president whose supporters consider him the victim of a "witch hunt." Some liberal commentators, such as Damon Linker, have urged caution, arguing that any eventual indictment and prosecution of Trump under a Democratic administration would likely result in unprecedented political violence and institutional breakdown. Better, Linker thinks, to defeat Trump again at the ballot box in 2024.

But other liberals, such as Michelle Goldberg and Jamelle Bouie, have persuasively argued that there would be an even greater risk in failing to prosecute Trump if the Justice Department determines that he has indeed committed a crime. Declining to charge Trump for fear of how his supporters might react would concede to him the one thing he's always wanted: total impunity. It is indeed possible that enforcing the law in this case will lead to a kind of political violence the United States has not seen in decades. But it is *certain* that if the Justice Department, yielding to GOP threats, decides to take a pass, it will undermine not only its own authority but the rule of law itself. Trump—and Trumpism—will have won, whether or not he decides to run again.

—Griffin Oleynick

Smothering the Coptic Church

On August 14, a fire broke out during Sunday Mass at a Coptic church in a working-class neighborhood in Cairo. Forty-one people, eighteen of them children, died of smoke inhalation or in the resulting stampede. Many of the children were in the church-run daycare center on the bottom floor, where the fire is believed to have started. Witnesses described people jumping from windows at the top of the four-story building to escape the flames.

The fire at Abu Sefein Church was accidental, the result of an electrical problem that caused either a generator or an air conditioner to catch fire. Destructive and deadly fires are not rare in Cairo, where infrastructure is poorly maintained and residences or businesses are often built with little enforcement of safety standards. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi extended his "sincere condolences to the families of the innocent victims that have passed on to be with their Lord in one of his houses of worship." He ordered Egypt's armed forces to rebuild the church immediately.

For decades, Egypt's Coptic Christians have accused the government of restricting the number and size of churches that can be built and making it difficult to renovate or restore the churches that already exist. As a result, Copts have been forced to set up worship spaces in unsuitable or overcrowded buildings. This is true in the case of Abu Sefein Church, which had been an apartment building. After the fire, Tawadros II, the Coptic pope, said that the church had been too small to hold the number of members it served, and

he called on the government to allow more churches to be built. Anba Angaelos, the archbishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in London, tweeted that the fire at Abu Sefein is "a direct result of a painful time when Christian communities could not build purpose-designed churches, and would have to covertly use other buildings, not fit for the purpose and lacking the necessary health and safety features and escapes." In 2016, el-Sisi removed some restrictions on the building and renovation of churches, but local governments still have the power to limit church construction. A U.S. State Department report on religious freedom found in 2021 that the building of churches in Egypt is "subject to greater government scrutiny than that applied to the construction of new mosques."

Copts, who make up 10 percent of the total population of Egypt, have long endured violence and discrimination. In 2011, a crowd of Muslims burned several churches in Cairo, and Coptic churches have also been the target of terrorist attacks. Some observers accuse the government of restricting the building of churches out of fear of these Muslim extremists, who believe Christian churches undermine the country's "Islamic character." In this charged atmosphere, churches also serve as important community centers for Christians, offering a haven from violence or harassment.

When a church in Africa is attacked by Islamic militant groups like Boko Haram, it often makes international news. But there are other ways to make a religious minority feel unwelcome. "Copts are forced to live in the shadows and worship in silence," one Copt told *Middle East Eye*. In the days following the tragedy at Abu Sefein, two more accidental fires broke out at two other Coptic churches. No deaths were reported, but the danger remains. As one woman who lost two relatives in the Abu Sefein fire lamented, "No one can believe that children went to pray and never came back."

—Regina Munch

The Inflation Reduction Act

Passing any significant climate, health-care, or tax legislation seemed impossible a month ago, frustrating and worrying Democrats, whose razor-thin Senate majority may not survive the November midterms. But on August 16, President Joe Biden signed into law the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (IRA), after months of stalled Senate negotiations. The new law is aimed at helping reduce consumer spending in two major categories—health care and energy—with investments offset by corporate-minimum and stock-buyback taxes, and increased funding for the IRS to pursue wealthy tax cheats. The law also contains long-awaited provisions that will allow Medicare to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies, cap the price of insulin, limit out-of-pocket drug costs for seniors, and extend tax credits that help keep millions of Americans insured. But it is the law's climate provisions that have garnered the most attention. Its historic investments in clean energy are projected to result in a 40-percent reduction in U.S. emissions (from 2005 levels) by 2030—well above the 25-percent reduction projected before the new law.

The IRA comes in the wake of last fall's failed Build Back Better bill, and while it is not nearly as big ($369 billion compared to $3.5 trillion), it is still a major step forward in the fight against climate change—one the reluctance of Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) almost kept us from taking. But the smaller scale of the new bill, combined with certain concessions (including a pipeline deal in Manchin's home state), convinced him to join the rest of his party. The other Democratic senator whose support was not assured, Arizona's Kyrsten Sinema, voted for the law on the condition that it not eliminate the egregiously unfair carried-interest tax loophole. (Private-equity managers, who benefit from that loophole, have donated nearly a million dollars to Sinema in the past year). Not a single Republican voted for the law.

Unlike earlier climate legislation, the IRA focuses more on the demand than the supply side of the energy industry, providing consumers with tax incentives to electrify their vehicles, appliances, and heating and cooling systems. Crucially, it also locks in tax credits for clean energy for the next ten years. This allows businesses and investors to rely on those credits, rather than making their renewal vulnerable to every change in administration. Still, the law's compromises are frustrating for those who had hoped for something more like a Green New Deal. Its provisions will not get the United States all the way to its Paris Agreement goals. It also ties leases on new land for renewable energy to leases on land for oil and gas drilling (which may or may not lead to actual drilling). Nevertheless, the IRA includes the largest-ever investment in environmental justice, with money dedicated to cleaning polluted ports and block grants provided for community-run projects. The scale and variety of issues it addresses is impressive—from electrifying the USPS to reducing agricultural emissions to restoring coastal ecosystems.

Despite its name, the IRA is unlikely to have a large effect on inflation, at least in the short term. While the tax provisions and savings on health-care spending may help in that regard, some of this will be offset by the law's environmental provisions, which will encourage more short-term consumer spending via tax credits and rebates. In any case, the law's greatest impact will be not on inflation or the deficit but on investments in renewable energy. It will thus give a much-needed boost to the transition away from fossil fuels, and not a moment too soon.

—Isabella Simon

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SUSAN BIGELOW REYNOLDS

The Paradox of Public Scholarship

We need more of it—but on whose terms?

Public scholarship is having a moment. From Twitter threads to op-eds, scholars are encouraged to channel their research into forms that shape social and political discourse in tangible ways. Public scholarship strives to make good on the highest ideals and the most compelling promises of the scholarly vocation itself: to place our work at the service of justice, to make research accessible to those far from the seats of power, to promote informed and democratic engagement in the public sphere. Far from antiquated clichés about ivory towers and low stakes, most scholars genuinely want to do work that matters—not only to peers, but to the world.

For theologians, public scholarship holds a particular allure. It resonates with the missionary imperative at the heart of the Gospel to preach the subversive hope of Christ's resurrection to the ends of the earth. Implicitly, public scholarship is motivated by a recognition that, per Thomas Aquinas's principle, everything known is known according to the mode of the receiver. In a moment in which the consequences of nationalist and white-supremacist Christian ideologies are proving catastrophic for American democracy, public theology represents a form of corrective work that is urgent and salutary and, in a real sense, holy. As an academic theologian who regularly writes for audiences beyond the academy, I view such work as a deep and vivifying part of my vocation.

Yet despite the value of such work, it is also the case that the embrace of public scholarship seems to have proceeded with a surprising lack of critical reflection about who creates this scholarship and under what conditions. Several years ago, I participated in a "Write to Change the World" workshop for faculty at my university led by the Op-Ed Project. The purpose of the two-day intensive was to train faculty from unique and underrepresented backgrounds to use our voices effectively in shaping public conversations and, in a deeper sense, to embrace a sense of our own expertise. Participation was application-based, and applicants had to commit to being present for the entire two-day intensive. When I arrived at the first morning of the workshop, I was surprised to walk into a room full of women. Only one of the fifteen participants was a man. The women in the group were richly diverse—among us were international scholars, queer women, and women of color from disciplines that spanned the university. Many of us were early-career faculty.

I think about the composition of that room often because it seemed to capture something important about the paradox within the promise of public scholarship. In seeking to construct more inclusive public discourse, we place the burden of leading such efforts on the shoulders of scholars who already occupy marginalized positions within the academy. Scholars from minority groups are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of this paradox. Public scholarship is a form of care work whose object of nurture is society, and as with virtually all care work, public scholarship goes unrewarded. At worst, it can be a professional liability: university leaders often laud the *idea* of public scholarship for its ostensible impact and innovation while simultaneously disincentivizing and even penalizing faculty for engaging in what those responsible for granting tenure and promotion perceive as an un-rigorous form of scholarship. Within the discipline of theology, the distinction between the rigorous and the popular often materializes in a certain kind of pejorative contrast between the systematic and the pastoral—the former associated with intellectual purity and the latter—because it not only seeks but requires broad ecclesial comprehensibility—with gauzy practical application.

Even if we maintain the value of public scholarship—and to be clear, I believe we should—we must also view the commodification of scholarly voices with suspicion. In the contemporary online media landscape, public scholarship is content. While scholars pen op-eds and offer news commentary out of a desire to promote public understanding, media outlets are balancing a more complex and contradictory set of concerns, many of which are determined by advertisers and measured, ultimately, in clicks.

It is indeed the case that the voices of white men are overrepresented in influential spaces of authority and public opinion. It is also the case that expecting women, especially women of color, to remediate that imbalance through uncompensated labor that may ultimately work against them is a problem. There is a quasi-outdated adage about the academic job market that for male candidates, a wedding ring is a symbol of stability, whereas for women, it is a liability. I have started to wonder whether public-facing scholarship functions in a similar way: for white men, evidence of reputation and expertise; for women and people of color, an unserious diversion from the *real* work of scholarly production. If universities want to cultivate scholars who do work that matters—in the words of the late Katie Cannon, who do the work that their souls must have—then these institutions must begin to recognize public scholarship for the intellectual and social labor that it is.

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

FELIX ROBERTSON

Scandals that Stick

Letter from the United Kingdom

In the end, the pressure was too great even for "Teflon Boris." On July 7, Boris Johnson officially stepped down as leader of the Conservative Party after more than fifty Tory officials resigned in protest over his mishandling of allegations concerning Deputy Chief Whip Chris Pincher. Announcing his decision, Johnson neither apologized nor agreed to step down immediately as prime minister: he would remain in office until the party elected a new leader. He never even used the word "resign." Nevertheless, the tenure that Johnson hoped would last ten years or more is at an end, and Britain will have a new prime minister.

Now, for the second time in three years, the United Kingdom is closely watching an election in which the vast majority of the population is unable to take part, with voting limited to Conservative MPs and, for the final round, Conservative Party members. Over the past weeks, successive rounds of voting have eliminated six candidates, leaving former Chancellor Rishi Sunak and Foreign Secretary Liz Truss as the final contestants. The battle, perhaps predictably, has not been pretty. Recent debates have been characterized by ad hominem attacks, absurd aspersions (Sunak described his opponent's economic policies as "Marxist"), and an overall dearth of policy innovation. As of this writing, Truss is firmly in the lead, commanding the favor of 62 percent of Conservative Party members. Sunak's belated embrace of tax cuts and slightly desperate attempts to lean into culture-war rhetoric have not been enough to restore his ebbing momentum.

Whoever wins will be rewarded with a historically challenging brief. The next prime minister will have to contend with a spiraling cost-of-living crisis (household energy bills are predicted to rise by as much as 74 percent by October), and the winter pressure on a health service already stretched to its limits. With such challenges ahead, Truss and Sunak may well be battling for the chance to undergo political obliteration two years from now. Though the next general election is not formally due until 2024, the Conservatives' electoral situation is already looking fragile. In June, two by-elections resulted in the Conservatives losing the constituencies of Wakefield and Tiverton and Honiton—the latter elected a Liberal Democrat after voting Conservative for more than a hundred years. Meanwhile, Conservative MPs in so-called "red wall seats," traditionally Labour areas that the Conservatives seized in the 2019 election, have warned that their seats may now be imperiled, with many of their constituents complaining that there is still no sign of the prom-

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson at Downing Street in London, July 6, 2022

CNS PHOTO/JOHN SIBLEY, REUTERS

ised "levelling up." In such challenging economic circumstances, it is hardly surprising that concerns over the next general election have frequently surfaced in the current leadership debates, where both candidates have sought to prove, not very convincingly, that they represent the best chance of heading off a Labour victory.

It is, of course, difficult to predict what topics might dominate an election still two years off. Fuel prices, the NHS, growing inequality, and outrage over cruel and divisive immigration policies may all play a part. Alongside these concerns, the future Conservative leader would do well to reckon with one further issue: the smoldering legacy of the Partygate scandal. That Partygate could still play an important role in the next election might seem, on the face of it, rather unlikely. The series of scandals over lockdown parties at Downing Street, in which both Johnson and Sunak were implicated, certainly gripped the public conscience earlier in 2022. In June, after the publication of the long-anticipated Sue Gray report, widespread public anger led to a vote of no confidence in the House of Commons. Once again "Teflon Boris" survived, with the backing of 211 MPs against 148 votes of no confidence.

Still, Johnson's successor would be foolish not to reckon with the implications of Partygate. While the press has mostly moved on, internal parliamentary investigations are still underway. A report from the House of Commons Privileges Committee, released in July, indicates that Johnson may have to face a by-election in his Uxbridge seat if he is found to have misled MPs when he repeatedly claimed that "all guidance was followed" during the lockdowns. Such an election probably wouldn't take place while Johnson is still prime minister, but it would still be a significant source of embarrassment for the Conservatives, setting yet another disciplinary precedent for Johnson, already the first prime minister in British history proved to have broken the law while in office.

There is also the possibility that more revelations may still emerge. Dominic Cummings, the Machiavellian chief advisor Johnson dramatically sacked in late 2020, has hinted at the existence of more photos of the gatherings we already know about. And rumors continue to circulate about other gatherings, including an "Abba Party" thrown by the prime minister's wife, Carrie Johnson. Such revelations could be especially dangerous for Sunak, who was fined for attending a birthday party for Johnson during the first lockdown. Sunak has tried to present himself as a safe, reliable pair of hands, and to distance himself from Johnson's volatile reputation. More reminders of the scandal or evidence of further rule-breaking by Sunak himself could be disastrous for his standing with both Conservative MPs and the public more broadly.

But even without further revelations, the next prime minister will still have to reckon with the long-term impact of the scandal. To fully understand the significance of Partygate, one must remember how restrictive the Covid rules were here in England. The country's first lockdown began on March 23, 2020, and was not lifted for three months. The rules, especially in the early days, were severe. Meeting anyone outside of your household group was forbidden and you were permitted to leave home only for essential purposes, such as infrequent shopping and exercise. Many, including me, did not see anyone outside their home for months. These measures, strict as they were, received broad support from the British public, with 93 percent of Britons backing the first lockdown in March. Compliance with the rules was high.

On May 13, nearly two months after the lockdown was introduced, the rules were slightly relaxed to allow people from different households to meet, albeit outside and distanced from each other. Two days later, Health Secretary Matt Hancock gave a press conference stressing the importance of adhering to these rules, and insisting that the good weather should not be taken as an excuse for illegal socializing. Just two hours after this press conference, a party of between thirty and forty people was underway in the Downing Street garden, which the prime minister attended for around half an hour. The Sue Gray report provides a grisly dissection of the event, its dry, bureaucratic prose contrasting sharply with the evidence it presents. It provides conclusive proof that a range of government officials knew of the event. In a WhatsApp message sent after the event, Chief of Staff Martin Reynolds expressed relief that the press "hadn't focused on our drinks," and fatefully concluded that "we seem to have got away with" it.

It is hard to say what was more egregious, the hypocrisy or the recklessness. What were they thinking? Already in lockdown for close to two months, the United Kingdom registered 2,530 new Covid cases on May 15. That was many months before vaccines became available, and little was known about the safety of outdoor events. It is striking, then, to consider how cavalier the guests at this party were about their own safety, let alone that of the other attendees. It may well be the case that these parties, like so many other scandals during the Johnson government, will be forgotten by the time of the next general election. But Partygate is unlike many other scandals. The Covid lockdowns marked an extraordinary act of sacrifice and collective resolve from the British public. By exempting themselves from this sacrifice, those in government left most Britons feeling betrayed.

Johnson's imminent departure will not lift the stain of Partygate. Unless the next Conservative leader can find a way to rebuild public trust after this singular dereliction of duty, they may well find that it is this betrayal, as much as any policy decision, that costs the Tories the next election.

FELIX ROBERTSON *is a former* Commonweal *intern. He graduated this spring from Peterhouse, Cambridge, where he studied theology.*

FERNANDO C. SALDIVAR, SJ

Double Standards

Why some African nations are reluctant to condemn Russia

Although heavy fighting continues in Ukraine five months after Russia's invasion began, the West seems to have recovered from its initial shock. With no end to the war in sight, our attention has turned back to political and economic problems at home—to the January 6 hearings, mass shootings, and inflation. But what is happening in Ukraine still demands our attention, and for more than one reason. Russia's aggression is turning the post-1945 global order on its head and undermining the stability of the international institutions created in the wake of the Second World War. We desperately need to be talking about the future of multilateralism at this very moment, as the pillars that have supported the postwar order begin to buckle.

One of those pillars is international criminal justice, the promise that those responsible for wars of aggression, genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity will be held accountable. According to leading international lawyer Philippe Sands, the world experienced a revolutionary change in 1945, when, "for the first time, states agreed that they were not absolutely sovereign, that they could not kill individuals or destroy groups." This legacy is now in peril, according to Sands. It is threatened not only by Russia's invasion, but also by the reluctance of powerful states to establish a Nuremberg-like tribunal to investigate Russia for the crime of aggression. Sands argues that Britain, France, and the United States are all worried that they, too, could one day find themselves in front of such a tribunal.

A *special* tribunal is required in this case because the International Criminal Court (ICC) lacks jurisdiction to investigate Russia, which was not a party to the agreement that established the ICC. That agreement, called the Rome Statute, took effect twenty years ago this July. Its anniversary is a good occasion to reflect on the progress of the ICC over these past two decades and to consider where it might be headed in the future.

According to Philip Zelikow, the international system of which the ICC is such an important part has become increasingly hollow, undermined by the conduct of China, Russia, the United States, and Europe. But how that conduct is perceived by others, particularly in Africa, is also important; it explains not only Africa's fraught relationship with the ICC, but also its relatively tepid response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

African leaders and activists played an early and critical role in the campaign to establish the ICC and in the negotiations that led to the Rome Statute. They hoped that such a court would protect weaker states in a more egalitarian international system, providing a check against the whims of great powers. This initial enthusiasm ebbed, however, when many of these great powers—including the United States, Russia, and China—refused to ratify the Rome Statute and submit themselves to the ICC's jurisdiction. Washington's wariness of the ICC turned into open hostility during the Trump presidency, when the U.S. government levied sanctions on the court and its Gambian chief prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, because the ICC had the temerity to open an investigation into potential war crimes committed during the war in Afghanistan.

Notwithstanding the refusal of some of the world's most powerful countries to join the ICC, the court has not wanted for work, and most of its cases have to do with Africa. Of the seventeen ongoing investigations before the ICC, ten involve African states. As a consequence, many Africans have concluded that there is a double standard in international criminal justice, one that allows powerful states to protect themselves and their allies from the court's reach. This imperial attitude of "do as I say, not as I do" has affected public opinion in Africa about the appropriate response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

To the chagrin of President Biden and other Western leaders, that response has been notably reserved. Many African states have been reluctant to condemn Russia or to join in sanctions against it. Although twenty-eight African states voted in favor of the March 22 UN General Assembly resolution demanding that Russia "immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders," seventeen African states abstained, eight did not vote, and one, Eritrea, voted against the resolution.

Africa's lukewarm response to Russia's invasion was no less evident during Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky's address to the African Union on June 20: just four African heads of state were interested in attending Zelensky's talk—and then only behind closed doors. Zelensky reminded them that the sharp rise in food prices in Africa is largely due to Russia's invasion, but even this was not enough to sway African Union leaders to condemn Moscow or express broader support for Ukrainian resistance. This does not mean that Africans have been uniformly indifferent to Ukraine's plight. In South Africa, for example, civil society has been vocal in criticizing the government's overt support for Moscow, but so far that support has continued.

All this might seem counterintuitive. One might assume that African governments would be eager to see Vladimir Putin brought before the ICC, to face the same judicial

Rebel leader Bahr Idriss Abu Garda sits next to his lawyers in the courtroom of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, October 2009.

process that African leaders have faced when accused of similar crimes. Indeed, the reach of the international criminal justice system into Africa is not limited to the ICC. Under the principle of universal jurisdiction, European countries including France, Belgium, and the United Kingdom (all former colonial powers in Africa) can and do try African defendants in their courts for human-rights violations committed abroad. African states had hoped that the system created by the Rome Statute would make the most powerful countries more accountable, but in practice the ICC has focused mainly on crimes committed by government officials in the Global South. As a result, those countries that were the ICC's earliest and most ardent supporters have grown skeptical of the whole concept of international justice.

A certain amount of ambivalence among some African states is attributable to Russia's recent expansion of its economic and military influence on the continent, but Moscow has also successfully manipulated social-media platforms to impress upon an African audience its own interpretation of events. Russian propaganda relies heavily on a kind of "whataboutism." According to Russia, the West's concern with human-rights abuses is highly selective, and Western countries engage in many of the same practices they denounce. This charge of hypocrisy resonates with the belief, common among Africans, that the international rules are applied differently depending on which continent one comes from.

The perception of a double standard has been compounded by the pandemic. Gross inequities in the distribution of vaccines, along with the unwillingness of many Western countries to relax intellectual-property laws in order to facilitate the manufacture of generic vaccines, seem to suggest that the lives of Africans counted for less than those of people in Europe and the United States. By the time Russia invaded Ukraine in February, much of the world's attention had already moved on from Covid, but Africa was still in need of assistance to weather the social and economic damage caused by the pandemic. Now there was a new emergency, and the West no longer seemed interested in Africa's continuing distress.

It's an old story: today's headline too quickly becomes tomorrow's footnote. But both yesterday's headlines and today's—the pandemic and the war in Ukraine—are reminding us of the urgent need for an open and honest conversation about what multilateralism and international institutions will mean in the future. The post-1945 order is showing its age, and vestiges of colonialism, still all too visible to Africans, are coming back to haunt international institutions that cannot function well without African support.

It is not just a question of whether Africa will support these institutions; it is also a question of whether these institutions will provide the support Africa needs in the twenty-first century. The architects of the Pax Americana in 1945 could not imagine a world with fifty-four independent African countries, or that the population of the continent would account for a quarter of the world's population by 2050. We need to reexamine what it means to be a stakeholder in this system. A new paradigm in international relations is needed, one based on equal respect for nations in every part of the world and on the impartial application of international law. There can be no more "junior partners." The shift to such a paradigm will no doubt be difficult for the United States and Europe, which still cling to their exceptionalism. But the alternative is a continuing erosion of confidence in international law and in the institutions charged with enforcing it.

FERNANDO C. SALDIVAR, SJ, *is a Jesuit Scholastic of the USA West Province and is the global policy and advocacy officer for the Jesuit Justice and Ecology Network Africa (JENA) in Nairobi, Kenya.*

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RAND RICHARDS COOPER

The Steadfast Gaze

In Poland, unanswered questions about the war in Ukraine

In the main square of Krakow, packed with May Day tourists, a solitary performance artist stood vigil beneath the medieval clock tower. Dressed in a black robe, her head shaved and her face devoid of expression, she stood there—a gaunt and somber figure, mutely holding up a placard bearing a big question mark. Before her, affixed to an easel, a statement in Polish and English addressed the war in Ukraine. "The canvas is wrapped in gauze to reflect shared pain and trauma," it read. "With a question mark, into which you can put the most disturbing questions: 'How is this possible?' 'Will it end?' 'What will happen next?'"

I had come to Poland with an American magician, Bill Herz, who was performing shows for Ukrainian refugees. Herz and his wife, Gwenn, had seen the plight of families fleeing Ukraine and felt called to help. And so, to the flood of aid flowing into Central Europe—of arms, food, medical supplies, and money—Herz was adding the Mouth Coil, the Hat Tear, the Human Xylophone, and other illusions. These were nonessential goods…and yet every show produced an audience of captivated kids raucously laughing as mothers in the back of the room aimed cell phones, taking pictures to send back to their husbands in Berdyansk and Kharkiv and Mariupol. *Look*, those pictures said, *our child is happy, our child is laughing, our child is safe.*

Bill Herz is a droll court jester: always a quip or a joke, or a piece of sly advice that *sounds* like a joke ("How can you guarantee late checkout at a hotel? Go to the front desk and say, 'We ate in your restaurant last night, and my wife's stomach is upset.' Guaranteed!"). Yet the trip itself—the mothers we were meeting and the stories they were telling us about the assault on their country—was anything but funny. A woman from Dymer, near the Belarusian border, described helicopters firing, rockets flying "from morning to night," and the streets of her town on fire. Another recalled the outbreak of war on February 24 in Kharkiv. She and her family hauled mattresses, water bottles, and food to the basement, hiding for the next two weeks as bombs rained down and she explained to her four-year-old son that their city was being attacked "by a bad man with fireworks." She described the fear they felt—how it steals your breath, paralyzing your muscles and freezing you "like a wax figure."

Bill's tricks delighted the kids, and his sleight of hand never failed to evoke clucks of astonishment. I was as baffled as his audiences. See enough magic tricks and you almost can't help thinking that something uncanny is happening. Bill scoffs at illusionists who encourage people to believe that their magic is real. "It bothers me when someone truly believes that I can read minds," he told me. I wondered why. He had explained that even very young kids could appreciate magic, since all you needed was a capacity for basic object permanence. Yet that phrase contains sharp ironies for the Ukrainian children, whose world now includes almost nothing permanent. After one show, Bill stood looking out at the room of milling children. "It's important to me, when I do magic with kids, that no one leaves the room actually thinking I have the power to move things around through space." Especially these kids, he seemed to imply. Their lives had vanished, and it would be cruel to let them think someone might be able to put them back, just like that.

As for the children, a grade-school teacher at a show outside Warsaw told us about the big difference between those kids who left Ukraine early in the war and those who left later. The later ones, she said, "have seen things, bad things." Some had trouble focusing or even talking. Touch one on the shoulder and he might flinch in a reflex of terror.

We struggled to imagine what these children had gone through. "Hearing bombs at night, seeing dead bodies?" Bill mused. "Having your mother tell you you're packing a bag and leaving, and who knows when you'll see your father again? How do you get over that?" One day the newspapers quoted Ukraine's human-rights commissioner charging the Russians with war crimes against children. The commissioner called it an attempt not just to conquer Ukraine, but to destroy it. "When they kill children," she said, "it means that they do not want our nation to be in this world."

Two books I'd brought with me underscored the grimness of these stories. One was Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands*, a chilling account of how Soviet and Nazi policies in Poland and Ukraine resulted in mass killing on a scale unprecedented in human history. Snyder's chronicle reminded me that Putin's attack on Ukraine threatened not simply destruction and death, but something even more drastic: obliteration, through precisely the kind of national vanishing that Poles knew all too well from their own history. An awareness of such existential threat is built into the national muscle memory of the Poles and helped propel their spectacular generosity in taking in three million Ukrainians—almost 10 percent of their own population—and providing them housing, health care, and education. ("The Polish people have the biggest hearts in the world," one Ukrainian woman told me.)

The other book was *On the Natural History of Destruction*, W. G. Sebald's survey of the obliteration of German cities during World War II and his complaint about silence afterward—both the refusal to talk about it and the reliance on poeticizing or romanticizing literature that prettified it, which Sebald viewed as a colossal failure on the part of German writers. Things must be faced squarely and seen in all their direness, Sebald argues in the book: "only a steadfast gaze bent on reality" can provide the necessary approach to historical horror.

In Krakow we took a walking tour of Kazimierz, the city's former Jewish quarter, led by Tomasz, a towering, jovial guide whose English bore a curious Cockney trace. The tour started outside a synagogue in Ulica Szeroka, a pretty cobblestone square that exudes a ramshackle charm. A big part of that charm is its Jewish character. Along with two synagogues, there were falafel and shawarma joints with signs in Hebrew lettering, and klezmer music playing around a menorah. We passed the Jerusalem Tea Room, the Judah Food Market. "Hummus is Happiness," read a sign on a building.

Tomasz filled us in on the history of this neighborhood, where eighty years ago Jewish residents were killed in cold blood on those same cobblestones, or herded across the river to a hastily built ghetto to be shipped to the death camp at Belzec. Of the seventy thousand Jews living in Krakow before the war, only a handful had survived. How is it that yesterday's site of horror becomes today's leisure destination? *Schindler's List* was filmed in Krakow, and Tomasz reinforced the themes of our tour with frame-by-frame recountings of scenes from the movie. "Right here," he'd say, "is where Amon Goeth's SS officers chase the man down the alley." But wait, was that the movie or reality? Time passes, and from the calamity of famines, pogroms, genocides, and cities bombed to bits arises a pretty tourist square. Is this redemption or blasphemy? In Kazimierz it is hard not to feel a queasy awe at the prospect of suffering alchemized into gold; of trauma polished, burnished, and marketed. Hummus is Happiness.

We crossed the Vistula River by a footbridge into Podgórze, site of the former deportation camp. In the bridge's suspension cables, bronze sculptures by Jerzy Kędziora depict figures in poses of acrobatic skill on a high wire, evoking precarious balancing acts. On the other side of the river the tour wound through narrow streets of houses where Jewish families had crouched in fear, encircled by Nazi wolves and largely unassisted by Poles. I asked Tomasz about the efforts of nationalist-minded Poles today to minimize or deny Polish antisemitism during World War II. "Of *course* Poles were antisemitic," he said. "It is silly to say otherwise. But you do see people defending this position. And defending becomes denying." He continued with words that eerily echoed the passage in Sebald that I had read just the night before. "It is important to see the past as it was," Tomasz told our group. "Only through a direct gaze can we achieve acceptance, and only through acceptance can we get to progress."

