A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

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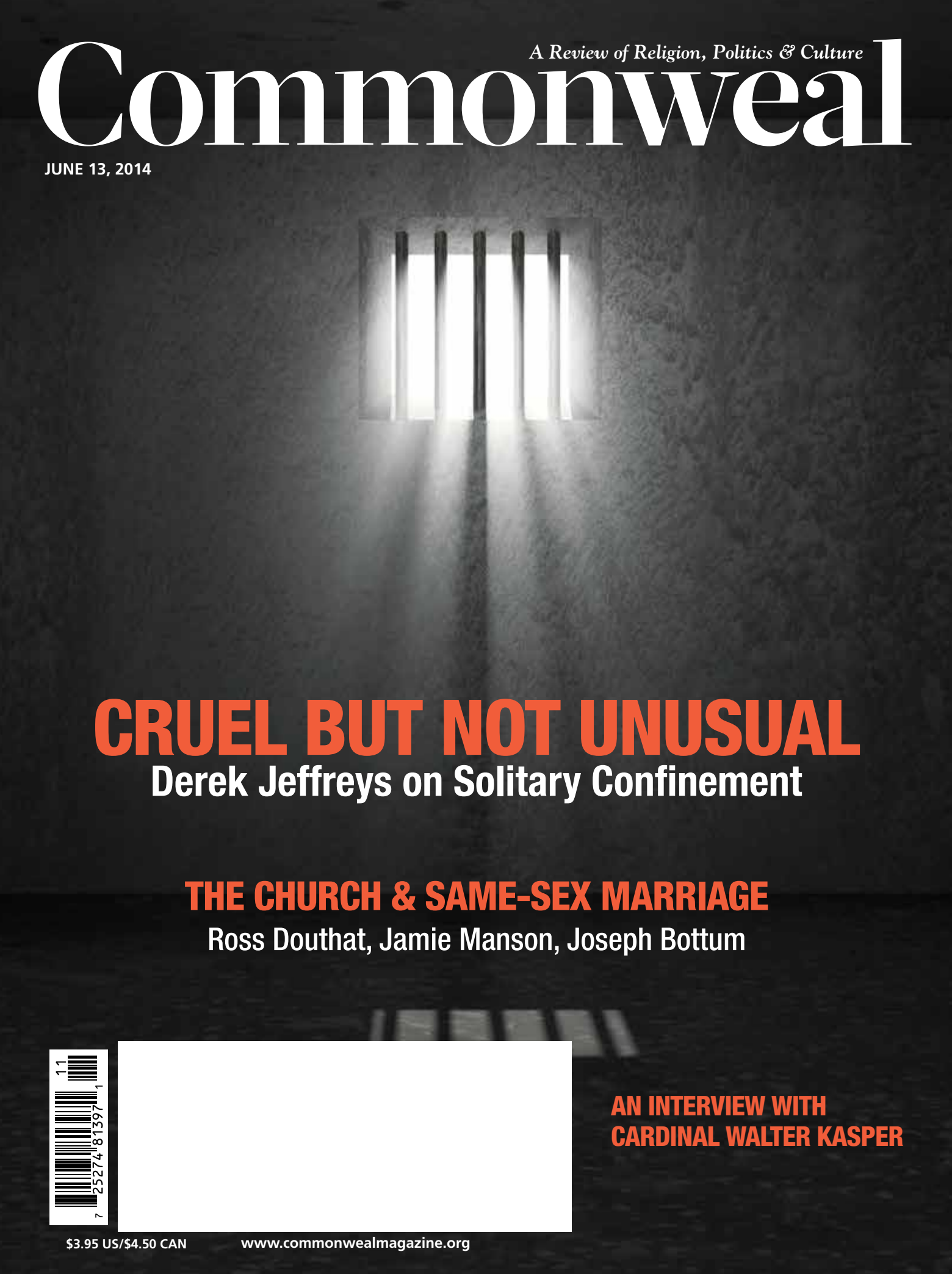

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LETTERS

Episcopal authority, gutting Aquinas, etc.

NEWMAN'S OWN

John Thiel's efforts to correct Cardinal Donald Wuerl's misconception that bishops are the "only authoritative teachers of the faith" hit a consistently judicious and generous note ("Parallel Magisterium?" May 16). Pointing gently to the dynamics of development in Catholic teaching spearheaded by theologians, Thiel points out that Wuerl's cramped understanding of theologians' role in the church "runs counter to the understanding of a large majority of Catholic theologians."

Among these theologians can be numbered Cardinal John Henry Newman, who outlined a far more nuanced view of the role of the hierarchy, situating it within the broader apostolic tradition committed to the whole church. In his groundbreaking *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, Newman affirmed that the tradition "manifests itself variously at various times: sometimes by the mouth of the episcopacy, sometimes by the doctors, sometimes by the people, sometimes by liturgy" none of which "may be treated with disrespect."

In the 1877 edition of *The Via Media*, Newman formalized this understanding as the threefold office of the Body of Christ, in which teaching (theology), rule (governing), and ministry (worship) together constitute a virtual system of checks and balances. At the center is "the action of pastor and flock," but serving this center are the *schola theologorum*, on the one hand, and, on the other, the "papacy and its curia." But Newman also affirmed that "the fundamental and regulating principle of the whole church system" is theology, which "has in a certain sense a power of jurisdiction over" the governing and sanctifying offices—"theologians ever being in request and in employment in keeping within bounds both the political and popular elements in the church's constitution," both of which he saw as "far more liable to excess and corruption."

PAUL E. DINTER
Ossining, N.Y.

FAITH & MYSTERY

In reviewing Denys Turner's *Thomas Aquinas* ("Doubting Thomas," May 16), Gary Gutting claims to have shown, at least to his own satisfaction, that Aquinas's treatment of the Christian doctrines of the immortality of the soul, creation, and God as Triune is unintelligible. Indeed, he finds that in what Aquinas says about many other Christian doctrines "the specter of unintelligibility—or if you like, 'mystery'—looms large."

What would Gutting have Aquinas, or anyone else, say about any of the central doctrines of the Christian faith? Here's Gutting's advice: "A well-grounded truth of reason may require us to modify or reject what we had thought was a revealed truth. If we find...that careful formulation of what we think a revealed truth means leads to absurdity, we should conclude that the truth does not mean what we thought it did. The task then is to reformulate, not to try to convince ourselves that our failure to understand is a higher form of understanding."

In other words, Gutting would have us "reformulate" the expression "I believe in order to understand" as "I only believe what I can understand." Think about how St. Paul would have dealt with Gutting's advice.

BERNARD DAUENHAUER
Bethlehem, Penn.

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From the Editors

You Vote, They Decide

Keeping money from undermining democratic politics can seem like a Sisyphean task: successful efforts are always partial and temporary, and there are many failures along the way. Most bills designed to check the power of wealth over the government succumb to the very disease they seek to cure, and those that manage to survive the legislative process can be quickly disposed of by a handful of Supreme Court justices.

In April the High Court ruled in *McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission* that limits on the total amount a person can contribute to candidates and political parties during a two-year election cycle were unconstitutional. This decision extended the logic behind an earlier ruling, the notorious *Citizens United*, which opened the door to unlimited independent campaign spending by corporations. According to this logic, money equals speech; therefore, the right to free speech includes the right of all Americans—including American corporations and billionaires—to spend as much money as they like on the causes and candidates they support. Departures from this principle are legitimate only when needed to curb "quid pro quo corruption," or the appearance of such corruption. As long as campaign contributions are not obviously transactional, there's little Congress can do to restrict the political influence of wealthy donors. As Justice Anthony M. Kennedy put it in his majority opinion for *Citizens United*, "That speakers [read 'donors'] may have influence over or access to elected officials does not mean that those officials are corrupt. And the appearance of influence or access will not cause the electorate to lose faith in this democracy."

The first of these two sentences involves a point of semantics—but an important one: Kennedy's formulation essentially reduces the meaning of "corruption" to bribery. But corruption comes in many flavors. Sometimes it consists in a donor's not *having* to ask elected officials for favors because he or she is confident they will know, without being told, how to express their gratitude appropriately. Ingrates rarely get reelected. As for the electorate's "losing faith in democracy," if that means overthrowing the government, Kennedy is probably right not to worry. But people are less likely to vote if they believe that whoever is elected to represent them will end up ignoring their interests. In a survey conducted by the pollsters Mark Mellman and Richard Wirthlin, two-thirds of respondents agreed with the statement "big contributors to political parties sometimes block decisions by the federal government that could improve people's everyday lives." Big campaign donations threaten the common good by allowing big donors to drown out the voices of ordinary voters both before and after elections. In his dissent from the majority in *McCutcheon*, Justice Stephen G. Breyer observed that "where enough money calls the tune, the general public will not be heard."

And the facts appear to confirm that money calls the tune in Washington. In an article published last year in the *Columbia Law Review*, Nicholas O. Stephanopoulos concluded that there is "near consensus in the empirical literature that politicians' positions more accurately reflect the views of their donors than those of their constituents." Meanwhile, two political scientists—Princeton's Martin Gilens and Northwestern's Benjamin Page—have compared two decades' worth of legislation with public-opinion surveys and discovered that in the United States "the majority does not rule—at least not in the causal sense of actually determining policy outcomes. When a majority of citizens disagrees with economic elites and/or with organized interests, they generally lose."

