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THE DEAD END OF THE LEFT?
CARLO LANCELLOTTI ON AUGUSTO DEL NOCE

PATRICK JORDAN ON JOHN GARVEY
MARY MCDONOUGH ON LIFE-EXTENSION RESEARCH
GRIFFIN OLEYNICK ON ZURBARÁN

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LETTERS

Hart's translation, financial clericalism, etc.

CATASTROPHICALLY WRONG

My thanks to Luke Timothy Johnson for his generally benign review of my translation of the New Testament ("No Compromises," March 9). It was as I expected. Reviews by New Testament scholars, whether favorable or unfavorable, would invariably devolve into catalogues of demurrals regarding particular word choices. Certified experts do tend to have strong preferences regarding their fields. And I, alas, as a humble classicist (among other things), enter this arena with a different collection of weapons. Even so, I have to say that, to my mind, my choices are better than Johnson's in pretty much every case—especially those where he suggests that I "[miss] the meaning of the Greek." (That is not possible.)

Some of my choices—those regarding the terms *aionios, loudaios, dikaios*—I deal with at length in my critical apparatus, and cannot address here. But a few trivial observations are worth making: In Mark 15:10, Johnson thinks I should have translated *phthonos* as "envy" rather than "malice"; it is hard to say why, though, since the latter is far closer to the word's most common connotation, and nothing in the text makes the former more plausible. He censures my use of the word "mind" in Philippians 2:5's *touto phroneite* ("be of that mind") on the grounds that the Greek does not include the word *nous* (at least, I guess that's his point). He does not like "good tidings" for *evangelion*, but his ear and mine simply do not agree there. He thinks *hypokrites* better rendered as "hypocrite" than as "charlatan"; but, for us, the former is often only someone whose deeds contradict his words, whereas the Greek word carries a very definite connotation of theatrical public imposture and exhibitionism as well. For the word *porneia*, Johnson prefers the boringly sanitized phrase "sexual immorality" to my chosen term, "whoring"; but the latter is the more accurate translation, in both meaning and tone. And he does not like "blissful" for *makarios* (many don't), because for him the word "bliss" summons up images of "stoners and gurus." Well…yes. For me the word carries a far richer range of literary and religious associations; still, Johnson's observation is, as it happens, correct as far as it goes: "bliss" suggests not mere complacent material happiness or good fortune, but rather something like ecstatic transport or giddy ebullience. That is why my choice is correct. More consequentially, Johnson thinks that I should translate the phrase *ean me* in Galatians 2:16 not as "but" (one is "vindicated not by observance of law but by the faithfulness of the Anointed One Jesus"), but rather as "except" (which is usually the more literal rendering). Believe me, I would do just that if I could, especially if some handy present subjunctive verb followed; but that would contradict the clear meaning of basically everything else Paul says in Galatians. Here the phrase applies to the verb "vindicated" (*dikaioutai*) alone, and reinforces its negative (*ou*) relation to "observance." The best I can manage as an even more literal rendering of Paul's awkward phrasing would be: "If not by the faithfulness of the Anointed One Jesus, neither by observance of Law will a human being be vindicated." And, finally, Johnson claims that nothing is gained by my choice to transliterate the word *kosmos* as "cosmos" rather than to translate it as "world." He could not be more catastrophically wrong. For us, the "world" is either this planet we live on or the totality of human society. But in the New Testament the word *kosmos* almost always refers to the entire universe of physical, spiritual, terrestrial, and celestial reality—angels and demons no less than human beings and animals, planetary and astral heavens no less than

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sea and land. When the fourth Gospel's author describes Christ as the one who descends "from above" into this cosmos to overthrow both it and its "archon," or when Paul speaks of Christ's conquest of the cosmic rulers and powers on high—well, neither is speaking merely of what we mean by "world." By retaining the term "cosmos," absolutely everything is gained. And not to retain it is to obscure a very great deal about the world of the New Testament.

DAVID BENTLEY HART
South Bend, Ind.

LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON REPLIES: Readers of Hart's book (and translation) can evaluate my review, and then, if they are still awake, can make the judgment as to whether Hart's response to my review is actually a response or an artful exercise in evasion.

AN EASIER ANTIDOTE

William M. Shea's article ("Imagine There's No Clergy," January 26) is, of course, provocative and intriguing. His assertion that clericism has led to "rolling waves of disappointment" such as the Reformation, the silence of the hierarchy during the Nazi persecution of WWII, the anti-modern crusade of nineteenth-century popes, etc., is compelling. It leads him to his remedies which are, among other things, ending the ontological sign of ordination, ending the accoutrements of sacred office, and ending Christendom.

I would like to kindly and gently suggest to Shea that he read Yves Congar's book *Good and Bad Reform in the Catholic Church,* which outlines four major criteria for good church reform. Maybe you could square-peg-round-hole Shea's reforms into Congar's criteria, but you would probably bang your thumb in the process.

More importantly, Peter Steinfels's areas of reform outlined in an article he wrote for *Commonweal* in 2012 ("What We've Learned," August 2017) are easier to understand and implement. They are the areas of governance, accountability, and transparency. The Canon Law Society of America, for instance, addressed the area of governance in its October 2014 Survey of (Arch) Diocesan/Eparchiel Finance Councils.

Similarly, the Finance Working Group of Voice of the Faithful published a survey of the (Arch)dioceses of the United States in November 2017 with regard to financial transparency. It ranked the dioceses based on ten questions that were assigned numerical weights. The total weight dioceses could achieve was sixty. The dioceses were then ranked from highest to lowest.

We need only look as far as Canons 492, 493, and 494 to see that had the dioceses followed canon law with regard to full disclosure of financial information, to include the (undisclosed) settlement payments to survivors, and had the bishops followed canon law with regard to obtaining "consent" from their finance councils for those "extraordinary" payments, according to canon law, the scandal and sin and sickness of abuse of children would not have persisted as long as it did.

JOSEPH F. FINN JR.
Wellesley Hills, Mass.

LISTEN

Cassandra Nelson's "Bracing for Impact" (February 9) nailed the process of recovery from childhood sexual abuse. Facing a deep unearthing of pain is essential to heal over and over again. As a psychotherapist in private practice as well as a survivor of sexual abuse, I am comforted by her writing, her truth-telling. Her recovery mirrors mine and I am grateful.

What can be tough is the judgment that others wield against survivors of sexual abuse: "There must be something about her that sets the stage for the abuse." "Why didn't she tell a trusted adult or teacher?" "How can she be so successful and in loving relationships and also have good friends with that abuse history?"

It takes courage to heal, hard emotional work, the willingness to be open with a trusted therapist and good friends. My faith was the bedrock of my healing and continues to be.

These stories need to be told even though it may be hard for others to hear and respond. Listen gently, with the respect and care a young child deserves when she has had to carry the heavy burden of sexual secrets too gruesome to disclose until it is safe—saved by the passing of time, the death of her perpetrator, and mostly, the emotional space to release her pain and heal.

PATRICIA GALLAGHER MARCHANT
Franklin, Wisc.

From the Editors

Striking for Survival

Nearly three decades ago, the labor lawyer Thomas Geoghegan determined it had become "insane" for American workers to go on strike. Observing the weakening of organized labor during the Reagan and Bush years, and the failure of numerous high-profile stoppages to achieve their aims, he gloomily concluded: "Every strike ends in disaster." Unions grew increasingly reluctant to resort to walkouts, and since then, as Jake Rosenfeld wrote in *What Unions No Longer Do* (2014), "labor's most powerful and prominent weapon in wage and benefit negotiations has nearly vanished from the American economic landscape."

But public-school teachers in West Virginia recently issued a reminder of just what a well-executed, wide-scale walkout can accomplish. Without collective bargaining powers or the legal right to go on strike, some twenty thousand teachers left their jobs in early February to protest stagnant wages, dwindling benefits, and cuts in education funding. It was one of the rare statewide teacher strikes in U.S. history, and its size and scope proved critical. Drawing on their state's ancestral tradition of coalminer activism, strikers took an "all-in-or-nothing" approach, while using social media and crowdsourcing tactics to ensure solidarity among far-flung union members and win support from the public. Notably, a decentralized rank-and-file made up mostly of women managed the effort, sidestepping a cautious and seemingly slow-footed leadership to get what they wanted—not least, a 5 percent raise. It was a strategy that reportedly flummoxed legislators who were convinced a strike couldn't possibly be mounted, much less succeed.

That success has not gone unnoticed in states (many red) where years of tax and budget cuts, hostility to public employees, and disdain for the common good have exacted a damaging toll. Public-school teachers in Oklahoma, who have not received a raise since 2008, are set to strike on April 2, seeking not just better pay but also an end to decades of cuts in instructional funding that have scaled back academic offerings and eliminated numerous extracurricular programs. Teacher unions in Arizona and Kentucky have amped up their demands for pension protections and more educational funding. Importantly, residents of these states increasingly view the protests favorably, which seems to be getting the attention of elected officials.

The fortunes of labor also appeared to get a boost with the victory of Democrat Conor Lamb in a recent special election in Pennsylvania's eighteenth congressional district. Lamb, as an approving Joe Biden said at a campaign event, "is not afraid to say the word 'union,'" and indeed, the candidate made a point of reaching out to organized steelworkers and coalminers, who make up 20 percent of the district's electorate. Reminding voters that a statue of a union founder stands in his hometown Catholic church, Lamb has promised to protect pensions and benefits and to fight right-to-work legislation, which prevents unions from requiring workers to pay dues.

These are welcome developments, yet the overall picture remains sobering. Union membership has been in decline for decades, and today, only 6 percent of America's private-sector workforce is unionized. Of those in the public sector, slightly more than 30 percent are unionized, but twenty-eight states have enacted right-to-work laws, and many others have stripped public employees of collective-bargaining powers. Now the biggest threat to organized labor comes from the Supreme Court. In February, it heard oral arguments in *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees*, a challenge to the right of public-sector unions to charge compulsory fees to support collective bargaining. The U.S. bishops have filed an amicus brief on behalf of AFSCME, citing the encyclical *Caritas in veritate* in noting that right-to-work laws "represent a governmentally imposed 'limit [on] the freedom or the negotiating capacity of labor unions.'" The court split four-four on a similar case following the death of Justice Antonin Scalia in 2016, but with the arrival of Justice Neil Gorsuch, it is all but certain to side with the plaintiff when it rules on *Janus* in June. Many experts say the decision will have a devastating effect on public-sector workers.

In a March address at Seton Hall University, AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka forcefully reminded attendees of the prophetic, innovative mission of unions. Now would seem the time to embrace that mission with renewed purpose. West Virginia's teachers offer both a practical and inspirational example. Courageously proclaiming the dignity and importance of their work, fueled by grassroots political energy, they showed how to operate outside outmoded structures while harnessing new tools for mobilization and communication. This might be a template for meeting the challenges that now threaten the very existence of organized labor. ■

March 27, 2018

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Sleepwalking into Disaster

LESSONS FROM WORLD WAR I

One hundred years ago, in the spring of 1918, the Germans unleashed six-thousand artillery pieces and forty-four divisions of Stormtroopers on the British army in Belgium and France. The battle was General Erich Ludendorff's desperate grasp for victory—"the last role of the dice," as one historian calls it. At first, the attack succeeded. But then it didn't. One consequence was to compel U.S. General John Pershing to finally throw the weight of the newly minted American army into the fight lest the British and French armies collapse. The fresh troops notwithstanding, World War I dragged on until November 11 when Germany signed an armistice.

Though the U.S. army helped to turn the tide and President Woodrow Wilson was a central figure at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, World War I wasn't America's war. It wasn't to us, as it was to the British and the French, the "Great War." In the United States, what other countries call Remembrance Day was renamed Veterans Day, a catch-all celebrating veterans of all our wars, which may or may not be observed on the actual date of the armistice, November 11. We've moved on.