A performance artist in Krakow, Poland, 2022

Tomasz was a polished storyteller, interweaving narrative strands cued by buildings and houses, then tying them together at the tour's end, in Plac Bohaterów Getta—Ghetto Heroes Square. The square is set with sixty-eight empty bronze chairs, one for every thousand Jews murdered in Krakow, and as we stood among those empty chairs, Tomasz painted a vivid scene featuring a young boy who escapes named Raymond Liebling—a boy who will later become known as Roman Polanski—and a girl named Rena Wohlhaber who survives because, during a death-camp selection right there in the square, she impulsively gives her puppy to *Untersturmführer* Amon Goeth, who spares her. Tomasz appended a tantalizing coda in which, seven decades later, a German writer named Jennifer Teege published a book expressing her horror at discovering that she is Goeth's granddaughter, whereupon Rena Wohlhaber—by now an old woman—wrote to Teege, telling her that for at least one crucial, merciful moment, Goeth had been something other than a monster.

It was a bravura narrative performance, and on the guided-tour scale it registered a clear ten. Yet I couldn't help but think that Tomasz's story, even with its heavy cargo of human suffering, represented still another act of romanticizing, one that revealed how nearly inescapable it is, this attempt to marshal horrific events into an order that will, in some manner and to some degree, spare us.

The Herzes and I flew home two days later. In a week and a half, the family had logged over a thousand miles and entertained over a thousand Ukrainians. Bill called the trip the most emotionally draining thing he had ever done. "I haven't even begun to process it," he said. "But I know I won't forget what we saw here."

Now, months later, the war in Ukraine grinds on. Putin has pulled back his initial countrywide assault to focus on areas of the South and East that he clearly hopes to annex. As a result, the refugee flow between Poland and Ukraine has become bidirectional, with some refugees continuing to arrive even as others head back. Life in Kyiv is said to be returning to a semblance of normal, even as terror, turmoil, and destruction continue in the East.

This "normal" is both a wonderful and an awful thing. As I watch news stories showing young Ukrainians enjoying themselves once again in the cafés and clubs of Kyiv, I keep thinking about the solitary mute figure standing in the central square of Krakow, with her list of questions and the expressionless look on her face. I understand now that her message resided less in her questions than in that look itself, its intensity and fixity reinforcing the power of witness even as it underlined the challenge of the steadfast gaze: how hard it is to find it, and then to keep it.

RAND RICHARDS COOPER *is a contributing editor to* Commonweal.

RAND RICHARDS COOPER

Meghan Sullivan
David Cloutier
Cathleen Kaveny
George Scialabba
Lisa Fullam
Massimo Faggioli
Eve Tushnet

Abortion after Dobbs

In the two months since the Supreme Court announced its decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, *many have compared the anti-abortion movement to the dog that finally caught the car. Pro-lifers focused for half a century on the elusive goal of overturning* Roe v. Wade. *After years of organizing, many disappointments, and some Faustian political bargains, that goal has finally been reached. Now the movement faces a massive backlash from Americans who supported* Roe *and had taken it for granted; it also faces the daunting challenge of devising new abortion restrictions that won't endanger the health of pregnant women or alienate a majority of their fellow citizens. So-called "abortion abolitionists" have made it clear that they will accept no exceptions to abortion bans, not even to save a woman's life. And much to the consternation of most pro-lifers, some of these "abolitionists" also advocate criminal prosecution for women who procure abortions. Alarmed by this extremism, voters in Kansas, one of the most conservative states in the country, recently voted down a ballot initiative that would have removed abortion rights from their state's constitution. Many Democrats are now hoping to ride this wave of alarm and outrage to victory in November's midterm elections, and polling suggests that it is indeed likely to help them. But they, too, must deal with the perils of policy overreach and rhetorical excess. While polling indicates that most Americans did not want to see* Roe *overturned, it also shows that a majority supports abortion restrictions that* Roe *did not permit and that almost all Democratic politicians now reject. Meanwhile, many advocates of "reproductive justice" now routinely decry "forced birth," implying their opposition to* any *restriction on abortion at* any *stage of gestation. In these circumstances, the Catholic Church might seem like the one institution in this country that could credibly claim to combine consistent opposition to abortion with support for policies that would make it easier, and safer, for a woman to welcome and raise an unexpected child. But despite its official statements—and some important charitable activities that embody its commitment to the unborn—the U.S. Catholic Church has squandered much of its credibility on this issue by aligning itself with a political party that cannot plausibly claim to have the best interests of struggling mothers and families at heart. We asked seven* Commonweal *contributors, from various backgrounds and with various views, to discuss what Dobbs is likely to mean for abortion law, American politics, and the challenge of creating a "culture of life" worthy of the name.*

—The Editors

MEGHAN SULLIVAN

In one of the most vulnerable moments of her 2017 memoir, *Priestdaddy*, Patricia Lockwood discloses the vertigo she feels whenever abortion debates come up:

> The twinge you are feeling right now is the twinge of wondering whether I am really right-thinking, whether I am really on the right side when it comes to this subject. I put that twinge in because I sometimes feel it myself. But after all that, you must understand that I had to leave right-thinkingness behind.

Lockwood was raised in a weird, wonderful, devoutly Catholic family. We learn that she's skeptical of metaphysics. She bristles at the patriarchy. We squirm when she recounts a traumatic childhood visit with her mother to a protest at a Planned Parenthood clinic. Nevertheless, Lockwood feels a twinge that there is something significant about abortion that is missed by her family's politics and even by her own carefully tended outlook.

The *Dobbs* decision returns the questions surrounding the legality of abortion to the states and the consciences of their residents. There is a confidence on the part of Justice Alito and the court that we will be able to think through abortion in the same way we have hashed out different state-level policies regarding, say, gambling or recreational marijuana use. For the past fifty years, the debate about abortion has centered on the arbitrary gestational cutoffs that *Roe* and then *Casey* drew to settle when fetal life has legal significance. We have now—surprisingly—managed to multiply that arbitrariness. In 2022 the same procedure involving the same two lives is deemed routine medical care in Buffalo, but felony malpractice in Biloxi. "Personhood" under American law now depends not only on time of development but also place.

Moral philosophy helps us manage arbitrariness, and this is especially important in times of social disruption. As we grapple with another revolutionary change in abortion policy, it can help to revisit the most important philosophy paper of the *Roe* era. In 1971, Judith Jarvis Thomson was in her early forties, a tenured professor at MIT, and one of astonishingly few women who could get a job as a philosopher. She published "A Defense of Abortion" in the first issue of *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, just as *Roe* was entering the Supreme Court. Thomson's article helped make abortion a major research topic in moral theory. It has been cited and reprinted countless times, and has become a fixture of syllabi.

It begins with a thought experiment. Suppose one day you wake up in a hospital and discover your kidneys are linked up to an unconscious man next to you. The hospital director tells you that the man suffers from a grave infection and your kidneys are keeping him alive while he recovers. It turns out he is a talented violinist. An extremist group of violin aficionados has kidnapped you and arranged this scenario. The director assures you they will be prosecuted and that you will receive good treatment at the hospital. The man in the next bed will die unless you remain connected with him long enough for his kidneys to recover. They estimate it will take nine months.

The thought experiment appears in so many introductory philosophy courses because it is an approachable example of how philosophers work. Thomson grants for the sake of argument that a fetus at any stage of gestation is a person, with dignity and access to moral rights. She then asks what fetal personhood would entail about the moral significance of abortion. We can have a difficult time reasoning through this by directly thinking about pregnancy; we worry about conforming with "right thinking" in a superheated political debate. But we can consider instead this purely hypothetical case of one person being biologically dependent on another. We don't have social scripts to follow about involuntary dialysis; the musical detail makes it still more surreal. Thomson's ingenious strategy is to test our moral judgments about this thought experiment, and then see how those judgments shed light on real-world cases of pregnancies caused by rape or abuse. (She suggests other thought experiments for failed birth control.)

Thomson draws two conclusions from the method. First she thinks the violinist does not have a *moral right* to the use of your kidneys, even if he clearly has a right to life more broadly understood. By analogy, she infers that fetuses can have a broad right to life, but not a right that requires a woman

As a matter of biological complexity and social dysfunction, women in the United States spend nearly half of our lives on a reproductive Jericho road.

to gestate. Most discussions of Thomson's paper focus on this attempt to distinguish the relevant rights. There isn't any philosophical consensus on whether she's successful, and it is probably hard to determine whose rights take priority if we just have contrived thought experiments to go on. When moral rights conflict, actual historical details and context become very important.

To my mind, Thomson's second point is more interesting, though often neglected. She spends much of that 1971 article arguing that beyond debating competing rights, there is nevertheless something deeply morally significant about someone who would offer themselves to enable another person to live. She calls this the issue of "good samaritanism." A good Samaritan is someone who perceives a strong moral reason to sacrifice for another person, without that person having any standing to demand their sacrifice. While you might exercise a right to unplug the violinist, she argues, we can still wonder whether your act was brave, cruel, heedless, or tragic. Crucial (and controversial) to Thomson's analogy is granting that a fetus is like a stranger in need, at least in cases of unintended pregnancy. In a key passage, Thomson suggests we should invoke the idea of "minimally decent samaritanism" to capture the twinge we feel about some abortions. She presses her case:

> I am inclined to think it a merit of my account precisely that it does not give a general yes or a general no. It allows for and supports our sense that, for example, a sick and desperately frightened fourteen-year-old schoolgirl, pregnant due to rape, may of course choose abortion and that any law which rules this out is an insane law. And it also allows for and supports our sense that in other cases resort to abortion is even positively indecent. It would be indecent…to request an abortion and indecent in a doctor to perform it, if she is in her seventh month, and wants the abortion just to avoid the nuisance of postponing a trip abroad.

For Thomson, this kind of samaritanism comes in degrees, and importantly, no outside party has the standing to compel someone to be a good or even minimally decent Samaritan.

When I teach Thomson, I ask my students if she understands samaritanism in the same way Christians do. The concept comes to us from the famous parable in the Gospel of Luke. A man is robbed and beaten while traveling down the Jericho road. Two passersby—both religious elites—see the man in need, but ignore him. Then a Samaritan comes across the man and is moved with compassion. His response is intimate and intense: he bundles up the man, takes him to an inn, cares for him throughout the night, and promises the innkeeper to pay any expenses "over and above" what is needed to help him fully recuperate. Jesus offers the parable as an answer to the question of how to understand the Greatest Commandment, the foundation of Jewish and Christian moral life. We are meant to be moved to love others, including strangers, in a way that expresses radical generosity. The moral pressure is interior rather than social, a vulnerability to the significance of someone else. Moral life involves coming to respond to the twinge.

Do you feel it? Would *you* stay plugged into the violinist? My students often complain that Thomson's thought experiment is under-described. They want to know if they can move around the hospital room while they are plugged in. They want to know if they will lose their jobs or if their partner will dump them if they devote themselves to this for nine months. They wonder how traumatic the kidnapping was. I note that the passage in Luke also tells us next to nothing about the Samaritan or the man who was hurt. Readers are left to imagine the details. Most commentators suppose that the beaten man was Jewish. The Samaritan was a regular guy on his way to conduct some business. In the Ignatian tradition, we are directed to contemplate the parable by imagining ourselves in the role of each character, including the passersby and the innkeeper. We think about their possible intentions, and in the process shape our own consciences.

What if we imagine the Samaritan as a graduate student, personally secure and set on a busy course that doesn't involve an all-night detour in an inn? Or if we imagine the Samaritan as a scared ten-year-old? What if handling the stranger's body would make the Samaritan dangerously sick? What if the passersby are unwilling to stop to help people of a particular gender or people with cognitive disabilities? Is the innkeeper responsible for helping the Samaritan? How we understand the moral significance of an act of samaritanism or a refusal surely depends on such details.

You may worry that a Samaritan approach to abortion makes the issue purely a matter of personal morality, that it has nothing to say about the policy debates we now face. But samaritanism is also deeply political. Martin Luther King Jr.'s commentary on the parable focuses on the Jericho road itself: How on earth did each of these men find themselves in such a dangerous place? As a matter of biological complexity and social dysfunction, women in the United States spend nearly half of our lives on a reproductive Jericho road. For those of us inclined to think of the abortion debates in Samaritan terms, the *Dobbs* decision returns the wrong issue to the

A licensed vocational nurse at Houston Women's Reproductive Services in Texas hands a patient her ultrasound, October 2021.

CNS PHOTO/EVELYN HOCKSTEIN, REUTERS

states. Legislatures are directly responsible for "road maintenance," and they have a special obligation to work with physicians, family services, and employers to build systems that alleviate the unconscionable risks that still come with pregnancy.

Such work requires a commitment to non-coercive love that seems quite absent from our social lives at the moment, in part because of the efforts of Christians. The Texas abortion-restriction law functions by turning neighbors into informants on one another. National political parties have built strategies that depend on abortion remaining an issue that persistently divides voters. In universities where moral questions are meant to be contemplated and consciences are meant to be formed, there is a definite reluctance to study the *Dobbs* decision in any way that might amplify views that are at odds with the local moral consensus. I worry that after fifty years, both Thomson and her critics will be dropped from philosophy textbooks.

Pope Francis has taken up the role that samaritanism plays in Christian political life very directly in recent discussions of polarization, wars of aggression, and the pandemic. In his 2020 encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, he offers an extended meditation on the Good Samaritan, and a harsh judgment for how we have let our politics disintegrate our moral integrity:

> There are those who appear to feel encouraged or at least permitted by their faith to support varieties of narrow and violent nationalism, xenophobia and contempt, and even the mistreatment of those who are different. Faith, and the humanism it inspires, must maintain a critical sense in the face of these tendencies, and prompt an immediate response whenever they rear their head.

Many people today assume that Christians are anti-intellectual or out of touch with serious moral philosophy, especially on issues like abortion. And Americans are, without doubt, experiencing the 2020s as an unprecedented crisis for the common good. Rediscovering our commitment to Samaritan love could help restore our integrity on both issues.

MEGHAN SULLIVAN *is the Wilsey Family College Professor of Philosophy at Notre Dame and the director of Notre Dame's Institute for Advanced Study. She is currently writing a book about samaritanism in moral theory.*

A pro-life advocate near the U.S. Supreme Court, December 2021

CNS PHOTO/TYLER ORSBURN

DAVID CLOUTIER

The 1850s were a rough time in American history. The historian James McPherson recounts the story of a jury that convicted a slave trader who had illegally imported slaves from Africa (the trade had been banned since 1808). The jury was subjected to such vicious public threats that they collectively issued a public recantation of their verdict. In it, they distanced themselves from the "pretended philanthropy and diseased mental aberration of 'higher law' fanatics." The term "higher law" had become a common term used by radical abolitionists to justify their refusal to follow mandates like the Fugitive Slave Act. Obviously, the scare quotes were intended to suggest how skeptical these Southerners were toward any appeal to a higher law. And it wasn't only Southerners who defined abolitionists as fanatics. In 1863, "Peace Democrats" in the North sought to strike a compromise with the South instead of, as they put it, causing further "bloodshed to gratify a religious fanaticism."

In the period between 1853 and 1863, it was not obvious that the position of radical abolitionists—that all slaveholding should be outlawed and that former slaves should be granted an equality of civil freedom—would ever prevail. Certainly, in the 1850s, this position was quite outside the mainstream. Lincoln even spent the first years of the Civil War insisting that his aim was not to end slavery or enact Black equality. Indeed, certain anti-slavery extremists like John Brown were constantly held up as proof of the violent nature of this religious fanaticism; lurid descriptions of what would happen if abolitionists had their way ratified the worst Southern fears. Gradually, the outrageous behavior of many pro-slavery fanatics, especially those zealous to expand slavery to the territories using any means necessary, nudged both politicians and ordinary citizens toward the abolitionists' side. Still, it's safe to say that the more common view of slavery was a kind of ambivalence. Most Americans certainly did not hold slaves, but their distaste for slavery stemmed as much from an idealization of the nobility of honest "free labor" and a resentment of the power exercised by Southerners in national politics as it did from any sense that slavery was wrong. Nor did many really know what would happen after slavery ended. Even among the slaveholding Founders, there was clearly an intention to manage a kind of gradual disappearance of slavery. But how, exactly? Would former slaves be sent back

to Africa, as some thought? Most citizens of antebellum America, in the North as well as in the South, would not have endorsed racial equality. The pity of many white Americans was aroused by accounts of the inhumanity of slavery, like in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. But this pity was not always accompanied by respect for Black civic equality.

How, then, did a minority holding a view outside the mainstream and derided as "religious fanatics" within a divided and ambivalent culture finally win the day? And what exactly constituted "winning"? These are really the two questions that all opponents of abortion ought to be asking themselves in the wake of *Dobbs*. As Alasdair MacIntyre writes, "the history of any society is in key part the history of an extended conflict or set of conflicts," most importantly about justice, but also inevitably about the moral reasoning of the society in general. The enslavement of Black people and the subsequent history of racial injustice is one such defining conflict about justice and natural rights; abortion has surely become another. We must not imagine that the conflict is of marginal importance because voters may now be more concerned about, say, inflation. The issue of slavery was not a central one in the minds of many ordinary people in the 1850s. But by then, there had already been decades of struggle between two groups of cultural elites for whom the issue had particular moral importance, and that struggle was only intensifying.

There are more parallels between the antebellum conflict over slavery and the current conflict over abortion than people might realize. As with slavery then, abortion itself already appears to be in slow decline, but that fact has not dampened the debate. The position of activists on each side has hardened. Abortion advocates have increasingly turned away from an apologetic tone about "difficult choices" toward a confrontational demand for reproductive rights "without apology," just as Southerners went from being content with accommodations of their "peculiar institution" to claiming their absolute right to their "property." As with slavery, we are now facing a situation in which states have radically different legal regimes—and in which one kind of regime is morally repugnant to those affirming the other kind. This is not like a difference over income-tax rates or business regulations. Meanwhile, as with slavery in the 1850s, there's a larger cultural ambivalence about abortion, one which is particularly apparent in purple states, just as it was then particularly apparent in "border states." While there wasn't a lot of doubt about slavery in either Vermont or South Carolina, it was a different story in Maryland or Tennessee.

Finally, the most important parallel: like the nineteenth-century abolitionists, abortion abolitionists are ultimately right, even if theirs is an "inconvenient truth." Modern embryology textbooks teach that a new organism begins at conception, one that is genetically distinct from either parent and whose development as a particular human is directed from within. With this knowledge of genetics and of fetal development, it is clearer than ever that attempts to draw a fundamental line at any stage in fetal development—*there* life is, but *here* it is not—are arbitrary, at least scientifically. Along these lines, Pope Francis famously analogized abortion to "hiring a hit man" to take care of a problem, a remark he repeated in the wake of *Dobbs*. Euphemisms like "reproductive justice" and dystopian scaremongering about a theocratic "Gilead" distract from what's really going on in the *specific act* of abortion, just as the Southern evasions about "property rights" and scaremongering about the social chaos of freeing Blacks were meant to distract from the fundamental moral question: the incompatibility of "liberty and justice for all" with the practice of bondage and inequality for some.

Still, it is one thing to be morally right about a key question of human dignity; it is very much another thing to have a plan for what will happen when the laws change. Here we find another parallel with slavery, perhaps the one that should concern us most. Most Northerners, even Lincoln himself, were quite hazy on the question of what society might look like after slavery. Just as today's polls show public ambivalence about particular cases of and restrictions on abortion, it seems that many Americans in the 1850s were uncomfortable with slavery and would have welcomed its disappearance, but most did not think that full civil equality of the races was desirable or even possible. That lack of clarity about what should happen after slavery still haunts American society, especially the descendants of those who were held in bondage.

While many of those who welcome *Dobbs* loudly (and earnestly!) call for large-scale assistance for pregnant women and mothers, the real test will come once it becomes clearer what America might look like with hundreds of thousands of more babies every year, babies whose mothers may not really want the child, babies whose mothers are often single women living in poverty. Further, there remains considerable evasion on the part of some pro-lifers about how such laws might actually be enforced without confirming the dystopian fantasies of pro-choicers. Add our broken health-care system and a wildly unequal school and childcare system that reinforces privilege and disadvantage, and one may begin to get a

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sense of the mountains pro-lifers will have to move in order to make good on their commitment to the dignity and value of every human life.

My hope is that the primary message of the Supreme Court in *Dobbs*—America, stop expecting the court to solve your intractable conflicts, and deal with them democratically in your legislatures—will lead to bipartisan attempts to address these serious problems, which affect the common good in ways that go well beyond their relationship to abortion. Moreover, I do believe that states can serve as good social laboratories for experiments in improving the core systems of our society.

However, there is always the danger that a deep moral zealotry (on either side) about a complicated social problem can sabotage the best efforts to work gradually through its complexities. The Civil War did not in fact end "with malice toward none," and the moral zeal of both racists and their adversaries persisted—and indeed, still persists, albeit in different guises. With both abortion and any kind of racial discrimination, the Catholic *moral* position is clear. But the way forward through a fragmented society and the fallen human condition is far less clear. More than anything else, we have to figure out ways to walk forward together. Moral clarity too often turns into a zealotry that would make this impossible: you don't walk forward with a mortal enemy, you march against him. Our nation has been suffering from unhealed racial wounds—and inflicting plenty of new ones—ever since the Civil War ended, with the burden falling most heavily not on the abolitionists or the former slaveholders but on the former slaves themselves and their offspring. So too will it be for a generation of women and children unless the fifty-year movement for the abolition of abortion is now matched by a collective effort to forge an alternative social framework.

The adjective "historic" is overused, but it's safe to say that *Dobbs* is historic. It is historic because it stands as a clear marker in an ongoing set of conflicts over who we are as a nation and over what our fundamental moral principles are. And yet history warns us that the real mountain to climb still lies ahead, as we struggle not to *end* something but to begin something new, a true culture of life—a culture where, in the words of St. Paul VI, "every life is a vocation."

DAVID CLOUTIER *is associate professor of theology at the Catholic University of America and is currently working on a book about how Catholic social thought can raise deeper questions about the problems of American society that transcend instead of reinforce partisan division on policy issues.*

CATHLEEN KAVENY

With *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the Supreme Court has attempted to repair the fissures in its own legitimacy created a half century ago by *Roe v. Wade*. Will this attempt work? Or will it only deepen our moral and political divisions?

In my view, both the dissent and the majority opinions represent approaches that are unlikely to heal the divisions precipitated by *Roe*. The most promising—because it is the most judicious—approach was proposed by Chief Justice John Roberts in his concurring opinion, which would have upheld the Mississippi law at issue without technically overturning *Roe*. It is unfortunate that he was unable to convince Justice Brett Kavanaugh to join him rather than the majority, despite Kavanaugh's clear reservations about the majority opinion. We might then have had a controlling opinion that allowed us, slowly and haltingly, to move forward together as one people on the vexing question of abortion. Instead, by returning abortion to the states for each to regulate as it sees fit, Justice Alito's majority opinion condemns us to more severe balkanization.

Drawing on Justice Robert Jackson's famous observation, we can say that the Supreme Court is not final because it is right; it is right because it is final. By this standard, *Roe v. Wade* was not at all right, because it was by no means final. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, abortion was at the margins of our national political debates. It was nearly exclusively the province of academics and a few activists on either side. *Roe v. Wade* provoked a raging political controversy about abortion where there was none.

But that controversy has proven irresolvable. As many polls show, opinions on abortion have shifted very little over the past few decades. Gallup concluded that in 2022, 35 percent of the population said that "abortion should be legal under any circumstances," 18 percent said that it "should be legal under most circumstances," 32 percent said that it should be legal "only in a few circumstances," and 13 percent said that it should be "illegal in all circumstances." Three percent of the respondents expressed no position. In 1994, the first year for which Gallup provides data on this question, the responses were extremely similar.

Viewing these polls, we are tempted to claim that *Roe* made no difference in our national views on abortion. But such a claim would be deeply misleading. *Roe* functioned like a political virus, whose mutant DNA reconfigured and divided the country,

The justices of the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, April 2021

CNS PHOTO/ERIN SCHAFF, POOL VIA REUTERS

as abortion morphed into a wedge issue. Gallup polls show that in 1995, 51 percent of Republicans identified as pro-life, while 42 percent viewed themselves as pro-choice. By 2022, 70 percent of Republicans were claiming the pro-life label, while only 23 percent described themselves as pro-choice. The opposite trend is evident among Democrats. Fifty-eight percent of them were pro-choice in 1995; 88 percent were pro-choice in 2022. One-third of Democrats still identified as pro-life in 1995; only one in ten identified as such in 2022.

Political divisions in the United States are increasingly correlated with other divisions. One study showed that Democrats and Republicans are now less likely to marry and form families with each other. With the solidification of "red states" and "blue states," they are also less likely to have to govern together. In a recent article in the *Atlantic* ("America Is Growing Apart, Possibly for Good"), Ronald Brownstein provocatively argues that the divisions of the Civil War still exert their influence—although this time, the South may have the upper hand.

Roe failed to convince the majority of the country of its approach to abortion and the law. Crucially, however, it also *failed to fail*. The fact that Americans remain so evenly divided about the question is what distinguishes *Roe* from other key cases where the court has overruled a prior decision, such as the court's repudiation of the constitutional impediments it placed in the way of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. By the time the court reversed course on the New Deal, nearly the entire country recognized that addressing the suffering caused by the Great Depression required a new approach.

Dobbs has inaugurated a more heavily armed culture war, if not yet an outright civil war, between pro-life and pro-choice states.

One could argue that times have changed since the 1930s; we are now helplessly riven by the culture wars. But consider two other watershed Supreme Court cases that involved culture-war issues. In 1997, in *Washington v. Glucksberg*, the Supreme Court declined to recognize physician-assisted suicide as a constitutional right, leaving the matter to the states to regulate as they saw fit. Nearly twenty years later, in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the court recognized that the Constitution protects the right of same-sex couples to marry on the same terms as opposite-sex couples. Although controversial at the time, neither of these decisions has proven to be incendiary in the way that *Roe* did.

How should the Supreme Court treat a decision like *Roe*, which not only failed to succeed, but also failed to fail, thereby leaving the country divided in numerous ways? There are three basic options, each of which is taken by the three major opinions in the case. Let's begin with the dissent (Justices Stephen Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor, and Elena Kagan), which is arguably the most conservative of the opinions in *Dobbs*, because it argues that the right decision is to stay the course and uphold *Roe*. The dissenting justices emphasize the importance of following precedent for the sake of judicial humility and respect for the rule of law. Moreover, they point out that the right to abortion is protected by precedent upon precedent; *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* reaffirmed—while also reconfiguring—the right to abortion almost twenty years after *Roe*. Because nothing fundamental has changed since *Casey* was decided *except* the membership of the Supreme Court, the dissent argues that overruling *Roe* is a political decision, not a decision of sound jurisprudence.

The dissent makes several important points. Stability and predictability are essential to a well-run legal system. Change, particularly sudden change, can undermine the rule of law, eroding confidence in the fairness and workability of its broader framework. Judicial respect for precedent promotes law's legitimacy as an exercise of power. Good law, as Aquinas recognized, must be settled law. But *Roe v. Wade* did not settle anything, so proceeding as if it did is not the answer. The dissent's approach is therefore a non-starter.

Justice Samuel Alito, joined by Justices Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett, takes the opposite approach. The majority opinion is not conservative but *radical*, in at least three senses. First, it did not merely cut back *Casey* and *Roe*; it uprooted them completely: "We therefore hold that the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion. *Roe* and *Casey* must be overruled, and the authority to regulate abortion must be returned to the people and their elected representatives." Second, it cast both decisions, and their underlying interpretive framework, into jurisprudential darkness. The language of the majority opinion is immoderate and contemptuous. The opinion describes *Roe* not merely as mistaken, but as "egregiously wrong." This is the language of prophetic indictment, not jurisprudence.

Third, and most strikingly, the majority opinion does not acknowledge the legitimacy or even the good faith of those who take a different view of the constitutional protections due to abortion, the importance of precedent, or, most fundamentally, the practice of constitutional interpretation. Contrast this with Justice Kavanaugh's concurring opinion, which takes pains to emphasize the reasonableness and good faith of his opponents.

By overruling *Roe* and *Casey*, the majority may seek to return the country to the legal status quo ante, where some states were beginning to review and revise their abortion laws on their own initiative. But we cannot return to the debate as it was fifty years ago; there is too much water under the bridge.

Roe and its reasoning have become intertwined with other constitutional decisions that are part of a generally accepted package of rights. The right to privacy, understood as self-determination in the most intimate spheres of one life, not only generated a right to abortion, but also protects the right to buy and use contraception, along with right of same-sex couples to marry. As Justice Thomas suggested in his concurring opinion, dismissing the right to privacy in *Roe* entails dismissing it in those other cases too. Justice Alito denies this in his majority opinion, but his denial is unpersuasive, given his emphasis that true constitutional rights must be "deeply rooted in this Nation's history and tradition." Indeed, it is arguable that the law at the time of the Framers took a dimmer view of same-sex activity than it did of abortion.

Dobbs, then, disturbs established legal custom, just as *Roe* did before it. The *Dobbs* majority cites laws and legal practices going back seven centuries to argue that there is no deeply rooted right to abortion in our nation's history and traditions. They may be right about that. But if we're going to consider the effect of custom on law, it should be clear that the most recent fifty years of U.S. history counts more than the first fifty years. Custom may have its roots in the past, but it has its life and force in the present.

Women long dead cannot get pregnant now. But women alive today have lived their entire repro-

ductive lives assuming that there is a constitutional protection for abortion as a backdrop for their decisions. In fact, the Guttmacher Institute estimates that about one in four American women will have an abortion in her lifetime. For many women in this country, *Dobbs* comes as a "bolt from the blue," no less than *Roe* did half a century ago.

Finally, *Dobbs* cannot return the nation to the legal status quo ante because of the culture war precipitated by *Roe* itself. As we have already begun to see, the states will not leave each other in peace. Some conservative states will attempt to restrict travel to states with more liberal abortion laws, which will in turn offer themselves as sanctuaries for women facing unwanted pregnancies. *Dobbs* has inaugurated a more heavily armed culture war, if not yet an outright civil war, between pro-life and pro-choice states.

The arrogance in the *Dobbs* majority opinion is striking. It treats its own originalist approach to interpretation as if it were the only legitimate one, strongly implying that a more developmental approach is constitutional heresy. It frames the discussion of abortion in a way that emphasizes the legitimacy and dignity of the pro-life cause, while giving only cursory attention to the way losing the right to abortion may affect women's lives. Moreover, it emphasizes the erosion of the rule of law brought about by *Roe*, without considering the damage its own opinion might do to the legal landscape.

In this respect, at least, the majority opinion and the dissent are mirror images of one another. The dissent, for its part, assumes that viewing the Constitution as living and developing is the only sensible approach. While it acknowledges the value of fetal life, it emphasizes the role that reproductive autonomy plays in the well-being of women, particularly those who are economically and socially disadvantaged. And in its own way, the dissent also ignores the past fifty years, refusing to acknowledge the failure of *Roe* and *Casey* to settle the abortion debate once and for all.