Thus, a bill that would have required criminal background checks for all gun purchasers died last year in the Senate, despite the fact that an overwhelming majority of Americans (91 percent) say they'd support such a law. All that mattered was the opposition of a well-funded "organized interest," the National Rifle Association. And thus the recent decision by Senate Republicans to filibuster a bill that would have raised the federal minimum wage to $10.10, despite the fact that a majority of Americans—and even a majority of registered Republicans—support a higher minimum wage. What mattered was the opposition of the economic elite, who fear that a higher minimum wage will mean lower corporate profit margins.

The good news is that if the United States is not as democratic as it ought to be—nor as democratic as most Americans imagine it to be—it is at least more democratic than it once was. And this is because, from time to time, ordinary citizens have banded together to become one of those "organized interests" politicians have trouble ignoring. The United States now needs another Progressive Movement, to secure and extend the victories of the first one, and to keep our new robber barons in check. It won't be easy—it wasn't then. But if democracy happens at all, it happens every day, not just during election season. It is, if you like, quid pro quo: in return for our vigilance and active political engagement, we can have a government that actually represents us. And not otherwise. ■

Jo McGowan

Modi's M.O.

THE BIG PROMISES & DARK PAST OF INDIA'S NEW PRIME MINISTER

"I dearly love a presidential year," E. B. White wrote in 1956. "What capers! What laughs and spills! And—at the end of the line—a real, live president. And the people's choice at that."

There weren't many laughs or capers in India's elections this year. Sixty-six percent of the country's 814.5 million eligible voters participated, and most voters appeared to take the election very seriously. Nevertheless, it was by and large a depressing campaign season. The ruling Congress Party—dominated by the Gandhi dynasty for generations—had to play defense, as it tried to rationalize its dismal performance over the past five years. The insurgent Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) was in ferocious attack mode: sarcastic, accusatory, haranguing.

At the end of it all, the BJP's Narendra Modi, formerly the chief minister of the western state of Gujarat, was the real, live prime minister. The BJP's win was described in the press as "historic," "momentous," and "game-changing." In fact, 69 percent of eligible voters did not vote at all, voted for one of the country's many regional parties, or voted for the Congress Party. Only 31 percent of the electorate actually voted for the BJP—not exactly a sweeping mandate. So why does it still feel like one?

Modi campaigned brilliantly and tirelessly. His was the first campaign in India to be professionally designed and managed, and it made excellent use of social media and technology. Modi was able to address a hundred rallies simultaneously, using lifelike holograms. He seemed to be everywhere at the same time: clever, convincing ads on prime-time television; full-page color ads in every newspaper (my husband and I subscribe to eight papers, and it felt like he lived with us). While no official figures have been released, his campaign is thought to have spent at least $670 million. There is no record of where this money came from.

The BJP's campaign tapped into a deep well of anger at the Congress Party's corrupt and ineffective governance. In city after city, state after state, Modi hammered home the point: India is mired in corruption, and its economy is stagnant; the country needs good governance. All true.

Modi craftily positioned himself as the only leader with the stature and the credentials to take the country forward, pointing to his ten-year record in Gujarat, a state widely regarded as a model of prosperity. In fact, Gujarat's growth rate is not much higher than that of many other states in India, and it actually lags behind on social indices like infant mortality, female literacy, and malnutrition. Twelve other states have a lower poverty rate, and Gujarat is ranked twenty-first in education. The state is in the "alarming" category on the India State Hunger Index: 44.7 percent of children in Gujarat under the age of five are underweight, and 23 percent are undernourished. Questioned about the rise in the number of undernourished children in 2006, about halfway into his tenure as chief minister, Modi claimed that Gujarati girls were so thin because they were too beauty-conscious.

During the election campaign, Modi was unapologetic about his strong Hindu beliefs and values. The stages set up for his rallies were sometimes decorated with religious imagery, and he was often to be seen bowing ostentatiously to Hindu deities, performing Hindu rituals, and seeking the blessing of Hindu leaders. Although he speaks about his party as one in which all are welcome, Muslims are clearly beyond the pale. One of his campaign stunts was to wear the headgear of whichever region he was speaking in: a turban in Punjab, a topi in Himachal, a beanie in Assam. But when a Sufi imam offered him the common Muslim skullcap, Modi pointedly refused.

Internationally, Narendra Modi is perhaps best known for his role in the 2002 Gujarat riots, in which more than a thousand Muslim citizens were massacred while police stood by, under orders to let things take their natural course for at least three days. It is generally believed that those orders had to have come from the chief minister's office. Refugee camps were set up to shelter the nearly two hundred thousand Muslims who lost their homes in the pogrom. Modi referred to these camps contemptuously as "baby-making factories"—an obvious appeal to the strangely popular notion that Muslims are poised to outnumber Hindus, who still make up 85 percent of the population in India. When pressed last year to show some remorse for the lives lost in the riots, Modi said he felt the same kind of sadness one might feel as a passenger in a car that runs over a puppy.

Modi is a lifelong member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu fundamentalist organization with views so extreme it has been banned three times in its nearly hundred-year history in India. One of its long-term goals is Akhand Bharat—a "united India" that would include countries from Afghanistan to Bangladesh. The RSS is the real force behind Modi's victory, and many believe it will be calling the shots in the new government.

Indian voters responded mainly to Modi's promises of rapid economic growth and a country where merit and hard work would be rewarded. He is "the people's choice," and maybe he will make good on his promises. But choosing to ignore his dark past and even darker ambitions seems like willful blindness. ■

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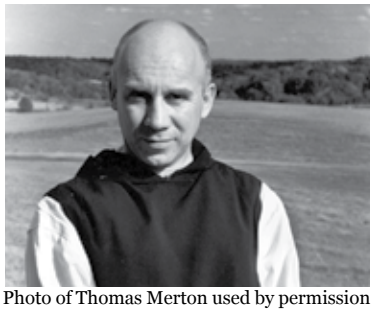

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noteworthy, given that the Dalai Lama himself praised Merton as having a more profound understanding of Buddhism than any other Christian he had ever known. Merton explores such topics as the importance of emptying the self, Zen Buddhism's elusive simplicity, and how it can help Christians reach a more heartfelt form of obedience to God.

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Mollie Wilson O'Reilly

The U.S. Sisters & the Holy See

A CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER IN ACTION?

Why hasn't Pope Francis stepped in to get the Vatican off the nuns' backs? After all, he has said he wants a more collegial church, in keeping with the vision of the Second Vatican Council. He urges priests and bishops to focus on encounter and outreach. He talks about leadership roles for women.

And yet the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's 2012 "assessment" of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious stands, and the LCWR—composed of the heads of some 80 percent of U.S. sisters—is still under orders to reform its ways to the satisfaction of the CDF. If Francis really wants a less authoritarian, more mission-focused church, shouldn't he have called this whole thing off already?

The fact that he hasn't, and the scolding the LCWR took from CDF head Cardinal Gerhard Müller in April, has led some to grumble that Francis is all talk. But to wish for the pope to cut short a process that began under his predecessor is to wish for him to play the autocrat, albeit on the side of the angels. Out of shrewdness, indifference, or agreement with the nuns' critics, Francis seems inclined to let the negotiations continue. And the awkward conversation between the LCWR and the CDF may turn out to be just the kind of encounter the church needs.

Laurie Brink, OP, suggested as much in a 2007 address to the LCWR, in which she acknowledged the serious divisions between hierarchy and nuns: "Until we as congregations of women religious initiate a process of reconciliation with our ecclesiastical brothers," she said, "we cannot hope to have much of an impact elsewhere." Ironically, the CDF cited Brink's talk as a reason for its crackdown. Still, then-prefect Cardinal William Levada promised the mandated reform would begin with a "personal encounter" between his office and the accused, "in a spirit of mutual respect and collaboration." The sisters have tried to take him at his word.

The question is whether the parties *can* have a respectful, collaborative relationship, given that the paternalism that rankles the sisters and their many supporters is, in Rome, the proper order of things. In the view of the CDF, bishops are always presumed to be acting correctly and in good faith, and the sisters are expected to take their cues entirely from them. Women's religious communities have a more expansive view of their vocations. Moreover, they know bishops do not always act wisely or in good faith. Recall that in 2011, the U.S. bishops' Committee on Doctrine issued a critique of Elizabeth Johnson's book *Quest for the Living God*. The tone was hostile and hyperbolic—Johnson's work, the bishops claimed, "completely undermines the Gospel and the faith of those who believe in that Gospel"—and the arguments grossly distorted what she had written.

Müller may not know that; he does, however, know that the U.S. bishops criticized Johnson "because of the gravity of the doctrinal errors in [her] writings," and so he interprets the LCWR's decision to give her an award at its August assembly as an "open provocation against the Holy See." He presumes both that the bishops' critique of Johnson was justified and that the sisters are acting in bad faith in honoring her. In fact, he insists, "there is no other interpretive lens, within and outside the church, through which the decision to confer this honor will be viewed." It is hard to be hopeful about any exchange that begins with one side declaring that there are no valid perspectives besides its own.

Sr. Pat Farrell, OSF

CNS PHOTO / SID HASTINGS

The American sisters' response to the investigation has been "humble, but not submissive...truthful, but gentle and absolutely fearless," as Pat Farrell, OSF, put it in her 2012 LCWR address. It could be that the group now wishes to honor Johnson to spite the bishops. But given their deliberate avoidance of open provocation thus far, it seems more likely that their decision to "recognize and thank [her] for modeling extraordinary leadership" is a sincere expression of admiration for the graceful way she has responded to the assault on her good name.