Over the past two years, our neighborhood World War I reading group has worked its way through several thousand pages of this history, beginning with the run-up to the war. Right now, we are mired in the postwar tangle: the collapse of three empires (Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Ottoman), the promise of self-determination to a variety of ethnic and national groups, the fog of reparations and indebtedness, and U.S. abandonment of the League of Nations with its promise of international security.

In college and graduate school, World War I was only a blip. Now it looms like the seminal event of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Not "the war to end war," as H. G. Wells wrote in 1915, but the seedbed of many wars. Or as a British officer observed of the Paris Peace Conference, "the peace to end peace."

When the guns fell silent in November 1918, they didn't fall silent everywhere. Fighting continued in Finland and Hungary, in Central and Eastern Europe, in Russia, and in the Ottoman Empire. Poland fought six wars to establish its borders. Ukraine struggled for independence from Bolshevik Russia. Ataturk battled the Allies to establish Turkey. It is a historical commonplace that Hitler's rise in Germany grew out of resentment over reparations, occupation of the Rhineland, loss of territory to Poland, and bitterness at the way Germany was treated by the Allies.

In 1945, the victors studiously avoided the mistakes of the Treaty of Versailles, but its detritus lingers. Promises of self-determination in 1919 were not extended to the far-flung colonies of Britain and France. The partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, a result of delayed hopes, ended in war and continues in the struggle over Kashmir. France's effort to retain control in Vietnam drew the United States into a futile war in the 1950s. (A young Ho Chi Minh tried to meet with President Wilson in Paris in 1919, hoping the American president would extend the principle of national self-determination to Asia.) The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 threw into doubt the 1919 settlements with respect to Ukraine, the Baltic nations, and the Sudetenland, and led the Czechs and Slovaks to dissolve their (unhappy) union. The Balkan Wars of the 1990s unraveled the 1919 creation of Yugoslavia. In 1992, Serbians shelled Sarajevo, where in July 1914 a Serbian nationalist assassinated Archduke Ferdinand of Austria.

Or consider today's wars in the Middle East. In 1916, the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement between Britain and France divided the Ottoman Empire into modern-day Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. The national boundaries drawn by Britain and France, and given international approval at Versailles, had more to do with satisfying Europe's balance of power than with the ethnic and religious divisions of the Middle East. Those boundaries are at least partly to blame for decades of conflict throughout the region.

So many wars, so much history! We pay too little attention to their causes, their consequences, their persistence—a miasma summed up in the title of one of the books our reading group read: *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*. Who are the sleepwalkers today? The centenary of World War I is a good time to think about that. ■

British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, Italian Premier Vittorio Orlando, French Premier Georges Clemenceau, and President Woodrow Wilson at the WWI Paris Peace Conference, May 27, 1919

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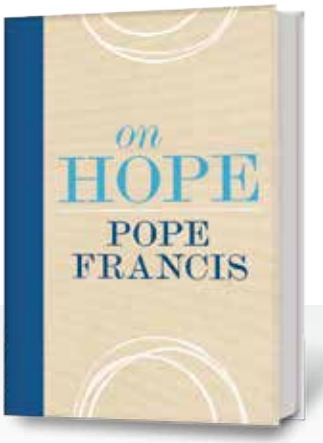

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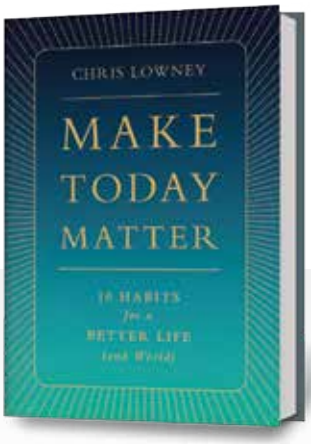

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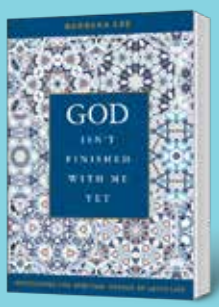

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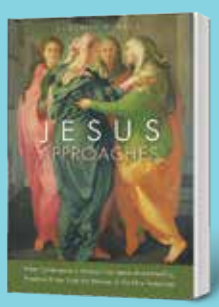

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Rita Ferrone

Sign Me Up

EASTER IS A BEGINNING, NOT AN ENDING

In the scriptures the number fifty is a mystical number. It is associated with deliverance. The jubilee year, described in the Book of Leviticus, was the fiftieth year: it was a time to set captives free, forgive debts, rejoice in the generosity of God, and imitate that generosity toward one another. Scripture scholars point out that we do not know if the jubilee year spoken of in the Bible was actually observed in history; there are no records to prove it. Yet it remained a powerful image of God's will for restorative justice among his people and care for the earth.

Easter is the Christian jubilee, the commemoration of our deliverance from death through the power of Christ's Resurrection. The fifty days of the Easter season bring us back to that same mystical number. This liturgical season is a week of weeks, plus the day of Pentecost. It is an experience of "the fullness of time," not merely a series of days that pass like any other. Easter is a time when Christians are called upon to remember that because of the resurrection we have entered into a new time—the era of redemption. Easter is the vessel of our hope for a renewed cosmos, too; it brings with it an eschatological vision of justice and restoration. If we are going to celebrate anything for an extended period of time, surely Easter is it.

There is a black spiritual that captures well the joy of the promised jubilee of God's redemption—something that is only capable of being realized in full "when Jesus comes":

> Sign me up for the Christian jubilee,
> Write my name on the roll.
> I've been changed, since the Lord has lifted me.
> I want to be ready when Jesus comes.

It might well be heard as a song in praise of baptism, too, as the newly baptized find their names "on the roll" of the Book of Life (Philippians 4:3). This song has been used in celebrations of the Rite of Election, when catechumens sign the book of the elect on their journey to Easter. That rite is filled with eschatological hope, as the catechumens draw near to the font of rebirth.

At the Paschal Vigil, death gives way to life in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation, and the jubilee truly begins. Fifty days of rejoicing, from Easter to Pentecost. Fifty days to marvel at the fact that Jesus is alive and in our midst. Fifty days to reflect on the wonderful truth that the risen Lord has called us and sends us out in mission through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sadly, the great fifty days of Easter are often celebrated rather weakly in our parishes. Despite excellent lectionary readings, and a rich tradition of Easter theology available to anyone who wants to seek it out, the Sunday assembly during the Easter season can easily slide into "business as usual." All sorts of things come up to distract us or take away from the focus on resurrection and new life that mark Easter as our most sacred season. The lilies wilt, our temporary baptismal fonts are rolled away, the choir goes on vacation, the neophytes blend into the congregation, and our attention turns to other things—spring break, Mother's Day, weddings, graduations, and the rest.

How can we recover a robust sense of the fifty days? Certainly, improving the quality of our liturgical celebrations can help. Strong, mystagogical preaching on the readings of Easter, for example, is essential. Liturgical ministries—especially music—must support the fifty days as a time of Easter joy. Catechesis on the liturgy and the lectionary readings can enrich the experience of the season. Praying the Hours, meditating on the Word, and celebrating the Eucharist returns us again and again to the center, the core of what the season is all about.

Yet we also need to cultivate a spirituality of Easter through action. Since the Second Vatican Council raised the concept of the Paschal Mystery to prominence as the central mystery we celebrate in the liturgy, the church has certainly "talked the talk" of death, resurrection, and glory. Yet beneath the surface I suspect that many faithful Catholics remain wedded to an individualistic spirituality centered on Good Friday, with only a sketchy idea of what Easter demands of us.

Perhaps we need to bring to Easter our hopes and dreams of jubilee. Our own debts have been cancelled, our slavery ended, and our losses restored by the sacrifice of Christ. How can we do the same for others? When we discover the answer to that question, Easter joy breaks out anew, and the promise of a new creation becomes concrete. ■

Fr. Souhail Khoury blesses a baby after Easter Monday Mass at St. Mary's Church in Iqrit, Israel, April 13, 2015.

CNS PHOTO / DEBBIE HILL

Joe Holland

Get Rid of the Clergy

BUT KEEP HOLY ORDERS

In their fascinating exchange on the clergy ("Imagine There's No Clergy," *Commonweal*, January 15), William M. Shea and David Cloutier seem unable to distinguish the "clerical state" from the "sacrament of orders." One author appears to seek elimination of both for the sake of evangelical renewal, while the other appears to seek preservation of both for the same reason.

Contrary to what appears to be the argument of both authors, the "sacrament of orders" and the "clerical state" are historically distinct and institutionally separable. During its first three centuries, the Greek-speaking church developed and sustained the "sacrament of orders" for *episcopoi*, *presbyteroi*, and *diaconoi* (bishops, presbyters, and deacons). But there was as yet no "clerical state." That came only in the fourth century, through the Constantinian fusion of the Catholic Church with the Roman Imperial State.

In that fusion, the leadership of the Roman Empire transferred imperial "hierarchical" privileges from the pagan priesthood to the ordained servant-leaders of the Catholic Church. The new imperial "clergy" were legally empowered to rule over the non-clerical "laity." Prior to this development, the entire church (meaning both ordained servant-leaders and the entire membership) had been understood as both sacredly lay (the holy *laos*) and as divinely chosen (the holy *kleros*).

Since the sacrament of orders and the clerical state are historically distinct, the former having existed for three centuries without the latter, that means they are also institutionally separable. Indeed, in the Western Church canon law recognizes the distinction between the sacrament of orders and the clerical state. When Roman Catholic priests decide to marry, they may apply for a "reduction" to the lay state. This reduction removes them from the clerical state but, according to official church teaching, they remain ordained priests "ontologically."

In short, the sacrament of orders is of apostolic origin, while the "clerical state" is a fourth-century legal construction by the Roman Empire. Later, in the eleventh century, the Western Catholic clergy were further segregated from the laity when the papacy imposed mandatory celibacy on all diocesan presbyters and bishops in the West. (By so doing, the papacy also forced many wives of bishops and presbyters into homelessness, slavery, or even suicide. See Anne Llewellyn Barstow's book *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy*.)

Then, in the sixteenth century, the Council of Trent segregated the clergy still more by mandating formation in monastery-like clerical seminaries. These structures uprooted candidates for ordination from their original lay communities of kinship and friendship, prepared them to become part of a "chosen" clerical caste, and molded them for work as interchangeable parts within a standardized and often-impersonal ecclesiastical bureaucracy.

Today, across the Americas and elsewhere, Western Catholics are flooding out of often stagnant Catholic parishes into more dynamic Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations, whose pastors long ago returned to the original apostolic model of non-clerical and lay servant-leadership. In general, these lay pastors relate much more effectively to the lay experiences and spiritual needs of the wider *laos* that they serve.

Of course, from a Catholic perspective, these churches also suffer from serious theological problems, including biblical literalism and the so-called "Gospel of Prosperity." And all too often these churches support patriarchy and authoritarian governments. But the Catholic Church can still learn from their non-clerical model of pastoral ministry, with its clear roots in the presbyterate of the early church.

The clerical enculturations of the Roman Catholic presbyterate, which have developed in stages since the fourth century, now need to be dismantled for the sake of twenty-first-century global evangelization. The sacrament of orders needs to be rescued from the legal overlay of clericalism that today blocks its spiritual power and fosters a bureaucratized caste system. At the same time, the entire Catholic *laos* needs to recover its apostolic mission and sacred identity, which clericalism has frequently obscured. Declericalizing the Western Church would not secularize it—or desacramentalize it, as David Cloutier fears. On the contrary, it would return the church to its roots and remind it that the entire *laos* is sacred and chosen.