Chief Justice Roberts's concurring opinion is in some ways difficult to read. Far from sweeping, it is decided on narrow legal grounds. On the one hand, Roberts would not *technically* overrule *Roe v. Wade*—that is, he would not disturb its holding that a Texas statute prohibiting abortion except to save the life of the mother was unconstitutional. On the other hand, by upholding the Mississippi law that prohibits abortion after fifteen weeks except in the case of necessity, he would also go beyond *Casey*—which went beyond *Roe*—in allowing states to regulate abortion to protect fetal life. Roberts argues that Mississippi's regulations are not "unduly burdensome" on a woman's right to choose abortion: "Ample evidence thus suggests that a 15-week ban provides sufficient time, absent rare circumstances, for a woman 'to decide for herself' whether to terminate her pregnancy."

By holding the conflicting interests about abortion together, Roberts is attempting to hold the country together. He does not downplay the moral concerns on either side of the issue. Rather than encouraging balkanization, his approach provides an incentive—and possibly a blueprint—for the states to develop a more uniform approach to abortion that might be a workable compromise. The fifteen-week limit of the Mississippi law at issue is roughly similar to restrictions in Western European countries, where abortion is permitted in the earlier weeks of pregnancy and prohibited later on, with exemptions for pregnancies that threaten the health of the mother.

Roberts's approach, of course, is subject to the same serious objection from both sides. He could be accused of making the same mistake that Lincoln made before the Civil War, by prioritizing national unity over the moral principle at stake in eradicating slavery. But the analogy does not hold. There was no moral good to be preserved on the pro-slavery side. Human beings cannot be owned. They cannot be treated as mere instruments of the will of another. In the slavery debate, moral balance was neither necessary nor possible. But abortion is different. Here, both sides of the debate perceive genuine goods. A woman's bodily integrity and moral autonomy is a good. Protecting fetal life is a good. As polls show, many Americans are perplexed by abortion precisely because it is a question of good versus good, not good versus evil. While the Constitution may not settle the details of legislation, it can help point us toward a robust valuing of both goods.

Roberts's compromise offers a framework for morally sound law in an increasingly divided society. The Mississippi law he upholds is moderate, roughly reflecting what polls show to be the position of many Americans. By keeping but revising *Roe* and *Casey*, Roberts's opinion provides a better starting point for our national conversation about abortion, a point closer to the middle than to either extreme. In so doing, he offers hope that the issue of abortion will not permanently divide us as a people. It is a shame that his approach did not prevail.

CATHLEEN KAVENY *teaches law and theology at Boston College.*

GEORGE SCIALABBA

Dobbs leaves us with two fundamental questions: What is a person? And who should decide? The answer to the first question seems to me straightforward. At no point in the first and second trimesters, nor in the third, when the mother's life or health is at stake, does the fetus—sans thoughts, sans emotions, sans experiences, sans everything—have any rights that override those of the woman of whose body it is merely an infinitesimal part during the time when more than 90 percent of abortions currently take place. Unlike its host, it is a potential person, not an actual person; a future person, not a present one. That millions of Americans think differently is a source of puzzlement and distress to me, as well as, I hope, humility. But with all the good will I can muster, I'm unable to find any plausibility in their view.

Suppose a state legislature outlawed sex-reassignment surgeries, judging them unnatural and offensive to God. The Supreme Court would (probably) declare that law unconstitutional. Since the Constitution does not expressly mention sex-change operations, there can be no constitutional right to one. Instead, the court would, or should, rule that a state legislature is not allowed to legislate its religious beliefs, even if they are the beliefs of a majority of the state's citizens.

Now, what are the beliefs on the basis of which a legislature would likely outlaw abortion? Presumably that the fetus is a human person, entitled to the state's protection. What reason could they give for that conclusion? Crucially, they cannot say that a fetus has a soul. That is a religious belief. It is held almost exclusively by religious persons and defended almost exclusively with religious reasons. They could say that from conception the fetus is a full human being, with a range of human attri-

Then-President Donald Trump speaks during the annual March for Life rally in Washington, January 2020.

CNS PHOTO/TYLER ORSBURN

butes. But they would have to stipulate that belief and then refuse to hear expert witnesses, most of whom would rebut it. They could claim that the fetus contains a human genome, and that anything with a human genome is entitled to be considered human and protected by the state. But every cell in the human body—every hair, every fingernail, every bead of sweat—contains a human genome, which is just a complete set of human DNA. Of course, unlike those tissues, the embryo (its proper name during most of the first trimester) will, with a great deal of effort, pain, and sometimes danger on the part of its host, become viable. Virtually no one argues that it deserves no protection once it is viable—at twenty-four to twenty-eight weeks. But by then, there is virtually nothing to protect it from. Fewer than 1 percent of abortions take place after viability.

Is there really any doubt that an abortion ban would be a religious imposition? Among the nonreligious, there is very little support for restricting abortion. A majority of Americans belonging to each of the major religions, excepting Mormons and Evangelical Protestants, would allow abortion in some or all cases. As far as I know, Mormons haven't been active in opposing *Roe*. The only two groups who have been notably active are Evangelical Protestants and Catholics, especially the Catholic hierarchy. The bishops have maintained a steady opposition since 1973, but with little effect, so they deserve only a modest share of the blame for *Dobbs*.

That leaves Evangelicals. I suggest they have made a devil's bargain. The Evangelical movement has regularly provided the margin of victory for a radical party that has undermined democracy with gerrymandering and voter restriction, allowed the number of guns in the country to swell to lunatic proportions, voted its rich patrons a $1.5 trillion tax cut while one in six American children lives in poverty, and, with almost incomprehensible irresponsibility, has prevented serious government action to reduce carbon emissions, contemptuously disregarding biblical (and papal) admonitions to stewardship of the Earth. Evangelicals voted overwhelmingly (85 percent) to place supreme political power in the hands of a sociopath and sexual predator, who took a wrecking ball to the executive branch and ended his term with a treasonous refusal to hand over power peacefully to his successor. Evangelicals inflicted all this misgovernment and disgrace on their fellow Americans solely in order to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Quite possibly, their fellow Americans will not thank them for it.

Very few Americans—only 25 percent, the lowest level ever recorded—express confidence in the current Supreme Court. That is understandable. Five of the six conservative justices were appointed by presidents who had not won the popular vote. The egregious cheat by which Sen. Mitch McCon-nell stole a seat from the Democrats and, four years later, in identical circumstances, rammed through a Republican nominee, was a national scandal. The three most recent nominees were pressed for their opinion of *Roe*; each replied that they considered it "settled law" and then voted to repeal it at the first opportunity. Justice Clarence Thomas has so far refused to recuse himself from cases related to the insurrection on January 6, despite his wife's unflagging efforts to further the "Stop the Steal" canard. Perhaps Thomas will offer the same elegant reply to critics of this refusal that Justice Antonin Scalia offered to critics of *Bush v. Gore*: "Get over it."

Governing without a majority has become a Republican specialty. Early in this century, Republicans forged a new strategy. They recognized that, for all its utility, the politics of resentment could not guarantee them a lasting majority. They were, after all, and had always been, the party of the rich. So they conceived the idea of launching an electoral blitz at the state level in the 2010 elections, which, if successful, would allow them control of the decennial redistricting process. The Democratic Party was Washington-centric and uninterested in local politics, so the Republicans were wildly successful. They then hired armies of computer consultants and gerrymandered every state they controlled within an inch of its life. Of course, they did not invent gerrymandering, but they brought it to a level that was to previous Democratic efforts as World Cup play is to ten-year-olds on a back street.

As a result, a fair number of states have a majority of registered Democratic voters but a majority of Republican state and Congressional legislators, or else a considerable disproportion between the size of the Republican majority of voters in a state and the size of the state legislature's Republican majority. In 2018, Democrats won 54 percent of the statewide vote in Pennsylvania but only 45 percent of seats in the legislature. In Michigan, Democrats won 53 percent of the vote and 47 percent of the seats. In North Carolina, Democrats won 51 percent of the vote but only 45 percent of the seats. In Wisconsin, Democrats won 54 percent of the vote but only 36 percent of the seats. In Texas, party affiliation is 40 percent

Evangelicals inflicted all this misgovernment and disgrace on their fellow Americans solely in order to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Quite possibly, their fellow Americans will not thank them for it.

Dobbs will force tens of thousands of women to go into debt or leave their state or risk their health or risk criminal prosecution or bear unwanted children. (Or, of course, forgo sex—not all of it extramarital.)

Democratic, 39 percent Republican, but Republicans have an 18–13 majority in the state senate, an 82–67 majority in the state legislature, and a 25–11 majority in the state's Congressional delegation. There are many such examples. And Texas, which tried to turn its citizens into anti-abortion bounty hunters, offers a characteristic example of radical Republicans' exquisite deference to the voice of the people. In May 2022, 78 percent of Texans thought abortion should be legal in some circumstances (39 percent in all circumstances), 28 percent only in cases of rape or incest, and just 15 percent thought it should never be legal—that is, agreed with their elected representatives. Nonetheless, it is a foregone conclusion that after *Dobbs*, Texas will enforce a maximally restrictive law against abortion.

Dobbs proclaims that since "the Constitution makes no express reference to the right to obtain an abortion…the authority to regulate abortion is returned to the people and their elected representatives." It is not surprising that the court took no notice of the crisis of democratic legitimacy produced by unscrupulous Republican partisanship, since the court has largely enabled it. *Shelby County v. Holder* barred the Federal Election Commission from overseeing state election laws, and *Citizens United*—the mother and father of all anti-democratic Supreme Court decisions—removed all limits on political spending. The Constitution makes no express reference to gerrymandering or to unlimited campaign contributions, but this did not prompt the court to return the authority to regulate these things to the people and their elected representatives. Nor did the court trust the democratic process to regulate gun mayhem (*District of Columbia v. Heller*, *NYSRPA v. Bruen*) or climate chaos (*West Virginia v. EPA*). *Dobbs* is undeniably a tainted victory.

How would a genuinely democratic polity address constitutional controversies? Undoubtedly, "the people and their elected representatives" are the ultimate court of appeal, notwithstanding the Founders' well-known misgivings about our wisdom and character. And even though the Constitution makes no express reference to "judicial review," the deliberations of nine wise and learned men and women do sometimes supply essential discriminations and clarifications and model moral and political reasoning for the rest of us.

The problem is that American government is not sufficiently accountable. Congress has generally been, and the Supreme Court has nearly always been, to the right of public opinion. The traditional remedy—voting the scoundrels out—does not work if only scoundrels have the resources to sponsor, lobby, and (after their term in office) employ politicians, initiate complex lawsuits, or saturate the media with their message. Campaigns for constitutional amendments and ballot referenda are expensive, often prohibitively so. Our political media are commercial enterprises, not civic ones. Our political system is more accurately described as a plutocracy than a democracy, and the understandable attitude of more and more citizens is a sullen passivity, occasionally erupting into unreasoning rage. And this Supreme Court's only response has been to double down, announcing after two hundred years its discovery that the Founders considered money to be the equivalent of free speech.

Dobbs makes one cogent criticism of *Roe* and some not-so-cogent ones. One of the not-so-cogent criticisms has to do with *Roe*'s trimester scheme. That approach, which even Justice Blackmun conceded was "arbitrary," nonetheless made practical sense. It gradually shifted authority over the abortion decision from the woman and her doctor to the state, which had a gradually increasing rational, nonreligious basis for intervening as the pregnancy proceeded. *Dobbs* could result in a dozen different schemes, any or all of them equally arbitrary.

Not very cogently, Justice Alito writes: "Far from bringing about a national settlement of the abortion issue, *Roe* and *Casey* have inflamed debate and deepened division." But *Roe* and *Casey* did not force anyone to do anything, whereas *Dobbs* will force tens of thousands of women to go into debt or leave their state or risk their health or risk criminal prosecution or bear unwanted children. (Or, of course, forgo sex—not all of it extramarital.) For *Dobbs*, women are just one party in an "inflamed debate," with nothing more at stake than legislators or other citizens, which may explain the opinion's curiously tone-deaf remark: "The regulation of abortion is not a sex-based classification." There is undoubtedly a technical meaning of "sex-based classification" that makes this sentence technically correct. But the evil of forced pregnancy is very great, and it is entirely sex-based.

Dobbs's cogent criticism—however hypocritical in view of this court's own practice—is that the court should normally defer to the people and their representatives, even if it thinks them mistaken. That is what we have—or wish we had—a democracy for.

GEORGE SCIALABBA's *selected essays will be published by Verso next year.*

Pro-choice demonstrators in Brooklyn, New York City, May 2022

CNS PHOTO/CAITLIN OCHS, REUTERS

LISA FULLAM

It was foreseeable that a decision by the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe* would not end abortion in the United States, but would instead result in a patchwork of starkly disparate laws and regulations so that what might be regarded as a right in one state would be treated as a felony in another.

Already we are witnessing what can happen to women and children who live in states where abortion has been seriously restricted or criminalized. The ten-year-old rape victim denied an abortion despite the substantial risk that pregnancy would pose for her physical and mental health. The woman whose water broke at eighteen weeks and who endured a dangerous and agonizing wait for the fetus's cardiac activity to cease before doctors would complete her abortion. Women with ectopic pregnancies who are not treated until their lives are on the cusp of being lost. Even where laws provide for termination of pregnancy when the mother's life or health is threatened, doctors and health-care institutions are unsure about what "counts" as life-threatening and what the options are. Must the woman be at imminent risk of dying? What if a woman has preeclampsia and her blood pressure is rising dangerously? How serious does a health risk need to be for termination to be allowed? Does a woman whose diabetes or renal disease can be exacerbated by pregnancy qualify?

And who decides? The lack of legal clarity leaves doctors caught between their oaths to help their patients and the risk of losing their licenses or going to prison. Dana Stone, a doctor in Oklahoma, which has banned almost all abortions, told the Associated Press, "We've asked some legislators, 'How are medical providers supposed to interpret the laws?' They say, 'They'll figure it out.'"

Though it's already well documented, it's worth repeating that states with the most restrictions on abortion already suffer some of the highest rates of maternal mortality. Louisiana, which bans abortion after six weeks, ranks forty-eighth in the nation in maternal and child health; from 2016 to 2018, maternal mortality rates rose 16 percent. We also know that the burden of bans will not be borne equitably. Jack Resneck Jr., president of the American Medical Association, made this point in his statement on the *Dobbs* decision: "Access to legal reproductive care will be limited to those with the sufficient resources, circumstances, and financial means to do so—exacerbating health inequities by placing the heaviest burden on patients from Black, Latinx, Indigenous, low-income, rural, and other historically disadvantaged communities who already face numerous structural and systemic barriers to accessing health care."

We've also seen how those who insist on a legal prohibition of abortion often downplay or ignore the

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Those giant posters of apparently free-floating fetuses seen at pro-life rallies sell a biological fiction: there is no such thing as a living, developing fetus that is not utterly dependent on the well-being of its mother.

structural economic forces that can lead women to terminate their pregnancies. According to data cited by Luu D. Ireland, assistant professor of obstetrics & gynecology at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, 73 percent of women seeking an abortion say they cannot afford another child. (More than half are already mothers.) The most common reason women give for seeking abortion is lack of social support: they say that "pregnancy would interfere with education, work or ability to care for dependents." A study conducted by the University of California, San Francisco, shows that women who are denied abortions face greater likelihood of long-term economic insecurity, of remaining in contact with a violent partner, and of serious health problems than women who have them.

Dobbs was not decided in order to enact Catholic magisterial teaching in the public square. But since it was celebrated by many in Church leadership, and since post-*Roe* abortion bans are the subject of vigorous and munificent Church lobbying, that teaching is worth a quick summary.

Catholic teaching across the centuries has focused almost exclusively on the philosophical quandary of when a developing embryo or fetus is a human person—that is, a being endowed with rights, including the right to life. Personhood, though, is a philosophical determination, while biological development is a continuum with a number of points at which personhood might be imputed. Indeed, in a footnote to 1974's Declaration on Procured Abortion, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith made this quandary clear:

> There is not a unanimous tradition on [when a fetus becomes a human person] and authors are as yet in disagreement. For some it dates from the first instant; for others it could not at least precede nidation. It is not within the competence of science to decide between these views, because the existence of an immortal soul is not a question in its field. It is a philosophical problem.

The footnote concludes with a defense of regarding the early embryo as a person from conception; subsequent Church documents still refrain—barely—from declaring a zygote a person. This does not imply any approval of abortion: the Vatican II document *Gaudium et spes* declared that "abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes." Abortion imposes *latae sententiae* excommunication on the responsible parties. According to the ethical and religious directives that guide Catholic health-care institutions, no direct action to terminate a pregnancy, or even a direct abortion of an extrauterine pregnancy, is licit, although in some cases involving double-effect reasoning (one classic example is the reasoning that accepts removal of a pregnant woman's cancerous uterus), one may pursue treatment that is foreseen but not directly intended to cause the death of an embryo.

Finally, Catholic teaching makes no logical exception for cases of rape or incest, since neither crime against the mother affects the ontological status of the fetus. Pope John Paul II also ruled out considerations like a mother's "desire to protect certain important values such as her own health or a decent standard of living for the other members of the family." He declared that "in no way could this human being ever be considered an aggressor, much less an unjust aggressor!"—thus apparently ruling out self-defense claims aside from those justified under the terms of double-effect.

Other religious bodies harbor different opinions on the moral status of the early embryo and the morality of abortion; some of those are now protesting abortion bans on religious-freedom grounds. As for U.S. Catholics, most say that abortion should be legal in all or most cases. More Catholics have abortions than members of other religious groups: 24 percent of all women who have abortions are Catholic, compared to 17 percent who are mainline Protestant and 13 percent who are Evangelical Protestant (38 percent have no religious affiliation).

Taken together, all of this suggests to me that we need a new starting point for thinking about abortion. First, let's take biology seriously. While an embryo, from conception, does have different DNA than its mother, it is also true that from implantation until viability the developing fetus is intimately and exclusively bound to the mother. Those giant posters of apparently free-floating fetuses seen at pro-life rallies sell a biological fiction: there is no such thing as a living, developing fetus that is not utterly dependent on the well-being of its mother.

Taking biology seriously means accepting that sometimes a fetus or embryo can be an unjust attacker—*pace* John Paul II—even though completely without evil intent. In other words, sometimes it is pregnancy itself that occasions a threat to the mother's life or health. "Whenever the embryo is a danger to the life of the mother, an abortion is permissible," John T. Noonan Jr. wrote in "How to Argue About Abortion," not long after *Roe* was decided. "At the level of reason nothing more can be asked of the mother."

How to make these decisions? We must restore the place of medical judgment—medical prudence—in cases when the mother's life could be at risk. Discerning whether a pregnancy poses

a significant threat to a woman's life or health involves assessing a matter of medical probabilities and likelihoods, a matter of standards of care that were clear before *Dobbs* and remain clear in states where abortion is still legal. In keeping with the Catholic principle of subsidiarity, shouldn't these decisions be made by those closest to them: the pregnant woman, her partner, and the physician? The Biden administration has declared that the federal Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act, which requires physicians to intervene in life-threatening situations, preempts state laws banning abortion. This protects the ability of doctors to exercise medical judgment in some cases, but it does not guarantee protection from all legal exposure. It also seems to require a delay in action long past when a prudent practitioner might have recognized and dealt with the potential threat before it became an emergency.

Further, rape and incest must be allowed as justifications for legal termination of pregnancy if the mother wishes. Otherwise, we are in effect allowing a man to legally commandeer a woman's body for nine months, after which she is faced with the agonizing choice of whether to raise or give up for adoption a child conceived by violence, who is the child of her attacker and is also her own. This is a violation of the personhood of women.

We must also strike a stance of solidarity with women who face serious structural hardship from pregnancies. Writing in the *Journal of Religious Ethics* in 2018, Cristina Traina, the Avery Cardinal Dulles, SJ, Chair of Catholic Theology at Fordham University, argued for systemic change:

> Women with unwanted pregnancies need mercy or forgiveness. But they also need compassionate solidarity: prophetic, active efforts to transform the social structures that make material harm and moral failure, and consequent moral anguish and moral injury, inevitable for many pregnant women.

Ideally, effective systemic and individual reforms would have been established before we would ever consider banning abortion. Now that *Roe* is gone, Church leaders might lobby against enforcement of abortion bans until there are adequate protections for mothers in place.

And a final thought from Catholic moral theology. Aquinas argued that the purpose of the law is not to legislate all of morality, but to serve the common good. It seems clear that post-*Dobbs* bans and restrictions are not merely confusing, not merely cruel and unjust, but also a direct assault on the common good. Abortions will be less safe where bans are in place. More women will die unnecessarily. More women and children will suffer from poverty. Many women will be forced to bear and likely raise unwanted children. Women of child-bearing age will count as somewhat less than full persons. This is the post-*Dobbs* United States that all Americans, especially Catholic Americans, should prevent from coming to be.

LISA FULLAM *is professor emerita at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. She is the author of* The Virtue of Humility: A Thomistic Apologetic *(Edwin Mellen Press).*

MASSIMO FAGGIOLI

Commentary on the overturning of *Roe* regularly makes references to European countries in which legislative measures have led to politically and socially acceptable compromise on abortion—some set of restrictions on a procedure that nonetheless remains legal and accessible—as if these examples could suggest a way for the United States to proceed in the aftermath of *Dobbs*. Italy is sometimes specifically cited, and sometimes in connection with the role of the Catholic Church in so much of Italian life.

Legge 194 (or "The 194," as Italians call it), which the Italian Parliament passed in 1978, allows women to receive abortions through the first ninety days of pregnancy, after getting counseling in a public medical facility. Beyond ninety days, abortion is permissible "a) when pregnancy or childbirth involves a serious danger to the woman's life; b) when pathological processes are ascertained, including those relating to significant anomalies or malformations of the unborn child, which cause a serious danger to the physical or mental health of the woman."

When there is the possibility of viability outside the womb, interruption of pregnancy is permissible only when pregnancy or childbirth involves a serious danger to the woman's life, and then the doctor who performs the surgery must take all appropriate measures to safeguard the life of the fetus. Before Legge 194, a woman who had an abortion risked up to four years in prison, and whoever performed an abortion faced up to five years. "The 194" has survived constitutional challenges and even a public referendum in 1981; though it decriminalized abortion, it did not make it a constitutional right.

But does Italy's approach really have something to offer to the United States? It's important to remember that the social, cultural, and histor-

Today, the right-wing Italian parties led by Matteo Salvini and Giorgia Meloni care little about abortion, instead waging a culture war over the issue of immigration.

ical tides leading to *Roe* in 1973 (and to *Dobbs* a half-century later) are far different from those that led to Legge 194 in 1978. Italy's legislation initially grew out of a larger, somewhat drawn-out effort to overturn the legacy of fascism, particularly the penal code of 1930 (known as the Rocco Code), which applied to a number of issues. First, in 1971, the Constitutional Court ruled that Article 553 of the code, which had outlawed the "incitement of practices against procreation," was unconstitutional. In 1975, the Italian Parliament passed a bill on family-law reform that established equality between the roles of father and mother in terms of duties and dignity. Then, in February 1975, the Constitutional Court declared Article 546 of the Rocco Code on abortion unconstitutional, ruling that the protection of an embryo is *not* equivalent to the right to life and health of one who is already a person, such as a pregnant woman. In 1978, the remainder of the portion of the Rocco Code pertaining to "crimes against the integrity and health of the lineage" was repealed with the passage of Legge 194.

Still, the Constitutional Court and other courts in Italy played a relatively marginal role. Policy was mainly produced through the parliamentary process, beginning in 1973, when the Socialist Party MP Loris Fortuna (who advanced the law that legalized divorce in 1970) made a moderate proposal amending the penal code on abortion. And then there was the influence of the Italian Church: in 1975, the Italian bishops' conference issued a document that reiterated traditional Catholic teaching on abortion, but also indirectly critiqued the Fascist-era concept of abortion as a crime against the integrity of race or lineage. Then came the national elections of June 1976, which in bringing about significant gains for the Communist Party (thanks in no small part to Catholic voters) also brought about the end of the anti-abortion majority in Parliament. Leftist parties (Socialist, Communist, Proletarian Democracy), liberal-capitalist parties (Republican, Liberal, and Social Democratic), and the Radical Party—supported by numerous associations and movements—soon drafted a consensus bill on abortion that passed in the lower chamber. After being initially rejected by the senate it was resubmitted, and in May 1978, it overcame opposition from Movimento Sociale Italiano (the neo-fascist party) and Democrazia Cristiana (the Christian-Democratic party, composed mostly of Catholics) to pass. The law was then promulgated by the president of the republic, Giovanni Leone, a Catholic. Neither Leone nor any of the Catholic parliamentarians who'd supported it were threatened with canonical consequences: none of them were denied access to the sacraments (in contrast to what we've seen in the United States not only recently but as far back as 2004).

But things didn't end there. In May 1981, 79 percent of Italy's registered voters went to the polls to vote on a referendum that included two questions on abortion. One, put forth by the Movement for Life (officially nondenominational but largely composed of and run by Catholics), called for the repeal of Legge 194; it was rejected by 68 percent of voters. The other was advanced by the Radical Party, which called for further liberalization of abortion law—specifically, eliminating the prohibition on abortion for women under the age of eighteen, lifting the ninety-day limit, and allowing private health facilities (not just public) to perform abortions; this proposal was rejected by 88 percent of voters. Legge 194 has remained in place since, and its defenders note that the number of abortions has plummeted in Italy over that time. Indeed, its figures on abortion today are among the lowest in the world. But other factors must be considered, such as the more widespread availability of contraceptives and the morning-after pill. There's also the undeniable fact that Italy's population is growing older, far fewer women are becoming pregnant, and far fewer children are being born now than in the 1970s.

Legge 194 legislated three other important points: it established the role of judges in allowing abortions for underage women when the parents or legal guardians do not agree with the decision to abort; it mandated that women receive counseling in public health-care facilities regarding alternatives to abortion; and it protected conscientious objection by medical personnel opposed to abortion. This last point has been among the most debated provisions of the law since the time it was passed. In some southern regions of Italy, the percentage of medical personnel claiming conscientious objection ranges from 80 percent to 95 percent; in the North, it's around 45 percent. This can make it very difficult for women to access abortion, according to progressives, who claim that as a result, unsafe "back-alley" abortions are on the rise.

If the passage of Legge 194 can be viewed as a response to Fascist-era penal codes, its place in Italian life must also be viewed in the context of the massive changes in Church-state relations in the latter part of the twentieth century. These include the Second Vatican Council's call for a new relationship with secular states and respect for religious liberty of non-Catholics. For Italy, this meant updating the 1929 Concordat, with changes signed with the Holy

See in 1984; revising family law regarding equality between the father and the mother; and, in October 1978, electing the first non-Italian pope in centuries, John Paul II. Passage of "The 194" and the 1981 referendum were decisive transitions for Italian society, and the second wake-up call for the Catholic Church in Italy—following the 1974 referendum allowing divorce—on the country's secularization.

Legge 194 also brought Italy's policy on abortion into line with those of other European countries. It did not liberalize abortion, nor did it create an individual or constitutional right to abortion, as *Roe* did in the United States. Rather, it established certain conditions under which abortion could not be punishable as a crime and set up mechanisms under which abortion would be handled within the public health-care system. The undergirding moral principle was not the will and agency of the pregnant woman, but a pregnant woman's right to health—the idea being that both unsafe illegal abortion *and* legal abortion on demand violate that right.

When comparing Italy's approach to abortion to that of the United States, all these factors must be kept in mind—the particulars of the legislation, the way it came into being, the lingering memories of fascism, and the role of the Catholic Church. The fact that Italy got to this point through parliamentary proceedings and a nationwide public referendum, and not via court interventions, is a critical difference. Further, even in this predominantly Catholic country, abortion never became the divisive and all-consuming political and cultural issue it did in the United States, because Italian politics is multi-party and consensus-driven—not two-party, winner-take-all. And while the Catholic hierarchy lamented Legge 194 and the referendum, and endorsed the Movement for Life, it never tried to mount the kind of culture war that U.S. bishops did.

Already by the 1970s, most Catholics and progressives in Italy agreed that abortion was a serious moral and social issue and needed to be discouraged and limited, but that it could be legislated thanks in part to Italians' trust in the welfare state and a taxpayer-funded health-care system. The compromise, balancing freedom with moral concerns, was widely accepted. Even in the twenty years dominated by Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing coalition beginning in the 1990s, abortion was never a significant part of its political platform. Today, the right-wing parties led by Matteo Salvini and Giorgia Meloni care little about abortion, instead waging a culture war over the issue of immigration.

Legge 194 arose out of a broad compromise between Italian progressive and conservative Catholics, and between leftist-progressive forces and the establishment. There was mutual suspicion about libertarianism, as well as general agreement on the need to strengthen institutions like the national health-care system and to prevent crusading, mutually exclusive campaigns on the issue of abortion. It was a way to do away with Fascist-era legislation at a time when Italian democracy was at risk. American democracy faces its own risks today. But if that's the *only* parallel, it seems unlikely that the United States will soon find its own way to consensus.

MASSIMO FAGGIOLI *is professor of theology and religious studies at Villanova University. His most recent book is* Joe Biden and Catholicism in the United States *(Bayard). Follow him on Twitter @MassimoFaggioli.*

EVE TUSHNET

For about twenty years, I've volunteered at a pro-life pregnancy center. (The views expressed here are mine alone.) I don't know how much my experience can contribute to the broader national politics of abortion. Everything I'm about to say is drawn from what my clients have told me, and while I do everything in my power to build trust, I am not in their shoes and can speak only as an observer.

Moreover, my pregnancy center is in the District of Columbia; abortion will likely remain legal here or across the border in Maryland. The women we see are not the ones most directly affected by the court's decision. I can't speak to the experiences of women in states where Republican lawmakers compete to "own the libs" by pushing increasingly punitive laws (against the wishes of the biggest pro-life groups in the country, which have all declared that they do not want women punished for seeking abortions). The *Dobbs* decision will not—at least not immediately—lead D.C. doctors to delay or withhold treatments intended to save pregnant women's lives out of fear of criminal investigation.

At least for a while, our clients will continue to make decisions about their pregnancies under more or less the same conditions that they have in the past. They will face the same health-care disparities that poorer women and women of color face across the country: D.C.'s maternal mortality rate is well above the national average—and a recent review by the District's Maternal Mortality Review Committee found that 90 percent of all people who died of pregnancy-related causes in D.C. during the years

There is no way to talk about abortion in America without talking about the suffering, shame, and guilt caused by the belief that it's wrong to have a baby when you're poor.