American women religious draw their remarkable strength in part from a half-century's experience living out the vision of Vatican II in their own communities. "The participative structures and collaborative leadership models we have developed have been empowering, life-giving," Farrell reminded the LCWR. "These models may very well be the gift we now bring to the church and the world." I hope so. I do want the CDF to get off the sisters' backs. But I also want bishops and sisters to be able to work together. Appeals to authority alone won't get us there. Intentionally or not, Francis is giving us all a chance to find out whether we can work through the messiness that comes with a culture of encounter. ■

Engagement or Retreat?

Catholicism & Same-Sex Marriage

Ross Douthat, Jamie L. Manson, Joseph Bottum

Last summer Commonweal *published a controversial essay by Joseph Bottum ("The Things We Share: A Catholic's Case for Same-Sex Marriage," September 13). Bottum, the former editor of* First Things, *had long publicly opposed same-sex marriage, but in "The Things We Share" he argued that it was no longer prudent for American Catholics to oppose the legal recognition of same-sex civil marriage—because such opposition had likely become a lost cause; because the only good arguments against same-sex marriage were no longer intelligible in an essentially post-Christian culture; and because same-sex civil marriage might end up being good for gay couples, as well as for America's marriage culture more generally. According to Bottum, Catholics should instead concentrate their efforts on the "re-enchantment" of a culture that had forgotten "the essential God-hauntedness" of the world. Because he did not argue for a change in church teaching, many readers of Bottum's essay criticized him for not going far enough. Many conservatives, meanwhile, criticized him for going much too far. We invited Ross Douthat, a conservative columnist at the* New York Times, *and Jamie Manson of the* National Catholic Reporter *to comment on Bottum's argument. What follows are their responses, together with Bottum's reply.*

Ross Douthat

I share many of the impulses that animate Joseph Bottum's essay: a recognition that gay-marriage opponents have been thoroughly routed in a remarkably brief span; a frustration with how the debate has played out for the church; a desire to rescue the riches of Catholicism from the clichés and caricatures of culture war. I also share his skepticism about some of the natural-law arguments deployed in defense of traditional marriage, his view that the march toward same-sex wedlock follows logically from premises embraced by the culture long ago, and his emphasis on the metaphysical underpinnings of our present situation.

But for all that, I think his central conclusion is either confused or a cop-out. The logic of Bottum's argument is similar (as he acknowledges) to the logic of Paul Griffiths's essay in *Commonweal*'s pages a decade ago ("Legalize Same-Sex Marriage," June 28, 2004), which argued that Catholics should support civil marriage for gay couples as a means of disentangling the church's sacramental view of wedlock from a "profoundly pagan" cultural context, and in the hope of "making the church more seductively beautiful" by contrast with the civil law.

Writing in response to Griffiths, former *Commonweal* editor Margaret O'Brien Steinfels noted that basic Catholic ideas about wedlock were still widely shared (this was 2004, when 60 percent of the country still favored the traditional definition of marriage), wondered why Griffiths would "throw in the towel in a polity where there is general agreement about the fundamentals of marriage," and accused him of succumbing to the lure of purity and separatism. "Withdrawal from public debate on the definition of marriage," she wrote, "or any other publicly contested issue is the gesture of sectarians"—and one that non-despairing Catholics should reject.

Much has changed since then, and Griffiths was obviously prescient about the direction of the debate. But Steinfels was right about the implications of the kind of move he was suggesting. For the Catholic Church to explicitly support the disentanglement of civil and religious marriage, and to cease to make any kind of public argument against treating same-sex unions the same way opposite-sex ones are treated in law and policy, would be a very serious withdrawal from political and cultural engagement. It is one thing to urge the church to prepare for political defeat on this issue—such preparations are obviously necessary, more obviously so now even than when Bottum's essay first appeared. But it is quite another—more separatist, more sectarian, and thus more problematic—to say that the church should preemptively cease to even make the argument.

After all, gay marriage is not the first case where the arc of modernity has bent away from Catholic ideas about the common good. (The age of social Darwinism springs readily to mind.) And it will not be the last. But to respond to such marginalization by simply withdrawing from the argument is a statement not of prudence but of cultural despair—suited to a social climate so corrupt, so pagan or post-Christian, that political participation is no longer possible at all.

The logic of Bottum's essay, like that of Griffiths's before it, points in this direction—toward a strategic withdrawal

from a corrupted culture, with implications that extend well beyond the marriage issue. And some of his rhetoric has that flavor as well—for instance, his suggestion that not only the debate over same-sex marriage but engagement across the entire terrain of sexual ethics needs to await the results of a very long-term "re-enchantment" process.

But Bottum doesn't want to follow this logic all the way to its separatist conclusion. Instead, he insists he's not actually counseling any kind of political or cultural retreat: "We should not accept without a fight," he writes, "an essentially un-Catholic retreat from the public square to a lifeboat theology and the small communities of the saved that Alasdair MacIntyre predicted at the end of *After Virtue* (1981)." But what will the church be doing in the public square, once it has ceased to offer public arguments on questions where its position has become unpopular? Well, says Bottum, we need a "more effective witness in the culture as it actually exists," and we need to find "much better ways than opposing same-sex marriage for teaching the essential God-hauntedness, the enchantment, of the world." Fair enough, and I agree—but then, as his examples of that witness and those ways, he offers the following: "Massive investments in charity, the further evangelizing of Asia, a willingness to face martyrdom by preaching in countries where Christians are killed simply because they are Christians, and a church-wide effort to reinvigorate the beauty and the solemnity of the liturgy."

I am afraid this risks being ridiculous. Charity, missions, martyrdom, liturgy—of course these are all crucial areas of concern for the church, but saying that American Catholics should support missions in Asia as a substitute for arguing about sexuality and marriage in America is a kind of Mrs. Jellyby Catholicism, in which the issues that Providence has actually placed before us are deemed too difficult to wrestle with and in their place we are to turn our gaze to the problems of Christians ten thousand miles away. (Suggesting that we should all go "face martyrdom" is less Jellyby-ish but even more implausible.) A church that followed this advice would be turning inward by turning outward; it would be no less sectarian than the MacIntyrean church that Bottum disfavors, but perhaps more self-deceived.

The point is this: If Catholics are to continue contending in the American public square, if they are going to choose active participation over catacombs and lifeboats, they need to have something to say to actual Americans about actual American debates. Those debates may have to do with economics, immigration, health care... but in a culture that's increasingly libertine, atomized, and postfamilial, some of what the church has to say will necessarily have to do with sexuality. And in arguing about sexuality, there is no honest way for the church to avoid stating its position on what the legal definition of marriage ought to be—even in a world where that definition has changed and doesn't seem likely to change back.

This need not mean starting every conversation with same-sex marriage; once the legal change is accomplished, it may involve talking about the issue less often, or talking about it in some very different way. But it cannot mean pretending that the church's opposition to calling same-sex unions "marriage" no longer exists.

Unless, of course, it actually doesn't. Bottum's essay, as I read it, does not make an argument for a formal change in church teaching, only for ceasing to defend that teaching's application to secular law. But in some passages he does tiptoe up to an argument that many liberal Catholics would make more explicitly—that is, the idea that there might be not only a small-c conservative case for gay marriage but a specifically Catholic one as well, and that an eventual ecclesiastical blessing of same-sex unions might actually fit in neatly with the church's broader message on marriage, and help our culture strengthen the crumbling link between sex, monogamy, childrearing, and wedlock.

Bottum's essay is mostly correct in its diagnosis of why and how the Catholic vision of marriage has lost ground in the culture, but mostly unpersuasive about what kind of engagement the church should seek instead.

I hesitate to rebut an argument that's only gestured at, even if it's one that many readers favorably disposed to Bottum's essay would endorse—and one that, if offered, might have lent his essay a little more coherence. So I'll just say this much: I think a serious look at the trends that have accompanied the advance of gay marriage, at the legal arguments deployed on its behalf, at the shifting understanding of marriage that has made it seem commonsensical, and at the direction of the debate on related issues (from polygamy to surrogacy) should all cast grave doubt on the idea that the church could somehow incorporate same-sex nuptials into its view of marriage without transforming that view beyond all recognition.

And since that wider transformation is something that Bottum definitely does not seek, I'll conclude where I began: His essay is mostly correct in its diagnosis of why and how the Catholic vision of marriage has lost ground in the culture, but mostly unpersuasive about what kind of engagement the church should seek instead. I don't blame him; it's a hard problem to solve. But the pre-emptive surrender he proposes cannot be the answer. ■

Ross Douthat *is a columnist for the* New York Times *and the author, most recently, of* Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics *(Free Press).*

Jamie L. Manson

On the first day same-sex marriage became legal in New York State, in July 2011, I headed to Washington Square Park to witness the marriage of two women. The couple, who had been together for nineteen years, first exchanged vows and rings in a commitment ceremony seventeen years ago. The vows they repeated on that Sunday afternoon gave them, at last, equal protection under the law.

After the ceremony, we celebrated with pizza, strawberries, and prosecco (smuggled into the park in coolers). The twenty people in attendance, whose ages ranged from twenty-one to well over seventy, all shared two things in common with the couple. We were all either gay or lesbian, and we all remained deeply committed to our Catholic faith. The married couple—both former nuns—first met at Mass two decades ago. And it was directly to Mass that they, and most of the wedding party, headed after the festivities.