Pope Francis has rightly challenged "clericalism" across the Western Church, but he seems to regard it only as a problem of attitude. Rather, it is a structural problem with deep historical roots, and one that reproduces itself from one generation to the next. If we are serious about moving beyond clericalism, and not just lamenting it, we can begin by distinguishing between the sacrament of orders, which we still need, and the clerical state, which we would be better off without. ■

Joe Holland *is the author of* The Cruel Eleventh-Century Imposition of Western Clerical Celibacy *(Pacem in Terris Press).*

Mary McDonough

Cheating Death

THE PERILS OF ANTI-AGING RESEARCH

Jesus revolutionized the meaning of dying. For Christians everywhere, the dawn of Easter morning reminds us of his triumph over death. Our belief in the resurrection of the body is the core of our Christian faith. But what if we could radically extend our life spans? Or even prolong life indefinitely?

A number of Silicon Valley entrepreneurs are currently waging a war on death. In the past few years, these "visionaries" have funded companies aimed at radically extending our longevity. One of the earliest enthusiasts, British biomedical gerontologist Aubrey de Grey, started a company called SENS Research whose mission is to find a way to extend the healthy human life span by hundreds of years. In 2013, Bill Maris, the creator and CEO of Google Ventures, convinced the founders of Google to start a company called Calico Labs. Funded with a billion dollars, the company's goal is to study the biology of aging and develop life-extending drugs.

Then in 2014, Craig Venter, famous for his work sequencing the human genome, established Human Longevity, Inc., a company whose goal is to amass a huge database of human genome sequences for use in life-extension research. Even Facebook's founder, Mark Zuckerberg, has gotten into the prolonging-life business. He and his physician wife, Priscilla, have pledged to donate more than $3 billion toward a plan to "cure, prevent, or manage all disease within our children's lifetime."

It is important to note that this research is not directed at eradicating the kind of deaths we would see as tragic—the type of cruel illness that cuts short the life of a child, or a controllable disease, such as malaria, that disproportionately affects the global poor. Instead, the goal of longevity research is to dramatically increase the human lifespan.

The mysteries surrounding how and why we age have not been unraveled. Scientists cannot even agree on the exact cause of aging, much less on the possibility of controlling it. Some experts believe the biological aging process is caused by the switching on and off of certain genes. Others think genetic mutations occur and accumulate with increasing age, causing cellular and molecular deterioration. Numerous other theories abound. Regardless, efforts to delay aging—a phrase many researchers prefer to anti-aging—have delivered little success. One drug, Metformin, long used to treat type 2 diabetes, has modified aging in some animals. But so far it is hard to find much else that shows promise in this area of research; and nothing for humans. Hovering over that effort, however, and reflected in the debate about what to even call the research, is a long-standing argument among some leading researchers on aging: Will it ever be possible to radically extend life expectancy? One group says no; another says yes. Many of the most ambitious scientists and entrepreneurs, ever optimistic, are not part of that debate.

To some people life-extension research may seem like a perfectly good idea. If we could eradicate all disease and use

The Death of Adam *by Piero della Francesca*

anti-aging drugs to enable people to live to two hundred years old, or even indefinitely, what a great world it would be. Sounds like the Garden of Eden before the Fall. But is it? Do we really want to do battle with death? Medicine itself has long carried on such a struggle, but has accepted death as an unavoidable part of human life.

The dream of living forever has been around as long as people have confronted death. Legends dating back as far as 3000 BC tell tales of the human quest for immortality. For Christians, the Risen Christ is the principle and source of our own future resurrections. St. Paul eloquently describes this doctrine: "We have died with Christ. We believe that we shall also live with him. We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him." Or, as my former theology professor would often say, "Death does not have the last word."

Still, the Catholic Church acknowledges that even the most faith-filled Christians often face the finality of death with great fear. In *Gaudium et spes* the Second Vatican Council astutely observes: "It is in the face of death that the riddle of human existence becomes most acute. Not only is man tortured by pain and by the advancing deterioration of his body, but even more by a dread of perpetual extinction. He rightly follows the intuition of his heart when he abhors and repudiates the absolute ruin and total disappearance of his own person." Given this insight, can we really criticize a group of entrepreneurs who yearn for an extended lifespan? After all, are their desires that much different than those of Christians who seek everlasting life with God?

There is indeed a difference. While the science behind life-extending technologies is uncertain, one thing is clear: life-extension proponents ignore potential ethical consequences. They do not ask: What if we succeed? What will our life and community be like? They could learn a lot from Catholic social teaching with its emphasis on the common good. We live in communities made up of interdependent political, social, and economic structures, each necessary for, and each influencing, our human existence. The good of the greater community, therefore, is as important as the good of the individual. Accordingly, in order to evaluate radical life extension we must ask: Would longevity technology benefit the community? Our individual lives? Would it make the world better, families stronger, alleviate poverty, end war, or bring us closer to God? Hardly.

While we can only imagine a world where people live past 150 and perhaps far longer, we can predict some consequences with a fair amount of confidence. If we rid the world of disease and death, the resulting rise in population will have devastating consequences for our planet. The UN projects an increase of human population growth from 7.2 billion now to 11 billion by 2100. That growth is a major contributor to global warming. More people means more demand for oil, gas, coal, and other fuels. When burned, these fuels spew enough carbon dioxide into the atmosphere to trap warm air inside like a greenhouse, causing extreme weather such as flooding and wildfires. Extreme weather results in, among other things, reduced crop yields causing food shortages. Another impact of global warming is a reduction in the availability of fresh water. Droughts are lethal. According to the World Economic Forum, since 1900 global droughts have caused over 11 million deaths.

Aside from the disastrous environmental impact, we cannot ignore social and economic consequences. It would be impossible for government programs, health-care systems, infrastructure facilities, pension systems, and employment markets to accommodate the ever-increasing population. We also cannot neglect the implications for social justice. Who will have access to life-extending technologies? Would only the wealthy be able to afford them? If so, would the poor then have significantly shorter lifespans than the rich? If we think the gap between the rich and poor is wide now, imagine a world in which the wealthy can buy longer lives than the poor.

Rather than spending billions of dollars and hours of precious scientific research obsessing over how long we might extend our lifespans, life-extension proponents should instead concentrate on how they can improve the world in which we live right now. In a 2015 speech to the UN, Pope Francis outlined his vision of sustainable global development. He listed several goals on which communities should focus, including: education of children (particularly girls), alleviation of poverty, protection of the environment, construction of adequate housing, and creation of decent jobs. But, according to the pope, the most important mission of all is never to forget "that political and economic activity is only effective when it is understood as a prudential activity, guided by a perennial concept of justice and constantly conscious of the fact that, above and beyond our plans and programs, we are dealing with real men and women who live, struggle, and suffer, and are often forced to live in great poverty, deprived of all rights."

Silicon Valley life-extension funders should rethink their research. In a world full of poverty, starvation, human-rights violations, terrorism, and many other evils, life-prolonging technology is not a cause worth fighting for. It would be far better if this group of very fortunate, wealthy individuals would finally begin to consider the ethical consequences of their research and put their money into causes that would improve global problems, not make them worse. ■

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‘Constant in the Struggle’

The Life & Writing of John Garvey

Patrick Jordan

For over four decades, John Garvey (1944–2015) was *Commonweal*’s “elemental” columnist. Under the title “Of Several Minds,” his entries covered a range of topics relating to culture, politics, and theology, and were invariably both readable and challenging. Those columns, as well as his occasional articles and book reviews, served for many as a veritable ballast for these pages. Whether writing about the hot-button issues of racism, euthanasia, abortion, birth control, or gay marriage; or discussing the novels of Philip Roth, the poetry of Richard Wilbur, or the paintings of Mark Rothko, John invariably ended up dealing with essentials: with first and lasting things, of this life and of life eternal. Year after year John was awarded the “Best Column” prize by the Catholic Press Association. It got to the point that David Toolan, SJ, an editor at both *Commonweal* and *America*, remarked the prize should simply be renamed The Garvey Trophy. “As a writer,” a contest judge once noted, “Garvey has wit and style; as a thinker he has depth.” John’s writing was suffused with a deep and hard-earned Christian faith, but never an unquestioning one.

John Garvey, 1997

John was born in Decatur, Illinois, in 1944, the oldest of nine children. Soon thereafter, his family moved to Springfield, Illinois, where his father and an uncle founded Templegate Publishers, a small Catholic book firm that continues to this day. The Garvey family lived on the outskirts of town, and as a boy John used to cross the road from the house and climb a tree that towered over adjacent fields. From up in its branches he could scan as far as the Midwestern horizon allowed. One day, a violent windstorm kicked up just as he reached the top of the tree, and he had to cling on for dear life. Many years later, John wrote that this experience had been formative: it opened an expansive philosophical and theological sensibility that never left him.

John’s schooling at St. Agnes Catholic School was interrupted at age seven, when he developed a rare blood disorder and nearly died. He missed school for over a year, but his convalescence allowed him to become an avid reader. He was especially attracted to comics, Norse mythology, and science fiction; once back in class, he read the school library’s sole sci-fi novel thirteen times. (When his mother awoke him one morning with news that the Soviets had launched the first satellite, John’s immediate question was whether it was “conical or spherical.”) After grammar school, John attended an all-boys Catholic high school. Like so many Catholic boys at the time, he seriously considered becoming a priest. (One of his uncles was ordained.) It was during this impressionable time, when John was fifteen, that the Garvey family suffered a catastrophic loss: the sudden death

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of John's eighteen-month-old sister, Grace. Her death had a profound and enduring effect on him, shaping his understanding of life's fragility.

In 1963, John entered the highly selective general-studies program at the University of Notre Dame. Returning to Springfield the summer after his freshman year, he decided to look up Regina Carbonell, whom he had briefly dated during high school, and who had remained in Springfield to study music at the community college. Though John was entertaining the possibility of a monastic vocation, when he returned to Notre Dame in the fall, he began corresponding with Regina. The subsequent exchange of letters changed their lives. As John later recounted, somewhat shamefacedly, he found himself standing in a chapel praying: "If You want me to be a monk, Lord, You have to make it really clear.... I don't seem to be heading in that direction."

For John, the general-studies program proved the right fit, its great-books curriculum coupling independent study with extensive expository writing assignments. Studying under such legendary mentors as Frank O'Malley and the priest-theologian John Dunne, he perfected his talents as a voracious reader, note-taker, and budding raconteur. In June 1967, immediately after graduation, Regina and John were married. He was twenty-three and an objector to the Vietnam War. The following year, he taught literature and theology at a Catholic high school in Mishiwaka, Indiana, not far from South Bend. It was during this period that he and Regina became friends with Henri Nouwen, who had just arrived at Notre Dame (John would later edit an anthology of Nouwen's writings for Templegate). And it was here that the Garveys' first child, Maria, was born. Two months premature, she endured a life-or-death struggle for survival. John would later write about the revelatory nature of this experience: how it disclosed a love that can make you willing to give up your life for another.

The Garveys then returned to Springfield, where their son Hugh was born, and where John worked as an editor for Templegate, while Regina taught piano. It was in Springfield that the young family was befriended by the feisty Chicago Catholic editor and publisher, Dan Herr. His Thomas More Press would publish John's first book, *Saints for Confused Times*, and Herr's magazine, the *Critic*, began printing John's articles. By 1973, John's writing had come to the attention of the editors of *Commonweal*, who first asked him to write reviews and articles, and then, in 1976, to join the ranks of the magazine's columnists, which included the likes of Thomas Powers, now a regular contributor to the *New York Review of Books*, and Abigail McCarthy, wife of Senator Eugene McCarthy, also a *Commonweal* contributor.

Writing for Herr and for *Commonweal* provided John with little more than "oatmeal" money. So he began working in the public-relations office at Sangamon State University, then shifted to part-time work at Springfield's famed Lincoln Library so that he could devote more time to his writing. In the mid-1980s, he applied for a staff position with the Republican membership of the Illinois State Legislature. He got the job—thanks in part to a senior member of the hiring staff who admired his *Commonweal* column. The nonpartisan position involved writing papers on the fiscal impact of legislative proposals, a task requiring sharp research and analytical skills. Decades later, asked to write a critical report on the finances of a troubled eparchy of the Orthodox Church, John said it was his number-crunching for the Illinois legislature that gave him the wherewithal to do it.