A woman looks at a picture of her ultrasound at Houston Women's Reproductive Services, October 2021.

CNS PHOTO/EVELYN HOCKSTEIN, REUTERS

under review were Black. These numbers increase some of our clients' fears of pregnancy complications, and their fears about having children at all.

I can know only what my clients choose to share with me: how they choose to present themselves to someone who is nearly a stranger, maybe just a voice on the phone. But I think I have discerned patterns in the reasons clients mention for considering abortion or choosing life.

Many of my clients want an abortion because they believe it is the most responsible choice. This is not vocabulary I've encountered often in pro-life rhetoric about women's reasons for abortion. It's not hard to find people who think they're defending the unborn by depicting women who seek abortions as irresponsible, wanting sex without consequences, wanting to lead carefree single lives. And it's not hard to find pro-life people depicting women who seek abortions as trapped victims. The second image is a bit closer to what I've seen than the first, but most of the women who tell us that they intend to have an abortion if they're pregnant understand themselves to be making a moral choice. This kind of client often understands that other women have had the baby under similar circumstances, and she doesn't waste time judging them, but she thinks it would be irresponsible for *her*, right now, to have a baby.

The reasons they think abortion would be the responsible choice are varied. Sometimes they think it would be irresponsible to have a baby before they're married. (Most of our clients' sexual decisions are made with the intention of eventually marrying. But not "waiting until marriage"—that, too, is irresponsible, because you risk marrying the wrong person or never marrying at all.) Sometimes they think it would be irresponsible to have a baby before they have their lives in order on an emotional level. Most often they think it would be irresponsible to have a baby before they're financially stable. For clients who already have children, there's an extra urgency, since each additional child pushes that stable future a little farther away.

Most of our clients believe strongly that they have a moral responsibility to attain financial stability. They feel intense familial and internal pressure to graduate from high school, then college, and then to get a stable job. They want to be, if not homeowners, at least people who live independently from their parents. A baby will never help them do this. A baby (a first or second or third baby) will always make the snakes-and-lad-

ders upward scramble slower and harder and more uncertain. Sometimes the conflict between baby and financial stability is blunt and brutal: last year, two D.C. police officers came forward to say that, when they were cadets, they aborted their pregnancies because a sergeant told them that having a baby would cost them their jobs. But even when the pressure to abort is less explicit, even when it isn't embodied in a specific employer or supervisor, our clients fear that a baby will drag them back into poverty or prevent them from finally—after years of grueling effort—escaping it. This isn't new. The hip-hop artist Lauryn Hill captured the dilemma perfectly in 1998 in the song she dedicated to her son, "To Zion": *They said, "Lauryn, baby, use your head" / But instead I chose to use my heart.*

To think with your heart is foolish. It often feels selfish. A pregnancy threatens to let down all the people who supported you, who hoped for you, who sacrificed so you could make it. And it takes so long to get stable—so much longer than you thought. Every setback pushes back the day when the baby you long for would be a reward and not a disaster.

We can and should do more to support parents: a baby *shouldn't* be a financial catastrophe. It should be easier than it is to attain basic stability. I'm not sure how far that would go, since "stability" or security can always be redefined—the bar can always be raised. But it would be the right thing to do. Meanwhile, there is no way to talk about abortion in America without talking about the suffering, shame, and guilt caused by the belief that it's wrong to have a baby when you're poor. When do you have enough money and security to earn the right to have a child? You aren't supposed to get married before you're financially stable; you aren't supposed to have a baby before you're financially stable. Who, exactly, are poor people allowed to love?

In the face of this intense moral pressure to "use your head," a pregnancy center can help a little. We may be able to help a woman find a doula, an immigration lawyer, or resources to stay in school. We may be able to help her talk through her conflicting moral beliefs, including the belief that a baby is always a blessing. But one of the most important things we can do is simply help her see what is happening inside her. I would say two things have most often prompted a woman considering abortion to choose life. One is just talking with someone who encourages her to voice her own ambivalence, her own longing for a child, her own fears and hopes. There is a voice inside most of our clients that already speaks for life.

The other thing is exploring the process of fetal development. *This is probably about where you are now. This is three weeks from now.* There is pain but also wonder in discovering the strange unfurling of the fetus. Even when a client is very early in her pregnancy, simply considering that process shifts things. It suggests that something has already begun, that it is already further advanced than she realizes: before you know it, someone new has come.

There's a pro-life rhetorical trope that urges us to imagine all the children who would have been born if not for abortion. Empty school desks, swing sets rocking aimlessly in a phantom breeze. I don't know that our clients would find these images compelling. Our clients almost always either have children already or intend to have them one day. They do picture their children filling those school desks and those swing sets eventually—once they're married, once they're financially stable, once they're *ready*. What makes a difference is not the dreamed-of, imaginary future. That may be partly because they know a child in the womb may never draw breath or grow big enough to rock a swing set. We hope and pray that the choice for life is a choice for a newborn, a toddler, a tween, a kid taller than his mother, a sweet singer like her father. But our clients know better than I do that none of that is guaranteed just because you canceled your abortion appointment. What they are choosing to protect is not the imagined future child, but the child currently, at this moment, growing and changing within them. The discovery of that child is a discovery that there is more in your life than you know.

The first Letter of John proposes, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother." Against laws and institutions that denied the reality of the child we could not see (and thereby harmed that child's mother), *Dobbs* counterposes a new regime. In many parts of the country, the laws and institutions of this new regime will refuse to shelter the pregnant woman we *can* see. In this way the institutions of the new regime will betray the children they ostensibly sought to protect.

One way to define the good of politics is that it's how we fight against all the forces that would dehumanize us, and that pressure us to dehumanize one another. My experience as a crisis pregnancy counselor has not given me any special expertise on these politics. It has only taught me the urgency of the task.

EVE TUSHNET *is a writer in Washington D.C.*

Mass in Kuru, Nigeria

‘No Longer a European Export’

John T. McGreevy

How the Church became truly global

Quick: Name the countries with the most baptized Catholics. You might guess Brazil (172.2 million) or the United States (72.3 million). You might miss Mexico (110.9 million) and the Philippines (83.6 million). You might be surprised by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (43.2 million). Only Church demographers know that Nigeria (29 million) will soon pass Spain and may eventually catch Italy.

FRIEDRICH STARK/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Catholicism has become the most multicultural and multilingual institution in the world. In 1900 two-thirds of Catholics lived in Europe. Now two-thirds of the 1.2 billion baptized Catholics live in the Global South.

Astute observers have long anticipated this shift. In the fall of 1961, Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI, only thirty-four but already a celebrated theology professor at the University of Bonn, met with Cologne's Cardinal Josef Frings. The two men discussed an address Ratzinger was drafting for Frings—who was nearly blind and would memorize the speech—on the topic of the upcoming Second Vatican Council.

In his draft, Ratzinger contrasted preparation for the First Vatican Council in the 1860s with preparation for the Second Vatican Council, scheduled to open in 1962. Then, liberalism in politics, economics, and theology seemed the most important challenge. Now, globalization was. Radio and television brought the world into almost every home and trains and airplanes allowed ordinary people to journey vast distances. More than anything else, the Church needed to "become in a fuller sense than heretofore a world Church."

To Ratzinger, Europe's plunge into the abyss of two world wars between 1914 and 1945 had discredited ideas of Western superiority. Catholics must "recognize the relativity of all human cultural forms" and cultivate "a modesty which sets no human and historical heritage as absolute."

To read Joseph Ratzinger acknowledging "the relativity of all human cultural forms" is disconcerting. Forty years later he would blast the "dictatorship of relativism" that he associated with modernity. (Comparing young Ratzinger with old Ratzinger has become a scholarly growth industry.) But his analysis in 1961 was shrewd. He did not use the term "decolonization." Still, neither the Second Vatican Council nor the current Catholic moment can be understood without it.

Catholicism became significantly more global in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as millions of migrants and tens of thousands of missionary priests and nuns left Europe. It did not become more multicultural. When clergy trained in Europe or North America landed in China or Cameroon they lugged with them statues of the Sacred Heart, rosaries, blueprints for neo-Gothic churches, and Latin textbooks. Their theological project was uniformity. In the words of another German theologian, Karl Rahner, Ratzinger's collaborator during the Second Vatican Council and his rival in its messy aftermath, these missionaries "exported a European religion as a commodity [they] did not really want to change."

This Catholic globalization of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often became entangled with imperialism. Missionaries frequently worked with government officials from Catholic colonial powers such as France, Belgium, and Portugal, and even Protestant empires such as Great Britain. (British leaders admired the way Irish Catholic bishops kept order among Irish Catholic soldiers and settlers.) The Protestant imperial German government, not the Catholic Church, funded the first scholarly chair in Catholic mission studies at the University of Münster in the early twentieth century. When its first occupant published an account of German Catholic missions in Africa, he dedicated it to Kaiser Wilhelm II. The same scholar volunteered that missionaries could lift Africans from "their state of rudeness to a life worthy of a human being."

The Catholic and colonial world shattered in the two decades after 1945. The process began with the Cold War. Before World War II, if they discussed economic growth at all, Catholic intellectuals focused on the industrial North Atlantic and warned against the ways in which growth might disrupt social hierarchies. Growth meant small businesses bought out by corporations, family farms swallowed by large landowners, or families torn apart by a desire for unnecessary luxuries (including mothers working outside the home when extra income was unnecessary). Redistribution, not growth, seemed the most likely solution to the global depression of the 1930s. Foundational documents for Catholic social thought such as the papal encyclicals *Rerum novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo anno* (1931) advocated just wages for (usually male) workers, not greater equality between rich and poor nations.

The postwar struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States for influence in what was then called the Third World changed this calculus. Many Western policymakers feared poverty would serve as the gateway drug to communism. The alternative was economic development, and because Catholic institutions were so numerous in the Global South, they joined colonial governments and international aid agencies in facilitating development programs. Bishops in the tiny West African country of Guinea, for example, requested—and received—from the French government more than seventy million francs in the single year of 1954 to build Catholic schools. In Ghana, women religious from the United States and Europe serving as missionary nurses helped establish the country's modern medical system.

Catholics also joined the development conversation. Two voices were crucial. The first was Barbara Ward's. Born in 1914, Ward graduated from Oxford as the only woman in her year with a first-class honours degree. By 1940 she was a full-time writer for the British newsweekly the *Economist*, one of the first women to hold such a role.

Ward married a United Nations diplomat from Australia, Robert Jackson, who spent his career working on hydroelectric development projects. She accompanied Jackson to postings in Australia, India, and the Gold Coast (Ghana). She became friends with Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of an independent India, and Kwame Nkrumah, the first prime minister of an independent Ghana. Informed by these experiences, Ward published several books during the 1950s, written with lightning speed even as she composed pieces

for the *Economist* and lectured on both sides of the Atlantic. Always anti-Communist, she reminded her readers that aid to less-developed nations was the least expensive way to combat the Soviets. Catholics, especially, needed to recognize "moral obligations which stretch beyond our own frontiers."

Ward's best-known study, *The Rich Nations and the Poor Nations*, appeared in 1962. Now a fixture on the New York-Washington-London policy circuit, Ward became an advisor to the World Bank. The book garnered her a White House dinner invitation with President John F. Kennedy, who jotted down in a notebook his conviction, taken from a conversation with Ward, that the Soviets feared only "a religion that transcends frontiers and can challenge the purpose and performance of the nation state."

The second voice was that of Fr. Louis-Joseph Lebret. A pilot during the First World War in the French air force, Lebret entered the Dominican order in 1926. He began his ministry in Brittany, where he competed with Communists for the allegiance of dockworkers, and observed with dismay the threat posed to local fishermen by multinational companies claiming the most productive waters. In 1942, he founded a think tank focused on development issues—*Économie et Humanisme*—dedicated to understanding a world with a growing gap between developed and "under-developed" nations.

Léopold Sedar Senghor, 1978

Lebret moved away from a single-minded focus on economic growth toward a wider view, one that acknowledged "the human need for transcendence." Development meant not just "having more" but "being more." In the 1950s, Lebret hopscotched from Lebanon to South Vietnam to Uruguay to the United Nations to Rome. In São Paulo, he established a satellite version of his development organization and lectured there frequently.

Ward and Lebret understood that Catholics must abandon the equation of the Church with the West. Filipino independence from the United States in 1946, Indian independence from Britain in 1948, Indonesian independence from the Dutch in 1949, Vietnamese independence from France in 1954, and independence for thirty-three countries in Africa, including Ghana, Senegal, Nigeria, Uganda, and Kenya, between 1954 and 1965, did not move to a single tempo, but the end result was a world of independent nation-states, not colonies and empires.

What also changed after 1945 was that Indigenous peoples fully joined the debate. The most influential group of Indigenous Catholics came from French colonial Africa. Plucked from the best Catholic secondary schools after competitive examinations and given scholarships to study at French universities, Catholic students from colonies in West Africa met each other in Paris in the 1930s and 1940s. Through late-night conversations in shared apartments and dormitories, they came to see political independence for their native countries as inseparable from native leadership within the Church.

Léopold Senghor became the leading voice. He grew up in rural Senegal, where he was educated in missionary schools and converted from Islam to Catholicism before winning a scholarship to study in Paris. He excelled as a student, qualifying to teach in an elite French *lycée*, or high school, and then a French university. He became one of the first African-born writers to establish a major reputation in Europe.

After the war, Senghor knew that the old imperial order could not endure. His own poems and essays made the case for Negritude, or pride in the autonomous value of African cultures. In the 1940s, he unsurprisingly clashed with European Catholic missionaries who complained about an African "lack of civilization." He explained that "missionaries who were the most liberal Europeans [in Africa] before [World War II], fail to comprehend the evolution the war has wrought in minds and fact." He was elected Senegal's first president in 1960 and he immediately appointed Lebret to develop an economic plan for the country.

While Senghor and other African Catholics met in Paris, African seminarians and priests taking theological degrees encountered one another in Rome. They, too, began to reflect on racial consciousness within the Church, publishing essays that urged European Catholics to accept both Negritude and decolonization. A priest from the Congo urged the Church to become truly African. "In the Congo," he insisted, "[the Church] should be Congolese, in the construction of the church and in the making of sacred objects, one should carefully consider the lines, the colors and all the elements of Congolese art."

Some missionary priests and bishops still held to a view that Christianity and European civilization could not be disentangled. An influential French prelate, Marcel Lefebvre,

Catholic students from colonies in West Africa came to see political independence for their native countries as inseparable from native leadership within the Church.

spent sixteen years in Gabon before his eventual appointment as apostolic delegate for Africa and archbishop of Dakar. Lefebvre thought it obvious that European Catholic culture shielded Africans from communism and an Islam that depended upon "fanaticism, collectivism, and the enslavement of the weak."

Other European and North American missionaries viewed their work differently. Historian Elizabeth Foster, in her superb *African Catholic*, details a fascinating debate among French clergy in Paris in the 1950s on whether Catholics had a "duty to decolonize." A group of African Catholic students based in Paris authored a remarkable manifesto that reached the front page of *Le Monde*:

> We, the Catholic students of Black Africa in France, reaffirm our desire to stay simultaneously entirely Christian and entirely African; we cannot, in any circumstances or under any pressure, choose between these two loyalties.... We affirm our attachment to the natural right of African peoples to self-determination [and] [w]e ask French Catholics to make the necessary effort to understand the demands of this double loyalty to the church and to Africa.

Archbishop Lefebvre found such arguments a "serious problem." Along with his allies he stressed the benefit to Africans of colonial administration by "peoples more privileged than they." In the final days of the papacy of Pius XII, this view received a hearing, and Lefebvre helped draft the first ever encyclical on the subject of Africa, *Fidei donum*. Even by the standards of 1957, the document's paternalism was glaring. The pope applauded Africans now "reaching out toward the highest civilization of our times" but continued to worry about the continent's "heathen multitudes."

A muted response came from African Catholic students, two hundred of whom had gathered in Rome the weekend of the encyclical's release. "Should not the Church take a solemn position against colonialism?" Joseph Ki-Zerbo from Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) asked. The students met with top Vatican officials, but an ailing Pius XII declined to join them.

A parallel dynamic of Catholic decolonization also became evident in Southeast Asia. In the Philippines, Horacio de la Costa had graduated from an elite Jesuit high school in Manila in the 1930s. Interned during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines during World War II, he obtained a PhD in history from Harvard after the war. He soon became the first Filipino leader of the Jesuits, succeeding American Jesuits who had taken on leadership roles after the 1898 American occupation of the islands. His scholarly passion, even when writing on events in the sixteenth century, was the origins of a Filipino nationalist consciousness. As early as 1952, he insisted that Catholicism could no longer be viewed as a Western import but instead as belonging "fully as much to Asia as to Europe."

In Indonesia after 1945, Dutch Catholic Church officials and political leaders scrambled to sustain the country as a colony by warning of "chaos" should a nascent independence movement succeed. But Indigenous Catholic support for an independent republic proved more influential. The first native Indonesian bishop, Albertus Soegijapranata, played a crucial role. An aristocrat (and Jesuit) from Java, Soegijapranata became the region's most important Catholic figure during the World War II Japanese occupation (when Dutch Catholics were imprisoned or placed under house arrest). He developed contacts with republican leaders, some of whom were Catholic. Eventually Soegijapranata cajoled Dutch Catholic leaders into accepting the new republic and arranged for official recognition from the Vatican.

Vietnamese Catholic students, like their African Catholic contemporaries, used scholarships from the French imperial government to make their way to Paris in the 1930s. After the war and the Japanese occupation, Bishop Ngô Đình Thục rallied the Vietnamese bishops to support calls for Vietnamese independence from France. In this more nationalist setting, French missionary bishops and clergy came under attack from Vietnamese Catholics as "undesirables and troublemakers, if not enemies of the nation."

Bishop Ngô Đình Thục's brother, Ngô Đình Diệm, became the first president of South Vietnam after the split of the country into North and South in 1954. Ngô Đình Diệm's alliances with American military and political leaders in the 1950s, as well as New York's Cardinal Francis Spellman, are well documented, as are his own authoritarian instincts. Another Catholic president, John F. Kennedy, initially admired Diệm for "holding the country together." But Kennedy-administration officials, frustrated by continued instability within South Vietnam and Diệm's unpopularity as a Catholic leader in a majority-Buddhist country, condoned a coup led by South Vietnamese generals. Captured while hiding in a Catholic Church, Diệm was assassinated in November 1963.

This emergence of Indigenous Catholic leaders—in West Africa, the Philippines, Indonesia, and South Vietnam—fueled some of the discussions at the Second Vatican Council. In contrast to Pius XII's caution, Pope John XXIII unequivocally welcomed the "attainment of political independence by the peoples of Asia and Africa." He had served in Paris as Vatican ambassador or nuncio in

DOMINIQUE ROGER/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

the late 1940s and understood the aspirations of African and Vietnamese Catholics. He met with not only Léopold Senghor but other Africans in the months before the council.

Bishops and missionaries from the Global South almost uniformly supported the biggest single change authorized by the council: the shift from the Latin Mass to liturgy in the vernacular. One of the African bishops urged that the text on the liturgy drop the word "Western" since the Church was not, and never had been, limited to the West. "The victory of the vernacular in the church liturgy," Karl Rahner later argued, "signals unmistakably the coming-to-be of a world Church whose individual churches exist with a certain independence in their respective cultural spheres, inculturated, and no longer a European export." Archbishop Lefebrve, the defender of French colonialism in the 1950s, bitterly opposed the vernacular liturgy and would lead a major schism after the council, demanding the retention of the pre-1962 Latin rite.

Just after the council, Fr. Lebret and Barbara Ward helped Paul VI draft his 1967 social encyclical, *Populorum progressio*. The pope stressed the importance of "integral human development" and described "a type of capitalism" in bleak terms. The document was received rapturously in Latin America, where it informed the development of liberation theology.

The *Wall Street Journal*, by contrast, described *Populorum progressio* as "warmed over Marxism." The text fell into eclipse in the 1980s and 1990s. Access to global markets, far more than development programs, brought hundreds of millions of people out of poverty in East Asia, especially, but also in Latin America. Communist governments in eastern Europe and then the Soviet Union itself collapsed. One of communism's most influential opponents, Pope John Paul II, understood spiritual freedom as inseparable from economic freedom. Communism denied both.

This post-1989 confidence now seems premature. Inequality has increased to dangerous levels not only within wealthy nations such as the United States but between poor regions such as sub-Saharan Africa and more affluent parts of the world. Pope Francis frequently cites *Populorum progressio*. And while Catholic libertarians in the United States scoff at climate change, Francis's environmental encyclical, *Laudato si'*, laments an obsession with economic growth. It is now the most influential Church document of the past sixty years.

Francis, too, is a man of the Global South, with experience working in the poorest neighborhoods of Buenos Aires. His moral sensibility is traditional: opposed to the death penalty, abortion, and gay marriage (although more welcoming than any previous pope to gay Catholics). But he is skeptical of free-market nostrums. Fellow Catholic Joe Biden placed a photo of himself with Pope Francis on his desk in the Oval Office only minutes after his inauguration. Biden delights in the fact that the pope has encouraged him to keep taking Communion even as some American bishops scheme to deny Biden the sacrament because of his pro-choice position on abortion. Still, Biden is not the American politician who quotes Pope Francis on the economy with the greatest enthusiasm. That would be Bernie Sanders.

An oddity of the moment is that two of the world's most successful Anglophone writers happen to be Nigerian Catholics. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's ancestors converted to Catholicism in the 1920s under the tutelage of Irish Catholic missionaries. As a child, her family attended Mass every Sunday at the Catholic chapel at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka, and she vividly recalls singing in Igbo and English, as well as "gold pendants at women's throats, their headscarves flared out like the wings of giant butterflies; men's caftans crisply starched; children in frilly socks and uncomfortable clothes." Her adult relationship to Catholicism is fraught but enduring, since "to be raised Roman Catholic is to be inducted into a culture that clings, that slides between your soul's crevices and stays." Characters in her fiction visit a Lourdes shrine and claim to see the Virgin Mary. A Nigerian priest travels to work in Germany because of that country's clergy shortage. The villain of her first novel is a censorious and abusive Catholic father tied to a colonial vision of the Church; a heroine is an aunt whose Catholicism is more humane. Adichie declares herself "proud" of Pope Francis since he "seems to value the person as much as the institution."

Another Nigerian Catholic writer, Uwem Akpan, trained as a Jesuit. His stories reveal the world through the eyes of children. One makes a dangerous journey through Catholic and Muslim regions of Nigeria. Another clutches the family crucifix while evading warring mobs in Rwanda. "I think fiction allows us to sit for a while," he told an interviewer, "with people we would rather not meet." His emphasis on the vulnerable people of a continent in turmoil rests upon the final document of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes* (1965), and especially its famous first line, frequently referenced by Pope Francis: "the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well."

In 1961, as decolonization accelerated, a young Joseph Ratzinger predicted that "we cannot yet imagine the riches to come when the charisms of Asia and Africa make their contributions to the whole Church." Now, the Nigerian Cardinal John Onaiyekan echoes Francis in seeing "the hand of God in the process of globalization."

What will the next sixty years bring? Perhaps some of the divisions among Catholics, especially in the United States, will dissipate, less because of unanticipated resolutions and more because the world, and the Church, will have moved on. A new generation may place more emphasis on Pope Francis's call to be "citizens of our respective nations and of the entire world, builders of a new social bond."

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 this month by W.W. Norton.*

Two Poems from Micheal O'Siadhail's Testament

30

With mother's milk the hushaby
All will be well no need to cry—
O promise me she didn't lie.

Although we know of death's goodbye,
We swear a love that will not die—
O promise me that we don't lie.

Eternities of joy deny
Time's ruthless arrow on the fly—
O promise that they do not lie.

We laugh and laughing you're nearby
All fun is reaching for your sky—
O promise that it doesn't lie

Here under your eternal eye,
I want to trust your lullaby—
O promise that you do not lie.

67

The morning's heavy sky is closed and fraught
With snow that won't allow the dawn to flush
A gloom that in my youth I'd often fought.

Almighty, I've no knock-down proof of you—
You're far beyond the reach of any thought,
All logic fails, no argument will do,

No image can contain you, no similitude.
Beyond our being, words now falter too—
Superlatives compare, infinitude

Here stands apart from all we can define
And every name I give you still elude;
No matter how I try you hold the line.

I know no one can see your face and live,
Allow me to hear your voice, give me a sign!
Although you're never argumentative

Whatever you desire you will disclose
In words; insisting on the figurative,
You're poet-God who will not speak in prose

But sends allusive lines from high-command
With metaphors refusing to foreclose
The mystery of how you show your hand.

But now the sun has dared a kindled blush—
I listen for your voice as here I stand
Unsandalled still before your burning bush.

MICHEAL O'SIADHAIL *is Distinguished Poet-in-Residence at Union Theological Seminary. His works include* The Five Quintets, Collected Poems, *and* One Crimson Thread. *These above two poems are from his new collection,* Testament, *published this month by Baylor University Press. Used by permission.*

Earnest Desire

Rita Ferrone

Pope Francis's letter on liturgical formation challenges and affirms the People of God as a whole.

Pope Francis's June 2022 letter on liturgical formation is a fascinating reflection on how liturgy forms us, and what sort of process we ourselves must undergo in order to celebrate and live the liturgy fully. One might have thought that a letter about liturgical formation would be concerned with highlighting what the Church ought to do to establish programs of formation in parishes and dioceses, or that it would admonish us about things we are doing wrong. Programs are duly mentioned in the letter, and bad habits are noted for correction. But from the very beginning, Pope Francis reverses the assumption that this sort of business will provide all that is needed. No, something more is required, and the letter shows us what it is. Liturgical formation must be grounded not in what we do, but in the faith-filled discovery of what Christ has done and is doing for us.

Francis's exposition begins with desire—not our desire, but the desire of Jesus. The letter starts by recalling Jesus' *earnest desire* to eat the Passover meal with his disciples and, by extension, with all people through time. The point here is that the whole program of liturgy originates in God's action, not our own. If we miss this foundational fact, we will misunderstand everything else.

Mass at Corpus Christi Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

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The title of the letter is therefore important. It is something of a tongue twister (*Desiderio desideravi*), but its great virtue is that it highlights the intensity of Jesus' desire to share this meal with us. "I have earnestly desired [*Desiderio desideravi*] to eat this Passover with you before I suffer," Jesus says in Luke 22:15. In that small text from Luke's Gospel, Francis discerns the opening to a profound mystery. It is "the crevice [*spiraglio*] through which we are given the surprising possibility of intuiting the depths of the love of the persons of the Most Holy Trinity for us" (2).

The way in which Francis reverses expectations, placing the desire of Jesus in first place, bears a striking resemblance to the passage on prayer found at the outset of the fourth section of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (see CCC 2560–61). There, the image of the woman at the well is used to make the point that prayer begins not with our thirst for God, but with God's thirst for us. The section on prayer, considered by many as the most poetic and beautiful portion of the Catechism, was written by Jean Corbon (1924–2001), a Maronite Catholic liturgical theologian who was also the author of the influential book *The Wellspring of Worship*. Although Francis does not mention him explicitly, Corbon's influence can be felt in this section. Most of Francis's reflections are strongly Christo-centric, reflective of Western thinking, but here he makes reference to the action of the Trinity—a nod to the East.

At the end of the letter, Francis also refers to the liturgy as "the first wellspring of Christian spirituality." Liturgical formation entails cultivating a spirituality in which prayer and liturgy are intertwined. A relationship with the living Jesus is passionately proposed as essential in the letter. "Knowledge of the mystery of Christ, the decisive question for our lives, does not consist in a mental assimilation of some idea but in real existential engagement with his person," Francis explains (41). The work of the Spirit in the liturgy is to draw us to Christ so closely that we become him. "This is the purpose for which the Spirit is given, whose action is always and only to confect the Body of Christ. It is that way with the Eucharistic bread, and with every one of the baptized" (41).

Francis's letter is in many ways like a retreat—offering "prompts" or "cues" for reflection rather than structured arguments or practical to-do lists. This pastoral approach is of a piece with the strategy he pursued with the bishops in the wake of the sex-abuse crisis, first in Chile and then in the United States. He knew that the bishops would want a program, a solution, a way to regain the control they felt they were losing. But he wanted to lead them to a conversion of a deeper sort. So, he thwarted their impulse to move directly into problem solving, insisting instead that they first go on retreat. In a similar way, his letter shows us that the work of liturgical formation cannot really begin without first meeting Jesus anew, in prayer and contemplation, startled and amazed by the immeasurable gift of God's love poured out in Christ's paschal mystery.

The ease with which Francis proposes an imaginative identification with figures in scripture bears witness to his own formation in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola; one can imagine him as an effective retreat director. With Christ at the center, we are also given numerous people from the Bible with whom we may identify, so that we can learn from their encounters with Jesus the deep meaning of the sacraments: "I am Nicodemus," Francis writes, "the Samaritan woman at the well, the man possessed by demons at Capernaum, the paralytic in the house of Peter, the sinful woman pardoned, the woman afflicted by haemorrhages, the daughter of Jairus,

the blind man of Jericho, Zacchaeus, Lazarus, the thief and Peter both pardoned" (11). In other words, we meet Jesus not only in the story of the Last Supper, or in the accounts of his passion, death, and resurrection. We meet him in his life and ministry through the Word that is proclaimed, and which invites our active listening.

Still, the paschal mystery remains at the center. The American bishops in their recent statement on the Eucharist ("The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church") abandoned the primacy of the conciliar language of paschal mystery (or Pascha) to speak of Christ's action in the liturgy—the term appears only once. Pope Francis, however, uses it constantly (11, 12, 20, 21, 23, 25, 36, 43, 49, 62, 65), and therefore guarantees it a prominent place in our understanding of the task of liturgical formation. "The Liturgy gives glory to God not because we can add something to the beauty of the inaccessible light within which God dwells (1 Timothy 6:16)," Francis writes, "nor can we add to the perfection of the angelic song which resounds eternally through the heavenly places. The Liturgy gives glory to God because it allows us—here, on earth—to see God in the celebration of the mysteries, and in seeing Him to draw life from his Passover" (43).