Seeing these two women still so completely in love after two decades together, few could deny how naturally they complemented one another on every level. But for all of the special and spiritual aspects of the afternoon, I was struck most by how *ordinary* it was. I wished that those who regard same-sex marriage with contempt, fear, or concern could have observed that celebration. What they would have witnessed would probably have borne a striking resemblance to other weddings they've attended: friends weeping over the couple's vows, taking tons of pictures, and enjoying a great party.

Joseph Bottum is certainly correct that "same-sex marriage is already here; it's not as though we can halt it"—and that strenuously resisting state recognition of same-sex marriage is an expensive, damaging battle for the Catholic hierarchy. In his view, "American Catholics should accept state recognition of same-sex marriage simply because they are Americans."

I would take that further. As someone preparing to enter a same-sex marriage with my partner of five years, I think American Catholics can and should accept recognition of same-sex marriage because they are Catholics. The church should revise its attitude toward same-sex relationships not simply because the culture is moving in that direction—which by itself, as Bottum says, is no reason to alter any moral teaching—but because it has become clear that that what the church teaches about homosexuality is not true.

Bottum writes that "the thin notions of natural law deployed against same-sex marriage in recent times are unpersuasive, and, what's more, they deserve to be unpersuasive—for their thinness reflects their lack of rich truth about the spiritual meanings present in this created world." I agree, though I suspect the truth I have in mind is not what Bottum is gesturing toward. Anyone with an experience of loving same-sex relationships will find unpersuasive the Catholic teaching that such relationships are sinful by their very nature because only sex acts that have the potential to create new life are licit.

Such a strict interpretation of natural law reduces human beings to their biological functions, and fails to appreciate persons in their totality as the emotional, spiritual, and physical beings that God created us to be. Most of us have realized that the potential to procreate does not by itself lead to the flourishing of married couples. Many childless couples have demonstrated that their relationships can also be fruitful and life-giving. So why must same-sex couples be regarded as incapable of marriage?

The church should revise its attitude toward same-sex relationships not simply because the culture is moving in that direction but because it has become clear that that what the church teaches about homosexuality is not true.

In her book *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, Margaret Farley proposes that, in addition to meeting the norms of equality, mutuality, and commitment, a just and loving sexual relationship should also demonstrate fruitfulness—which need not be limited to conceiving and raising children. Some married couples are called to be parents, Farley explains, but *all* married couples are called to bring the life of God into the world by caring for one another, nourishing other relationships, working to mend our broken world, and being a sign of faithfulness to their community.

Rather than making procreation and genital complementarity the fundamental criteria for marriage, we should instead be asking whether spouses are a visible, tangible sign of God's loving presence in our midst. Does their relationship help them flourish as individuals and as a couple? Does their commitment inspire others to deepen their fidelity and devotion? Are they a sign of the power of forgiveness, mercy, and unconditional love? Are the sacrifices that they make for one another an incarnation of the selfless love to which Jesus calls us?

Many of us know same-sex couples that fit this description, and, sadly, we know married heterosexual couples that do not. Reducing these couples to the functions of their anatomies simply does not do justice to the Catholic understanding of human persons. Recognizing the potential of a gay or lesbian couple to fulfill the requirements of sacramental marriage would be one way to embrace "the spiritual meanings present in this created world," as Bottum puts it. The growing acceptance of same-sex relationships

and the push for same-sex marriage is not, I would argue, a sign that reality needs re-enchanting, but a sign that our culture may be more receptive to a challenging spiritual vision of married love and commitment than Bottum suspects.

Bottum seems to want to table the question of whether gay and lesbian relationships are sinful until some future date when the church and the culture are better equipped to discuss it. "After the long hard work of restoring cultural sensitivity to the metaphysical meanings reflected in all of reality," he says, "Catholics will have enough experience to decide what measure of the deep spirituality of nuptials, almost absent in present culture, can reside in same-sex unions." For people like myself, and the friends who joined me that Sunday in Washington Square Park, that suggestion is unsatisfactory. By all means, we should work to make our culture more sensitive to the deep spirituality of nuptials. But same-sex couples shouldn't have to wait for the success of that project, whatever that might look like, before we can participate.

It may take centuries before the Catholic hierarchy recognizes that marriages like the one I witnessed in the park, or the one I hope to enter, are holy unions with the potential to bring the life of God more fully into our world. But just as most of our culture has already concluded that same-sex relationships are equally deserving of protection under the law, for many Catholics the question of whether gays and lesbians are capable of living the vocation of marriage is already settled.

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Joseph Bottum

All our discussions of marriage in this country are strange, contorted expeditions—stretching over unmarked chasms, swerving around invisible barriers. We are voyagers adrift in a landscape of unlikeliness, and most of the peculiarity derives, I think, from a very simple fact: We wish to hide from ourselves the truth that contemporary Western culture has generally removed sex from the category of human actions that it believes can be judged in moral terms.

Of course, polls show that Americans still express strong disapproval of adultery, however often they commit it, and rape remains a moral category—an expanding category, in fact, which may itself be confirmation of the broader condition: perhaps the word "rape" is used for an increasing range of crimes simply because we lack any other moral vocabulary for identifying wrongful sex. Still, most sexual behavior, from masturbation to sadomasochism, has come to seem not much more than an amoral bouncing: sex as anaerobic workouts in the gymnasium of our beds.

The Pill is often named as the great enabler of these changes in our cultural understanding, combined with such things as publically acceptable divorce and the antibiotics that brought venereal disease under control in the era before AIDS. But whatever their origin, our altered attitudes about sex would have made for an odd social landscape all by themselves—except, of course, that those attitudes never existed all by themselves. The final piece of strangeness, the last skew, is the peculiar fact that the demoralizing of sex came to us in the twentieth century as itself a moral thing. Whether formulated in terms of physical health or mental stability or social improvement, our attitude to sex reflects an inherited Edwardianism that finds its moral gratifications in rejecting Victorian mores: a stern judgmentalism about anything that resists nonjudgmentalism in sex.

You can hear it still in the admiring tone with which the word "transgressive" is used in the sex-drenched essays of modern academia. You hear it still, for that matter, in the way Jamie L. Manson deploys the word "challenging" in her reply to my essay, even while she describes the social outcomes she wants as so ordinary and unremarkable that the church ought to embrace them immediately. There is, in truth, a key cultural feeling of morality left in sex, but it's the self-righteous joy of knowing that one opposes the evil prudes who think sex still has some morality left in it.

This is the landscape in which same-sex marriage made its dramatic appearance over an incredibly short period of time, a volcano cone suddenly rising and erupting in American society. I've just never been sure where exactly on the map it lies. Sometimes same-sex marriage has been described as a natural outcome of the removal of sex from the realm of morality. Sometimes it has been praised as a wonderful transgressive rebellion, good because it helped undo bad Western norms. Sometimes it has been described as a useful expansion of an old idea, helping preserve the marriage culture. Occasionally it has been promoted as a way of returning ethics to sexual relations, drawing gays and lesbians away from support for the demoralization of sex, to which, it is claimed, they were forced by the repressions of a premodern morality that lasted into the modern world.

In other words, the arrival of legal recognition of same-sex marriage was over-determined in America. And that's why I think it makes a terrible object for the Catholic Church to pick as the synechdoche for all the objectionable things in contemporary society. Our problem as Catholics isn't that same-sex marriage somehow uniquely represents Western society's recent turns; our problem is those turns themselves: the disenchantment of the world, the systematic effort to hunt down and destroy the last vestiges of old metaphysical and spiritual meanings in the world.

As I argue in my latest book, *An Anxious Age*, the eradication of the old supernatural meanings ended up creating new supernatural meanings in America—and often less benign ones, as strange angels and demons drifted out of the decaying mainline Protestant churches to find their

THE CATCH

On Paul Signac's
The Blessing of the Tuna Fleet at Groix

Signac painted the fishing boats straight on,
Five of them and a little skiff,
prows forward, masts splicing the air,
flags flying in the breeze of a most
temperate day, clouds, but not rain, the rippling
Atlantic waters contained in the bay.

The people, sticks of black behind the boats,
barely visible, but I bet the whole town
turned out for the send-off, at least one child
fished out, gasping, and the priest, rushing
the planks, wings of his stole flapping
behind him, ready to fling holy water aloft.

But the blessing belongs to the artist
who must have sketched the scene from his own boat
further out, the one he sailed from Mediterranean
port to port, all the way to Istanbul.
He painted a thousand dabs of color
he knew the eye would transform into fish for the catch.

—Norita Dittberner-Jax

home in social politics. Such a situation is both unhealthy and dangerous. When we suppose our ordinary political opponents are not simply mistaken but actually evil, we live in a world overtaken by misplaced spirituality. A world in which politics has become soteriology.

This is the modern turn that public Catholicism in America needs to oppose. In the current American legal and social climate, there is simply no available solution to the puzzle of human sexual desire. The cathedral of meaningful marriage has collapsed, opening space for advocates of same-sex unions to claim that they are building a small but stable chapel in the rubble. Are they, in fact? I don't know, and neither does anyone else. But I rather imagine they should be left alone to try, just as I demand that the high post-Protestant moralists stop using same-sex marriage as a sledgehammer with which to knock down every Catholic institution in America.