In politics—which he considered something of a game, one in which you had better know the rules if you intended to play—he maintained a Midwestern libertarian bent. This gave him a flexibility that allowed him to shed and shred most ideological straitjackets, which he did with alacrity.

But John's greatest, indeed lifelong, work was his odyssey from Catholicism to Orthodoxy, and his explication of the holy mysteries stemming from that experience. Readers can discover this journey by rereading his early *Commonweal* columns. In December 1984, when he announced in the magazine that he had taken this step, he did so with characteristic directness. Leaving Catholicism was not so much a rejection of his Catholic faith, he said, as a truer understanding of what the gospels and tradition required of him. His hope, he wrote, was to experience and practice a deeper sense of prayer, mystery, and self-sacrifice.

John was never attracted to what medieval Scholastics called "accidentals." The sincere disagreements he had with Catholicism—over issues like papal infallibility, Augustine's understanding of Original Sin, and church teachings on birth control and homosexuality—were not the driving forces in his becoming Orthodox. Nor was he attracted to what he called Orthodoxy's own brand of spiritual triumphalism, to its clerical intrigues (he said that church politics interested him about as much as cricket), or to its curious marriage with various nationalisms. Rather, he was drawn

by Orthodoxy's liturgy, the importance monasticism plays in its prayer life, and to its forms of communal governance (*sobornost* or "conciliarity"). In an article for the *Critic*, John underscored Orthodoxy's emphasis on "the responsibility of all believers for the fullness of faith." Even the teaching of an ecumenical council, he wrote, "cannot claim to be finally authoritative…until it is accepted by the people." He was also drawn to the role asceticism plays in freeing human nature to seek communion with the divine, and to the care this practice inspires toward others. John had a clear sense—expressed often in his writing—that religion can become idolatrous; that its practices and structures can erect barriers to our experience of the Divine Presence. His life work involved finding ways to surmount these barriers.

In 1990, John, a quintessential Midwesterner who had grown up reading Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, decided to move east—not to seek fortune, but rather to further his understanding of Orthodoxy by attending St. Vladimir's Seminary, near New York City. In 1993 he received his Master of Divinity degree. But before his studies were completed, he was directed on a totally different path, one he had neither sought nor anticipated. At St. Vladimir's, John's intellect and maturity—as well as his Irish wit and human touch—quickly became apparent. The faculty included such theological giants as John Meyendorff and Thomas Hopko. In Orthodoxy, ordination to the priesthood is not merely a self-determined choice or "vocation." Rather, it is understood as a calling to ordained ministry by the whole community itself. Therefore, it was both a surprise and an obedience, a call to submission, when Meyendorff told John in 1992 that he would soon be ordained a priest—to serve at the nearby military academy at West Point.

John could not help but see the irony. To be sure, over the years his thinking about nonviolence would evolve from a near-absolute pacifist stance to a more nuanced position that recognized a moral obligation to protect the innocent, maybe even at the price of shedding blood oneself. Additionally, he found compelling Orthodoxy's understanding that killing, even when done in self-defense or in service of one's country, is always sinful; and that consequently it demands confession, serious penance, and even abstinence from the Eucharist. Still, John had little doubt about the serious challenges presented by Jesus' teaching on violence, let alone enfleshed in his suffering and death. And so there it was: God the trickster, as John once described God's role in the story of Job, telling John—the pacifist—to cross the Hudson and enter the Promised Land at West Point.

John Garvey's forty years of *Commonweal* columns cover a trove of subjects, many of them still highly relevant today. I was fortunate to be one of his editors. When I first started working with him—well into his *Commonweal* tenure—my questions, queries, and suggestions were met with a bemused but gentlemanly diffidence. With time, and thanks to John's restraint and charity, he came

Garvey as an undergraduate at Notre Dame

to (generally) welcome what I had to offer. After that, our frequent phone conversations became occasions for wide-ranging discussion, laughter, and what I can only describe as the pleasurable experience of John's benevolent well-being. In fact, one of my hardest tasks at *Commonweal* was having to end a phone conversation with John because we were on deadline. Even then, his laughter would continue ringing in my ears.

John's interests were many, but they never seemed esoteric. He brought his intellect and historical awareness to all of them. The big issues of the times—the ones often avoided in popular discussions and the media—were his bread and butter. He was primarily a Christian humanist, tilting at the various windmills of our mad, materialist culture. In politics—which he considered something of a game, one in which you had better know the rules if you intended to play—he maintained a Midwestern libertarian bent. This gave him a flexibility that allowed him to shed and shred most ideological straitjackets, which he did with alacrity. He thought TV and the internet were lobotomizing the population; that Ronald Reagan was an affable fellow whose saber-rattling and trickle-down nostrums were leading the country over a precipice; that gay marriage was a matter of secular justice; and that a homosexual like W. H. Auden was "in most senses a healthier (and less 'objectively disordered') person than is the heterosexual Donald Trump." On

OTTER

I shine like a hairless fish,
or a tongue, but this is my pelt,
enclosing a secret's cunning—
winters in dark surf have given me
the silhouette of a wave rising
or just-spent, and the cold ocean
utters me like a whisper.
The sand-shark
cannot catch me. The rip-fanged moray
I leave behind, and your gaze, too,
is always tardy as you call

to your companions, aim the camera,
steady the binoculars for
another look. In my
better-than-hands the stone-shelled mollusc
is a morsel, and I pluck the flashing sand-dab
from her fathoms. I'm that name
you can't remember, the language you forgot,
the hope you knew would never come,
tide departing to return.

—Michael Cadnum

Michael Cadnum's Earthquake Murder, *a new book of short stories, will be published in 2018, and a collection of animal poems, many of which have appeared in* Commonweal, *is in progress.*

the other hand, he challenged Democrats for their lockstep position on abortion rights; fundamentalists of whatever stripe for their hypocrisy and intolerance; and Catholics who were so rigid, they wouldn't even *talk* about women's ordination. He cautioned about the hegemony of scientism and its "tone-deafness" concerning all that is incalculable and ineffable; and he bemoaned the culture's addiction to entertainment, advertising, and distraction.

John knew his own demons, and he would share them on occasion; his advice, quoting Leonard Cohen's "Anthem," was: "Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." He wrote of his depressions (what he called his "lifelong melancholia"), and of his anger; for years, he said, he lived "as if I were a clenched fist." Such feelings overshadowed him so fully at times, he said, that he did not even know they existed until after they had lifted. He told readers of his early smoking problem. He had started at age thirteen, emulating Raymond Chandler's detective Philip Marlowe, and only after "five years of false starts" did he finally shake the habit—at thirty. Writing in his mid-forties, he wittily advised readers to do as he had done over the course of his life: when young, he urged, they should "get as little exercise as possible, smoke, and drink too much"; later, when their clean-living counterparts were beginning to "experience the pull of gravity," they could give up smoking, be temperate in drink, watch their diet, and exercise. "You will feel better than you ever did," he quipped, "while they will feel much worse."

John liked to quote the humorist Mort Sahl and felt that humor is spiritually important: "it gives a better sense of real human scale than anything else I can think of." There were also the arts, both to write about and to luxuriate in. Literature and books were nearly sacramentals to him. "The best novelists, poets, and critics," he observed, "are more sensitive to our real climate than most theologians and philosophers." When John first read Rilke's *Duino Elegies* and Joyce's "The Dead," he recalled later, he knew that "in some way I was changed, and that if I didn't betray that moment, things would not be the same from now on." From his reading he culled quotations and ideas worth exploring, which he kept in copious notebooks. Sometimes these would coalesce into a column topic or serve as the lynchpin for an essay or a talk. His wife Regina recalls that John had a gift for extemporaneous speech, and that in conversation he always seemed to have just the right anecdote or quote at his fingertips. This was evident occasionally at a feast-day liturgy if none of the other clergy had prepared a homily. They would spontaneously look to John, who would quickly zero in on the day's readings and point to their practical significance.

This improvisational, off-the-cuff quality never made an appearance in John's columns or in his Sunday homilies. His columns invariably have a clear beginning, middle, and end. They typically open with an engaging sentence, outline two contrary views on a given topic, and finish with John's own nuanced, third alternative. He had the ability to incorporate an opponent's best arguments in his response, an approach he felt was essential to the practice of democracy, and which he applied to ecumenism and to interreligious dialogue. His book *Seeds of the Word: Orthodox Thinking and Other Religions* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005), presents not only the strengths of other theologies and belief systems, but their potential for helping one understand the riches of one's own tradition, and for addressing the broader spiritual and cultural needs of the time. John wrote pointedly about the need for a Roman Catholic pope who could really listen, "who could truly understand (even as he disagreed with) the many currents of thought in the whole of the Christian tradition." Of course, he added, such a pope would have to do more than just listen; but "deep listening…is an essential beginning."

John's Chrismation into Orthodoxy, as noted, was the fulfillment of a long and steady advance; his decision was twenty-one years in the making, a period nearly equaling

his subsequent twenty-two years as an Orthodox priest. One crucial moment in that process was a meeting he and Regina had in London with Metropolitan Anthony Bloom. As John recalled in a 1983 *Commonweal* essay, meeting Bloom had "conveyed a sense of what it means to be a Christian." A few years later he wrote again about Bloom, describing him as "a man whose God-filled quality was startling." He went on to observe that Bloom's "most keen awareness is of spiritual struggle, and his own failure to be what he is called to be. He is a great help to many people; but this is not because he has attained a form of mastery they lack, but because he has been more constant in the struggle." Bloom's presence threw John's entire life into relief, clarifying for him what "a sloppy and unfocused thing" it had been to that point. "This experience was not only not discouraging; it gave hope," he wrote. "For the first time I had a sense of what it could mean to be a Christian." After the Garveys returned from London, John came to realize that in good conscience he could no longer remain a Roman Catholic. In 1990, Regina followed him into Orthodoxy.

From the beginning, John's *Commonweal* columns evidenced an interest in theological matters and in a wide variety of spiritual conundrums. When he became Orthodox, those reflections became richer and even more evocative. Following his ordination in 1992 and subsequent assignment as pastor of St. Nicholas Albanian Orthodox Church in Queens, they took on an increasingly pastoral tone. John put in long hours with the sick and the dying, the grieved and the stranded. He became for them a steadfast companion—he said he experienced the Trinity at the parish coffee hour—and there grew in him a discernible tenderness. When it came to the issue of death, for example, he never sugar-coated its absolute finality; nor did he downplay the reality that suffering is inextricable from the human condition. Rather, he used these insights to instill hope, reflecting on the immense generosity of God's coming among us as a human being: a love so complete, he wrote, "it is joined to the cross." Some years after being made a pastor, he wrote a book on death, *Death and the Rest of Our Life* (Eerdmans, 2005). While short, it brings together years of reflection. One finishes the book wishing it had been longer. But, as John was wont to say, too many religious writers "try to explain too much."

Looking back now, it seems clear that John finished well before "explaining too much"—and certainly before his family, friends, and colleagues were ready. John and Regina had moved to Washington State in 2011, to be nearer to their children and four grandchildren. In 2012, he underwent intestinal surgery. All seemed well, but in 2014 John experienced what he called a lingering malaise. When he visited his doctor in early 2015, he was sent home without having raised immediate alarms. But the following night he vomited blood and collapsed. He was taken to the hospital, slipped into a semi-comatose state, and died six days later.

Unlike most of us, John was quite prepared for death. Discussing Christian hope in the face of death, he could be as straightforward as an actuary: "We must face the fact that death is as bad as it looks, that it is not simply a rite of passage. It is the loss of everything we have known."