In the face of so great a mystery, humility is essential. Francis makes reference to "being small" as a precondition of receiving Christ's gift in the liturgy no fewer than five times (3, 38, 47, 47 bis, 53). There is no room for arrogance or self-aggrandizement here. Tellingly, he brings this point home when discussing a wide range of "inadequate models" of the priest presiding over the liturgy. After Francis gives us a piquant list of distortions we all can recognize—"rigid austerity or an exasperating creativity, a spiritualizing mysticism or a practical functionalism, a rushed briskness or an overemphasized slowness, a sloppy carelessness or an excessive finickiness, a superabundant friendliness or priestly impassibility"—he delivers the punch: "I think that the inadequacy of these models of presiding have a common root: a heightened personalism of the celebrating style which at times expressed a poorly concealed mania to be the center of attention" (54). "Being small" is quite the opposite of this.

A good deal of the early commentary on Francis's letter has noted that beauty is a theme, but this assertion is easily misunderstood. He says in paragraph 22: "The continual rediscovery of the beauty of the liturgy is not the search for a ritual aesthetic." When Francis speaks of beauty, therefore, it is never about handsome objects or fine clothing, graceful gestures or sensory pleasures. The entire section devoted to the *ars celebrandi* (the art of celebration), which demands the artful use of material things, never once mentions beauty. Rather, for Francis the beauty of the liturgy is the "beauty of the truth" (21, 62). It is the "powerful beauty" (10) of the encounter with Christ in his paschal mystery. "In the Eucharist and in all the sacraments we are guaranteed the possibility of encountering the Lord Jesus and of having the power of his paschal mystery reach us" (11). When Francis warmly affirms, as he does, the sacramental use of created things as "a manifestation of the love of God" (42), he moves immediately to affirm even more strongly that the fullness of that same love is manifested in the cross and resurrection of Jesus—to which all creation is drawn.

When I first saw that Francis was using the language of "amazement" in his letter I wondered if he was borrowing this idea from Pope Saint John Paul II's 2003 encyclical letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* ("On the Eucharist and Its Relationship to the Church"). John Paul's stated aim in writing this encyclical was to "rekindle…amazement" at the mystery of the Eucharist. Upon careful reading, however, it becomes clear that what Francis has done is really something quite different. John Paul was intensely focused on the role of the priest in the Eucharist. In fact, so much of the "amazing" role of Christ is absorbed by the action of the priest in the Mass, in his telling, that little is left for the people, aside from the reception of Communion. He acknowledges the Church as the Body of Christ, but assigns them no particular agency in the liturgy. What he does instead is devote thirteen paragraphs at the end of the encyclical to the "Marian" role of the people, complementing the Christic role of the priest.

Francis's invocation of Eucharistic amazement could not be more different. He finds amazement in the paschal mystery itself. Christ's Passover is amazing. The fact that his Pasch is made sacramentally present and accessible to us in daily liturgy is amazing. The role of the priest is of irreducible importance to Francis, but he is after something wider and more all-embracing when he talks about being amazed at the liturgy. "Wonder is an essential part of the liturgical act," Francis explains. "It is the marvelling of those who experience the power of symbol, which does not consist in referring to some abstract concept but rather in containing and expressing in its very concreteness what it signifies" (26). Guided by the writings of the German liturgical theologian Romano Guardini (1885–1968), Pope Francis discusses in some detail the challenge modern (and postmodern) people face in learning to speak the language of symbol. This challenge is essential to meet, however, because liturgy speaks in the language of symbol, and so we must continue to listen and learn.

Several times, Francis uses the striking expression "the Bread broken" to refer to the Eucharist (7, 16, 52, 65). This expression is found in the first-century document *The Didache*, and the fact that it comes easily to Francis demonstrates how a "return to the sources" cultivated by the liturgical movement of the first half of the twentieth century has left its mark. The expression "Bread broken" is richly symbolic. It points to the Eucharist's communal nature, because bread broken is bread shared. As the Italian liturgical theologian Goffredo Boselli pointed out in his book on mystagogy, it is precisely in its being broken and shared that the sign of bread achieves its fullness in the Eucharist. Francis joyfully points out that "from Sunday to Sunday the energy of the Bread broken sustains us in announcing the Gospel" (65).

Francis situates the letter as the second in a series, the first of which was *Traditionis custodes* ("On the Use of the

Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970"). That *motu proprio*, issued to promote ecclesial communion, stated that the liturgy as it was reformed following the Second Vatican Council "is the unique expression of the *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite." It strictly curtailed the use of the liturgical forms prior to Vatican II, a permission that Benedict XVI had greatly expanded in 2007.

Francis continues to promote the unity of the Roman Rite in this new letter. It remains a priority for him, both for ecclesiological reasons (for the unity of the Church in communion with the pope and the bishops), and also as a foundation for moving beyond polemics and tensions that have marred our liturgical life in practice (what some have termed "the liturgy wars"). In this letter, he gives no ground to the liturgical traditionalists or to those who might wish to "reform the reform," and indeed he doubles down on the importance of accepting the liturgical reform that proceeded from the Council (31, 16, 61). The larger goal of *Desiderio desideravi*, however, is to move from disciplinary to theological and pastoral themes, offering "prompts or cues for reflections" to "aid in the contemplation of the beauty and truth of Christian celebration" (1).

Francis urges the study of liturgy, both in seminaries and in venues suitable for the faithful more generally, but he does it in a particular way. He stresses that such study should always be linked to and supported by the experience of lively and life-giving celebrations of the liturgy in practice. He makes the distinction between being formed "for" the liturgy and being formed "by" the liturgy, but this does not mean that the two exist apart from each other. He clearly expects that growth in knowledge and experiential formation will go hand in hand.

The letter states the problematic of liturgical formation in positive terms: "The fundamental question is this: how do we recover the capacity to live completely the liturgical action?" (27). This alone would signal a refreshing change from the approach typically taken during the John Paul and Benedict years, which focused on eliminating "liturgical abuses"—as if such a course of action would be sufficient to guarantee the liturgy's proper "use." Francis is saying here that we are called to enter into a fuller way of living our rites: he is focusing on their use. This conviction opens onto such topics as how to avoid "the poison of spiritual worldliness" (17–20), learning how to "read" symbols (44–45), and regaining a confidence in creation in order to grasp the meaning of sacrament (46).

Perhaps most significantly, however, Pope Francis clarifies the question of agency in a way that both challenges and affirms the People of God as a whole. Who "does" the liturgy? According to Francis, "the subject acting in the Liturgy is always and only Christ-Church, the mystical Body of Christ" (15). Liturgical participation by the People of God, therefore—the goal so much desired by Vatican II—is a calling for the whole Body of Christ, by virtue of our baptism. Understanding this raises the stakes of liturgical formation considerably, making it the care and concern of all the faithful and their pastors. Pope Francis reiterates and emphasizes the point strongly: "Let us always remember that it is the Church, the Body of Christ, that is the celebrating subject and not just the priest" (36). Although Francis reflects upon the role of the priest and the gift of Holy Orders, and even presents a kind of mystical vision of the priest plunged into a furnace as the intermediary between the fire of Christ's love and the fire in the hearts of Christ's people, it is clear that liturgy is never just about the priest. It is the work of Christ in all of us.

Desiderio desideravi ought to be a wake-up call to the American Church, which used to support a large number of enthusiastic national organizations devoted to liturgical formation but no longer does so. There used to be diocesan support for such work, too, but now there is little money set aside for such undertakings. There are two main reasons for this unfortunate state of affairs. First, the legitimation of traditionalism introduced confusion over direction and created divisions concerning what ought to be taught concerning the liturgy. Second, the costs associated with the sex-abuse scandal emptied the coffers of local churches. Many dioceses have shut down worship offices and let go of qualified personnel who might have done such work in better times. This trend has created a ripple effect, and there are now fewer candidates for liturgy degrees because there are no jobs for them when they graduate. Priestly formation always commands resources, but this is a tiny percentage of the work that needs to be done. Sadly, the formation of the laity is now increasingly left to chance.

It does not have to remain this way. Pope Francis has done the Church an enormous service by cracking down on traditionalism and reaffirming the liturgical reforms of Vatican II. There should be no more confusion concerning the content to be conveyed in programs of liturgical formation or the direction that they ought to take. We now have a single, unified template for the Roman Rite, and Pope Francis has spoken quite movingly about the spirituality that undergirds the reformed liturgy we celebrate.

The second problem may be more challenging, but it can be addressed by making liturgical formation a budgetary priority. Rather than pouring resources into one-time events that have the quality of a rally (consider the $28 million U.S. bishops are spending on the 2024 Eucharistic Congress), the Church needs to invest in quotidian formation events that progress gradually, and that take full advantage of the formative nature of liturgy well-celebrated as the indispensable partner of a prayerful study of the rites. In reviving liturgical formation, a good place to start might be in the promotion of this very letter of Pope Francis. Let us "go on retreat" with him, and dialogue with his "prompts and cues" that invite us to meet Jesus anew in the liturgy.

RITA FERRONE *is the author of several books about liturgy, including* Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium *(Paulist Press). She is a contributing writer to* Commonweal.

The Future of Ukraine

Why Ukraine matters

Michael C. Kimmage

The United States faces a protracted conflict in Ukraine. There is almost no chance of this war ending soon, and it is already having ripple effects across Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and in the United States. As Ukraine's most important supporter, Washington has developed a working policy for this war. Well before the war began, the United States was deeply involved in Ukraine's military planning, and Ukraine's current position—its capital city intact and the Ukrainian government still in control of around 80 percent of the country—would not have been possible without U.S. backing. Washington cannot point to success, but it has at least helped stave off failure. The Biden administration will not change its policy before or after the midterm congressional elections; nor should it. What the U.S. government must accept, and what the American people must understand, is the magnitude of this war and the depth of the transitions it will bring about. Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, is a turning point in history, like the start of World War I and World War II, or the onset of the Cold War in the late 1940s. But many people here have yet to realize, and adjust to, this new state of affairs.

Russia had three reasons for invading Ukraine in 2022. (The war itself began in 2014 and is in its eighth year, but the 2022 invasion changed its dynamic entirely.) The first reason is that Putin's Russia sees itself as entitled to control Ukraine in one way or another. The second is that Putin could not accept Russia's diminishing influence in Europe. The third is that Putin wanted to challenge U.S. power in Europe, on the assumption that this challenge, in February 2022, would benefit Russia and damage the United States.

Russia's will to control Ukraine or annex its territory has a long history. In the seventeenth century, the eastern half of today's Ukraine was absorbed into the Russian empire, and by 1914, when World War I began, Russia was occupying large parts of Poland. After World War I, Poland acquired western Ukraine, and Ukraine's East became the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic of the Soviet Union. After World War II, all of Ukraine fell within the Soviet Union. The Kremlin viewed this setup as the only natural state of affairs—the way things always should have been. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was precipitated in part by a movement for Ukrainian independence, but this did not keep Moscow from regarding Ukrainian independence as conditional. By 2012, Putin's modernization of the Russian military had given Moscow new options, and it was exactly at this moment that many Ukrainians started to turn against their pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovych, and to call for a more Western-oriented Ukraine. After Yanukovych was forced out of office by a popular uprising, Russia's response was to annex Crimea in March 2014. That set off a war with Ukraine, which settled into a negotiated stalemate in early 2015. Russia had some leverage as a result of this stalemate, but not as much as it wanted.

Putin's problem after 2014 was that he still believed Russia had a "right" to control Ukraine, but he also knew that Russia did not in fact control it. Two successive Ukrainian presidents, Petro Poroshenko and Volodymyr Zelensky, pushed for closer ties with the United States and Europe. They both endorsed a Western orientation for their country. They both sought membership in the European Union and openly discussed the possibility of joining NATO. Even without membership in NATO, Ukraine's military ties with the West developed considerably between 2014 and 2022. Putin assessed this trend as a threat to Russia. He feared that if these political, economic, and military ties with Europe and the United States were allowed to continue, they would eventually make Ukraine a part of the West. Russia would be sidelined and Putin humiliated. Joe Biden's election in November 2020 was further confirmation of this trend. Putin knew he couldn't persuade President Zelensky to change course, so he chose war. Even if a war failed to bring Ukraine into the Russian orbit, it would at least block Ukraine from becoming a well-functioning member of a Western coalition.

The National Guard of Ukraine use anti-aircraft defense equipment, August 2022

VYACHESLAV MADIYEVSKYY/SIPA USA VIA AP IMAGES

Putin's policies toward Europe have been paradoxical and in many ways self-defeating. He conceives of Russia as a European power, and indeed Russia has been part of the state system in Europe since the seventeenth century. Putin's first job was as a KGB officer in Dresden. He is well aware that the Soviet Union was once a major power within Europe, and that's what he would like Russia to be. He believes that Moscow deserves a say in how Europe is structured, in what its security arrangements are, and in what its political order will be. In 2009, during the brief period when Putin was prime minister, Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev released plans for a Europe that would be jointly fashioned by Russia and the nations of Europe. This went nowhere. Then, to Putin's great anger, Ukraine began turning away from Russia and toward Europe after 2013. A Poland in Europe was one thing—Russia could tolerate that. But a *Ukraine* in Europe was a bridge too far.

What makes Putin's posture toward Europe so self-defeating has to do with his use of force to get what he wants. He resorted to force in 2014, when he annexed Crimea and invaded Eastern Ukraine. That horrified many Europeans, inspiring them to support Ukraine and to impose economic sanctions on Russia. Putin's much more extreme use of force in 2022 has had a similar effect. It has led to greater European unity on a number of issues. It has provoked a very ambitious sanctions regime and led European countries to send large amounts of military aid to Ukraine. It has also solidified the relationship between Europe and the United States and prodded Sweden and Finland—nominally neutral states until 2022—to join NATO, which they are likely to do soon. The invasion has made Russia impossible to ignore, while bolstering the idea of a united Europe to which Russia does not belong. Coercion is now Putin's only tool for influencing European politics and security, and coercion is by definition a blunt instrument.

The third layer of Russia's war against Ukraine is the conflict between Russia and the United States. Putin has waged war in Ukraine because he perceives the United States to be too strong in one way and very weak in another. Contemptuous of the government in Kyiv, Putin construes it as Washington's puppet. The United States, he fears, has manipulated the Ukrainians, convincing them that Russia is their enemy. He believes that the United States wishes to transform Ukraine into a staging ground for U.S. military power and that, were it to succeed in this plan, Russia would face an existential threat. At the same time, Putin has argued that the United States is a country in decline, heavily indebted and politically polarized. Its own citizens attacked its most symbolically resonant building on January 6, 2021. The United States botched its withdrawal from Afghanistan a year ago, after losing to a premodern army of Islamicists. Even in Ukraine, Putin suspects, U.S. power may prove hollow. He has put this proposition to the test by invading. He knew the United States would respond by backing Ukraine, but this did not deter him. He seems to believe that U.S. backing isn't worth what it used to be.

The hope in Moscow was for a quick decapitation of the Ukrainian government, but the war has not gone according to Putin's plan. Russia's military setbacks have been severe. Kyiv was not taken. Nor were Chernihiv and Kharkiv. Russia has lost an immense amount of equipment, and its combat forces have suffered unknown numbers of deaths and casualties, very likely in the tens of thousands. The Russian army is now defending an enormous line of contacts between itself and Ukrainian forces, which are receiving ever more sophisti-

cated weapons from the United States and other partners. Russia may not be able to hold all the territory it has taken since the start of the war, and for the next several months at least a shortage of manpower will make it hard for it to go on the offensive. It is mired in a war of attrition. Meanwhile, it is also largely cut off from Europe. The sanctions are having a serious effect on Russia's economy in general, and particularly on the industrial base of its military. War crimes committed by Russian soldiers have gone unpunished but not unreported. They—and the war itself—have turned Ukrainian public opinion against Russia for generations to come. Putin's war has all the hallmarks of a strategic blunder: overconfident planning, deficiencies of execution, vacuity of concept.

Nevertheless, the war still presents acute challenges to Ukraine and, by extension, to Europe and the United States. The greatest challenge will be to sustain the war effort, and to understand the stakes. Nor will it be enough for only policymakers to understand. A majority of ordinary citizens in all the countries involved will also need to know what's going on and why. Impatience or a lack of focus on their part could eventually play into Putin's hands.

Russia cannot defeat Ukraine outright—it will not get the Ukrainians to surrender—but it can still do a lot to prevent the country's development. Russia is likely intent on the conquest of all Ukrainian territory on the Black Sea; this would entail the invasion of Odesa and the Southwest of Ukraine. Were Russia to succeed in this, Ukraine's economy would be devastated. (Already much of the country's industrial and agricultural base is in the East and South—areas that Russia now controls.) A war that lasts years is the most likely scenario. Such a war would mean missile strikes all over the country, continual attacks on infrastructure, as well as conventional military campaigns by Russian forces. This would cause foreign direct investment in Ukraine to dry up (no one wants to build what is sure to be destroyed). Ukraine's GDP has already declined precipitously because of the war. A primary challenge, then, will be to sustain Ukraine, economically and socially. There are now an estimated 6 million Ukrainian refugees, along with 6 million internally displaced people, and these numbers could grow. Here too, the sustenance of Ukrainian society, including that part of it living in exile, is essential—no less essential than supporting Ukraine's military.

Russia is going to make sure that Europe suffers for its support of Ukraine. This winter, Russia will likely cut off gas supplies to various European countries still dependent on Russian energy. This will force governments to ration, and it will have a profound effect on economic life—especially in Germany. Many German businesses depend on the cheap electricity made possible by easy access to natural gas. Russia's goal is to impress on the people of Europe the cost of their governments' foreign policy. Russia may well offer a peace plan, on its own terms, and tie this plan to the provision of Russian gas to Europe. Russia could also resort to disinformation on behalf of pro-Russian politicians and political parties in Europe. Refugee flows from Ukraine have already bolstered populist sentiment in several European countries, though notably not in Poland and the Baltic States, which closely identify with the cause of Ukrainians living under the shadow of war. The Russian calculus is that most Europeans care more about their standard of living than about Ukraine, and this is the vulnerability Moscow will try to exploit.

Russia's influence in the United States is smaller. The United States produces a decent amount of its own gas and oil and is therefore far less dependent on Russian energy. The midterm congressional elections are not going to change U.S. foreign policy. In our system of government, the executive branch has great latitude over security issues, and that branch will not change hands until 2025 at the earliest. The U.S. challenge, given Europe's coming energy crisis, will be to maintain the transatlantic alliance, to keep it focused on Ukraine, to maintain the sanctions on Russia, to keep arms flowing to Ukraine, and—no less important—to keep Ukraine afloat financially. None of this will be easy. Zelensky's charisma, the plight of Ukrainians, and the surprise of Ukraine's early military success have all contributed to high levels of public support for Ukraine in the West. Over time, however, domestic concerns will reassert themselves, the war will receive less attention in the media, and the desire for a return to normalcy—whatever that means—will grow stronger. The West's ultimate challenge is not the policy it has chosen for assisting Ukraine. It is the politics behind this policy.

The United States and Europe cannot afford an insular or top-down approach to Ukraine. It is not a technical problem, this war. It is an all-hands-on-deck problem. European leaders and the American president must do all they can to explain what's at stake for the people of Ukraine and their neighbors. They must explain why even a partial Russian victory would be very costly. They must explain the priorities of the countries that stand behind Ukraine, and they must do so in a language that is vivid, nonpartisan, and frequently reinforced in speeches to the general public—and not just at elite political gatherings like NATO summits or meetings of the G7. They must counsel patience and explain why careful resolve is preferable to a short-term rush to compromise. Putin's strategic blunder in Ukraine will not inevitably lead to his defeat. He will try to improvise his way to some kind of success, complete or incomplete. The war in Ukraine will not be over for a long time to come. That is another reason for politicians in the West to make their case eloquently and often. Putin is waiting for the citizens of Western countries to lose interest. We must make sure that they don't.

MICHAEL C. KIMMAGE *is a professor of history at the Catholic University of America and a fellow at the German Marshall Fund. From 2014 to 2016 he served on the Secretary's policy planning staff at the U.S. Department of State, where he held the Russia/Ukraine portfolio.*

Why Ukraine will prevail

Adrian Bonenberger

What makes one people fight to the end, while another falls apart and is swept away? What makes one country cohere, and another collapse? Culture, and people, and history—a combination of all those things. I deployed twice as an infantry officer to Afghanistan and lived in Ukraine for two years, and the question was, for me, a deeply personal one. Watching Afghanistan totter and fall in July of 2021, and watching Ukraine hold back a determined if haphazard Russian invasion in the winter and spring of 2022, the question took on a new urgency.

What is it about Ukraine?

Perhaps the first question that needs to be answered is: What *wasn't* it about Afghanistan? It wasn't cowardice on the part of Afghan soldiers—they fought hard and often under circumstances difficult for even Ukrainians to imagine. Yes, Afghans were fighting the Taliban, not the Russian Army; but what the Taliban lacked in artillery firepower, they made up for in craft, skill, and the ability to blend in with the local populace. Whereas Russia invaded Ukraine with arrogance and ignorance, the Taliban were prepared. They were clever foes, not to be underestimated. Afghanistan collapsed in just two weeks.

In purely military terms, the Taliban had been effective but not exceptional. Afghan's military fought capably and bravely, too. Did it require the U.S. military for support? By 2021, perhaps it did. The ANSF (Afghan National Security Forces, their military and various police organizations) had grown accustomed to fighting the way the U.S. military fights; it had grown used to having air power. On the ground, its soldiers and officers were cousins and brothers of Taliban insurgents. The military will to resist had been tested in Afghanistan for years, and not found wanting.

But Afghanistan's political leadership failed twice. First, it failed to see the true threat the Taliban posed: while Afghanistan's government demonstrated a long-term inability or unwillingness to deliver services or representation to distant rural areas, the Taliban stepped into the breach. They were effective at cultivating loyalty, through both fear and partnerships. Second, the president of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, did not see his own government as credible or tenable: he prematurely left a defensible Kabul and helped doom his country to destruction. He was not able to lead Afghanistan into a post-American prosperity. He now claims to have forestalled a far bloodier civil war than the one that had already taken place. Be that as it may, in the summer of 2021, the possibility of a peaceful and stable Afghanistan run along Western lines came to an abrupt end. Many Afghans fled the country, and it is unlikely they will ever see their homes again.

The summer of 2015 was hot in Mariupol. I had traveled there while writing about Ukraine's experience of its war with Russia, then in its second year. Mariupol wasn't a place I'd heard or read much about. But there was a unit that had recently been wrapped into the Ministry of Interior, the Azov Regiment, and I had access there through a couple of friends.

Women visit tombs of their relatives on Ukrainian Statehood Day, Lviv, July 28, 2022.

CNS PHOTO/PAVLO PALAMARCHUK, REUTERS

A nineteenth-century church damaged by a Russian rocket attack during the invasion of the Zhytomyr region of Ukraine, April 28, 2022

Mariupol—or rather a suburb east of Mariupol—was the last stop on a train line running south from the border with Russia. It was a good place to see if one wanted to understand the war.

A visitor looks for a place's distinguishing characteristics. In San Francisco, the hills and the bay help determine the shape and identity of the city, as do its fast fogs and the traces of its history as a Spanish settlement. The modern city of Rome developed around the Vatican, but also amid the ruins of the empire for which it is named. In Mariupol, I saw places of worship everywhere. Orthodox churches of the Moscow Patriarchate, a Sunni mosque, and humble tents pitched by itinerant Evangelical preachers. Deep in the city, in an otherwise unremarkable house, I found a Roman Catholic shrine tended by a priest; a faded photo of Pope John Paul II hung on the wall. Mariupol was Russian-speaking but distinctively—and patriotically—Ukrainian, a post-Soviet city on top of an imperial Russian port on top of an ancient Greek colony.

In February 2017 I visited Marinka, a town on the front lines of the fighting between Russia and Ukraine. The ground was covered with snow, and fighting was sporadic—nothing like the summer of 2016, when fierce artillery exchanges were commonplace. My interpreter and I stayed with a local volunteer for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. We visited several older women with no means of support, heard their stories, and distributed cash grants to help with their expenses.

The last day of our visit to Marinka, my interpreter and I went to a small prayer service led by a veteran who had fought against the Russians in the first stage of their invasion. He'd become an Evangelical preacher. Some American Christians from Pennsylvania were there, too. The modest space was warmed by the 150 people in attendance—among them, dozens of poor and destitute Marinkans who had been stripped of their health and livelihoods by the invasion. Their songs and prayers made me forget the woeful surroundings. I felt that the Holy Spirit was present.

Those churches and shrines in Mariupol may have survived the bombardment of the past few months, but they are no longer occupied by clerics and worshippers. The spirit that animated them is gone, replaced by Russia's repressive state orthodoxy. The people who gathered in those spaces have been murdered or exiled to Siberia. But the space in Marinka—still Ukrainian, as of this writing—continues to be a gathering point for people hoping to commune with God and with each other, to forget the ethnic cleansing, rape, torture, and spiritual savagery that hangs over their heads as Russian soldiers inch closer.

To say that Ukraine is a country of churches is true in one sense, but it risks attributing too much importance to buildings, to institutional infrastruc-

CNS PHOTO/VIACHESLAV RATYNSKYI, REUTERS

ture. The churches that people visit now in Lviv and Sumy and Chernihiv were used as barns or storage annexes during the Communist era. They were robbed of their purpose, desecrated, but the faith that had built them survived. Churches don't make a country, people do. Ukraine is a country filled with people of faith, and hope.

Western European and American popular culture tends to conflate Eastern Europe with Russia. Students learn about Ukraine from Chekhov and Dostoevsky, and from descriptions of the USSR as a grim, gray space full of despairing workers trudging toward factories. We project all of our preconceptions about the worst of modernity onto Eastern Europe. We assume that our fears about totalitarian rule and its destruction of the individual were fulfilled in Minsk and Kyiv, that the Soviet Union succeeded in its goal of extinguishing the humanity of those places.

But it's not true—as we have seen in the ongoing war in Ukraine and in attempts to overthrow a corrupt and unwelcome president in Belarus. It's not even exactly true of Russia itself. But the Russians have been laboring under one or another form of oppression for centuries, tsar after tsar, followed by the Bolsheviks and the long night of Stalinism. The Ukrainians, by contrast, are well-acquainted with an alternative to oppression; they have tasted independence and democracy and are not eager to be forcibly returned to the Russian fold. They just want to be left alone. That has bred in Ukrainian people and culture a kind of insistent hope and deep-seated resilience. They believe that what they are asking for is not unreasonable: to live in peace, to farm, to have their dignity as a nation respected—these have been the modest aspirations of Ukrainians for generations.

Christianity is above all a religion organized around hope, and it is fair to say that institutions that cultivate resignation and despair are not truly Christian, whatever their pretenses. False versions of Christianity are not always easy to spot; they may cloak themselves in vestments, carry crosses, and kneel in prayer, too. One can nevertheless tell the difference between an authentic Christian people and one that has become mired in self-delusion. An authentic Christian people is not a death cult; an authentic Christian people desires to live and values life, and this is manifest in the way they treat each other and other peoples. An authentic Christian people prefers the truth to the lies and deceit on which tyrants thrive. By these measures, Ukrainian Christians are authentic Christians, while the Russian regime—though not all Russians—has become fundamentally irreligious. Russian society is increasingly cynical and paranoid, haunted by apocalyptic visions of violence, festering with injured pride. The contrast with Ukraine could hardly be greater.

Another difference between Afghanistan and Ukraine bears consideration. Under the Taliban, religion was, and is again, compulsory; and wherever it is compulsory, religion becomes synonymous with oppression. But even where it isn't compulsory, religion can become the handmaid of tyranny. The Russian Orthodox Church operates in concert with Putin's regime and offers it a bogus spiritual legitimacy. By christening a brutal war of conquest as a civilizational struggle against the decadent West, the Russian Orthodox Church is becoming a space where worship is co-opted for the state's purposes.

In Ukraine, Orthodox Christianity means something else: it means hope and liberation, not resentment and domination. In spring of 2019, Ukraine's Orthodox Church broke from the Russian Orthodox Church. It could no longer recognize the authority of religious leaders who supported the annihilation of Ukraine as a separate nation. These were wolves in shepherds' clothing.

When Afghanistan fell, its government was unpopular and lacked credibility. Even so, many policemen and soldiers gave their lives for it, and would have continued to fight and die protecting Kabul; it wasn't until Ghani fled that the entire country lost whatever remained of its will to resist the Taliban.

Ukraine is different. In Ukraine the world saw Volodymyr Zelensky, a previously unpopular president, stay in Kyiv despite credible threats against his life. He became a popular president as a result of this courage. Soldiers and police fought bravely against what everyone believed to be one of the most powerful militaries in the world. They exposed that military as unprepared, ill-equipped, and incompetently led. It turned out the fearsome Russians were vulnerable and could be stopped. They were driven out of Kyiv and Kharkiv, though they have since made gains in Kherson and Donetsk, and seized all of Luhansk.

If Zelensky had been killed or captured—or if he had fled—would Ukraine have stopped fighting? Counterfactuals of this sort are rarely useful, but I'm convinced that Ukraine would have quickly selected a new leader and the fight would now look very much as it does today. This isn't only because Russia invaded Ukraine threatening to destroy it as an independent country, suppress its language and culture, and kill anyone refusing to go along with their imperialist project. It's also because Ukraine is a country of churches, a country characterized by hope—by the conviction that life can get better through collective effort. This is why I believe Ukraine will eventually win this war—slowly, with struggle, step by ponderous step. I believe it will finally triumph over Russia's superior numbers and resources, because Ukraine is in the right and Russia is in the wrong. The Russians are fighting to save Putin; the Ukrainians are fighting to save Ukraine, to save themselves. That will make all the difference.

ADRIAN BONENBERGER *is the author of* Afghan Post *and* The Disappointed Soldier and Other Stories From War. *He deployed twice to Afghanistan as an infantry officer with the U.S. Army, and reported on Ukraine as a freelance journalist.*

A dissent

Paul J. Griffiths

Intentional slaughter is something we humans are good at. We like it, do a lot of it, devote considerable effort to increasing our effectiveness at it, and celebrate our successes. The current slaughter in Ukraine is nothing new and nothing surprising: it's one more instance of something as common as birth, or tears, or a night's sleep. It's a simple and ordinary aspect of human social life. Lamentable and horrible, of course, but commonplace.

This past century or so, the tract of land now called Ukraine has soaked up a good deal of blood. I was reminded of this during Holy Week this year when I read the notebooks Ludwig Wittgenstein kept during the First World War. He was, in 1915, fighting unenthusiastically (he would have preferred to be working on the foundations of logic) for the Austro-Hungarian Empire against the Russian Empire near Lemberg, which is now called Lviv. A lot of blood was shed then, to little discernible good effect and for no discernible good purpose. A lot is being shed now, to uncertain effect and for uncertain purposes. Thousands were then cut apart by machine guns, burned alive, gassed, and left to die in the mud. As also now.