Ross Douthat reads my essay as a retreat from politics—and a self-contradictory one, since the essay also counsels against fleeing modern corruptions aboard small lifeboats of the saved. But the contradiction exists only if one takes a narrow view of politics as somehow existing apart from culture. Among political commentators, Douthat has been one of the most appreciative of culture, but he's still caught by the modern trap in which everything seems politicized, and our cultural understandings, our spiritualized experiences of the world, become political battles. The Catholic work that needs to be done is the work that rebuilds Catholic culture, restoring what in *An Anxious Age* I call "a room with a view," a spiritually and theologically secure place from which to look out on the world and offer both criticism and praise. The examples of good Catholic work I gave in "The Things We Share" are dismissed by Douthat as Mrs. Jellyby inanities: pretending to care for distant souls as an excuse for the selfish ignoring of souls nearby. But I named those things as possible ways of working toward goals not merely in Asia and the Global South (where, in fact, the future of Christianity lies) but also here at home: extra-political devices by which we try to create and assert Catholic culture among ourselves.

Jamie L. Manson wants to bring the current social regime into the church, and Ross Douthat wants to bring the church into the current social regime. I have enormous sympathy for the motives behind both these views. But they each begin with the late modern premise that the supernatural enchantment of reality is primarily a political thing. For that matter, they both begin with the notion that homosexuality—and the issue of same-sex marriage in particular—ought to be near the center of Catholicism's public moral concern. That's bad politics and bad metaphysics, in just about equal measure. Douthat admits that Catholics shouldn't necessarily begin conversations with same-sex marriage. Amen. But allow me to take a long step beyond that: I think we actually do need to start conversations with a mention of the Blessed Virgin. You want to re-moralize sex? Re-imbue it with beauty and meaning? Then use Catholic culture as your starting point. Say the rosary, and change the world.

With its strawberries and prosecco in the park, Manson's reply has the class markers and ecclesial feeling of writing by an admirably sensitive Episcopalian of liberal bent. With its rueful here-I-stand politics, Douthat's reply reads like the work of a thoughtful Evangelical culture warrior of conservative impulses. That both authors are Catholics I have no doubt, but hand in hand they walk the unlikely landscape of American post-Protestantism—formed by its struggles, determined by its debates: inseparable companions on a trip I urge them not to take. ■

Joseph Bottum *is an Amazon.com bestselling author whose latest book is* An Anxious Age: The Post-Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of America *(Image/Random House).*

Merciful God, Merciful Church

An Interview with Cardinal Walter Kasper

During his first Angelus address, Pope Francis recommended a work of theology that "has done me so much good" because it "says that mercy changes everything; it changes the world by making it less cold and more fair." That book is Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life *by Cardinal Walter Kasper, which was recently published in English by Paulist Press. Before serving as president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (2001–10), Kasper was bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart (1989–99). He has taught theology at the University of Tübingen, the Westphalian University of Münster, and the Catholic University of America. Last month, associate editors Matthew Boudway and Grant Gallicho spoke with the cardinal in New York. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

CNS PHOTO / PAUL HARING

COMMONWEAL: In your book *Mercy*, you argue that mercy is basic to God's nature. How is mercy key to understanding God?

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: The doctrine on God was arrived at by ontological understanding—God is absolute being and so on—which is not wrong. But the biblical understanding is much deeper and more personal. God's relation to Moses in the Burning Bush is not "I am," but "I am *with* you. I am *for* you. I am going with you." In this context, mercy is already very fundamental in the Old Testament. The God of the Old Testament is not an angry God but a merciful God, if you read the Psalms.

This ontological understanding of God was so strong that justice became the main attribute of God, not mercy. Thomas Aquinas clearly said that mercy is much more fundamental because God does not answer to the demands of our rules. Mercy is the faithfulness of God to his own being as love. Because God is love. And mercy is the love revealed to us in concrete deeds and words. So mercy becomes not only the central attribute of God, but also the key of Christian existence. Be merciful as God is merciful. We have to imitate God's mercy.

CWL: Why is it so necessary to retrieve that understanding today?

KASPER: The twentieth century was a very dark century, with two world wars, totalitarian systems, gulags, concentration camps, the Shoah, and so on. And the beginning of the twenty-first century is not much better. People need mercy. They need forgiveness. That's why Pope John XXIII wrote in his spiritual biography that mercy is the most beautiful attribute of God. In his famous speech at the opening of Vatican II, he said that the church has always resisted the errors of the day, often with great severity—but now we have to use the medicine of mercy. That was a major shift. John Paul II lived through the latter part of the Second World War and then Communism in Poland, and he saw all the suffering of his people and his own suffering. For him mercy was very important. Benedict XVI's first encyclical was *God Is Love*. And now Pope Francis, who has the experience of the southern hemisphere, where two-thirds of Catholics are living, many of them poor people—he has made mercy one of the central points of his pontificate. I think it's an answer to the signs of the times.

CWL: It was reported that Pope Francis asked a young Jesuit what he was working on, and when the man said he was studying fundamental theology, the pope joked, "I can't imagine anything more boring!" It seems that Francis wants to emphasize the role of pastoral theology. What does that mean for the practice of theology?

KASPER: I don't see a contradiction between dogmatic theology—which is what I studied—and pastoral theology. Theology without a pastoral dimension becomes an abstract ideology. It was always important during my time as an academic to visit parishes, hospitals, and so on. When I was responsible for Catholic relations with the Third World, I visited many slums in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. For me, those experiences were important because the word of God is not a doctrine. It's an address to people. Pastoral work without a certain doctrinal basis is not possible. It becomes arbitrary or just good-natured behavior. Therefore dogmatic theology and pastoral theology are interrelated; they need each other.

CWL: There's obviously a connection between mercy and forgiveness. Do you think that in the Christian understanding there can be forgiveness without reconciliation? Is forgiveness something that necessarily involves two parties—one to offer the gift and another to accept it? Or is it simply a matter of a readiness to forgive that does not depend on another person's willingness to accept forgiveness or acknowledge the need for it?

KASPER: You can start with the Latin term *misericordia*, which means mercy. Misericordia means having a heart for the poor—poor in a large sense, not only material poverty, but also relational poverty, spiritual poverty, cultural poverty, and so on. This is not only heart, not only an emotion, but also an active attitude—I have to change the situation of the other as much as I can. But mercy is also not opposed to justice. Justice is a minimum that we are obliged to do to the other to respect him as a human being—to give him what he must have. But mercy is the *maximum*—it goes beyond justice. Justice alone can be very cold. Mercy sees a concrete person. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the neighbor was the person the Samaritan met in the street. He's not obliged to help. It's not a question of justice. But he goes beyond. He was moved in his heart. He bent down in the dirt and helped this man. That's mercy.

Mercy is the fulfillment of justice because what people need is not only formal recognition but love. You ask about forgiveness: mercy is also forgiveness, but it should not be reduced to forgiveness. It goes beyond forgiveness. Often my willingness to forgive is a condition for the other to open himself, but it is not in my hands. I can offer forgiveness, or I can ask, "Please forgive me," but I cannot do more. If his heart is closed, I cannot change it. I can pray for him, I can ask, I can show my good will. More I cannot do. Of course, without forgiveness, no reconciliation is possible. It's a condition of reconciliation. But the other has to accept it. It's a question of freedom. To forgive is my freedom, and the other is free to accept it or not.

CWL: In your book you refer to John Paul II's second encyclical, in which he writes that justice alone is not enough, and that sometimes the highest justice can end up becoming the highest injustice. Has that been the case inside the church itself, especially with respect to the way the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has dealt with certain theologians?

KASPER: Mercy concerns not only individuals. It is also an imperative for the church itself. The church defined itself at the Second Vatican Council as a sacrament of God's grace. How can the church be sacramental, a sign and instrument of mercy, when she herself doesn't live out mercy? So many people do not perceive the church as merciful. It's hard. John XXIII said that we must use the medicine of mercy *within the church*. Mercy is also a critical point for the church. She has to preach it. We have a sacrament of mercy—the sacrament of penance, but we have to reevaluate it, I think. And it has to be done in social behavior and in social works. Pope Francis has said we must become a poor church for the poor—that's his program. In this respect, he begins a new phase of the reception of the council.

CWL: You also note that mercy and justice cannot be finally established here on earth, and that whoever has tried to create heaven on earth has instead created hell on earth. You say that this is true of ecclesiastical perfectionists too—those who conceive of the church as a club for the pure. How dominant is that view among church leadership today?

KASPER: There are those who believe the church is for the pure. They forget that the church is also a church of sinners. We all are sinners. And I am happy that's true because if it were not then I would not belong to the church. It's a matter of humility. John Paul II offered his mea culpas—for the teaching office of the church, and also for other behaviors. I have the impression that this is very important for Pope Francis. He does not like the people in the church who are only condemning others.

When it comes to the CDF's criticisms of some theologians, there was not always due process. That's evident, and here we must change our measures. This is also a problem when it comes to the question of Communion for divorced and remarried people, which is now under consideration in preparation for the Synod of Bishops this autumn. On the other hand, we have positive signs of mercy within the church. We have the saints, Mother Teresa—there are many Mother Teresas. This is also a reality of the church.