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> No touch or taste or smell, nothing to think with,
> Nothing to love or link with
> The anaesthetic from which none come round.

John's own conviction was that our Christian faith and hope in Jesus' resurrection have less to do with fear of death and its finality than with a desire for life lived more abundantly. "Christians believe in a resurrected life so unlike this one as to be unimaginable," he wrote in 2011, pointing out that Jesus' Resurrection is significant not because it is unique, but because Jesus "is the first to rise of many brothers and sisters." So, in spite of death's finality, we await our completion, one substantiated by the resurrected Jesus. "We do not now, and never can, possess or control what we are finally meant to become," John wrote. "Someone who loves us more than we could possibly love ourselves is in charge of that."

And that is why, in every generation, we are given those who explicate, exemplify, and deepen our hope and understanding. John Garvey was an uncommon and delightful bearer of that reality. ■

The Dead End of the Left?

Augusto Del Noce's Critique of Modern Politics

Carlo Lancellotti

In the Summer of 1969, while Europe was still in the turmoil of the student rebellion that had started in France the year before, the prestigious French journal *Esprit* published an exchange between two of the best-known Catholic intellectuals of the time. One was Jean-Marie Domenach, who in 1957 had succeeded Emmanuel Mounier as editor of *Esprit* and de facto flagbearer of "progressive" French Catholicism. The other was Thomas Molnar, the distinguished Hungarian-American philosopher and historian (and a regular *Commonweal* contributor). Domenach regarded Molnar as a representative of the "intelligent right" and asked him to comment on the *impasse de la gauche*, the "dead end of the left," at the end of the 1960s. The resulting article, together with a long reply by Domenach and a brief rejoinder by Molnar, appeared in the July-August 1969 issue of *Esprit*.

It immediately attracted the attention of another important Catholic intellectual, the Italian philosopher Augusto Del Noce, who had the debate translated into Italian and published as a book, together with his own introductory essay. The Molnar-Domenach-Del Noce discussion, titled *Il vicolo cieco della sinistra*, is a unique document of the intra-Catholic debate at the end of the '60s, but it is also relevant to today's debates about the relationship between Catholicism and politics. In many ways, Western politics as we know it, and especially progressive politics, took shape at that time. That period saw the rise of the so-called New Left, a moniker that has been used to designate a broad array of political movements that privileged the advancement of individual "civil rights" (women's rights, gay rights, minority rights) over more traditional concerns of the left such as the condition of laborers, economic inequality, and unionization. As a symbolic turning point in the transformation of the left, historians in the United States often cite the memorable Democratic convention of 1972, in which activists influenced by the New Left gained influence at the expense of organized labor and other traditional constituencies of the party. But similar transformations were taking place in Europe, albeit less visibly—on the surface, European leftist parties remained committed throughout the 1970s to their traditional political cultures (either orthodox Marxism or forms of social democracy). Nonetheless, perceptive intellectuals like Del Noce could see that old-fashioned leftist politics were in a crisis.

Today, few outside of Italy—and not even many Italians—are familiar with Del Noce's work. But his intellectual journey exemplifies the experience of many European Catholics of his generation. Born in 1910, Del Noce had come of age under Fascism. In the 1930s Italian Catholicism had sought and found a *modus vivendi* with Mussolini's regime. While most Catholics were not Fascists, many thought that Fascism cold be "used" to defeat what they regarded as two great enemies of the church: bourgeois liberalism and revolutionary socialism. The young Del Noce disagreed because he believed that Fascism's violence was incompatible with Christianity. He had been greatly influenced by the work of Jacques Maritain, and especially by the 1936 book *Integral Humanism*, in which Maritain had decisively criticized "medievalism"—the view that Catholics should just reject modernity entirely to pursue the restoration of an integrally Christian society, inspired by the medieval ideal of a "sacred empire." Maritain rejected the idea of a Catholic-Fascist alliance and advocated a form of Christian humanism open to the positive contributions of modernity, including some aspects of Marxism.

The question of Catholic-Marxist dialogue would become urgent a few years later, when Europe became engulfed by war and barbarism. Some young Catholics of Del Noce's generation came to the conclusion that the fight against Fascism required an alliance between Christianity and Marxism. This was the guiding principle of the so-called Communist-Catholic movement, which Del Noce himself joined for a time. In that respect, his experience will feel foreign to American Catholics; in the United States, the church was vehemently anti-Communist and very few Catholics had Marxist sympathies. But the same moral uneasiness that had made Del Noce an anti-Fascist soon made him

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uncomfortable with the Marxist-Leninist idea that violence is justified for the sake of the revolution. To address this uneasiness he studied systematically the works of Karl Marx. This marked a turning point in his intellectual life.

Contra the "Catholic Left," which tended to regard Marx's atheism as accidental, and tried to rescue his socio-political analysis from his religious views, Del Noce concluded that what Marx proposed was not just a new theory of history or a new program of political economy, but a new *anthropology*, one completely different from the Christian tradition. (Louis Dupré had made a similar argument in the pages of *Commonweal*; see "Marx and Religion: An Impossible Marriage," April 26, 1968.) Marx viewed humans as "social beings" entirely determined by historical and material circumstances rather than by their relationship with God. He viewed human reason as purely instrumental—a tool of production and social organization rather than the capacity to contemplate the truth and participate in the divine wisdom. Finally, Marx viewed liberation as the fruit of political action, not as a personal process of conversion aided by grace. Marxist politics was not guided by fixed and absolute ethical principles, because ethics, along with philosophy, was absorbed into politics. Del Noce concluded that there was no way to rescue Marx's politics from his atheism, which had as much to do with his view of man as with his view of God.

Augusto Del Noce in 1989

Nonetheless, after World War II Marxism experienced a resurgence in Western Europe, not only among intellectuals and politicians but also in mainstream culture. But Del Noce noticed that at the same time society was moving in a very different direction from what Marx had predicted: capitalism kept expanding, people were eagerly embracing consumerism, and the prospect of a Communist revolution seemed more and more remote. To Del Noce, this simultaneous success *and* defeat of Marxism pointed to a deep contradiction. On the one hand, Marx had taught historical materialism, the doctrine that metaphysical and ethical ideas are just ideological covers for economic and political interests. On the other hand, he had prophesied that the expansion of capitalism would inevitably lead to revolution, followed by the "new man," the "classless society," the "reign of freedom." But what if the revolution did not arrive, if the "new man" never materialized?

In that case, Del Noce realized, Marxist historical materialism would degenerate into a form of radical relativism—into the idea that philosophical and moral concepts are just reflections of historical and economic circumstances and have no permanent validity. This would have to include the concept of injustice, without which a critique of capitalism would be hard, if not impossible, to uphold. A post-Marxist culture—one that kept Marx's radical materialism and denial of religious transcendence, while dispensing with his confident predictions about the self-destruction of capitalism—would naturally tend to be *radically* bourgeois. By that, Del Noce meant a society that views "everything as an object of trade" and "as an instrument" to be used in the pursuit of individualized "well-being." Such bourgeois society would be highly individualistic, because it could not recognize any cultural or religious "common good." In the *Communist Manifesto,* Marx and Engels described the power of the bourgeois worldview to dissolve all cultural and religious allegiances into a universal market. Now, ironically,

Marxist ideas (which Del Noce viewed as a much larger and more influential phenomenon than political Marxism in a strict sense) had helped bring that process to completion. At a conference in Rome in 1968, Del Noce looked back at recent history and concluded that the post-Marxist culture would be "a society that accepts all of Marxism's negations against contemplative thought, religion, and metaphysics; that accepts, therefore, the Marxist reduction of ideas to instruments of production. But which, on the other hand, rejects the revolutionary-messianic aspects of Marxism, and thus all the religious elements that remain within the revolutionary idea. In this regard, it truly represents the bourgeois spirit in its pure state, the bourgeois spirit triumphant over its two traditional adversaries, transcendent religion and revolutionary thought."

This was a very unconventional diagnosis. At the time, Communism remained a major political force worldwide, and Marxist ideas influenced large sectors of Western culture, including Catholic culture. Del Noce's position was also out of step with the conservative habit of associating anti-Communism with an uncritical exaltation of the West. He was highly critical of the post–World War II "Western project of progressive modernization based on science and technology," by which he did not mean science and technology per se but rather *technocracy*, the notion that all social problems can be solved by technical progress and economic growth, and that society must be ruled by experts. According to Del Noce this view, quite common among American intellectuals (for examples, see George M. Marsden's masterful overview in *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment*), was not an adequate response to Marxism, not least because it shared Marx's fundamental assumptions: the primacy of the economic dimension of life, an instrumentalist idea of knowledge, the priority of action over contemplation. Under close inspection, the affluent Western consumer of the 1960s looked suspiciously like Marx's *homo economicus*. The main difference was that the Marxist dream of a revolutionary catharsis had transmogrified into a bourgeois utopia of liberation from sexual repression and the shackles of traditional morality.

Del Noce also reflected deeply on the political repercussions of the advent of such "post-Marxist bourgeois society." He believed that, ironically, the enduring influence of Marxist ideas would leave the left ill-equipped to correct the excesses of capitalism. If values like justice and human dignity do not have an objective reality rooted in a metaphysical order knowable by reason, then social criticism becomes purely negative. It can unmask the hypocrisy and contradictions of ideals like religion, family, and country, but there is no conceptual ground for new ideals. Secondly, Del Noce thought that the left itself was doomed to become "bourgeoisified," by losing its ties to the working classes and becoming focused on causes broadly linked with sexuality. By doing so it would end up embracing an essentially individualistic and secular idea of happiness, which French sociologist Jacques Ellul had called the bourgeois trait *par excellence*. Conversely, politics would no longer be the expression of a fabric of social life organized around families, churches, ethnic neighborhoods, trade unions, etc., because all of them were being undermined by the individualism of the new culture.

Indeed, Del Noce said, if a society's only ideal is the expansion of individual "well-being," the left faces two equally bad options. One is to embrace what he calls the "reality principle," and to compromise with the realities of late capitalism. Then the left must necessarily become the party of the technocratic elites, and end up pursuing power for power's sake, because in the vacuum of ideals left behind by Marxism there is no common ground between the elites and the masses. This "realistic left" can only organize itself around two principles: trust in science and technology, and what Del Noce calls "vitalism," sexual liberation, which provides a "mystified," bourgeois replacement of the revolution. The second option is what Del Noce calls "unrealism": dreaming the impossible, rejecting existing reality altogether, and embracing political extremism in various forms, all of which are destined for defeat. Unrealism "becomes an accomplice of the first attitude in the global rejection of all values."

In light of all of this, it should be clear why Del Noce was very interested when, in 1969, Jean-Marie Domenach began talking about the "dead end of the left." Domenach was responding to the dramatic events of 1968. In the East, the invasion of Czechoslovakia had been a stark reminder that, in the Soviet Union, Marxism had generated an oppressive multinational empire ruled by an oligarchy. In the West, the May student protesters had accused European social democracy of having thoroughly embraced technocratic politics and reconciled itself with capitalism in the name of economic development and mass consumption. Unfortunately, the students' demands for revolutionary social change were at risk of degenerating into what Domenach called "vulgar anarchism" and never going "beyond the stage of utopian stammering." To get beyond its current impasse, the left would have to chart a new route between the Scylla of actually existing socialism (in both its Eastern and Western forms) and the Charybdis of the "great refusal" of 1968. Clearly this predicament confirmed Del Noce's diagnosis and raised deeper questions. What was "the left" to begin with? What were its cultural foundations and what was its relationship with Marxism? Was its "dead end" just a contingent political circumstance, or did it reveal a deeper cultural crisis?