Precise figures are hard to come by and disputed on all sides, but it is likely that deaths directly caused by violence in Ukraine since the opening of hostilities toward the end of February now exceed 40,000, with more of the dead probably combatants than noncombatants. The UN keeps a tally of civilian deaths, which on July 11 stood at 5,024, but it acknowledges that the likely total is much higher; and while reliable estimates of Ukrainian and Russian combatant deaths are even harder to come by (each side minimizes its own casualties and inflates the other's, as always in war), intelligence provided by the British defense secretary at the end of June suggests that upwards of 20,000 Russian troops had already died in Ukraine. That was more than a month ago.

A lot of death, then, and much of it agonizing: incinerations by anti-tank weapons, dismemberments by bombs and missiles, bullets to the head, and so on. What for? There are various rationales. Putin has his: demilitarize Ukraine and re-enfold it into the bosom of Mother Russia, to which, in his view, it has always properly belonged; and, in doing those things, restrict the imperialism of the Western democracies, which are bent on destroying Russia. The Ukrainians have theirs: preserve national sovereignty against Russian aggression, democracy against totalitarianism, and Ukrainian language and culture against Russification. We Americans have our own rationale: defend innocent Ukrainians against Russia's indefensible revanchist aggression, and in doing so make the world safer for democracy. Underlying these ideological justifications are broader and more complicated geopolitical and economic interests on each side: oil, gas, trade, the reach of NATO and the European Union, the proper boundaries of the Russian Federation, the placement of U.S. troops and missiles on the European continent, and so on.

There appears to be no imminent end to the conflict. Pundits say it will be a long war. Pundits are usually wrong. Almost all predictions about this war—whether it would happen, how long it would last if it did, what the strategic and tactical approaches would be on each side—have so far turned out to be wrong, and perhaps this one will too. I hope so. But one thing does seem clear: without arms from the United States, this war would very likely be over already. We are by far the largest supplier of arms to Ukraine, and although what we have provided so far is from President Zelensky's viewpoint not enough, our arms have done more damage and slaughtered more people than those provided by any state other than the Russian Federation itself. The hands of every American taxpayer are now dripping with blood, and there seems no likely end to the flow of our weapons to Ukraine.

A remarkable feature of our aid to Ukraine is that, since the conflict began, we have devoted more than twice as much money to the provision of weapons as we have to the provision of

A Ukrainian serviceman during the Russian invasion of the Donetsk region, April 28, 2022

CNS PHOTO/SERHII NUZHNENKO, REUTERS

humanitarian support. That is a graphic illustration of our priorities. This situation is also commonplace. The United States, against its own better nature, is the principal purveyor of violent death to the world. We sell and provide weapons almost everywhere, to almost everyone, in much greater quantities than any other nation; and, since the end of the Soviet Empire, we have invaded, laid waste to, and otherwise damaged more sovereign states than the Russian Federation, and with a complete disregard for international law and national sovereignty.

We share with the Russian Federation two other distinctions: we neither recognize nor participate in the work of the International Criminal Court, largely because we know that many of our own actions are criminal by the standards of that court; and we practice extraterritorial assassination of both our own citizens and those of other sovereign states, again often in contravention of international law.

We also supply humanitarian aid and support on a large scale in much of the world—larger than that provided by any other sovereign state. But we prefer death to life: our spending on direct military interventions, and on indirect supply of weapons, intelligence, and military training to one side or another in conflicts in which we take no direct part, exceeds our humanitarian aid by a factor of at least five-to-one in any given year.

We have no ground, then, for arguing against the Russian invasion of Ukraine from a position of injured innocence or moral superiority, though it would be impossible to guess this from the rhetoric of President Biden. We have, of course, strategic and tactical interests that do make it reasonable, if not defensible, for us to supply weapons used to kill Russians. But interests of that kind, if we are frank about them, place us on a level with the Russian Federation. We want more of a presence in Eastern Europe than they want us to have; they want more of a buffer between them and the European Union and NATO than we want them to have. They want what they want, and kill for it, combatants and noncombatants both; we want what we want, and kill for it, combatants and noncombatants both. That is what all sovereign states do when they can; it is the burden and outflow of the *libido dominandi* under which all of them, including the United States, struggle and sink. It would be better to look this in the eye than to trick it out with moral glosses it cannot bear.

Suppose, then, that we ask something different about our supply of arms to Ukraine, something not about moral justification (we're doing it because it's the right thing to do), ideological justification (we're doing it to make the world safe for democracy), or strategic justification (we're doing it to prevent Russian expansion in Eastern Europe). Suppose we bring the thing itself before our gaze and ask ourselves what it is that we have done and are doing. What we see then is this. First, the weapons we've supplied have, since late February, been used to kill thousands of young men and women, most of them Russian, most of them painfully and horribly. The weapons we are supplying now and are planning to supply in the future seem set to do more of the same. Second, our weapons have extended a conflict that would likely have already ended without them, and which will certainly be lengthened by our continued supply of them. Third, when our president, our elected representatives, and most of the press defend and explain our supply of arms to Ukraine, they do so in a way that systematically, and perhaps intentionally, obscures from us the state of things just mentioned. Those defenses and explanations show (and exploit) Ukrainian suffering, while either ignoring Russian suffering or relishing it; they use moral and ideological language to justify and veil the particular kinds of death the weapons we're supplying cause; and they are, to put it kindly, coy about American strategic and tactical interests in the region. They are, finally, often mendacious in contrasting American righteousness with Russian perfidy—as mendacious as those who defend the Russian Federation.

One cannot see these things clearly without asking whether we should continue to arm Ukraine. It seems to me clear that we should not—though I can see, and sometimes entertain, arguments to the contrary. I think we should not because slaughtering people, or providing others with the means to slaughter people, in the service or defense of democracy, sovereignty, or temporary strategic geopolitical interests, is a game never worth the candle, a game that has been played too long. Recall Wittgenstein, dragged into that very game 107 years ago, and in the same place. The game shows no sign of ending, and that is because *libido dominandi* is not exhaustible by killing—not, anyway, until there is no one left to kill.

Ceasing to arm Ukraine need not mean doing nothing to help those now being subjected to violence by Russian aggression. We could renounce arming Ukrainians in favor of offering humanitarian aid on an unprecedented scale. This aid could, and should, include offering any Ukrainians who want it immediate and permanent residence in the United States, as well as extensive and generous support of resettlement efforts within Europe. This would not prevent the Russian Federation from continuing to expand into Ukraine; it would likely not prevent, and might hasten, the end of the Ukrainian state as an independent entity; it might encourage efforts at expansion by the Russian Federation elsewhere in Europe. These would all be regrettable outcomes. But to think them more regrettable than funding large-scale violent death is puzzling and counterintuitive; it suggests a depth of false consciousness that is hard to credit, and which may be among the most characteristic deformities of the American body politic.

PAUL J. GRIFFITHS *is a longtime contributor to* Commonweal *and the author of many books, most recently* Regret: A Theology *(University of Notre Dame Press) and* Why Read Pascal? *(Catholic University of America Press).*

What's Wrong with the 'Burbs?

An interview with Bill McKibben

Griffin Oleynick

Author and activist Bill McKibben is one of America's leading environmentalists. His memoir, The Flag, the Cross, and the Station Wagon: A Graying American Looks Back at His Suburban Boyhood and Wonders What the Hell Happened, *was published this summer by Henry Holt & Company. He spoke about it recently with Associate Editor Griffin Oleynick for the Commonweal Podcast. This interview has been edited for clarity and length.*

GRIFFIN OLEYNICK: You begin your book by describing two pivotal events from your childhood in the Boston suburbs. The first was a protest, the second a referendum. What happened at each of these events, and what do they mean for you now?

BILL MCKIBBEN: They happened about six weeks apart in the spring of 1971, when I was ten or eleven. Our family had just moved to Lexington, the birthplace of American liberty. The first fight of the Revolution took place on its historic Battle Green, and because of that, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, an antiwar movement led by John Kerry, wanted to camp there. But the town fathers said no, that was illegal, and threatened to arrest them.

Several hundred townspeople went down to stand there on the Green with the veterans. All were arrested and taken off to the town public-works shed for the night. My father, a mild-mannered business reporter, was very uncharacteristically there with them, and it made a big impression on me. It seemed to my ten-year-old brain that the long arc of history was moving in the right direction, towards solidarity and greater inclusivity.

But that same spring, there also was a plan to build the first affordable housing in lily-white Lexington. After a visit from Dr. King, the town's Suburban Responsibility Commission had come up with a plan to build one hundred units of affordable housing. All the town fathers agreed, and the ministers were in favor of it. But some homeowners petitioned for a referendum. In the privacy of the voting booth, the citizens of this theoretically liberal town voted the plan down two to one.

Looking back, that marks the other historical current—towards a more privatized and selfish view of the world, one that cared about property values above all. The 1970s were probably the hinge moment when these two views of the world—a project headed towards a great society, a beloved community—clashed with the vision of a more privatized world. And by the 1980s, with the election of Ronald Reagan and the elevation of markets above governments, that second vision had won out. And it's that world we still inhabit.

GO: The first section of your book, "The Flag," looks critically at the history of Lexington and America. It also indicts the racism, structural inequality, and self-deception that undergirds much of suburban life in this country. At a certain point, you write, "My life and the life of other people like me, was built in very real part on the suffering of others. That's not wokeness, that's not critical race theory, that's history." You note that your parents' house put you on the path to prosperity, something that wasn't available to other people—and by other people, you mean Black people.

BM: In 1970, they bought that house for $30,000, which would be about $200,000 in today's money. And it sold last year for one million dollars. So that $800,000 appreciation was the payoff, the premium for having been in the right place at the right time. But not everybody could afford to be in that right place. When Black soldiers came back from the war, they didn't get to use the GI bill like my dad did. When Social Security was formed in the 1930s, it mostly excluded the categories of labor where Black people were dominant. Because they couldn't accumulate the capital to buy in at the start of that poker game, it's no wonder that the wealth gap has widened between Black and white Americans over the last fifty years.

GO: You bring up the concept of reparations, and note the visceral reaction that many Americans had to initiatives like the 1619 Project, spearheaded by Nikole Hannah-Jones. Why do you think so many Americans are hostile to the notion of reparations when, as you say, Black families were excluded from accumulating the kind of capital that your family acquired so easily?

BM: For one thing, it would require some money, and too many of us don't want to pay taxes to begin with. But in a deeper way, I think it really forces people to confront the idea that things haven't been fair. There's an ingrained sense in much of America that you end up with what you deserve. Most of us probably know that's not really true. In the context of American history, Black people haven't been given a chance to do that, to compete in those same terms. That's painful for people to admit, and in my view that's what most of the furor over critical race theory in schools is about. I don't think anyone really believes that kids can't handle learning the truth about history. Instead, people are worried that they'll be made uncomfortable by their kids asking questions that really can't be answered.

Bill McKibben at a climate rally in Times Square, New York City

ADAM WELZ/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

GO: But you do think that there's some part of the American story worth preserving. What part is that?

BM: The part where you stand up as an underdog to entrenched power, where you refuse to be pushed around by kings. The idea that everybody was equal was a remarkable one. And even if we didn't mean it when it came to "everybody," we meant it more than it had ever been meant before on the planet. That's the powerful thing about the American story, and the tragic part is that we didn't live up to it on our own terms. But the good news is that we still can. We can make that history better than it otherwise would be by doing what we should've done all along.

GO: You were raised Christian. You attended different churches, which left a real impression on you. What was Christianity like for you when you were growing up?

BM: I came out of the mainline Protestant traditions that in those days comprised most Americans. More than half the U.S. population was Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Congregationalist, or Episcopalian. That 52 percent is now about 13 percent, with mainline Protestantism losing out to Evangelical Christianity over the last fifty years.

I think the religious story is similar to the political one. The mainline churches were, whatever their flaws, concretely engaged in this project of building a better society. They were the people who were trying to get affordable housing built in Lexington, who were ministering to the veterans on the Green, and so on. They've been replaced to a large extent by an Evangelical Christianity that's much more about "what's in it for me"—a one-on-one, individualized relationship with one's Lord and personal savior, as they say. This attitude makes it easy for people to ignore the things that Jesus came to talk about: clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, turning the other cheek, and giving money to the poor, as radical a doctrine as there's ever been. It's sad: we've surrendered not just the flag, but also the cross to the right wing in this country.

GO: So many Christians wring their hands about declining numbers and an increasing lack of institutional clout. Yet you're not depressed about the present state of affairs. You argue that it's actually a good thing for Christianity to move, as you put it, "from an institutional force to a force that challenges institutions."

BM: There was something to be said for that world that I grew up in, but we're not going back there. When everyone's in the Church, the Church is just baptizing the status quo. My sense is that Christianity works better as a counterculture than

a culture. Now it's in the position to be a counterculture again, as it was in the first couple of hundred years of its existence.

GO: In your work as an environmental activist, you see members of different faith traditions working together. You say that Christians don't need to lead environmental movements, but can still be partners in the initiatives that are happening right now. Could you elaborate on that?

BM: Thirty-five years ago, there was no religious environmental movement of any kind. In liberal churches, it was viewed as something you got to after you did poverty and war. In conservative churches, it was viewed as a way station on the road to paganism. But that's begun to change considerably as people understand climate change better. Destroying the environment is probably the most effective way of damaging the lives of people around the world that we've ever come up with—which is really something, considering we also came up with colonialism and imperialism. But now we're taking away people's ability to earn their daily bread in the place where they live. So it's been very powerful to watch people enunciate a theology of care for the world that God gave us.

GO: The final section of your book—entitled "The Station Wagon," after the quintessential suburban vehicle—is critical of the ways American prosperity has been unevenly apportioned, hoarded, and consumed. What's changed over the past four decades since you grew up in the suburbs?

BM: They've just gotten richer and richer. In the 1970s it seemed like a modest paradise: we had everything we could have needed. But that didn't stop anyone from seeking to acquire more and more. Suburban houses are now routinely enlarged, or simply torn down and rebuilt to be bigger. The station wagon now seems like an innocent, small vehicle since today we're all driving huge, semi-militarized vehicles everywhere we go.

That has not been without consequence. The suburbanization of America was even more carbon intensive than the industrialization of China, producing the largest puff of carbon dioxide that the atmosphere has ever had to absorb. What America spent most of its money on since World War II was the project of building bigger houses farther apart from each other. Once you've built them, you have to heat and cool them, you have to fill them with stuff, and you have to travel the distances between them, which really could only be accomplished with an automobile.

The reason that Lexington couldn't have affordable housing was because its zoning laws mandated that everybody have their own driveway and their own yard and their own house detached from the one next to it. And that's by definition expensive and inefficient. In order to build diverse communities, we need zoning that allows multifamily housing and densification, especially on transit corridors. And those are precisely the same things that help with the environmental footprint. We're finally starting to realize that this has to happen, but we need to move quickly, because climate change is a timed test. And if we don't get it right soon, then we will not get it right.

GO: What would you say to people who are hopeless about climate change?

BM: I don't always know how hopeful I am about climate change: I wrote the first book about climate change thirty-five years ago, and it had the cheerful title, *The End of Nature*. But I am convinced that we can make a big difference by organizing, so that's what I do. We've started a program called Third Act, which is organizing people over the age of sixty for action on issues around climate, race, and inequality. People are flooding in to do this work. There's room for change, and as long as that's a possibility, it's incumbent upon us all to do what we can.

Intergenerational work is really important. When I was in my forties I founded 350.org, which turned into the first global climate campaign. But I did it with seven college students. One of the things we did was to promote a massive divestment movement, which took root on campuses all across the country, and indeed throughout the world.

After college, those kids wanted to keep working. So they formed the Sunrise Movement that brought us the Green New Deal. Young people were doing extraordinary work even before the appearance of people like Greta Thunberg and the mobilization of tens of millions of junior high and high school students in this fight.

That's all well and good, but I began to worry that I heard too many people say, "Well, it's up to their generation to solve these problems." That seems ignoble. It also seems impractical, because for all their intelligence, idealism, engagement, and earnestness, young people do not currently have the structural power to make the changes that we need.

That's why we're trying to get older people engaged. There are 70 million of us above the age of sixty, a population larger than France. We all vote like crazy—there's no known way to keep old people from voting. And we ended up with most of the money. We've got about 70 percent of the country's financial assets, compared with about 5 percent for millennials.

If you want to move Washington or Wall Street—and I would like to—then it would be good to have some older people, too. But what's fun is when we're collaborating. We've been doing protests against the big banks that fund the fossil-fuel industry. I was at one not long ago outside Chase Bank in Manhattan. (They're the single biggest lender.) There were many young people, high school students. And since they're a little sprier, they were at the front of the march. But in the back was a big cloud of people my age, marching under a banner that said "Fossils Against Fossil Fuels." That's the kind of spirit it's going to take, and it's great fun to do across generations.

LISTEN

Hear the full interview with Bill McKibben on Episode 86 of the Commonweal Podcast.
commonwealmagazine.org/podcast

THIS SUMMER DAY

Yehoshua November

How we know nothing—
have no control over what's to come.

Our Father in Heaven is kind,
but will He be kind the way we want Him to be?

So much could happen,
though, month after month, nothing does.

One day, the children will be grown.
Hopefully, some pride

to go along with the regrets.
Some sun, as on this summer day:

The kids swim outside in the plastic pool.
Our oldest daughter overseas with your parents.

You, in a dark top and turquoise skirt,
run your hand over the surface of the water.

How you have remained beautiful
over these fourteen years,

beautiful and optimistic, despite
the nights in the small apartment

with great fears, carrying cups of water
to four sleepless children

as I commuted across the bridge to teach another section
of English Composition at the night college.

How the world gets larger

and smaller—like the moon,
each month—

larger and smaller.

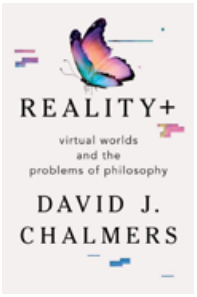
YEHOSHUA NOVEMBER *is the author of two poetry collections,* God's Optimism *(a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize) and* Two Worlds Exist *(a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award and Paterson Poetry Prize). His work has been featured in the* New York Times Magazine*,* Harvard Divinity Bulletin*,* Anglican Theological Review*, the* Sun*,* Virginia Quarterly Review*, and on National Public Radio and On Being's Poetry Unbound series. He has been called "one of the few Hasidic poets."*

Picture Imperfect

JOHN SCHWENKLER

Let us begin with Descartes, since arguably it is with him that the present story has its origin. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), the great French philosopher and mathematician lays out a thought experiment meant to undermine the supposed foundations of his commonsense beliefs. Let me imagine, Descartes writes, that a powerful deceiver is the source of all my thoughts and perceptions. When it seems that I am opening my eyes and seeing the stove in front of me, my vision is the product of a cunning deception. When it seems that I am raising my arm to scratch an itch, my feeling of embodiment is another of the deceiver's illusions. And so, too, for my sequences of logical and mathematical reasoning: these are the deceiver's art. In the face of this hypothesis, Descartes asks, what could permit me to rely on my senses or my reason as ways of knowing how things are?

Along with this skeptical thought experiment, Descartes's most famous contribution to the history of philosophy is the first argument he offers in response to it, which identifies *one's own* existence as the first thing a person is able to know with perfect certainty. *I think, therefore I am* was Descartes's formulation of the crucial argument in his *Discourse on Method* (1637)—and from this it follows that what I fundamentally am is not a human being, nor anything that takes up bodily space. In knowing himself, Descartes knows himself to be a *thinking* thing, and he knows this prior to his knowledge of anything that is bodily or "extended," such as his eyes, his arms, and the furniture in the room around him. Indeed, Descartes reasons, I myself could exist as the thinking thing I am, with just the thoughts and perceptions that I know myself to have, even if everything "external" to me and my thinking were imaginary.



REALITY+
Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy
DAVID J. CHALMERS
W. W. Norton
$20 | 544 pp.

In contemporary philosophy, the most compelling reconstruction of Descartes's skeptical scenario is in a 1981 article by Hilary Putnam, which explores the cognitive situation of a "brain in a vat." In Putnam's thought experiment, a human-like brain is sustained by fluid and connected to a computer that feeds it stimulation corresponding to what our brains ordinarily receive from our sensory systems, in a way that is responsive to outgoing signals from the motor system in the brain. This image avoids what is commonly taken to be the central embarrassment of Cartesianism—namely, that Descartes's "thinking thing" is an *immaterial* substance that exists outside the influence of physical laws. At the same time, Putnam's scenario renders in even more literal terms the idea that thinking, perceiving, and acting are *internal* processes that must be connected somehow to objects in a realm outside them. Descartes's immaterial soul may have been a metaphysical extravagance, but Putnam's brain in a vat provides a more scientific-seeming

Could our reality be nothing more than our brains responding to external stimuli?

VASABII/ISTOCK

version of the same basic picture—the picture of our mental lives as confined to a special realm. For Descartes, that realm was the domain of the immaterial soul. For Putnam, it was that of the vat.

Descartes's ideas marked a radical departure from the understanding of human nature that had been laid out by Aristotle and developed by his scholastic commentators. But the radicalness of these ideas is likely to be lost on us, as they have captured the popular and scientific imagination no less than the imagination of professional philosophers and their students. The Cartesian picture of human nature, where the mind is something *inner* with a problematic connection to things in the "external world," including our very bodies, is for many people the default way of understanding who and what we are. Putnam's thought experiment may seem implausible, but don't most of us already think of ourselves as essentially brains in vats? Only the vats are our human heads, the cables leading in and out are our sensory and motor nerves, and what lies outside is neither a deceiver nor a computer but the "external world" itself, doing just the same work of stimulating our brains that a deceiver, or a computer, or a sufficiently realistic and immersive virtual-reality system could in principle do instead. So it is that many of us fail to see that this picture is *only* a picture, and that there may be alternative pictures that provide a superior understanding of what we are.

Reality+, the latest book from the philosopher David Chalmers, is an engaging and far-reaching exploration of this Cartesian picture, by way of the hypothesis that our mental lives are the product of a massively complex computer simulation. Its central thesis is that *virtual worlds are real worlds*, so that even if we are living in a computer-generated simulation, or are ourselves the products of such a simulation, this is no threat at all to our own reality, to the reality of the things we take to be around us, to the truth of most of our beliefs about those things, or to the value and meaningfulness of our lives. The origin of this argument is in Chalmers's paper "*The Matrix* as Metaphysics" (2003), which used that famous science-fiction film to mount an updated version of Putnam's "Brain in a Vat" thought experiment. Most of us watch *The Matrix*, with its rows of human bodies hooked up to a machine feeding them images of a world nothing like the one around them, and judge this simulated world to be an unreal *illusion* that its subjects should want to escape. In this reaction we are in agreement with Plato, whose *Republic* imagines a world of prisoners chained in place and observing a realm of shadows. Anyone who was freed from this bondage and escaped to see things in the light of the sun would be obligated to return to the cave and help bring others to enlightenment. If Chalmers is right, however, this reaction would be misplaced. The shadow world is no less real or meaningful than the world beyond, and there is no deception at all in being confined to it.

How could this be? Isn't a simulated or "virtual" world necessarily a realm of illusion, and wouldn't we be deluded if we took its denizens to be real? Chalmers answers no, arguing that the labels "virtual" and "real" should not be opposed in the way this objection assumes. True, the products of a computer simulation are not part of *physical* reality, but there are other ways that something can be real. For example, consider the possibility that I throw a no-hitter in the World Series, and then contrast it with each of the following: my throwing a World Series no-hitter in the context of a simulated season in a video game, and my merely dreaming that I threw a no-hitter. There is a perfectly natural sense in which the middle possibility, where I play out a simulated season without ever leaving my living room, is one in which I *really* throw a no-hitter. (For example, if I brag about the exploit to my friends and they ask if I *really* did it, then I won't be lying or misleading them if I say yes, as long as it is understood that we are talking about a video game.) Chalmers applies a sophisticated version of this line of argument to the idea that our entire world is a massive simulation. Having rejected the mistake of conflating the real with the physical, we can see that there need be nothing unreal about what happens within a virtual world.

But wait. In order for me to have thrown a no-hitter in a World Series game, many things would have to be true of me that are not—for example, that I had the ability to pitch effectively to professional hitters, and that at some point I stood on the mound in a major-league stadium. None of these things need to be true for me to have thrown a no-hitter only in a video game or only in a dream. Nor, of course, would these things need to be true for me to throw a no-hitter in a massive computer simulation—in which case I myself will have been not a human being on a pitcher's mound (or in my living room or in bed), but a brain in a vat or a self-conscious virtual avatar made of nothing but digital bits. And doesn't this show that there is an important difference in how things are with me, and in the nature of the activities I engage in, depending on whether or not I am a living organism who acts in the physical world by means of my bodily movements? Doesn't it reveal an important difference between, on the one hand, what we are and do in a physical world and, on the other, what we are and do in a world that is merely virtual?

This is a point where Chalmers's argument relies on his commitment to a fundamentally Cartesian anthropology, and betrays his failure to recognize that Descartes's picture is at work in the background. Consider the following passage, in which Chalmers discusses what makes a given body "mine":

> I could lose pain or hunger and be unable to eat or drink, but this body would still be my body. My thinking could occur in a Cartesian mind, but this body would still be mine. And it's not so obvious that the physical body is the locus of my existence. I could transplant my brain to a new body, or upload myself to the cloud, and exist without the old body. So it's arguable that, like my avatar [in a computer simulation], my physical body is not quite the same as *me*.

This line of argument is supposed to show that if I throw a pitch in a virtual

baseball game, *I myself* will be located on a pitcher's mound no less and no more than if I do so in a physical game. According to Chalmers, what's true in both cases is that "my body," whether it's a physical thing or a digital avatar, will be standing on a physical or virtual mound, and that my body will not be the same as *me*. This, of course, is exactly the conclusion of Descartes's second Meditation, argued for in very much the same way.

Beyond the similarity to Descartes's arguments, it is striking how each description Chalmers gives of what "could" happen is entirely unquestioned and unsupported. It is an observable fact that human beings can go into persistent vegetative states in which they lack consciousness and cannot eat or drink voluntarily. By contrast, the supposed possibility that human-like thinking could occur in immaterial minds or be transplanted via our brains into new bodies or uploaded into computer systems is so far only a philosopher's fantasy. And outside the confines of this fantasy we have no way of saying what would happen if any of these "coulds" became real. Imagine that my brain is transplanted into a different body, which then begins to think just as I do. What reason is there to think that the resulting person would actually *be me*, rather than that a mental duplicate of me would have been brought into existence? The problem is even more severe in the case where "I" am supposed to have been uploaded to a digital cloud. Given that multiple versions of "me" may be created simultaneously in this way, why should any one of them have a claim to identity with the original? The answer, in each case, is that the only reason for saying what Chalmers does is that we are simply taking Descartes's picture of the mind for granted.

Reality+ is in many respects a stunning success. It is well written, cleverly illustrated, and packed with useful distinctions and powerful arguments. It makes excellent use of both history and contemporary culture to help the general reader understand its key concepts. And it does all of this without sacrificing any of the rigor one would expect in an analytic philosopher's treatment of these matters in an academic journal.

Still, I also find the book to be a revealing illustration of how one of the dominant contemporary approaches to philosophy can fall short of what the discipline demands. As long as our philosophical thinking is tethered only to fantasy or the farthest edges of scientific speculation, its conclusions will tend to reflect our casual and culturally contingent presuppositions. And as long as this work proceeds without awareness of the philosophical pictures that our thinking relies on, we will be unable to challenge the accuracy of those pictures, or search for potential alternatives to them.

JOHN SCHWENKLER *(@johnschwenkler) is professor of philosophy at Florida State University and the author of* Anscombe's 'Intention': A Guide *(Oxford University Press, 2019).*

Bernardine Evaristo

JENNIE SCOTT USE/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Strict Account

VALERIE SAYERS

Bernardine Evaristo first appeared on many literary radars when her novel *Girl, Woman, Other* was awarded the Booker Prize in 2019. "I became an overnight success," says Evaristo, "after forty years working professionally in the arts." She also became the first Black woman to receive the Booker, and her novel is charged with enough energy to qualify as a literary force of nature. Empathetic, funny, smart, and innovative, *Girl, Woman, Other* is written in the voices of twelve characters—eleven women and one non-binary person—whose artistic and love lives intersect at crucial points. The novel is also written in free verse, a form that doesn't often attract the broad audience Evaristo has finally found.

MANIFESTO
On Never Giving Up

BERNARDINE EVARISTO
Grove Press
$27 | 240 pp.

As her new fans have now discovered, Bernardine Evaristo has been writing surprising, experimental novels for decades. One of the surprises is how accessible and appealing her genre-busting, fluid prose (and/or poetry) can be. As she puts it in *Manifesto*, her memoir and account of her writing life, she doesn't want her readers to need "a doctorate in experimental fiction" to read her stories, so she employs straightforward language as she breaks new structural ground. Her subjects can be surprising, too: though she is mostly focused on the lives of women, her polyvocal narratives take on the full spectrum of gender identity. *Mr. Loverman* (2013) utilizes the voice of a married gay Londoner from the Caribbean whose delight in himself is both witty and affecting (and complicated in satisfying ways when the second half of his story is told in his wife's voice). *Blonde Roots* (2008), an alternative history that turns slavery inside out, channels the voice of a white European woman captured, transported, and enslaved by Africans. Evaristo's interest in history has sent her even deeper into the past: intrigued by the historical accounts of an early Black presence in Britain, Evaristo leapt back two millennia to arrive at the year 211 as the time frame for *The Emperor's Babe* (2001), the story of a Nubian teenager in Roman London. Despite the ancient setting, the novel's language is strictly twenty-first-century, full of raw and clever power that manages to suggest "the melting-pot origins of the English language."

As one of the readers who came late but delighted to this wide-ranging oeuvre, I was pleased to hear that Evaristo had published this *Manifesto*, especially since I have frequently assigned fiction-writing students the task of composing their own manifestos arguing for the kind of fiction we should be writing in the twenty-first century. Evaristo's version turns out to be a hybrid personal memoir and a meditation on writing; the book does append a perfunctory two-page manifesto, but what looks like an afterthought intended to deliver on the title's promise is not an exemplary

model (indeed, it's one of the book's few examples of perfunctory writing). I wouldn't call *Manifesto* the best place to begin exploring Evaristo's writing, nor for that matter would I call it entirely successful. Nonetheless, it's well worth a read for its intriguing personal history, its irrepressible spirit, its conceptual clarity, and its clear-eyed description of the challenges of a writing life, particularly in an English publishing world that was, for years, even more neglectful of Black writers than American publishers. *Manifesto* is also an excellent companion to Evaristo's semi-autobiographical novel, *Lara*.