CWL: In your speech to open the consistory in March [published in English as *The Gospel of the Family*], you noted that, for the sake of their children, many deserted partners are dependent on a new partnership, a civil marriage, which they cannot quit without new guilt. Later in your speech, you talk about the possibility that a divorced and remarried Catholic might, after a period of penance, receive Communion again. You say this would be a small number of people, the ones who really want the sacrament and who understand the reality of

their situation and are responsive to the concerns that their pastor would have. Are you envisioning a situation in which a divorced and remarried Catholic—a Catholic with a new partnership and a civil marriage—could not live with his or her new partner "as brother and sister" without destroying that partnership, since the other partner might not allow the relationship to continue on those terms. Is that the kind of scenario you had in mind?

KASPER: The failure of a first marriage is not only related to bad sexual behavior. It can come from a failure to realize what was promised before God and before the other partner and the church. Therefore, it failed; there were shortcomings. This has to be confessed. But I cannot think of a situation in which a human being has fallen into a gap and there is no way out. Often he cannot return to the first marriage. If this is possible, there should be a reconciliation, but often that's not possible.

In the Creed we say we believe in the forgiveness of sin. If there was this shortcoming, and it has been repented for—is absolution not possible? My question goes through the sacrament of penance, through which we have access to Holy Communion. But penance is the most important thing—repentance of what went wrong, and a new orientation. The new quasi-family or the new partnership must be solid, lived in a Christian way. A time of new orientation—*metanoia*—would be necessary. Not punishing people but a new orientation because divorce is always a tragedy. It takes time to work it out and to find a new perspective. My question—not a solution, but a question—is this: Is absolution not possible in this case? And if absolution, then also Holy Communion? There are many themes, many arguments in our Catholic tradition that could allow this way forward.

To live together as brother and sister? Of course I have high respect for those who are doing this. But it's a heroic act, and heroism is not for the average Christian. That could also create new tensions. Adultery is not only wrong sexual behavior. It's to leave a *familiaris consortio*, a communion, and to establish a new one. But normally it's also the sexual relations in such a communion, so I can't say whether it's ongoing adultery. Therefore I would say, yes, absolution is possible. Mercy means God gives to everybody who converts and repents a new chance.

CWL: A defender of the church's current teaching and pastoral practice would say that absolution requires penance, and that entails a firm purpose of amendment—that is, that you do not intend to go back to the sinful situation as though nothing has changed. You intend not only not to sin anymore but to avoid "the near occasion of sin." The critics of your proposal would say, yes, we're all for absolution for people like that, but it may require what you describe as a heroic adjustment of their lives for them to be properly disposed to receive Communion.

KASPER: I have high respect for such people. But whether I can impose it is another question. But I would say that people must do what is possible in their situation. We cannot as human beings always do the ideal, the best. We must do the best possible in a given situation. A position between rigorism and laxism—laxism is not possible, of course, because it would be against the call to holiness of Jesus. But also rigorism is not the tradition of the church.

Alphonsus Liguori was a rigorist at the beginning. Then he worked with simple people near Naples and found out that it's not possible. And he was a confessor. Then he worked out this system of equiprobabalism—where there are arguments for and against, and in these cases you can choose. I'm very sympathetic to this. And of course Alphonsus Liguori is the patron of moral theology. We aren't in bad company if we rely on him. And Thomas Aquinas wrote on the virtue of prudence, which does not deny a common rule, but you have to apply it to a concrete and often very complex situation. So I think there are arguments from the tradition.

I cannot think of a situation in which a human being has fallen into a gap and there is no way out. Often one cannot return to one's first marriage. If possible, there should be a reconciliation, but often it's not possible.

CWL: So, just to be clear, when you talk about a divorced and remarried Catholic not being able to fulfill the rigorist's requirements without incurring a new guilt, what would he or she be guilty of?

KASPER: The breakup of the second family. If there are children you cannot do it. If you're engaged to a new partner, you've given your word, and so it's not possible.

CWL: In your address to the consistory, you ask whether we can, "in the present situation, presuppose without further ado that the engaged couple shares the belief in the mystery that is signified by the sacrament and that they really understand and affirm the canonical conditions for the validity of the marriage." You ask whether the presumption of validity from which canon law proceeds is often "a legal fiction." But can the church afford *not* to make this presumption? How could the church continue to marry couples in good faith if it assumed that many of them were not really capable of entering into sacramental marriage because they were, as you put it somewhere else in your speech, "baptized pagans"?

KASPER: That's a real problem. I've spoken to the pope himself about this, and he said he believes that 50 percent of marriages are not valid. Marriage is a sacrament. A sacrament presupposes faith. And if the couple only want a bourgeois ceremony in a church because it's more beautiful, more romantic, than a civil ceremony, you have to ask whether there was faith, and whether they really accepted all the conditions of a valid sacramental marriage—that is, unity, exclusivity, and also indissolubility. The couples, when they get married, they want it because it's stable. But many think, "Well, if we fail, we have the right." And then already the principle is denied. Many canon lawyers tell me that today in our pluralistic situation we cannot presuppose that couples really assent to what the church requires. Often it is also ignorance. Therefore you have to emphasize and to strengthen prematrimonial catechesis. It's often done in a very bureaucratic way. No, we have to provide catechesis. I know some parishes in Rome where couples have to attend catechesis, and the pastor himself does it. We must do much more in prematrimonial catechesis and use pastoral work and so on because we cannot presuppose that everybody who is a formal Christian also has the faith. It wouldn't be realistic.

CWL: But you can imagine the outcry there would be if priests regularly told couples, "I can't marry you because I don't really think that you believe in the things people have to believe in order to get married."

KASPER: That's why there must be dialogue between the couple and the priest, who should teach them what it means to marry in the church. You can't presume that both partners know what they are doing.

CWL: You also talk about the difference between the Eastern Orthodox principle of *oikonomia* and the Western principle of *epikeia*. Could you explain the difference between those things, and how it's important in questions such as how the church treats divorced and remarried Catholics?

KASPER: The Orthodox have the principle of *oikonomia*, which allows them in concrete cases to dispense, as Catholics would say, the first marriage and to permit a second in the church. But they do not consider the second marriage a sacrament. That's important. They make that distinction (whether the people do is another question). I'm not sure whether we can adapt this tradition to our own, but we have similar elements. *Epikeia* says that a general rule must be applied to a particular situation—very often complex—taking into consideration all circumstances. We talk about *jurisprudence*, not *jurisscience*. The jurist must apply the general rule, taking account of all circumstances. For the great canonists of the Middle Ages, *epikaia* was justice sweetened with mercy. We can start there. We have our own resources for finding a solution.

CWL: Until recently you were president of the Pontifical Council on Promoting Christian Unity. How might this issue fit into ongoing ecumenical relations with the Eastern Orthodox. If there was a change in the way the Roman Catholic Church deals with remarried Catholics, would that make things much easier, or even a little easier, for rapprochement between the East and the West? Or no easier at all?

KASPER: It would be made easier. They have this old tradition, and their tradition was never condemned by an ecumenical council. The Council of Trent condemned the position of Luther, but did not discuss the Orthodox position. The council formulated the problem of the indissolubility in a very cautious way because Venice had some islands that were Orthodox but under the Latin hierarchy. They didn't want to lose those islands. So we did not talk about this problem. We had more fundamental problems with the Orthodox. But if we could find a new solution on the basis of our own Western tradition, I do think it would be easier to find a concrete solution to our problem with the Orthodox.

The fathers of the church had a wonderful image: If there is a shipwreck, you don't get a new ship to save you, but you get a plank so that you can survive. That's the mercy of God—to give us a plank so we can survive. That's my approach to the problem.

CWL: When it comes to the issue of Communion for divorced and remarried Catholics, you have your critics, some of whom have found outlets in the Italian press. Cardinal Carlo Caffarra, archbishop of Bologna, was given a great deal of space in *Il Foglio* to criticize your proposal. He has one question for you: "What happens to the first marriage?"

KASPER: The first marriage is indissoluble because marriage is not only a promise between the two partners; it's God's promise too, and what God does is done for all time. Therefore the bond of marriage remains. Of course, Christians who leave their first marriage have failed. That's clear. The problem is when there is no way out of such a situation. If we look to God's activity in salvation history, we see that God gives his people a new chance. That's mercy. God's love does not end because a human being has failed—if he repents. God provides a new chance—not by canceling the demands of justice: God does not justify the sin. But he

Two Poems by Rainer Maria Rilke
translated by Frauke Regan

AUTUMN

The leaves are falling, falling from afar,
as if in heaven distant gardens wilted;
they fall with gestures of negation.

At night the heavy earth in somber evocation
falls into solitude from every star.

We all do fall. This hand here falls,
and look at others: it is inherent in them all.

And yet, there's Someone who forestalls
in infinitely tender hands each fall.

ARCHAIC TORSO OF APOLLO

We never knew his audacious head
in which the eyeballs ripened. But
his torso still glows like a candelabra
in which his gaze, merely turned down low,

still lingers and gleams. Otherwise the downward
curving breast could not dazzle you, nor would a slight
turn of the loins educe a smile upon encountering
that central point where begetting begins.

Otherwise this stone would stand disfigured and
abridged below the shoulders' transparent plunge
and would not shimmer like the pelts of carnivores;

and would not burst from all its confining borders
like a star: for there is not a single point
that does not see you. You must change your life.

Frauke Regan is editing a translation of Brautbriefe *by Moses Mendelssohn (1936, Schocken Verlag).*

justifies the sinner. Many of my critics do not understand that distinction. They think, well, we want to justify their sin. No, nobody wants that. But God justifies the sinner who converts. This distinction appears already in Augustine.