Surprisingly—and despite the polemical punches they threw at each other in their exchange—Molnar and Domenach agreed that the left faced a philosophical crisis. Molnar put it quite bluntly: the left is doomed to oscillate between utopian anarchism and extreme political realism because of a philosophical mistake. He quoted Jacques Maritain

in *The Peasant of the Garonne*: "The pure man of the left detests being, always preferring, in principle, in the words of Rousseau, *what is not* to *what is*." But while Maritain viewed this as a mere temperamental inclination, Molnar believed that in the modern age "ontological restlessness" had evolved into a systematic and militant attitude, a habit of denying reality and "chasing the imaginary." Molnar probably had in mind the counter-culture of the late '60s, such as radical pacifism, absolute sexual freedom, the hippie movement, etc. However, he also cites some famous French left-wing intellectuals of his time, whose work is still very influential in American academia: Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Althusser, Foucault. The latter, in particular, theorized the "death of man," arguing that "human nature" is just a cultural construction, and "man" must be recognized as the product of its social and cultural circumstances, a "thing among things." It is not hard to draw a line from Foucault's ideas to today's theories about gender and sexuality. Molnar was probably referring to him when he wrote that "becoming" took priority over "being" and "above all there is no solid substratum behind events and phenomena!... The enterprise of dissolving human nature is central, although it disguises itself as a recognition of the malleability of man."

Our culture has largely embraced a form of "scientism" that excludes all mythical, philosophical, and religious narratives from the public debate except one: the myth of never-ending technological progress.

For his part, Domenach was willing to concede that the left had become unmoored from "Being"—that is, from the recognition of the ontological and moral realities, including human nature itself, that necessarily constrain any realistic political action. "The characteristic disease of the left is its passion for the limitless," he wrote.

> Freedom, identified with a vague notion of nature, unfolds in a vacuum, and toward what ends? Rest, happiness, friendship. These are the first fruits of Being, but they are utopian and ineffectual because they are not ordered to any hierarchy of values. In truth, Being is not a hidden treasure that will free itself…by exploding the crust of a repressive society. Being is an ascending totality within which human relationships are articulated: among humans, with nature, and with the supernatural. If Being is not affirmed as an order of values, it is pushed into the realm of dreams; being formless, it is confused with the impossible delights of a lost world or an imaginary world.

It was therefore time for the left to ask metaphysical questions, even at the cost of evoking laughter from "ideologues and tacticians." In particular, it was time to have some "idea of man and of his life in community." Lacking that, the left had "allowed itself to be locked up in a society that has no other shared goal but unlimited production and consumption, in a culture that has broken away from human totality."

Domenach's response to Molnar struck Del Noce as very significant. First of all, in the statement that "Being" will not "free itself...by exploding the crust of a repressive society," Del Noce recognized his own criticism of the "new" left. Intellectuals like Herbert Marcuse and Wilhelm Reich had theorized that there is a link between social oppression and sexual inhibition, and that the left should join the "fight against repression" because economic and sexual liberation go hand in hand. Now, Domenach agreed that this was a misunderstanding and that affirming a purely instinctual idea of freedom ("a vague notion of nature," another stab at Marcuse) was "utopian and ineffectual." On his part, Del Noce viewed the sexual revolution as part of the post-Marxist bourgeois culture, because under the cover of "freedom" it actually affirmed an individualistic and fundamentally irreligious view of man as producer and consumer, in which the human body lost its symbolic dimension to become an instrument of "well-being" and an object of trade. The left's failure to grasp this development had created a paradoxical situation, which Del Noce describes as follows:

> If by "right" we mean faithfulness to the spirit of tradition, meaning the tradition that talks about an uncreated order of values, which are grasped though intellectual intuition and are independent of any arbitrary will, not even the divine one; and if by "left" we mean, on the contrary, the rejection not merely of certain historical superstructures but of those very values, which are "unmasked" to show their true nature as oppressive ideologies, imposed by the dominant classes in order to protect themselves, well, then it seems that in no other historical period has the left advanced so dramatically as during the last quarter of a century…. And yet, one has to say that Domenach is right: if by "right" we mean "management technique at the service of the strongest," regardless of what ideologies are used to justify this management, we have to say that its victory has never been so complete, because it has been able to turn completely the culture of the left into its own tool.

Moreover, Del Noce viewed Domenach's statement that Being "must be affirmed as an order of values" as a welcome change from a long-standing attitude of progressive Ca-

tholicism. Since the 1950s, left-wing Catholics had argued that what is needed to dialogue with the secular world is "a philosophically neutral left, guided only by the ethical presupposition of the equal dignity of every human person" and therefore "politics, metaphysics, and religion must be kept rigorously distinguished." Now, by admitting the need for some "idea of man and of his life in community," Domenach was recognizing that in human societies ethics always reflects an "ontology," a vision of humanity and its place in the universe, usually based on a mythical historical narrative, or on explicit philosophical and religious foundations. Conversely, if ethics is affirmed in an ontological vacuum, without simultaneously affirming a clear and explicit "idea of man," it loses traction. This has been, arguably, the experience of politically engaged Catholics, both in Europe and in the United States, during the past fifty years: a long series of rear-guard battles on ethical issues (divorce, abortion, same-sex marriage, euthanasia, etc.) in a cultural context in which the philosophical and religious images (of human life, of marriage, of love) that underpinned those ethical values has faded. As a consequence, little can be gained by producing more comprehensive ethical lists, such as a "consistent ethics of life." Ethical appeals not backed by "Being" are destined either to fall on deaf ears, as expressions of personal religious preferences, or to develop into moralistic ideologies (think of "political correctness") backed by the will to power.

Fifty years later, it is fair to say that Del Noce's hopes about the Molnar-Domenach debate were not realized. Still, that distant discussion helps us understand what could be called the "curse" of politics in contemporary Western societies. On the one hand, progressivism seems firmly committed to the post-Marxist idea that the road to liberation passes through the denial of Domenach's "ascending totality within which human relationships are articulated." In fact, the very notion of an "order of being" is viewed as "repressive" by a culture that tends to identify freedom with unconstrained self-determination (Domenach's "delirium of the limitless"). On the other hand, our culture has largely embraced a form of "scientism" that excludes all mythical, philosophical, and religious narratives from the public debate *except one*: the myth of never-ending technological progress. But, as Del Noce remarked, the technological mindset is "the most conservative in the history of the world" because it radically denies the possibility of "another reality." Technological progress keeps changing the means of production, but does not bring about any moral change. The paradox is that these two trends (the leftist critique of authority and conservative technocracy) converged into what Del Noce called prophetically "the alliance between the technocratic right and the cultural left." Its result has been that "separation between the ruling class and the masses becomes extreme." Indeed, one plausible interpretation of the election of Donald Trump is that today many people who do not benefit from the expansion of technology feel that the only political choice is between an alien liberal technocracy and tribalism.

If this diagnosis is correct, the way to move forward is, in a sense, by going back and calling into question some of the ideas of the 1960s; in particular, the notion that political debate in a pluralist society must be "sterilized" so that it excludes fundamental religious and philosophical questions. The truth is that even when these questions are not asked, they are always answered, even if implicitly and covertly. In particular, according to Del Noce, there is an implicit philosophical question that dominates contemporary politics. It is the struggle between two "philosophical anthropologies":

> The true clash is between two conceptions of life. One could be described in terms of the *religious dimension* or of the presence of the divine in us; it certainly achieves its fullness in Christian thought, or in fact in Catholic thought, but it is not *per se* specifically Christian in the proper sense.... According to the second conception—the instrumentalist one, found in positivism, pragmatism, Marxism, and evolutionism in general, in its philosophic extension—there is nothing in spirit and in reason that possesses an independent metaphysical origin.

To Del Noce, the religious dimension meant that human beings are not reducible to sociological, economic, and biological factors. As Domenach had put it, "in man there is always something more." To be human means to be able to raise questions of meaning that transcend our historical-material context—including religious questions.

By insisting that the true fault line of contemporary history ran between those who affirmed man's religious dimension and those who denied it, Del Noce offered an unusual perspective on Catholic participation in the public arena. He thought its focus should be neither on protecting the power of the institutional church, nor on some list of religiously neutral ethical concerns, but rather on a conception of human flourishing that reflects the religious dimension. This would include an idea of education that is not just utilitarian but respects the deeper human need for beauty and knowledge as ends in themselves; respect for work as an expression of the human desire to build and to serve, not just a tool at the service of profit and economic growth; love for what Simone Weil called "rootedness"—namely "the real, active, and natural participation in the life of the community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future"; a passion for freedom, not as empty self-determination, but as protection of the most specifically human sphere, which is precisely the religious dimension, the search for meaning. A Catholic political orientation based on the awareness of the religious dimension would also allow—and indeed require—us to struggle for justice, but the justice we struggled for would not be our invention, much less a convenient fiction. It would be a moral reality that we recognize inside and outside of ourselves and to which we must ascend. ■

Griffin Oleynick

None of Us Faces Judgment Alone

'ZURBARÁN'S JACOB AND HIS TWELVE SONS' AT THE FRICK

With the arrival of the Easter season, we might be tempted to cast a backward glance at our ascetic efforts during Lent. What Lenten discipline did we practice? How did it go for us? Did it help us realize the new life we'd hoped for? Because they put the emphasis on ourselves and our actions, rather than on God and God's activity in our lives, these kinds of questions miss the point. Salvation leaves no room for solipsism: conversion is always a communal, collective process. Our turning to God during Lent, and our experience of new life at Easter, either happens together, as part of a family of faith, or not at all.

A new exhibition of Spanish paintings by the Golden Age master Francisco de Zurbarán (1598–1664), "Jacob and His Twelve Sons: Paintings from Auckland Castle," on view through April 22 at the Frick Collection in New York City, provides a refreshing reminder of this dynamic by bringing us into conversation with our religious ancestors, the Old Testament Patriarchs. This series of thirteen life-sized portraits, displayed as a kind of choreographed procession that wraps around the four walls of a single room at the Frick, depicts a subject rarely found in European religious painting: Jacob's Blessing, which appears at the end of the Book of Genesis. In the Biblical text, Jacob's prophetic verses, dramatically uttered on his deathbed, reveal the divergent destinies of each of his twelve sons, the legendary founders of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Taken together, they convey a firm sense of hope, recalling God's promise of fecundity made to Abraham earlier in Genesis, but also an anxious sentiment of foreboding, as they point to future suffering in Exodus.

Zurbarán's artistic virtuosity is on full display as he transforms Jacob's poetry into a compelling visual sequence of striking costumes, delicate gestures, and complex facial expressions. Equally striking is the fact that these paintings have arrived on our shores. Likely commissioned to adorn a monastery in the New World but never exhibited in the United States until now, the portraits were produced in Seville in the early 1640s, when Zurbarán was at the height of his creative powers. Mysteriously, the completed paintings never reached their final destination, somehow vanishing from the historical record for almost a century. They only surfaced again in an English merchant's log in 1722, before they were purchased at auction in 1756 by the Anglican Bishop Richard Trevor, a staunch proponent of legal equality for Jews. Wishing to make a powerful statement in support of Jewish rights, Trevor installed the series in the dining room of the Bishop's Residence at Auckland Castle in County Durham, where the paintings have remained for 250 years. Freed for travel by a two-year renovation at Auckland Castle, *Jacob and His Twelve Sons* constitutes the first major exhibition of Zurbarán's works to be held here in the United States in more than three decades.

Francisco de Zurbarán, Naphtali, *ca. 1640–45*

Though his reputation is often obscured by the fame of his better-known contemporary Diego Velázquez, Zurbarán is hardly a stranger to American art galleries, collectively the largest repository for his works outside of Spain. Masterpieces like the hyper-realistic *Still Life with Lemons, Oranges, and a Rose* and the haunting *Martyrdom of Saint Serapion* have contributed to the popular idea of Zurbarán as the "Spanish Caravaggio," an unabashed master of naturalistic detail and dramatic chiaroscuro technique—albeit one with a decidedly ascetic, even monastic temperament.