Evaristo opens *Manifesto* with a description of what her parents endured as an interracial couple in 1950s London. Her mother, of mostly Irish, English, and German descent, was training to be a teacher when they met; her father, newly arrived in London from his native Nigeria, was learning welding. Interracial marriages were uncommon, and Evaristo's maternal grandmother was dismayed; other relatives shunned the family for years. Evaristo, the fourth of eight children born in a ten-year span, says she was a "bona fide subaltern" in south London.

But her parents were determined to make the marriage work, and for thirty-three years, they managed to do so. The challenges were constant: an old dilapidated house; racist taunts; feeding, clothing, and educating ten family members on one income. Evaristo's mother Ellen, who did not return to the classroom until her youngest was in school, was good with money and with her children: she "had a kind of earth-mother vibe going on," as Evaristo puts it.

Evaristo's portrait of her "militaristic" father—delivering long lectures or whacks with spoon and belt—is more vivid. Having no use for two old pianos, he chopped them into pieces and burned them in the garden, where he also had his children cut the grass with machetes. Evaristo claims she "didn't have a proper conversation" with her father as a child and despised him as a teenager. But as she came into her adulthood, she began to appreciate the strength and ingenuity that allowed him to survive in London: he "kept a hammer at the side of his bed," challenged all insults, and, though taciturn at home and a non-Catholic, was a gregarious member of the local Catholic Club. He taught himself plumbing and founded his own business; he also became an enthusiastic trade unionist, and eventually a Labour Party councillor. Evaristo's account of learning to love her father is honest, complicated, and moving without being in the least sentimental.

Both parents were devoted to social and racial justice, and both were politically active. Unlike her father, Evaristo's mother Ellen was a faithful Catholic. The couple raised all eight children in the Church and bargained for tuition breaks at Catholic schools. Evaristo's memories of "theoretically religious" clergy are bitter: she recalls priests in the confessional "reeking of alcohol" and says they "never once extended a hand to offer any interest or assistance to the only black family in their flock." Indeed, what the family believes will be the first pastoral visit by a priest turns out to be a request that the Evaristos sell their house to the parish. One priest, unaware that Ellen is married to a Black man, talks about the "darkies." A "cruel" priest interrupts Mass when the large family traipses in late. By the time she is fifteen, Evaristo has left the Church, as all eight siblings and her mother will eventually do.

Yet Evaristo credits her childhood vision of Mary for her belief in the "unassailable goodness of women" and the "dramatic and poetic spectacle of the church services" for her trajectory as writer. She does not explore whether her own lifelong pursuit of racial and gender justice or her seemingly boundless narrative empathy might have been influenced by her early Catholicism—the wounds run too deep. Her rejection is complete.

That rejection was fueled in part by the Church's condemnation of her own sexual experimentation. In her twenties, Evaristo lived as a lesbian, until a harrowing affair with an older woman led her to rekindle her attraction to men. Though she devotes considerable narrative space to her love life, her accounts aren't in the least titillating or shallow: she ties each affair to her growth as an artist and especially to her increasing self-confidence. Now long married to a supportive man, she quotes a friend's observation that "marriage was freedom" with approval. "I can't imagine one night stands now," she says, "to expose your naked body to a complete stranger in the pursuit of fleeting pleasure?" She still identifies as non-binary and remains intrigued by sexual pleasure as a means of communion with other humans. She holds herself to strict account when she recalls her own youthful callousness to needy lovers.

Indeed, she holds her entire life to strict account; other than J. M. Coetzee's memoirs, I can't recall another that holds its subject to such scrutiny. While Coetzee is pitiless in his self-judgment, however, Evaristo is bemused and as forgiving of herself as she is of others. She began her artistic life as an acting student, in a community theater arts program that would have a tremendous impact on her role as a Black writer determined to mentor and nurture beginning Black writers and to support people underserved by art. In drama school she was delighted to finally be in a classroom with other Black women, and with two of the friends she made there founded the Theatre of Black Women, the first of its kind in England. She was only in her twenties and already acting, writing plays, and administering the company, which meant finding grants and other funding. "Running a black women's theatre company," she says drily, "required a certain feistiness and bloody-mindedness."

When she transitioned to poetry and then fashioned that poetry into prose, feistiness served her well. Some of the most fascinating pages in the book narrate her refusal to accept rejection: all her life, she has been persistent in re-applying for grants she has been denied, finding publishers after manuscripts have been rejected, and especially in rewriting manuscripts over and over

and over—novels that began in poetry became prose, and vice versa. Her verse novel, *Lara*, a fictionalized exploration of her own Nigerian, Brazilian, Irish, English, and German heritage, was published first in 1997 and completely rewritten for a second release in 2009. It was in *Lara*, she says, that she "discovered my sense of humor as a writer." She speaks of rewriting pages forty times and manuscripts that might take five major revisions; both estimates sound right to me, as does her account of abandoning novels that just weren't working. What she makes clear to those embarking on a writing life is that novels take years, require single-minded determination, and almost always come without financial reward.

Even pre-Booker, though, the rewards have been apparent in Evaristo's life. She has survived for long stretches in voluntary and satisfied poverty but in increasingly clearer accordance with her own politics and principles. She's also grown mellower, as a person and as an artist. In the process of digging deeper and deeper into her family background for *Lara*, Evaristo found empathy and understanding for the grandmother who once objected to her parents' marriage and discovered a good deal more about her father's Brazilian roots. Her desire to understand a whole range of unique, idiosyncratic characters of every race and gender has sent her deep into the library and around the globe for research dives.

Many of Evaristo's observations about the writing life will be useful to readers and writers alike. The big surprise here is that the form of this book is, for once, not in the least innovative: an introduction announces what the book will cover and a conclusion summarizes what the book has said. Because its chapters are arranged thematically rather than chronologically, time loops back on itself and sometimes requires droll interjections ("Hold your horses, I'll get to her in due course"). Occasional repetitions slow down what is otherwise Evaristo's usual fast-moving pace. The tone is occasionally preachy and obvious ("If you continue to micro-manage your offspring's life in adulthood, then you are infantilizing them and probably setting up unnecessary conflict") but more often wry and insightful. Forays into "personal development," however, often result in clichés. Finally, that two-page manifesto is an excellent summary of her theories, but it's so slackly written that it lacks the punch Evaristo delivers elsewhere. The last pages of the book are the weakest—but they cannot and do not cancel out the generous, witty, and forgiving spirit of this book. Like the rest of Evaristo's venturesome writing, *Manifesto* is an affirmation of art's power to transform the intellect and the spirit. Besides, even in ordinary old essay form, it's still mostly a delight to read.

VALERIE SAYERS, *professor emerita at the University of Notre Dame, is the author of* The Age of Infidelity and Other Stories *and six novels.*

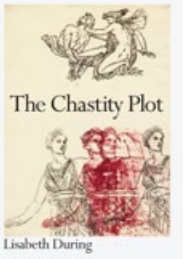
Francesco Rosaspina, *The Martyrdom of Saint Agnes* (after Domenichino)

Eunuchs & Maidens

MICHAEL WEST

Once, while interviewing for a job, I told an English department's search committee that I would be interested in teaching a class on chastity in literature. I don't know if my proposal alone torpedoed my candidacy, but I still remember the uncomfortable silence that followed. The message of that silence was clear: chastity is weird.

This weirdness is precisely what Lisabeth During homes in on in her intelligent, lengthy, and ambitious book *The Chastity Plot*. Chastity refuses to continue the cycle of generation contests and reconfigures societal imperatives, whatever those might be. "Militant chastity frustrates and allures," During writes. "[I]t is the making of martyrs, the sign of sovereignty, and the fast track to pathology. That is why it is interesting."



THE CHASTITY PLOT

LISABETH DURING
University of Chicago Press
$45 | 392 pp.

During opts for the term "chastity" rather than "celibacy" in part because chastity's meaning is so unstable. Depending on where and when it is used, it can mean temporary or lifelong abstinence from sex, or abstinence from "unlawful" sex, or, in the Catechism's formulation, the "successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being" (CCC 2337).

During calls her approach "genealogical," which means that she does not offer a clear definition of chastity but instead tells the story of its many transformations from antiquity to the present. Among these was the shift from a rigorous, prophetic, and sometimes antisocial Christian version of chastity to a more mundane version that reinforced the social order rather than challenging it. Chastity "in the Christian tradition is a virtue of the soul. In the secular tradition it is the honor of the female sex."

During is happily unencumbered by, and largely unaware of, the intra-Catholic debates that swirl about the con-

WELLCOME COLLECTION

cept—e.g. whether Latin-rite priests should be required to remain unmarried, or whether married couples should, under some circumstances, "live as brother and sister." During offers neither "an apology for chastity nor a lament for its decline." Instead, she aims to show that "the chastity ideal has profoundly influenced a number of the West's social and personal aspirations, modifying the ways individuality, subjectivity, and psychological norms have been imagined in the modern world."

During identifies a "chastity plot," which comes in major and minor versions: the "eunuch's plot" and the "maiden's plot." Despite their similarities, the two have different aspirations: "While the eunuch stakes almost everything on the chance for otherworldly transformation, the maiden seeks to have her significance recognized in the world." The distinction can be illustrated by comparing the Golden Legend's "Life of Saint Agnes" with *Jane Eyre*. St. Agnes does all she can to avoid marriage. Claiming to be "loved of another lover," Jesus, she aims at something higher than marriage to a powerful Roman. She would rather die than marry. Like St. Agnes, Jane Eyre fends off a rich man's proposal of marriage. But Jane's rejection of marriage, unlike St. Agnes's, is only provisional. Jane doesn't want to transcend marriage; she wants a *good* marriage.

Today, During observes, the maiden's plot has long "outstripped the eunuch's plot" and has morphed into "that mainstay of novel and film, the marriage plot." The fact that you're much more likely to have read—or at least to know about—Jane Eyre's life than St. Agnes's illustrates During's point.

During has unearthed a range of examples that I found fascinating. (Did you know that the slogan of the early-twentieth-century English suffragist Christabel Pankhurst was "Votes for Women, Chastity for Men"?) While During draws on the work of historians, her main sources tend to be philosophical and literary. After an overview of Nietzsche and Freud's critiques of ascetic ideals, there are chapters on Euripides's "masculine hero of chastity" Hippolytus, Puccini's unfinished opera *Turandot*, Tracy Lord in *The Philadelphia Story*, the Danaids in *The Suppliants*, and England's "Virgin Queen," Elizabeth I.

But the book revolves around two chapters on early Christianity and the eunuch plot. During is clearly taken by one story in particular: that of Thecla of Iconium. In the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, St. Paul's preaching convinces Thecla to refuse to marry her fiancée. She is sentenced to death by burning, but a rainstorm sent by God quenches the flames. After a trip to Antioch, where she narrowly avoids being raped, she retires to a mountain where, in some versions of the story, "some evil-disposed young men went up to ill-treat her: and she prayed, and the rock opened and she entered it, and it closed after her."

You get the idea: the holy virgin Thecla is consistently threatened by men and consistently protected by God. For During, Thecla's chastity contravenes many contemporary assumptions about the virtue: her chastity is anything but retiring, fearful, or conformist. Thecla is a "defiant virgin…one of chastity's irrepressible warriors."

The Chastity Plot also tours chastity's contemporary scene, including "Girls Gone Mild," people who have "kissed dating goodbye," abstinence-only sex ed, and a range of American (largely Protestant) approaches to chastity in the past few decades. We learn about The CW show *Jane the Virgin* (2014–19), whose title character makes a "vow to keep her virginity" and practices a "warm, if intermittent, Catholicism." Similarly, *Fleabag*'s (2016–19) "hot priest" also appears as an instance of "a celibate character who is neither corrupt nor corrupting, neither sanctimonious nor hypocritical."

Despite During's claim not to lament chastity's decline, she nevertheless argues that something important was lost when married people were brought into chastity's orbit around the time of the Reformation. For both Catholics and Protestants, chastity lost some of the "apocalyptic energies" that had motivated early Christians. During contrasts the virgin described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, for whom "the time is running out," with the "bourgeois Miss" of the nineteenth-century novel or, more recently, of chastity clubs. Both have resolved not to have sex, but their concerns are quite different.

> [T]he virgin whom Paul is thinking about does not spend her time worrying about her personality or reflecting on the special beauty of her sexual innocence. She is in a hurry for the end of time to arrive. This is not what the bourgeois Miss is about. Maidenly and delicate, she is keeping herself for marriage. Chastity is praised in both instances. But it is hard to recognize it as the same virtue.

For those who still consider "chastity" to be any kind of virtue, it is a virtue for everyone, not just the celibate. And this is where Catholicism comes into view.

The Catholic Church is the only major institution in the West that maintains a publicly recognized position for the unmarried. In other words, Catholic institutions still give witness to the intuition that chastity is not a withdrawal from life but the sign of a fuller life. The Catechism, which During quotes on the second-to-last page, calls this "the Kingdom": "Both the sacrament of Matrimony and virginity for the Kingdom of God come from the Lord himself.… Esteem of virginity for the sake of the kingdom and the Christian understanding of marriage are inseparable, and they reinforce each other" (CCC 1620).

During cheekily but correctly describes this formulation as trying "to swing both ways," holding together "the major plot of the eunuch's renunciation and the minor plot, which praises the maiden's modesty and advocates continence within marriage." Her tone is surprisingly approving. She seems glad that there is an institution still willing to speak a good word not just for chastity but for virginity, with all its eccentric, even defiant, implications.

MICHAEL WEST *teaches at the University of Dallas.*

End It Now

DEREK S. JEFFREYS

As Covid case numbers began declining this past spring, I resumed volunteering in a prison after almost two years away. Staff members and inmates told me about what had happened during my absence. Most of it was troubling. Hundreds of sick inmates had been quarantined; others were confined to their cells all day, receiving no recreation time, communal meals, or public educational activities. Worship opportunities sometimes disappeared. (I often worship at the prison, too.) I've been writing about solitary confinement for more than a decade, and I know how bad it can be. But that didn't stop my spirit from sinking as inmates recounted the horrific results of this practice, changed but still widespread at our prison. Some prisoners, I learned, had resorted to acts of self-harm, including cutting.

SURVIVING SOLITARY
Living and Working in Restricted Housing Units

DANIELLE S. RUDES, WITH SHANNON MAGNUSON AND ANGELA HATTERY
Stanford University Press
$26 | 272 pp.

Because of these experiences, I was eager to read Danielle S. Rudes, Shannon Magnuson, and Angela Hattery's *Surviving Solitary: Living and Working in Restricted Housing Units*. Unlike other books on this topic, theirs relies on extensive research conducted at more than one prison. Also atypically, the authors devote considerable attention to the experiences of people who work in prisons. But the book's strengths largely end there. *Surviving Solitary* not only fails to convey the uniquely pernicious character of modern solitary confinement; by disregarding ethical concerns, human dignity chief among them, it fails to grasp the moral urgency of abolishing solitary confinement.

Early on, Rudes and her coauthors clarify some significant vocabulary choices. Noting that corrections departments rarely use the term "solitary confinement," they too replace it with "restricted housing unit" (RHU), since inmates can sometimes be paired in a single cell. But the difference is largely semantic: RHUs are specifically designed to isolate inmates for long peri-

Interior of a high-risk solitary confinement cell

KAREN FOLEY PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ods of time, usually twenty-three hours per day. Instead of "inmate" or "prisoner," Rudes and her coauthors adopt the term "resident," maintaining that it displays respect to the incarcerated. But, as many who write about prisons have argued, such terms risk obscuring what actually happens inside. (I happen to agree with them.)

Nevertheless, the scale of the research here is impressive. Working with the permission of corrections officials, Rudes and her colleagues collected and analyzed data at six different prisons of varying security designations (medium and maximum). Using pseudonyms to avoid endangering their subjects, the authors include extensive quotations from staff members and inmates who reflect on topics such as risk, relationships, rules, reentry, reform, and reversal and revision. Their remarks reveal horrifying details about how RHUs operate. When inmates attempt to commit suicide by hanging, corrections officers first shower them with pepper spray before attempting to save their lives. Inmates who commit minor infractions (such as standing in the wrong place in their cells) can lose access to meals or showers. Such rules are often poorly communicated and enforced arbitrarily. Indeed, quotes from many prison staff reveal a startling ignorance of official prison policies.

Insightfully, *Surviving Solitary* illuminates how working in an RHU can damage corrections officers, too. Staff often suffer from strained family relationships, or struggle with substance abuse and mental illness. Perplexingly, most officers in this book eschew compassion for the inmates they supervise, holding them entirely responsible for their situation and therefore worthy of punishment. What helps explain this attitude is something Rudes and her colleagues call "masked malignancy." It refers to the unintended consequences of RHUs, which often unfold gradually and unexpectedly. Sadly, those who suffer such malignancies often deny that any problem exists.

For all its careful research, *Surviving Solitary* misunderstands something fundamental about contemporary solitary confinement. Rudes and her coauthors liken it to the traditional prison "hole," which has existed for centuries. But that obscures the fact that solitary confinement is a relatively recent phenomenon, one that emerged from late twentieth-century developments in American punishment. As criminologist Sharon Shalev points out in her important book *Supermax: Controlling Risk through Solitary Confinement*, the practice as we know it emerged in the early 1980s, made possible by advances in technology and a "tough on crime" political environment that sought harsh punishment for prisoners. Its use spread rapidly, with most states building and opening new supermax prisons, structures expressly designed to maximize isolation. Instead of critically contextualizing the historical expansion of solitary confinement, Rudes and her coauthors seem to simply take this state of affairs for granted.

Judging from the voices of inmates quoted in *Surviving Solitary*, they shouldn't. In prisoners' telling, RHUs are places of despair, where poor sanitation, severe mental illness, and acts of self-harm are common. Indifferent and hostile staff members treat inmates like animals. At one point, we learn about a man who has spent more than thirty years in isolation. As horrifying accounts pile up, we're left wondering: Isn't it obvious that solitary confinement is immoral? Shouldn't we move to end it immediately? Rudes and her colleagues, concluding that prisons are unlikely to close RHUs, restrict themselves to proposing modest reforms, like making the food better, or inviting more university researchers to observe RHUs.

This is galling, to say the least. Rudes and her colleagues have frustratingly little to say about ethics, and even less about human rights, which appears nowhere throughout the book. It's a strange omission, especially considering how much of the international debate over solitary confinement often appeals to human rights as a legal concept. The authors do occasionally refer to "human dignity," but inexplicably, they never really say what it means and they fail to see how solitary confinement could damage it.

Instead, Rudes and her colleagues rely uncritically on controversial notions borrowed from psychology. Consider their explanation for the apathy, passivity, and lack of interest in the future that characterizes many prisoners held in isolation. The authors cite psychologist Martin Seligman's infamous experiments about "learned helplessness." What they don't tell us is the fact that Seligman developed his ideas by shocking helpless dogs. Or take their proposals for reforming RHUs. They suggest prisons adopt "Contingency Management," a program based on B. F. Skinner's behaviorist theory of "operant conditioning." It was Skinner who famously urged us to move "beyond freedom and dignity." Do we really want to employ his theories in our penal practices?

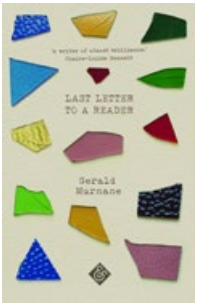
Thankfully, we don't have to. The pandemic may have temporarily halted the movement to end solitary confinement, but there are signs of progress. Already, many European countries refuse to employ solitary confinement as we do. Even here in the United States, we've made some progress toward eliminating it, too. New York State recently adopted the internationally recognized "Mandela Rules," which preclude isolation beyond fifteen days. Rudes and her colleagues are aware of these developments, but ultimately reject the abolition of solitary confinement as a policy goal. For me (and I suspect for many readers), such a conclusion represents an unacceptable compromise with an immoral practice. Human dignity isn't some abstract concept that can be waved away in favor of political expediency or the status quo; it's an integral part of any serious discussion of ethics and prisons. How disappointing that the authors of *Surviving Solitary* don't see it that way.

DEREK S. JEFFREYS *is professor of humanities and religion at the University of Wisconsin, Green Bay. He is the author of* Spirituality in Dark Places: The Ethics of Solitary Confinement *(Palgrave Macmillan 2013). He is currently working on a book about human dignity and the American prison.*

The Dominance of Place

JACK HANSON

Near where I was raised, there is an island that was used as a training ground for amphibious campaigns during the Second World War. By the time I was born, the island had long since been claimed by the state parks service. It was only through public-education initiatives that I learned its full history—from its place in the geography and politics of indigenous peoples, to its use as farmland in the nineteenth century and its later wartime function, up to present-day conservation efforts focused on its modest but remarkable flora, fauna, and marine ecosystems. When I was growing up, my family would visit the island weekly, sometimes daily, for the usual summer recreation. The other children of this little community and I would roam the island's thick woods, splashing through marshes and jumping down sand dunes. Together with the simple fun of childhood play, there was the added thrill of an overgrown airstrip, the frame of a Jeep rusted and contorted by time and the elements, a fence post older than the trees that surrounded it. From a certain vantage, I could observe the stack of sea, sand, trees, and sky, following the colors up toward the sun, where they disappeared and seeing clearly meant seeing nothing at all. It seemed to me that in this particular place, made special both by the stories people told about it and by forces beyond anyone's control, time itself behaved differently, coiling back rather than leading forward.



LAST LETTER TO A READER
Essays

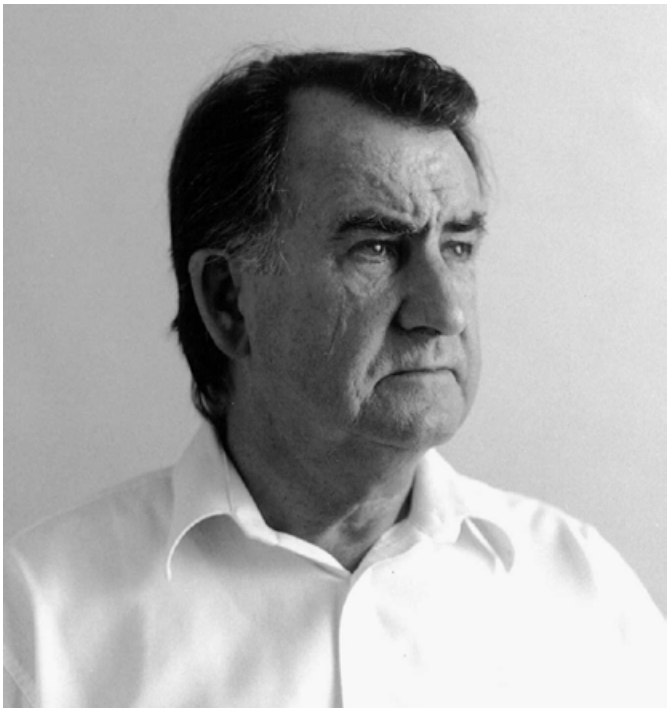
GERALD MURNANE
Giramondo
$26.95 | 140 pp.

The Australian writer Gerald Murnane has long held that time is an illusion, and that our experience is made up not of moments, but of the succession of places we've inhabited, each of which remains long after we've left it. His belief in this "secret dominance of place," as he (or, rather, one of his unnamed narrators) once called it, has led him to an aesthetic vision at once beguilingly strange and familiar. His prose, though clean and approachable, bears the mystical aura of one who has not only seen things others have not, but has also seen common things in a way no one else has.

This revelatory aspect of Murnane's "fictions" (he prefers this term to "novels" or "stories") is not one of blinding light and sudden comprehension, but of journeys through increasingly well-lit landscapes. His real subject is fiction itself, which in his estimation allows access to places one can reach by no other means. The territory he writes about expands inward toward a mysterious center rather than outward. A paragraph will often double back to qualify or fill in a preceding observation: "Having written the previous paragraph, I now remember…" In Murnane's hands these interpolations and revisions do not feel intrusive. Rather, they are part of an excavation disclosing ever-deeper layers of self-knowledge, reports from an interiority so particular it begins to seem universal.

Now, it would seem, no more reports will reach us—not, at least, while the reporter is still alive. With *Last Letter to a Reader*, Murnane has officially concluded his career as a writer for publication. It's unclear what to make of this. Quitting writing, at least for publication, is a crucial part of the strange story of Murnane's legendary career. Beginning with *Tamarisk Row* (1974), which is being reissued with *Last Letter*, Murnane published a series of novels written in an increasingly distinctive and self-possessed style, including his 1982 masterpiece, *The Plains*. His life has been as eccentric as his work. He has lived the whole of his eighty-two years in the state of Victoria, rarely leaving the greater Melbourne area until his 2009 move to the small border town of Goroke (population 299), where he occasionally tends bar at the local "men's shed." He is obsessed with horse racing and has an encyclopedic knowledge of the subject. He has never been on an airplane or worn sunglasses. Or so he says.

Gerald Murnane



IAN HILL

When *Emerald Blue* (1995) sold only six hundred copies, Murnane stopped publishing new work for a decade, returning in 2005 with the essay collection *Invisible Yet Enduring Lilacs*. It was not until 2009 that he published another novel, *Barley Patch.* Since then he has published more novels, essays, and a memoir of extraordinary quality. In 2018 the *New York Times Magazine* ran a profile of Murnane with the title: "Is the Next Nobel Laureate in Literature Tending Bar in a Dusty Australian Town?" The answer turned out to be no, but the point stands: Murnane has secured an international reputation with all his eccentricities and preoccupations intact. No better moment, then, to hang it all up. In the very brief foreword to *Last Letter to a Reader*, Murnane writes:

> Nearly six years ago, when I had written the last of my poems for the collection *Green Shadows and Other Poems*, I felt sure that I could write nothing more for publication. I went on writing, of course, but only for my archives.

But with Covid lockdowns and a bit of cajoling from his publisher, Murnane embarked upon *Last Letter*. The book comprises a series of short essays on his own published work, beginning with *Tamarisk Row* and ending with *Last Letter* itself. Last call, says the provincial bartender. And yet, as the reference to his archives suggests, he plans to continue serving himself.

Murnane readers will know of the famous archives, a detailed catalog of which was first published in 2013 in *Music & Literature*: three separate sets of large filing cabinets in the author's home, each containing an aspect of Murnane's life. The first is his "chronological archive," containing records and memorabilia, including old photos and keepsakes, reflections with titles like "Letter of 8,000 words to the Canadians" and "I'm a vengeful bastard!", and an extensive collection of Magyar flash cards (he is a great lover of all things Hungarian.) The second archive is his "literary archive," which houses early drafts, unpublished novels and stories, and notes for future work. Finally, and most intriguingly, there is what Murnane calls his "Antipodean archive," his entirely private exploration—including manuscripts, maps, and geographical surveys—of two fictional islands he has named New Arcady and New Eden, together called the Antipodes.

He has made reference to these islands in his fiction, notably in 1995's "The Interior of Gaaldine," which recounts in Murnane's distinctive first-person voice the narrator's travel by sea to Tasmania to meet other writers for a tour of the country. Averse to travel, like Murnane himself, the narrator drinks endless "stubbies" of beer and flasks of vodka, eats only some fruit he has brought with him, and goes without sleep for well over twenty-four hours, despite comfortable accommodations and scant obligations. When he is finally able to sleep for a few hours, he is awoken by a mysterious woman who knocks on his door, enters without invitation, and foists upon him a manuscript, which she claims was written by an unnamed friend of hers. The narrator then summarizes the manuscript: a typically Murnanian character—solitary, outwardly average, with an inner-life so rich it makes deep engagement with the outer world altogether unappealing—tells the story of his own life and his invention of an island named New Arcadia. Toward the end of this summary, Murnane interjects:

> A different sort of writer than myself might have wondered why the author of the pages in the briefcase had gone to such trouble to invent a duplication of what was already available to him: why should he have invented the racecourses of New Arcadia when he could have bought a racehorse for himself and watched it of a Saturday at Mowbray or Elwick. I have always been interested in what is usually called the world but only insofar as it provides me with evidence for the existence of another world. I have never written any piece of fiction with the simple purpose of understanding what I might call the real world. I have always written fiction in order to suggest to myself that another world exists.

It is worth noting that "The Interior of Gaaldine" appears in *Emerald Blue*, the last fiction Murnane published for nearly fifteen years. The chapter in *Last Letter to a Reader* devoted to this collection focuses almost entirely on this story, which Murnane had intended to be his farewell to fiction. "I believe today," he writes, "that I was driven to write 'The Interior of Gaaldine' partly to reassure myself that my Antipodean Archive, as I mostly call it nowadays, is as worthy a task as the planning and writing of any of my published works."

The drunken delirium of Murnane's narrator, like the ecstasy of a child, leads directly to his unanticipated entrance into a world not simply parallel with his own, nor born out of it, but somehow intertwined with the stuff of his everyday experience. For want of a better term, Murnane calls this other world "his mind," or simply "*the* Mind." I might suggest "Spirit." Whatever you call it, it is difficult not to be torn by his devotion to it. On the one hand, Murnane's reports are those of a genuine explorer: with a strange mixture of single-mindedness and openness to surprise, his work persistently follows the singular capacities of language for both the discovery and the creation of worlds. On the other hand, one begins to wonder where all of this leads. Murnane already abandoned his readers once, in 1995. And now, after the second half of a career increasingly marked by self-reference—the author endlessly reflecting on his own utterances, even from one sentence to the next—Murnane is again retreating from the world. Of course, that doesn't mean he will stop writing. The archives will grow, and when we finally enter into them, perhaps that will reveal a deeper communion, one that had been ongoing, however invisible.

JACK HANSON *is a PhD candidate at Yale University. His writing has appeared recently in* Artforum, *the* Baffler, Lapham's Quarterly, *and elsewhere. He lives in New York.*

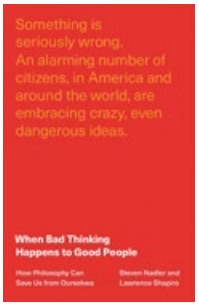
An Epidemic of Delusions

RYAN M. BROWN

An anti-vax protester in Trafalgar Square, London, UK, August 2020

MATTHEW CHATTLE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

"Something is seriously wrong. An alarming number of citizens, in America and around the world, are embracing crazy, even dangerous ideas." So claim Steven Nadler and Lawrence Shapiro in their recent book, *When Bad Thinking Happens to Good People*, a work that seeks to diagnose our contemporary "epistemological crisis" and to offer some tools with which we can combat the scientifically unfounded and conspiratorial thinking that is on the rise, especially in the United States. Formerly fringe movements, such as the anti-vax movement and QAnon, are increasingly prominent in American public discourse. Such movements have been the basis of political campaigns and have inspired a swath of protest movements across the country. As a recent PRRI poll has shown, a "nontrivial 15 percent of Americans agree with the sweeping QAnon allegation that 'the government, media, and financial worlds in the U.S. are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking operation.'" These and similar beliefs are certainly not morally innocent: anti-vax misinformation has led to unnecessary suffering and death, and the climate-change denial endorsed by some of our most prominent politicians has left the United States remarkably unprepared for a crisis that is already upon us.