I do not deny that the bond of marriage remains. But the fathers of the church had a wonderful image: If there is a shipwreck, you don't get a new ship to save you, but you get a plank so that you can survive. That's the mercy of God—to give us a plank so we can survive. That's my approach to the problem. I respect those who have a different position, but on the other hand, they must see what the concrete situation is today. How can we help the people who struggle in these situations? I know such people—often women. They are very engaged in parish life; they do all they can for their children. I know a woman who prepared her daughter for First Communion. The parish priest said the girl can go to Holy Communion, but not mama. I told the pope about this, and he said, "No, that's impossible."

The second marriage, of course, is not a marriage in our Christian sense. And I would be against celebrating it in church. But there are *elements* of a marriage. I would compare this to the way the Catholic Church views other churches. The Catholic Church is the true church of Christ, but there are other churches that have elements of the true church, and we recognize those elements. In a similar way, we can say, the true marriage is the sacramental marriage. And the second is not a marriage in the same sense, but there are elements of it—the partners take care of one another, they are exclusively bound to one another, there is an intention of permanence, they care for children, they lead a life of prayer, and so on. It's not the best situation. It's the best *possible* situation. Realistically, we should respect such situations, as we do with Protestants. We recognize them as Christians. We pray with them.

CWL: And we know that they don't consider their marriages a Catholic sacrament—

KASPER: There are other problems. We consider the civil marriage of Protestants as valid, indissoluble marriages. They don't believe in the sacramentality. There are also internal problems in the current canon law. How do you explain this to a Protestant—"it's a valid marriage for you, but for a Catholic it's not"? So we should to some degree reconsider the canonical regulations.

CWL: Is it fair to say that your critics think this is a disagreement about the indissolubility of marriage, but you're saying that the disagreement, such as it is, is about the purpose of the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist?

KASPER: In no way do I deny the indissolubility of a sacramental marriage. That would be stupid. We must enforce it, and help people to understand it and to live it out. That's a task for the church. But we must recognize that Christians

can fail, and then we have to help them. To those who say, "Well, they are in a sinful situation," I would say: Pope Benedict XVI has already said that such Catholics can receive spiritual communion. Spiritual communion is to be one with Christ. But if I am one with Christ, I cannot be in a situation of grave sin. So if they can receive spiritual communion, why not also sacramental Communion? I think there are also problems in the traditional position, and Pope Benedict reflected a lot about this, and he said that they must have means of salvation and spiritual communion. But spiritual communion goes very far: it's being one with Christ. Why should these people be excluded from the other Communion? Being in spiritual communion with Christ means God has forgiven this person. So the church, though the sacrament of forgiveness, should also be able to forgive if God does it. Otherwise there is an opposition between God and church—and that would be a great problem.

CWL: The pope has said that the church needs a better theology of women. You've said that we need to find a way to give women leadership roles inside Vatican offices. Do you see that happening any time soon, and how might that work?

KASPER: I'm not in favor of women's ordination. But there are offices in the Vatican that do not require ordination. In economic affairs, for example, there are professional women who could carry out such duties. Ordination is not required to lead the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Half of the laity are women. There is an office for laity and there are no women in leadership there. That's a problem. What about the Council for the Family? There's no family without women.

I have experience as a bishop. I appointed one woman to the bishop's advisory council. From that day on the whole atmosphere changed in our dialogue. She was a very courageous woman. Women bring a richness of vision and experience that men lack. At the Vatican, that could be helpful.

At the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, for example, ordination is required to lead. But the CDF has a group of consulting theologians. They do not decide; they consult. Today we have many women who are professors of theology. Why not include their voices? Something must be done about this. It would change a certain clericalistic atmosphere.

CWL: How would you describe the atmosphere at the Vatican right now? Is there a lot of nervousness, anticipation that changes are underway or will be soon, or is there a sense that a lot of the international media hype about the new papacy is sort of trivial and not closely related to the life of the church?

KASPER: The Vatican is a plurality of people, and they are different. At the Vatican there are many of us who are very much in favor of Pope Francis because we saw at the end of the last pontificate events like Vatileaks, so something went wrong. It wasn't functioning. Many people are in favor of some modifications, some changes—and the pope wants it. But of course to change is not easy. The Curia is the oldest continuously existing institution in Europe. Such an old institution has its ways of doing things, so it's not easy to change from one day to another. There is some resistance. And when you change something there's always a debate, pro and contra, which is happening at the Vatican. But I have the impression that Pope Francis is determined to make some changes. He's already made very important ones. I think there's already a point of no return. He made changes, for example, in financial and economic areas. He wants the church to have a more synodical structure. He wants the local churches to be taken more seriously—not in a way that denies the primacy of the universal church. Primacy and synodical structures are not opposed to each other. They are complementary, and Francis wants that. We're not having just one synod on marriage and the family—but we're going through a synodical *process*. Between the two sessions of the synod, this year and next, he goes back to the local church so this can be discussed at the parish level. He wants to bring in the voices of the faithful. These are changes that have met with some resistance, of course, but there are also many who are in favor of them. So the pope, very determined, goes on. If he's given a few years, he will do something.

CWL: The pope is seventy-seven years old. Given the fact that others will be responsible for carrying out his reforms—along with the institutional inertia that you just described—what are the prospects for success?

KASPER: Pope John XXIII only had five years, and he changed a lot. There was also a point of no return with Paul VI. Pope Francis cannot do everything by himself; he thinks in categories of process. He wants to initiate a process that continues beyond him. He will have the opportunity to appoint, I think, 40 percent of the cardinals, and they're the ones who will elect a new pope. In that way he's able to condition a new conclave.

Of course the Holy Spirit is also present. I wouldn't look at this only at the institutional level. The election of Pope Francis was a surprise—for us cardinals in the conclave too. This new pope is a surprise every day. During the conclave, I felt the Holy Spirit at work. So I trust more in this reality, in people. But Pope Francis's popularity is not only hype. Many pastors in Rome told me that last year and this year many more people went to confession at Eastertime—people who for years did not go to confession. If everybody who for years did not go to confession starts going again, then that's more than hype. That's a very deep personal decision. And these people returned, they said, because of the way the pope speaks about mercy. There is, I think, a deeper reality going on. And this deeper reality is, for me, very important. ■

Cruel but Not Unusual

The Scandal of Solitary Confinement

Derek S. Jeffreys

Several years ago, I drove more than two hundred miles from Green Bay, Wisconsin, to the isolated town of Boscobel. Boscobel is hard to get to; its airport has little commercial traffic, and the nearest Greyhound station is more than thirty miles away. If Wisconsinites have heard of the place at all, it's probably because Boscobel is home to the Wisconsin Secure Program Facility, a heavily fortified prison on the edge of town. I was there to visit one of the many inmates being held in solitary confinement.

Our visit was not exactly personal. It took place in a small room with a video screen near the ceiling, on which the image of the inmate suddenly appeared. I strained both my neck and voice to communicate with him. In the hour of conversation permitted to us, the inmate shared a story of remarkable resilience. Years of isolation in a small cell had left him with numerous physical ailments. Harsh and racist treatment from the prison staff had complicated his struggle to maintain sanity in a bleakly monotonous environment. He told me that only his practice of Islam had enabled him to survive. I left deeply impressed with his fortitude and personal dignity—and horrified at the conditions of his incarceration.

That visit to Boscobel brought home to me the degrading character of contemporary solitary confinement. In the past three decades, the United States penal system has embraced a brutal policy of isolating inmates. Despite a growing consensus that the tactic is a gross violation of human dignity, an estimated fifty- to eighty-thousand prisoners are held in isolation in the nation's jails and prisons. The policy represents a terrible tradeoff. Widespread use of solitary confinement may bring short-term order to some penal institutions, but it does serious damage to inmates and exacts a steep moral cost.

It would be hard to exaggerate the grim reality of life in U.S. penal institutions. They are overcrowded and dangerous, and prison officials struggle to maintain order. Gangs brutalize inmates and threaten staff members. Sexual predators assault vulnerable inmates. Violent men and women with little to lose wantonly attack corrections officers. And, in recent decades, thousands of mentally ill people have entered jails and prisons. Unable to adapt to incarceration, they often create serious disturbances. Corrections officials, responsible for protecting staff and inmates, must separate violent prisoners from the rest of the population, discourage breaches of discipline, and create an atmosphere where inmates can safely pursue recreational and other activities.

To achieve these goals, prison officials employ punitive isolation, placing inmates who violate disciplinary rules in solitary confinement. There they must live in small cells for at least twenty-three hours a day, released only for exercise (usually in a small cage), showering, or the occasional visit from relatives. Their lives are carefully controlled: they cannot read, watch television, listen to the radio, or engage in other activities without official permission. Often, they can read items only from an approved list of books or periodicals. Many cannot go to the bathroom, shower, or exercise without cameras monitoring them. When leaving their cells, they undergo humiliating body-cavity searches. They may have access to a chaplain, but cannot attend religious services; Catholic inmates may go years without receiving Communion if prison officials refuse to allow it. Depending on their behavior, inmates may also be barred from seeing relatives. Visits that do take place occur with a barrier of protective glass or, like my visit, via a video screen. Inmates can remain in isolation for months or years, and many have no idea when they will be released back into the general prison population.