Almost all of Zurbarán's works were originally commissioned by churches and religious orders, which sought grand iconographic representations of their Catholic faith during the height of the Counter-Reformation in Spain. Perhaps not surprisingly, much recent criticism has tried to distance the artist from overly spiritualizing interpretations of his paintings. Instead of sincerely depicting his own inner spiritual vision, the argument goes, Zurbarán acted instead as a canny businessman with a knack for winning commissions in the highly competitive art market of Inquisition-era Seville. The stirring, humane quality of his works thus emerges not because of, but rather in spite of, their overtly religious subjects.

Such a view insists that Zurbarán must be either genuinely prayerful or commercially savvy, but not both. Yet we might wonder whether the artist and his contemporaries, whose Christian theology insisted that God became decisively involved in even the most mundane human affairs by becoming human Himself, would have recognized such a stark distinction between prayer and work. To the contrary, Zurbarán's *Jacob and His Twelve Sons*, like its Genesis source material, reveals that both the oratory and the marketplace are charged with the sacramental grandeur of God.

Rereading Genesis in preparation for my visit to the exhibit, I was pleasantly surprised by the picaresque, almost novelistic quality of the narrative of Jacob and his sons. Like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* or Boccaccio's *Decameron*, these episodes portray a fallen human family in all of its gritty, convoluted reality. To start, Jacob disguises himself as his brother Esau in order to obtain a blessing from his father Isaac, while the twice-widowed Tamar (who later figures prominently in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus), dressed as a prostitute, tricks Jacob's son Judah (who is also her father-in-law twice-over) into impregnating her, thus securing her place in the family. And even though patristic exegesis would later hold up Jacob's twelve sons as moral exemplars prefiguring the twelve apostles, the Genesis narrative explicitly reminds us that these are the same brothers who, envious of Joseph's colorful robes, conscientiously decide to sell him into slavery in Egypt instead of just killing him outright. But what separates these stories from ordinary accounts of human depravity is the insistent, abiding presence of a loving God—one who consistently meets human sin, evident in countless betrayals and broken relationships, with ongoing fidelity, patience, and mercy.

With astounding visual economy, Zurbarán manages to compress this entire history into a single image, which consists of nothing more than a stooped figure, quietly leaning on a staff in a spare landscape. This is the portrait of Jacob, the first in the series. With his eyes downcast in a gesture of ponderous recollection, Jacob's body language silently communicates a deep wisdom. His long white beard, flowing scarf, and crimson tunic seem to pull his entire figure to the earth, reminding us of our human frailty and mortality, the result of Adam and Eve's fall from grace. Yet at the same time Jacob's hands, gently cupped above the staff upon which he rests his weary frame, indicate that this same earth also offers stability and support. At the end of his life Jacob becomes a visual lesson in humility, the proper attitude of human reverence before God.

The portraits of the sons that follow offer varying responses to this fatherly example. As the images succeed one another, our eyes are immediately drawn to their painstakingly detailed clothing, through which Zurbarán communicates the essence of their personalities. Levi's tasseled priestly robes, Judah's fur-lined regal mantle, and Dan's pointed turban indicate their high social status but also reveal their arrogance, while the plain brown farmers' tunics worn by Issachar and Naphtali suggest their self-effacing lowliness. Curiously, Zurbarán depicts these last two with greater warmth than the others: unlike Levi and Dan, who turn their backs to us, or the crowned-and-sceptered Judah, who seems to disappear beneath the folds of his royal clothing, Issachar and Naphtali are portrayed in simple profile, with their gazes directed down toward the earth. In contrast to the cursory mention they receive in Genesis 49, here by their very starkness Zurbarán has made them two of the most attractive portraits in the series, inviting viewers to linger contemplatively. Issachar, sandaled and accompanied by a donkey, and Naphtali, barefoot with a shovel and strap slung over his naked shoulder, eschew the guarded, self-conscious pride of their brothers, unmistakably evoking the humility of Christ. The moral and spiritual lesson imparted by Zurbarán's portraits now emerges into view.

Of all the portraits, only one gazes directly at us, that of Joseph. Observing the other visitors, I noticed that the majority spent most of their time with this painting. Joseph, "set apart from his brothers" as Genesis 49 has it, is the most regally dressed yet also the most moving. Zurbarán depicts him standing erect, adorned with gold and blue fabric and holding the rod and petitions proper to his status as a high-ranking Egyptian official.

My encounter with this painting left me with a profound sense of healing and liberation. I knew the story: after his brothers had betrayed Joseph, they came back to him seeking grain during a time of famine. I imagined I was one of these brothers, guilty of the same pettiness and in need of a similar forgiveness. My eyes at first rested on the folded petitions in Joseph's right hand, which became my petitions. His pointed index finger then drew my attention to the slender rod in his left, a symbol of his authority to judge, but also of his power to grant requests. I looked up to his eyes and was met with warmth and exceeding mercy: Zurbarán's Joseph mirrors the image of Christ Pantocrator, the all-powerful judge of humanity, popular in Orthodox Churches, whose stern yet tender gaze sustains the entire world. The portrait thus becomes an icon, a visible assurance of God's presence, before which it is impossible to feel judged in any way—except positively.

Jacob and His Twelve Sons shows us exactly what we need to see as we celebrate the joy of Christ's resurrection this Easter. Our efforts to be more loving, to pray more, to serve more generously may have fallen short of what we had hoped for during Lent. We may be tempted to judge ourselves harshly. Yet as Zurbarán reveals, none of us faces judgment alone. Together, as a flawed family, we are unconditionally loved. ■

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Charles R. Morris

Gross Distortion

The Growth Delusion
Wealth, Poverty, and the Well-Being of Nations
David Pilling
Tim Duggan Books, $26, 304 pp.

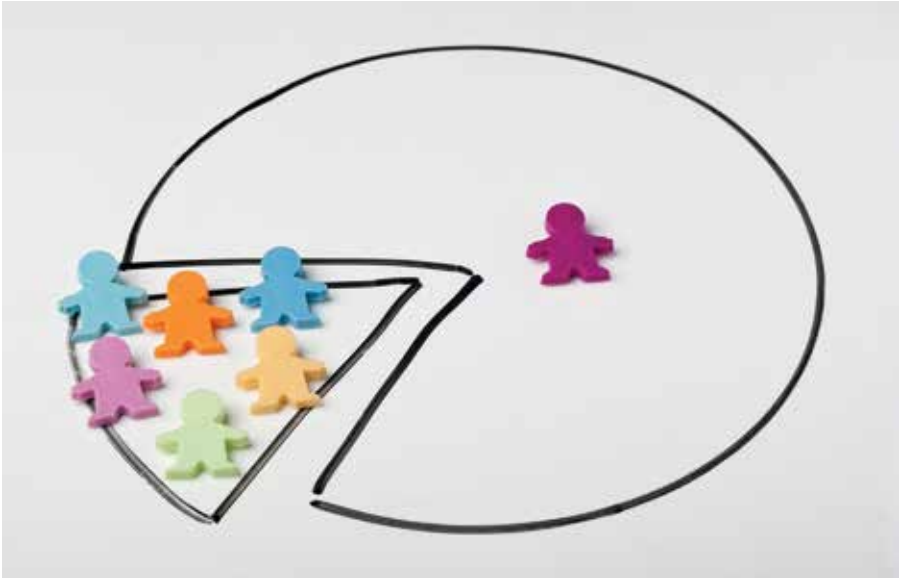
David Pilling is a widely traveled reporter for the *Financial Times*, with a raucous bee in his bonnet over the statistical idiocies of "Gross Domestic Product," or GDP—the prime economic measuring rod for all countries, advanced and aspiring alike.

Single-number economic scoring systems are a recent invention. The great economist Simon Kuznets created the National Accounts system in the United States and actually collected the raw data, although not before John Maynard Keynes won a battle to count everything that was not actually criminal. Faced with the grossly overpriced American health-care market, Kuznets would have argued that the excess should be subtracted from the GDP totals, using Medicare prices or some other proxy as a reasonable measure of value. Still, Keynes was probably right. Think of the screaming of the gun lobby if their favorite weapons were officially priced at less than zero.

The counting conventions lead to some odd results. Take the spouse who stays home to care for the house and kids. Most countries count that as zero contribution to the economy. But a careful recent analysis suggests that counting domestic work would add 26 percent to American GDP.

Or consider banking. Not long ago, commercial bankers were heavily regulated to protect the payments system, making sure each party was properly paid, and that fraudulent transactions were kept to a minimum. A couple of decades ago, however, bankers gradually discovered that they could amass stupendous amounts of money by selling their assets to each other and marking up the price each time. In Great Britain, for example, about 97 percent of all bank transactions were with other banks, while only about 3 percent were actually funding value-added business investment. For a few years, banking was the world's most profitable industry, before it was exposed as a house of cards. Ironically, it is still among the world's most profitable industries because the world's governments bought hundreds of billions of those bad loans to forestall an economic collapse. So the same banks, with the help of the Trump administration, may well do it all over again should the house of cards collapse once more.

The single-number GDP measurement convention sheds little light on the *distribution* of income and wealth, which in the United States is starting to look like those of undeveloped countries ruled by dictatorships. Eye-opening research by the 2015 Nobelist Angus Deaton and Anne Case disclosed a spike in death rates among the American white working class that rivals the Russian, mostly alcohol-fueled, death rates after the fall of the Soviet Union. By GDP reckoning, the American economy was doing reasonably well, despite the devastating 2008–2009 crash. In real terms, after inflation, from 2000 through 2015, the U.S. GDP grew by 30 percent. Beneath the sheen of progress in GDP, however, America's white working class is dying from opiods, crystal meth, and alcohol—"deaths of despair" Deaton and Case call them. (Interestingly, black and Hispanic death rates do not show a comparable change.) The harsh fact is that without a college education it is very hard to earn a middle-class income in today's America. In real terms, blue-collar workers have steadily been losing ground. All developed nations face this problem, but most allocate their national budgets to mitigate income shortfalls by broadly based entitlements—especially to nursery schools, health care, voca-



Y H LIM / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

tional training, and higher education. American budget policy, especially with the current Trump budget, has created a pronounced skewing of incomes toward the richest Americans, far in excess of any other wealthy country.

Pilling winds up his book with a set of modest proposals. He doesn't propose to scrap GDP, since it does convey considerable information. But he does propose a healthy skepticism about what should go into the numbers. For instance, the American oil giants are closing in on becoming the leading oil exporters in the world. In an era of climate change, is that a good thing? Pilling proposes instead to measure "good jobs, green space, decent health care," although he admits it would difficult.

But we also need to supplement a new and improved GDP with other simple measures. The most obvious one is to give equal billing to a *per capita* GDP. Knocking down Trump's wall and inviting in 10 million Mexican workers would give him the 3 percent growth he wants, but the income per capita, which is the real story, would not change.

Then there is *median* income, the middle of the income distribution. (Bill Gates walks into a bar; the average income jumps to more than a billion dollars.) America is quite a rich country, but the distribution of the wealth is badly skewed. Much more revealing would be a finer breakdown of income and wealth by percentiles. And finally, we have to do a better job of tracking assets and computing honest depreciation. The New York City subways are an essential service, but politicians have skimped on invisible, crucial system maintenance, to the point where many lines have become dangerously accident-prone.

Pilling enjoys exploring far-out, entertaining policy ideas, but always grounds his book in common sense. His modest statistical recommendations, which would be more difficult to implement than he lets on, could indeed radically change the common picture of economic progress. ■

Charles R. Morris's *most recent book is* A Rabble of Dead Money *(PublicAffairs).*

Anthony Domestico

A Hard-Earned Detachment

Devotions

Timothy Murphy
North Dakota State University, $24.95, 192 pp.