WHEN BAD THINKING HAPPENS TO GOOD PEOPLE
How Philosophy Can Save Us from Ourselves

STEVEN NADLER AND LAWRENCE SHAPIRO
Princeton University Press
$24.95 | 240 pp.

Nadler and Shapiro argue that the kind of "bad thinking" we see on display in climate-change denial and QAnon fanaticism is a special kind of intellectual failing, distinct from ignorance, miseducation, and stupidity. This kind of bad thinking is instead a kind of "epistemic stubbornness," a *refusal* to give up one's beliefs in the face of countervailing evidence. The epistemically stubborn are guilty of confirmation bias: they ignore any evidence that doesn't help their case and glom on to any information that does—or seems to. Epistemically stubborn people may be intellectually gifted. They may understand the "canons of good reason" but refuse to abide by them (one

Education is not about fixing a broken faculty or pouring information into an empty mind. Instead, it is about redirecting *an already functioning capacity for thinking so that it's looking at what really matters.*

of the authors' examples: a professional philosopher who promoted the conspiracy theory that the Sandy Hook massacre was a false-flag operation). The key words in this analysis are "stubborn," "ignore," and "refuse." While epistemically stubborn people are making intellectual mistakes when they uphold beliefs contrary to readily accessible evidence—beliefs that are often based on nothing more than hearsay and that conflict with other truths the stubborn thinker holds—they are also making *moral* mistakes. And not only because epistemic stubbornness can lead to morally bankrupt action (as when a parent refuses to vaccinate a child out of the baseless fear that vaccines cause autism). According to Nadler and Shapiro, epistemic stubbornness is morally fraught even when it doesn't produce harmful consequences. Whatever its practical effect, it is a "character flaw deserving of blame." Luckily, they tell us, "bad thinking is always avoidable."

The cure for the "virus" of bad thinking lies in a humanistic education, especially one that teaches us the "canons of good reasoning" as made available through philosophy. More broadly, the "antidote" is the examination of life promoted by Socrates, which seeks to cultivate a deep intellectual humility: I must come to recognize what I do and do not know, and I must never act as if I know when I do not know. If the conspiratorial, epistemically stubborn person can come to recognize what counts as good reasoning (valid deduction, statistically sound induction) and then begin asking herself, "*Why* do I believe this? Do I really have good and compelling evidence to support this claim?" then she can set forth on the road to recovery. When she learns to approach each of her beliefs with the same humility and demand for sound reasoning and evidence, then she will become wise.

There is much to commend in Nadler and Shapiro's account. It is a remarkably clear and accessible introduction to critical thinking, some of the basic tools of logic, and contemporary epistemology (especially as practiced in the Anglo-American "analytic" tradition). Anyone who needs an introduction to or refresher on these topics would be well served. Likewise, the careful clarification of "epistemic stubbornness" as both an intellectual and moral failing—as distinguished from non-moral intellectual failings and non-intellectual moral failings—is helpful for thinking about contemporary forms of bad thinking. Moreover, their basic theses are *right*: the kind of "bad thinking" operative in QAnon circles, anti-vax campaigns, and climate-change denial is well-described as "epistemic stubbornness," and an education in the humanities, and especially in philosophy, would help stem the tide of this "epidemic" of bad thinking. An otherwise insightful review of Nadler and Shapiro's book in the *Wall Street Journal* is wrong when it claims that the authors think too highly of philosophy. The real problem is that they think of philosophy too restrictively. As a result, their description of the epidemic doesn't go deep enough, and their solution to it isn't expansive enough. What's missing is something else we can learn from Socrates.

In Book VII of Plato's *Republic* (the "Allegory of the Cave"), Socrates tells his conversation partners that "education is not what the professions of certain men assert it to be. They presumably assert that they put into the soul knowledge that isn't in it, as though they were putting sight into blind eyes." Socrates's account of education, by contrast,

> indicates that this power [reason] is in the soul of each, and that the instrument with which each learns—just as an eye is not able to turn toward the light from the dark without the whole body—must be turned around from that which is *coming into being* together with the whole soul until it is able to endure looking at that which *is* and the brightest part of that which is. And we affirm that this is the good, don't we?

Shortly before making this claim, Socrates tries to direct his interlocutors' attention to what he calls the "good beyond being," which is the transcendent, lovable cause of all existence and knowledge. (Early Christian intellectuals reading this text would say "this is what we mean by 'God.'") According to Socrates, education is not about fixing a broken faculty or pouring information into an empty mind. Instead, it is about *redirecting* an already functioning capacity for thinking so that it's looking at what really matters. Reason, however, can't be turned toward the True, the Good, and the Beautiful until everything else in the soul, including our desires and emotions, has been redirected—just as your eyes can't be directed toward what's behind you until you move the rest of your body to face the same direction.

If Socrates is right, then the "cure" for bad thinking must be much more radical and holistic than Nadler and Shapiro think it is. They believe the problem lies mostly in the *form* of one's thinking (does one abide by the "canons of good reasoning"?) rather than the *content* (what one thinks about). They want us to hold opinions based on evidence

and believe that merely developing the logical tools of reasoning will suffice. This makes it hard for them to answer an important question: Why do even professional philosophers—those most conversant with the rules of logic and the standards of evidence—fall into bad thinking? Of course, many who are susceptible to conspiracy theories and junk science would benefit from the kind of education in logic and scientific reasoning that Nadler and Shapiro promote, but such an education is clearly insufficient. As Socrates argues, the epistemically stubborn need to be *redirected* from their deficient orientation to reality. One can't correct wishful thinking without correcting the non-rational part of us that does the wishing. Reason can't be properly directed until the sub-rational aspects of the human soul are likewise directed toward what's genuinely true and good. To their credit, the authors do discuss the problem of *akrasia*—when we know what's right and yet can't get ourselves to do it because of the force of some opposed emotion or desire—and they do briefly acknowledge extra-rational motivations in the last few pages of their book. Still, they remain placidly confident that the epistemically stubborn person just needs to start asking herself the right questions.

But how, exactly, would you persuade her to do that? As Jonathan Swift did not quite say, you can't reason someone out of a belief she didn't reason herself into. Then too, as G. K. Chesterton argued in *Orthodoxy*, the conspiratorial thinker, or "maniac," may suffer not from an absence of reason but from an overabundance of reasoning within a too-narrowly circumscribed worldview. As anyone who has argued with an anti-vaxxer knows, argument and evidence don't actually work because the anti-vaxxer—especially the kind that goes in for conspiracy theories—can always find a reason to dismiss or dispute the evidence ("the government is covering up the truth!").

That means we need to look at the ways reason itself becomes diseased, at what motivates motivated reasoning. Following Socrates's remarks on education, we might say that reason becomes diseased when whatever is sub-rational in the soul takes command over our rationality. Nadler and Shapiro mention this issue in the final paragraph of their book only to dodge it: "These are questions for psychologists to answer." Of course, it's true that anyone who wants to understand how our thinking can go wrong should attend to the findings of psychology, but the question at hand is not reducible to psychology or neuroscience. It also involves philosophy, as well as the other humanities and social sciences. Rather than simply passing the torch to the psychologists, or mentioning "political or economic interests" only in passing, Nadler and Shapiro might have asked how such interests prevent us from caring enough about the truth to commit ourselves to the disciplines of careful reasoning.

Consider, by contrast, Terry Eagleton's account in *Reason, Faith, and Revolution* of radical Islamic terrorism in terms of Western imperial aggression and the political and economic conditions that result from that aggression. These conditions prompt the would-be terrorist into precisely the kind of bad thinking Nadler and Shapiro are talking about. Or consider Michael Sandel's recent evaluation in *The Tyranny of Merit* of Trumpist populism in terms of the failures of Reaganite political economy to afford economic security and social esteem to working-class white voters. Eagleton and Sandel both recognize that we don't think in a vacuum; if we want to understand why people fall for crazy, debunked ideas, we have to understand the material conditions from which their reasoning emerges. And if we want to combat those ideas, we have to address those conditions. That means our approach to the problem must be informed by history, politics, and economics, not just logic and epistemology—important as these are. If there is indeed an epidemic of bad thinking in twenty-first-century America, it may be evidence not only of untrained minds, but of a defective society.

RYAN M. BROWN *specializes in ancient Greek philosophy. He teaches at Villanova University.*

BATS

Brian Swann

are mice who went wrong
way back but flapped about, cutting

and pasting, adding and taking
away, until they got it right, so now

any mistake's no big deal as they
do things their own way, sleeping

all day in attic and eave, coming
alive at dusk, intense morphemes in a

vast sentence to feel and feed
off the dark, make sense of night,

returning at dawn to tie up to
the same spot, dig in claws, wrapped

in wings, settle down beside us,
and we might not know they're there.

BRIAN SWANN'*s most recent poetry collection is* Sunday Out of Nowhere: New and Selected Poems *(Sheep Meadow Press) and his latest fiction is* Huskanaw *(MadHat Press). He teaches at Cooper Union in New York City.*

DANIEL WALDEN

A Power of Refusal

Will Arbery's *Corsicana*

When writing about emerging playwrights, one expects—and indeed welcomes—a certain amount of growth. But even with that expectation, a gifted playwright retains the capacity to astonish. Will Arbery's *Heroes of the Fourth Turning* made waves in 2019 and reached much larger audiences with a series of excellent Zoom productions in 2020, when it was also shortlisted for the Pulitzer Prize. *Heroes* stood out for its refusal to allow its audience the pleasant moral soporific of a liberal morality play: its characters were emblematic of types but not reducible to them, and its presentation of both generational and ideological divides in the American Right led critics across the political spectrum to hail it as a unique window into the tensions and anxieties of a form of religious conservatism that does not often find itself represented in the arts of the Trump era.

All this may have been true, but Arbery also writes about family: he has not been shy in talking about how his family members find their way into his characters—Gina in *Heroes* takes both her profession and her biography from his mother—and in *Corsicana*, which opened at Playwrights Horizons on June 22, he draws on his relationship with his older sister. The play opens in a living room in Corsicana, Texas, with a filmmaker named Christopher (Will Dagger) and his older half-sister Ginny (Jamie Brewer), who has Down syndrome. Their mother has recently died, and Christopher has moved home from Dallas and taken a job teaching film at the local community college to help care for Ginny. There is also Justice (Deirdre O'Connell), a family friend and middle-aged anarchist ex-librarian, who keeps them company and helps with things like getting groceries. Christopher sees Ginny going through an uncharacteristic depression in the wake of their mother's death, and so Justice arranges for them to meet her friend Lot (Harold Surratt), an older Black artist and musician who lives outside of town.

Will Dagger and Jamie Brewer in *Corsicana*

PHOTO BY JULIETA CERVANTES

Christopher's care for Ginny and Justice's care for Lot form the dramatic frame, which puts Ginny and Lot together so that he can help her write a song. He insists on doing this as a gift rather than a paid service, because payment entails consumption and, eventually, evacuation: you

pay for something and it turns to shit. Gifts and people's desire to give and to get them are one of the play's central concerns: How and when do people give, and are they truly giving or do they have another end in mind?

Ginny and Lot expose this tension most effectively: their intellectual disabilities—Lot has no diagnosis, but he spent "a couple years in that hallway" in high school—position each of them as a locus of need, as a bevy of obligations for other people to meet. But Ginny reminds Christopher repeatedly that she is his older sister and takes seriously her own obligation to care for him. And all of Lot's art, much discussed but never seen, is free creation, not to be sold and certainly not to be pigeonholed as what a writer for the *Oxford American* wants to call "outsider art." Lot says that he and Ginny are "special," equivocating between the euphemism and a sense of depth. He contrasts the two

Arbery cuts off all the routes by which we might escape into ideas and avoid confronting persons. In the end, people and their words are all we have to work with.

of them with the "Styrofoam people" around them, who are allowed to desire in uncomplicated ways. The metaphor conveys uniformity and simplicity, an easy continuity between need and desire. But part of the play's work is to expose this simplicity as a social fiction: no one is free of the tension created by an orthogonal relationship of desire to need, and nobody's needs are really adequately met.

Lot and Ginny's refusal of mere need is one of many refusals in *Corsicana*. Indeed, Arbery's increased power of refusal is one of the most surprising developments in this play. The characters' disavowals and refusals become the play's own: it is not a play "about" art, or about disability, or about race, or about giving, though all these things are present in the dramatic and intellectual tension of the work. Arbery does not offer the audience these frameworks of "aboutness" because he is writing about people who are not "about" one thing or even several things. He cuts off all the routes by which we might escape into ideas and avoid confronting persons.

In the end, people and their words are all we have to work with: this is a conversation play with a plain set that alternates between Ginny and Christopher's living room and Lot's house. Much of the tension turns on the things people say by mistake, or fail to say, or are unable to say. The play ties this to the different kinds of hyper-surveillance and hyper-policing that Ginny and Lot experience as a function of disability, gender, and race. Both have imputed (but false) sexual assault in their pasts, one as supposed victim and the other as supposed perpetrator. The scrutiny that both are put under begets falsehoods, and a genuine piece of abuse in Christopher's past remains hidden for most of the play. He cannot say it to himself, and the evidence that prompts him to remember it disappears as soon as he tries to show it to someone else. The lack of scrutiny can produce lies as well: Christopher eventually goes to see his father, who physically abused him, and they don't talk about any of it. Instead, they look for a piece of childhood memorabilia, and "looking for it felt like talking about it."

The only thing the play offers in the way of resolution takes place in the final scene when Ginny's song has been completed and the cast sings to the audience from a place out of time. I'm not entirely sure what to make of this—the final act of refusal in singing "Nobody is ever going to hear this song" in front of an audience is an effective capstone to the many refusals of the play, but the sudden jump from an intensely conversational and relational play to a song whose verses are essentially audience-directed monologues feels out of place. The scene also shortchanges Lot in a big way, since everyone else gets to talk about their own interiority and he's left singing only the words of the refrain written by Ginny. But the play has already denied us the sight of Lot's art as a way into his thoughts, so perhaps it's appropriate that the final scene, too, denies us direct access to his interior perspective.

There's a danger, though, in all these refusals. We can easily miss the plenitude of unconstrained encounter with persons and succumb to interpretive nihilism, refusing to make any sense of the words and actions in front of us. This mirrors the danger of overindulgence in apophatic modes of theology: stripping away images and frameworks in order to avoid idolatry may, if we aren't careful, leave us without any way to speak about the reality and the works of God. *Corsicana* seems to be aware of this, and the fact of live dramatic performance allows it to push up against these limits—words on a page stop making sense much sooner than people in the room do.

The performers are all strong, but Deirdre O'Connell's Justice stands out with her visionary monologues. Will Dagger's Christopher is a bundle of nerves, almost talking over himself, profoundly uncomfortable with silence and simple presence in anyone except Ginny. Jamie Brewer conveys both the maturity and the frustration of a woman with a long history of being misunderstood and misheard, and the moments in which Ginny reminds Christopher of her own duty and desire to take care of him are some of the most affecting in the play. The set design allows for smooth transitions between location and between moments in time, but these would be impossible without Isabella Byrd's superb lighting design, which unmistakably marks both spatial and temporal boundaries.

There will not, I think, be a strong consensus around this play, because its intense concern with the specificity of personal encounter makes it quite difficult to talk about. It's not so much that the play is a world unto itself as that each of its characters is, and audiences can hardly be expected to plumb four whole worlds in the same way, to the same degree. This is the plenitude of meaning that comes with encounter, the kind that live theater makes possible in ways that other forms of art do not. *Corsicana* will not generate the kind of press that *Heroes of the Fourth Turning* did, because it is a quieter and much less topical play. But what it offers its audience is worth receiving, sifting through, and exploring, and I look forward to more of Will Arbery's work.

DANIEL WALDEN *is a writer and classicist. He spends his time thinking about Homeric philology, Catholic socialism, musical theater, and the Michigan Wolverines.*

CLASSIFIED

ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY DEAN OF THE D'AMOUR COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

Assumption University (www.assumption.edu) seeks nominations and applications for the position of Dean of the D'Amour College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (DCLAS). The Dean DCLAS is the intellectual and administrative leader of that College. The Dean reports to the Provost and serves, together with the Deans of Business, Graduate and Professional Studies, Nursing, and Physician Assistant Studies and Health Professions, as a member of the Deans' Council. The Dean is responsible for: embedding, communicating, and promoting the mission of Assumption University within and throughout the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; establishing, sharing, and implementing a vision for the College; promoting academic excellence in teaching, research, scholarship, and throughout the curriculum and for all academic programs within the College; leading collaboratively always prioritizing the education, advancement, and welfare of students; and creating and sustaining a positive and inclusive work environment for faculty, staff, and administrators within the College. Assumption University, located in Worcester, MA, is a comprehensive, Catholic liberal arts institution sponsored by the Augustinians of the Assumption. "We awaken in students a sense of wonder, discovery, and purpose, forming graduates known for their intellectual seriousness, thoughtful citizenship, and devotion to the common good." Assumption's curricular and co-curricular programs provide students with an education that shapes their souls, forms them intellectually, and prepares them for meaningful careers. The University is a diverse community that welcomes different points of view and embraces all who share their mission. Enlivened by the Catholic affirmation of the harmony of faith and reason and by the pursuit of the truth in the company of friends, an Assumption education transforms the minds and hearts of students. ROLE OF THE DEAN: In company with a dedicated group of faculty, engaged in outstanding scholarship and practice that aligns with Assumption University's mission, and staff, students, and alumni, the Dean will play an integral role in helping Assumption University build upon its distinctive strengths, enhance its academic excellence, and secure its position as a comprehensive institution of higher education. Specific duties of the Dean of the D'Amour College of Liberal Arts and Sciences include: Providing visionary leadership for the D'Amour College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in line with the mission and vision of the University; Serving as a spokesperson and advocate for the D'Amour College of Liberal Arts and Sciences to the senior administration; Fostering a culture of academic excellence, collaboration, and commitment to continuous improvement; Leading diversity initiatives in the D'Amour College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in the areas of hiring and inclusion; and Collaborating with Institutional Advancement to cultivate new and existing funding sources for the College. QUALIFICATIONS: The next Dean must be willing to contribute actively to the mission of Assumption as well as show respect for the Catholic and Assumptionist identity of the University; have an earned doctorate (or terminal degree); a track record of innovative, energetic, and collaborative leadership; a commitment to academic excellence; superb management, planning, and financial skills, excellent oral and written communication skills, as well as outstanding listening skills; and a demonstrated commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity, across students, faculty, and staff. Assumption University is being assisted by the partners of Hyatt-Fennell. Nominations and application materials should be submitted to assumption@Hyatt-Fennell.com. Applications include a letter of interest, current curriculum vitae, and contact information for five professional references. All applications and nominations will be considered highly confidential. Applications will be reviewed as they are received. Assumption University is an Equal Opportunity Employer. Assumption favors diversity, ecumenically welcomes all who share its goals, and strongly encourages applicants from underrepresented racial minorities to apply. For more information: Cheryl Hyatt - 724-242-0476, assumption@hyatt-fennell.com, www.HYATT-FENNELL.com

CELEBRATING THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OPENING OF VATICAN II

October – December, 2022 The Oratory Center for Spirituality in Rock Hill, SC will present a series of programs to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the opening of Vatican II. Speakers include Maureen Sullivan, Massimo Faggioli, Carl McColman, Joseph Favazza and Peter Judge. In-person and virtual options. For more information contact the Center at oratorycenter@gmail.com or visit the Oratory website at www.rockhilloratory.org/events.

‘I Believe in the Beatitudes’

Remembering Thomas C. Cornell

PATRICK JORDAN

Tom Cornell, 2007

CNS PHOTO/JOHN THAVIS

The illustration on the program for the funeral Mass for Thomas C. Cornell said it all. A colorful mandala by *Commonweal* and *Catholic Worker* artist Rita Corbin declared—and illustrated—“Pray, Study, Work for Peace & Justice.” Tom Cornell, who died on August 1, had done precisely that nearly every day of his eighty-eight years.

A graduate of Jesuit schools with a New England upbringing, Cornell arrived at New York’s Catholic Worker headquarters in 1962. He had read Dorothy Day’s *The Long Loneliness* in college, had heard her speak, and had applied for his conscientious-objector status, which he finally received after a four-year delay. (It took that long because, at the time, “Catholic conscientious objector” seemed an oxymoron to his local draft board.)

On coming to New York, Cornell was immediately dragooned by Day into editing the *Catholic Worker* paper, an on-the-job training assignment at which he quickly excelled. But life at the Worker included far more than correcting galleys and laying out the pages. It required living with the poor in poor circumstances, serving countless meals, welcoming waves of guests and seekers, and publicly demonstrating against war and other injustices. As an editor, Cornell interviewed striking mine workers, traveled to Alabama to cover civil-rights developments, demonstrated at a nuclear submarine base, and personally inaugurated the first public protest against the Vietnam War—all in his first year and a half at the Catholic Worker.

Still, there was community life to be lived—and redeemed—on a daily basis, and Tom had an eye for reporting on that as well. As he noted, the atmosphere at the Chrystie Street house was "tremendously dynamic." To prove his point, he begins a 1963 column by describing the sound of shattering glass from the Worker's first-floor storefront window, "a window we replace often." The column then transitions to a scene at New York's Centre Street courthouse. Here Tom accompanies a young Beat poet to a court hearing. The man's name is Szabo. An illustration accompanying the article—unusual for the *Catholic Worker* paper—highlights the young poet's Elvis-like features and Fonzie-like carriage. Significantly, he sports a large crucifix around his neck.

Tom reports that the first thing he hears walking through the marble corridors is the booming voice of a red-faced Irish cop. "Hey kid," yells the officer at Szabo, "What are you wearing that crucifix for?"

"Well, it's like I feel an identification with Jesus," the young man replies.

Policeman: "What do you mean by that?"

Szabo: "I believe in the Beatitudes."

Policeman (laughing uproariously): "It sounds like a pretty shitty organization to me!"

Whether writing or speaking, Tom would often offset his ingrained "New England conservative instincts" with a wry—and sometimes ribald—humor. At the end of that "Chrystie Street" column, he returns to the scene of the shattered window. But now he describes a different sound: "There's quite a racket downstairs," he relates. "The fellow who broke the window just came back and kicked down the door."

That same year at the Catholic Worker, Tom met and fell in love with Monica Ribar. They married the following year. At the time, Tom was helping to cofound the Catholic Peace Fellowship (CPF); years later he would also be involved in launching Pax Christi USA. Under the auspices of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the CPF counseled hundreds of young men during the Vietnam era to follow their conscience in making decisions about the war. Tom became a mentor to many young men, some of whom remained lifelong friends. At the same time, he continued his active involvement in civil-rights issues and antiwar demonstrations. He marched with Dr. King in Selma in 1965, and burned his draft card on several occasions that year. (He had the chutzpah to ask his draft board for a replacement card so that he could burn it again.) To protest a new draconian law passed to deter such actions (penalties of up to five years in jail and a $10,000 fine), Tom helped organize a huge rally in New York's Union Square. It was there, on November 6, 1965, that he read a searing statement lamenting that the "grave crime" listed in the new statute was not "the destruction of life but the destruction of a piece of paper." His speech was met with threats by a group of counter-demonstrators who yelled derisively: "Burn your bodies, not your cards!" (Tom would later serve six months in federal prison for burning his card.) Part of Tom's statement that day appeared in *Commonweal*, accompanied by the editors' call for an immediate end to all bombing of North Vietnam.

But these are simply sketches from the earliest chapters of Tom's long, peripatetic life of protest, witness, dissent, welcome, and pilgrimage. Over the course of the next sixty years, he worked with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, ran a Catholic Worker house of hospitality in Waterbury, Connecticut, traveled the world on peace missions, advised the U.S. bishops on their 1983 pastoral letter on war, raised two remarkable children (and later delighted in five grandchildren), was ordained a Catholic deacon, and, for the last thirty years of his life, lived and worked with Monica at the Catholic Worker farm in upstate New York.

Tom had a strong background in Latin, which he enjoyed brandishing, and a finely trained analytical mind. He put these to work, in season and out, as a writer and speaker, defining and then defending such quixotic notions as anarchism, decentralism, the sacredness of life at all stages, and nonviolent unilateral disarmament. He was always ready to encourage others but was also ready to correct and enlighten when necessary. For example, he reported for *Commonweal* on a 1968 meeting in St. Louis of a group of American Catholics called the National Committee on Catholic Concerns. He concluded bluntly that it had not clarified the issues under discussion, let alone "come to grips with serious and urgent proposals" raised by the group itself.

Tom admitted having what he called a "Jesuit hard head," and was always happy to bring it to bear when editing others, including Dorothy Day. He took pride in correcting her syntax (not always to her liking), and sometimes deleted elements of her rambling style. Yet he readily admitted that her columns held vast treasures: whole paragraphs of incredible insight and understanding, which were an invitation to self-reflection and delight. He judged rightly when he commented that their spiritual depth had "the power that you associate with an Avila."

In his last years, Tom suffered greatly from the effects of shingles and a chronic, exquisitely painful neuropathy. Still, he carried on, welcoming guests to the Catholic Worker farm ("this incomparable community"), helping edit the *Catholic Worker* paper, being present to his family, serving as a deacon, mentor, and member of the board of the guild for the canonization of Dorothy Day, and planting trays of onion seeds when confined to sitting on the front porch. His final published words in the *Catholic Worker* (August-September 2022) were a riff on Catholic Worker anarchist Ammon Hennacy (d. 1970). The inimitable Hennacy, Tom wrote, was "sometimes a 'pain in the ass,'" but "he was always very dear." To the end, Tom could be both witty and appreciative.

He was buried on the feast of the deacon martyr, St. Lawrence. Like Lawrence, Tom had given his life daily in service of the Beatitudes. As St. Leo the Great said of Lawrence, so we can now say of Tom Cornell: "Let us rejoice…over the happy end of this illustrious man of God."

PATRICK JORDAN *served as a managing editor for the* Catholic Worker *and for* Commonweal.

SOUL DEEP

Jeff Fallis

I wake at five a.m. to find all the streetlights
In the neighborhood flashing.
There is no explanation. No one else sees it,
I have no one to share it with.

It is so hard to improvise a home
And make sure yourself is yourself.
Doo-wop floats through the window
Like blue cotton from another world.

My mind is on such intimate terms with tension
It does not know what to do with peace.
The darkness isn't a plot device: it's just there.
But the light is also. I don't understand it either.

My love is a river running soul deep! sing the Box Tops,
And I must not scoff at them for telling the truth.

JEFF FALLIS *'s poems and essays have appeared in the* Oxford American, Ploughshares, *the* American Poetry Review, B O DY, James Baldwin Review, *the* Iowa Review, *and elsewhere. He lives in Athens, Georgia, and teaches at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta.*

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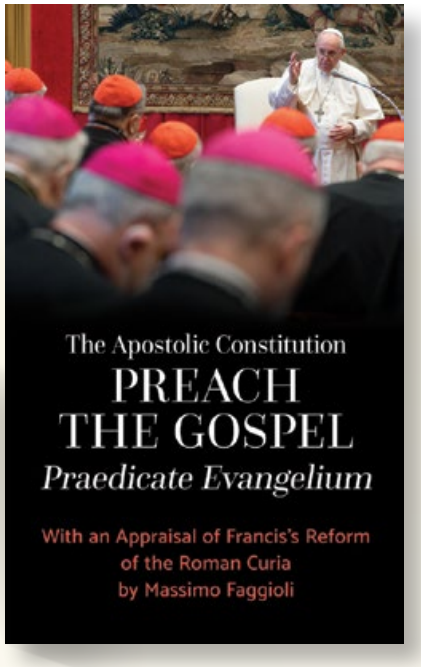

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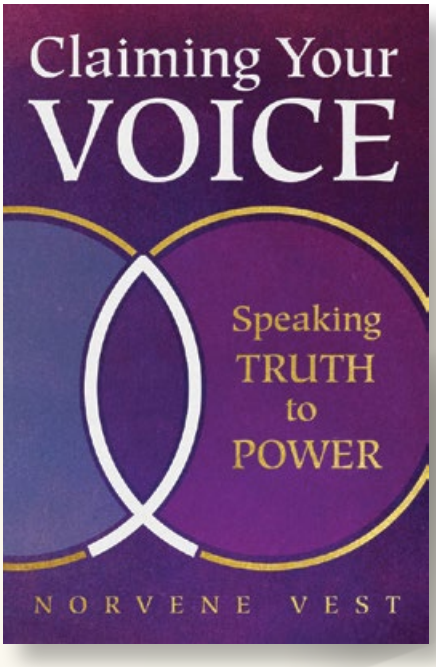

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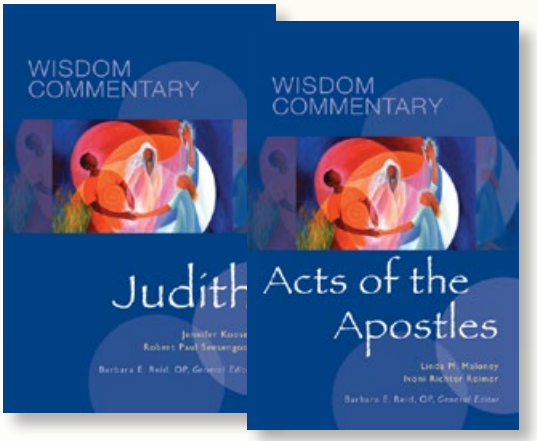

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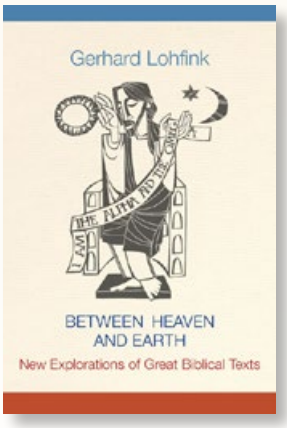

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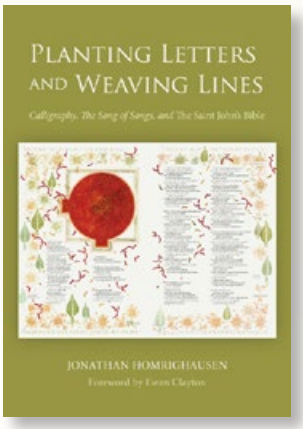

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