The poet Timothy Murphy's new collection, *Devotions*, begins with a trip to Disenchantment Bay, Alaska. There, the speaker and his companions witness the calving of a glacier: "Crack! A blue serac tottered and gave. / Stunned at the water's edge, / we fled our vantage ledge / like oystercatchers skittering from a wave." Once he's scurried to safety, the speaker's mind momentarily wanders, as the poem closes with different kinds of breakage, other forms of detachment:

GERRY CAMBRIDGE

Timothy Murphy

Now separation has become my fear.
What was does not console,
what is, is past control—
the disembodiment that looms so near.

Detachment? So an ice cliff by the sea
calves with a seismic crash
of bergy bits and brash,
choking a waterway with its debris.

We clear the neap tide beach of glacial wrack,
pace and mark the ground,
then wave the Cessna round.
Pilot, we bank on you to bear us back.

As is so frequently the case in this book, the surface simplicity of "Disenchantment Bay" belies a deeper complexity. One of the obvious pleasures the poem offers lies in its precise natural description. Murphy knows his surroundings, and this knowledge makes itself felt in the technical language—the "neap tide" and "bergy bits"—that so effortlessly floats in and out of the poem. "Disenchantment Bay" is also a lovely piece of poetic music, with the alliterations of "bergy bits and brash" picked up again in "bank on you to bear us back," with the play between long and short "a" sounds in "glacial wrack," "pace and mark." Murphy often uses regular rhyme and meter—he's a formalist's formalist, a protégé of the late Richard Wilbur—and his poems are a joy to read out loud and listen to, as we savor the glacier's cracking made audible in "calves" and "crash," "wrack" and "back."

Most movingly, though, "Disenchantment Bay" becomes in its last moments a meditation on death and mourning, which Murphy describes here as "the disembodiment that looms so near." *Devotions* is a deeply elegiac collection, and there's hardly a better description of the elegist's challenge, or the mourner's suffering, than these lines: "What was does not console, / what is, is past control." To mourn is to know the painful difference between *was* and *is*, and to know that the consolations offered—in the form of prayer, in the form of poetry—can soothe but never completely salve death's wounds.

Indeed, death permeates *Devotions*, from its first poem to its last line: "Re-

member, we are clay." Murphy was recently diagnosed with stage-IV cancer. Like the serac, Murphy must strive for a kind of detachment—a more difficult task for him than for the ice. (Note the question mark that comes after this word in "Disenchantment Bay": it's as if the speaker can't believe that such a thing is possible in the face of such looming loss.) Separation, from the life of hunting and eating and cooking and writing that Murphy loves, has become his fear.

If this is a death-haunted collection, it's also a deeply Catholic collection, and the last lines of this first poem offer some hope. The pilot here flies Murphy away from danger in his Cessna plane. In the rest of *Devotions*, though, the pilot who bears us on his back is Christ. Murphy was raised Catholic and fell away from the church when he was young, in large part because of the church's sexual doctrines. (Murphy is himself gay.) In 2004, though, he came back. As he puts it in "The Sea of Faith," a poem whose title and first line come from Matthew Arnold's doubt-filled poem "Dover Beach," "Like Jonah I was vomited ashore; / now every night a spring tide runs for me." In rite and ritual, word and sacrament, the Catholic faith offers Murphy a way to understand, and make meaningful, his fear and suffering.

The central death of *Devotions*, though, isn't Murphy's own, the one he's moving toward. Rather, it's one he's already experienced: the 2010 death of his longtime partner, the translator Alan Sullivan. Sullivan's death enters into many of the poems here. "Interment" begins with life, with a lovers' meeting:

> One boy with a guitar and dreadful novel,
> another, poems crammed inside his head—
> one led the other to his basement hovel
> and slung the slender stranger into bed.

And it ends, beautifully and sadly, with death and remembrance:

> I delve a deep hole in the orchard soil,
> singing my lover's favorite Latin song,
> *Tantum Ergo*. The digging is no toil.
> My friend? Let me pretend he did no wrong.

From the bed in the basement to the bed in the soil, from the guitar to the Latin song, the echoes between beginning and end are lightly done, movingly remembered. Here, what was—the "dogs to be fed and water," "the manuscripts of poems to be crafted"—does offer some consolation, even if it's an imperfect one. (And we sense that the future tense of those memories, that time when dogs and poems were things still to be cared for, both comforts and wounds.)

Sullivan is hardly the only soul Murphy has lost, and he's not the only one he mourns and celebrates in *Devotions*. "Purgatory" begins with Murphy imagining his own death, in the Latin of the church ("*Dignum et justum est*: that Murphy stay / in Purgatory until the Judgment Day"), but then moves on to other friends, fellow-poets, who have gone before him: "I have friends to see / who knew not God but tutored me, / Mezey and Hecht, expert in prosody, / urging me on when I gang aft agley." He writes in remembrance of Frederick Ress, a friend and talented tenor "who took his life rather than face / Parkinson's" but who Murphy sees now singing a new song: "His soul is freed / to sing for supper in a better place." Murphy mourns priests and fathers and friends, fellow-believers and those, like the aforementioned poet Anthony Hecht, whom he prays to meet again: "Each night I plead again, / 'Let them behold your face, / love them with your elect.' / I pray for Anthony Hecht. / Lord, hear my prayer."

With so much death, it may be surprising to learn that one emerges from Murphy's book with a renewed sense for life. Indeed, his poems are filled with life: verbal life, animal life, natural life, social life. Murphy lives and hunts in North Dakota, and the two, living and hunting, are deeply connected in this book. To live for Murphy is to hunt, and to hunt is to live. In "Missing Mass," Murphy describes skipping out on the Eucharist, instead "going to church afield," with his "faithful altar dog" at his side. The vast landscape transforms, suddenly and wondrously, into a sacred space: "A gale sweeps through the choir / and dries the prostrate grass / lightning and prairie fire / forge to beaten grass." In "Checklist," Murphy names the things that make the trip so pleasurable for him and his dog: "Cheetos and chocolate chips for Tim to nibble, / a shrink-wrapped pound of Jimmy's jerkied deer, / a six-pack of nonalcoholic beer, / for Feeney's sake a Ziplock bag of kibble." (Murphy struggled with drink for years, and it's a regular topic in his poetry.)

I don't hunt myself, but I do love my cats, so I get Murphy's reverence for his dog: "The Father taketh and the Spirit giveth, / but me? I know that my Retriever liveth." As these lines indicate, Murphy can be witty, or even silly; he can also be quite serious, even theological: "Sex led me to love; / love bound me to God." He's also a great friend, and one of the things these poems are most devoted to is communion with others (one of the many ways in which Murphy is an essentially Catholic poet). We hear about his friendships with poets and priests, of meals he has loved and the poetry, including that of Wilbur, that he cherishes: "I stand athwart this mossy, rocky bed, / revolving in my sunrise revery / quatrains I hold in memory / from the best sermon I have ever read." Death is so painful because Murphy loves life so much.

And yet we're all moving toward death; Murphy is only moving more quickly than most, and he knows it. This knowledge can't help but haunt the final words of "The Chase":

> The prairie is a poem rarely read.
> Its looseleaf pages blow.
> Too many students of this landscape fled
> its poverty and snow.
> Today I limp on stiffening knees,
> hoping that heedless pheasants take their ease
>
> in pigeon grasses sprung from durum stubble,
> in fragrant cedar shadow
> where a boy watched his father down a double.
> Maker of marsh and meadow,
> grant me more time to understand,
> more years to walk and memorize this land.

Murphy loves the marsh and the meadow, the pheasants and the prairie. These poems are a most powerful act of devotion. ■

Anthony Domestico *is a frequent contributor to* Commonweal. *His book* Poetry and the Modernist Period *was published last fall by Johns Hopkins University Press.*

Goodness & Greatness

Patrick Whelan

Last June, when President Donald Trump met President Vladimir Putin for the first time, much was made of the parallels between the two leaders. Along with their nationalist tendencies, personal boastfulness, and carefully crafted cults of personality, both have rooted their rhetoric in promises to make America or Russia great again.

Traveling recently with my teenage son to St. Petersburg—home to Putin when he worked for the KGB—I saw many hints of the empire Putin may be envisioning as he puts a new and more impressive face on Russia, twenty-five years after the fall of the Soviet Union. Imperial palaces, the glittering art collection of the Hermitage Museum, and the orderly canals and grand avenues all hark back to a time when Russia was rising to become a great power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

But as a symbol of past Russian greatness, nothing quite compares to St. Isaac's Cathedral. The largest Orthodox basilica in the world, it was built on a foundation said to have consumed whole forests, with nearly eleven thousand piles driven into the swampland adjoining the Baltic Sea. Three hundred thousand tons of marble and granite were used to construct the neoclassical exterior. The cathedral has 112 polished red granite columns, some of them 60 feet high and a full 7 feet in diameter.

The structure's crowning glory is its colossal dome, a technological wonder in its day, built out of cast iron and gilded with 220 pounds of pure gold. It was said that sixty men died in its construction, from the toxic fumes of mercury used to help spray the gold onto the dome's surface. But when it was completed in 1858, it was considered a masterpiece both inside and out.

Curiously, St. Isaac's played an important role in the erection of a similar shrine to national greatness, thousands of miles away, in Washington, D.C. By the mid-nineteenth century, the westward expansion and growth of the United States had increased the size of Congress, and in 1855 the decision was made to install a new and larger dome atop the recently expanded Capitol building. In designing it, architect Thomas Walter drew heavily on French architect Auguste de Montferrand's designs for St. Isaac's dome. As a result, the two possess almost identical proportions.

A paradox of St. Isaac's Cathedral is the identity of the saint himself, a hermit who lived in a wilderness hut outside fourth-century Constantinople. Isaac confronted the Roman Emperor Valens, persecutor of Nicene Christians, and predicted his violent death—and when it came to pass, he was pulled from his humble monastic life and made abbot of what subsequently became known as the Dalmatian Monastery. His death on May 30 around 396 created a Christian feast day that coincided with the birthday of the Russian emperor, Peter the Great, almost 1300 years later. So it was that Peter built a small wooden church at the heart of his new capital city of St. Petersburg, on land taken in a war against Sweden. There he married his second wife, and initiated a period

Saint Isaac's Cathedral in St. Petersburg

of territorial expansion and Western cultural transformation that created the Russia to which Putin now hearkens in his calls to national greatness.

Built on that spot, the cathedral has served both secular and religious purposes, functioning under the Soviets as—of all things—an atheism museum. As for its kissing cousin in our nation's capitol, it is not widely known that Sunday religious services, sometimes led by Catholic priests, were held in the House Chamber of the Capitol Building for well over half a century, from the time of Jefferson until after the Civil War.

Today beneath that dome, Republican leaders are busily deconstructing the Obama legacy, seeking to dismantle gains in healthcare coverage and cut back on spending for job training, education, and the environment in favor of a significant military expansion. In Russia the extraordinary erosion of democratic institutions under Putin and his kleptocracy has supplanted the simple goodness of a St. Isaac. Meanwhile in Washington, the word "peace" was long ago removed from the title of the Capitol Dome's Statue of Freedom, *Libertas*—whose image now graces the "Global War on Terrorism Civilian Service Medal" that recognizes Defense Department employees involved in the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Thus over time does the sacred yield to the profane. These and other developments, amid belligerent calls to national greatness, leave both presidents facing a prickly question: Can a country be considered great without also being good? ■

Patrick Whelan *is a physician with the Heritage Provider Network in Los Angeles. He lectures at the Keck School of Medicine and is on the Academic Advisory Board of the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at the University of Southern California.*

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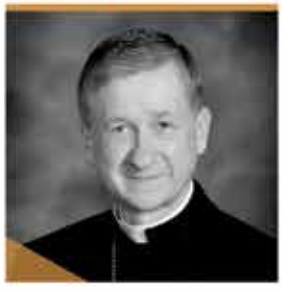

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