Scholars and activists trace the use of this kind of solitary confinement—routine, long-term, and punitive—to the federal prison in Marion, Illinois. In the 1960s Marion replaced Alcatraz as the nation's toughest federal detention facility. It housed particularly troublesome inmates, and when officials used a variety of behavioral-modification techniques to break their wills, the prison descended into chaos. Things came to a head in 1983, when inmates brutally murdered two corrections officers. In response, Marion officials instituted a controversial lockdown, confining inmates to their cells for twenty-three hours a day. The prison's rate

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of violence dropped, and what began as a temporary policy lasted for twenty-three years, despite protests from inmates and their supporters.

The Marion lockdown was one of several experiments in isolation in the last decades of the twentieth century; others occurred at a federal women's prison in Lexington, Kentucky, and a state prison in Trenton, New Jersey. Because these experimental policies survived court challenges and halted disorder, they became models for local, state, and federal penal authorities. As prison populations exploded in the 1980s and '90s, state after state constructed high-tech "supermax" facilities devoted entirely to solitary confinement. These prisons were often located in remote rural areas, which made it difficult for relatives to visit; architects worked meticulously to design buildings that maximized isolation. Other state prisons built new "segregation" units that could isolate as many as two hundred inmates at a time. In the 1990s, the federal government opened its supermax in Colorado, which houses convicted terrorists and other prominent criminals. Most jails and prisons now have sections dedicated to solitary confinement, typically labeled "Secure Housing Units," "Administrative Segregation Units," or even "Reflection Cottages."

Sr. Natalie Rossi, RSM, a prison chaplain, prays with a Catholic inmate in solitary confinement at the State Correctional Institution for Women in Cambridge Springs, Pennsylvania.

CNS PHOTO / BOB ROLLER

Corrections officials maintain that these isolation units reduce gang influence and contain violent inmates. Scholars find it difficult to substantiate these claims, since penal authorities are rarely forthcoming with data about inmates in solitary, and scholars cannot gain access to segregation units. A few, including Sharon Shalev and Daniel P. Mears, have tried to evaluate the efficacy of solitary confinement, and have found little empirical evidence that it achieves its stated goals. The threat of segregation does not clearly motivate inmates to change their behavior. Removing gang leaders from the general population may create a power vacuum that produces more violence. And some prisoners subjected to isolation become so damaged that they pose a renewed threat to staff and inmates when they return to the general prison population; if released from prison, they may also take out their rage on others in their communities.

Such realities provide reason to doubt that isolation enhances institutional safety in the long term. The difficulty of evaluating solitary confinement's efficacy also reflects the arbitrariness with which penal institutions administer it, and the lack of public scrutiny or oversight of the process. Officials insist they employ due process in deciding whom to isolate. But few inmates are sentenced by a court to serve time in solitary confinement; such sentences are administrative matters handled by Corrections Departments. Wardens and disciplinary committees decide who should be isolated, and inmates who contest these decisions rarely prevail. To be sure, some selected for solitary have committed horrific crimes, or are violent and incapable of living with others. Many, however, are guilty of only minor disciplinary infractions. Thousands are thrown into solitary for alleged gang association, insubordination, possession of contraband material, protests against prison conditions, or even for writing allegedly subversive essays.

Prisoners can receive up to a year in segregation for minor infractions; those guilty of more serious offenses can serve years. In Louisiana's Angola penitentiary, a man named Herman Wallace spent more than forty years in solitary before being granted a "compassionate release" while dying of cancer. Some inmates have had years tacked on to an initially short sentence in solitary for committing disciplinary offenses while in segregation. In the Secure Housing Unit (or "SHU") at California's Pelican Bay prison, those charged with gang affiliation were told they could exit solitary only by informing on others or renouncing their gang membership. Given the dangers of this choice, many inmates chose to remain in solitary.

In other cases, inmates have been thrown into segregation while still waiting for their cases to be tried. Recently at Rikers Island in New York City, a sixteen-year-old awaiting trial spent a total of four hundred days in solitary confinement. He was released from jail after three years when the flimsy case against him fell apart. Last year, a man in New Mexico settled a civil-rights lawsuit for his treatment in a local jail, where he was incarcerated on suspicion of a DWI but never given a trial. Placed in solitary for nearly two years and denied access to dental care, he was forced to extract one of his own teeth.

Corrections officers face daily threats of violence. On constant alert, they nonetheless frequently suffer injuries

at the hands of angry or mentally ill inmates. As a result, some feel safer working in a segregation unit, where inmates cannot easily assault them. Yet some corrections officers I spoke with consider the segregation unit the worst place in the prison to work, a site of continual noise, violence, and degradation. The work can be especially stressful and dangerous. When an inmate disobeys an order, groups of officers in an "extraction team" approach his cell, dressed in protective gear and armed with shields, Tasers, and other weapons. If the inmate refuses to comply, the officers will flood his cell with chemical agents. In some cases they have reportedly thrown stinger grenades, which spray rubber pellets into a concentrated area. Eventually the officers open the prisoner's cell and violently subdue him. A few states have employed dogs in cell extractions (as documented by Colin Dayan and Human Rights Watch).

Such extractions often result in injuries to both staff and inmates. But merely living in isolation is enough to cause deep damage to inmates. Because of the closed character of most penal institutions, social scientists find it difficult to measure how solitary affects people psychologically. Most of the research that has been conducted points to solitary's psychological harm. After a relatively short period in isolation, a person begins to disintegrate mentally and emotionally. Symptoms include constant agitation and the incapacity to tolerate new stimuli. The inmate often begins to ruminate excessively on minor offenses or relatively meaningless events. Agitation and rumination can lead to violent bouts of anger and paranoia. Sadly, such afflictions can remain with a person long after confinement is over. In addition, thousands of those now languishing in solitary confinement were already known to be mentally ill. The psychological pressure of isolation can lead to what mental-health professionals call "decompensation": mental illnesses reappear or worsen, and inmates are unable to perform everyday functions. This deterioration may give rise to violent conflicts with staff, and may require emergency psychiatric intervention.

In addition to psychological harm, solitary confinement also inflicts spiritual damage. A person in solitary finds his horizon drastically circumscribed. Cells are painted in ugly, drab colors. Some inmates don't see the outdoors for years. Cell doors block outside stimuli, creating sensory deprivation. Lights that remain continually on disrupt an inmate's diurnal rhythms and disorient his sense of time. Some inmates experience hallucinations and strange out-of-body experiences. One person I talked with reported seeing a dead relative in his cell. Gradually, some inmates lose any sense of an outside world and cannot imagine anything beyond their segregation unit.

The social deprivation of solitary confinement exacts a more subtle toll. Humans are social beings, and it is by relating to other people and gauging how they respond to us that we develop a narrative of our lives—our sense of self. But those in solitary receive no feedback from others and have difficulty judging the significance of their actions. They often lack clocks or calendars, and without a way to mark time, the events of their life become disconnected. Some inmates report having trouble recognizing their own faces in a mirror. They may withdraw completely or fall into depression, sleeping continually and refusing to leave their cells for exercise or showers. Others go mad, mutilate themselves, or engage in pointless battles against corrections staff. The suicide rate in many segregation units far exceeds that of the prison's general population.

The damage solitary confinement does to prisoners is no accident. The dehumanizing conditions in which inmates are held—the lack of sensory stimulation and human contact; the petty control over inmates' daily lives; the disorientation with regard to time; and the threat of indefinite isolation—are, in the minds of prison officials, essential to solitary's power as a disciplinary tool. Contemporary solitary confinement is a policy *designed* to do harm to the men and women subjected to it.

This would seem like an obvious case of cruel and unusual punishment under the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution. But courts have been reluctant to draw that conclusion, and current law makes it difficult for inmates in solitary even to bring cases to court. The 1996 Prison Litigation Reform Act erected a host of barriers to those who mount legal challenges to prison conditions. In cases where inmates and their lawyers have succeeded in doing so, courts have intervened to halt physical brutality against solitary inmates. But they generally refuse to go beyond such judicial actions by declaring solitary confinement itself to be cruel and unusual punishment. And while prisoners in California recently drew outside attention with a hunger strike to protest their living conditions—some of the strikers had been in solitary for more than a decade—in the end they extracted only minor concessions from prison authorities.

In some cases, courts have stopped penal institutions from placing mentally ill inmates in solitary. In 2000, inmates and lawyers brought a class-action lawsuit against Boscobel, alleging cruel and unusual punishment. A federal court ruled in favor of the inmates and barred Boscobel from keeping minors and mentally ill offenders in isolation. (In response, the Wisconsin Department of Corrections reclassified Boscobel, erasing the supermax designation. Nevertheless, it continues to hold inmates in solitary.) In 2013, lawyers alleged that a mentally ill inmate in the federal supermax in Colorado ate his own feces, built sculptures out it, and smeared it on his cell walls. Authorities ignored him and placed sandbags around his cell in an attempt to contain the foul odor. That case is still pending. But while its outcome might lead to improved conditions for mentally ill inmates in Colorado, the federal government shows little sign of abandoning solitary confinement; a promised review of its policies has not deterred it from proceeding with plans to open another supermax prison in Illinois.

Though progress at the federal level has been limited, some states have recognized the horror of solitary confinement and have made substantial changes to their penal systems. Mississippi and Maine have both moved away from solitary confinement in their maximum-security prisons, and in 2013, Illinois closed its Tamms supermax prison, a house of horrors that profoundly harmed its occupants. Following the national attention garnered by its inmate hunger strike, California promised to alter its procedures for sending inmates to the SHU. Other states have taken smaller steps, sometimes prompted by lawsuits, to reduce the numbers of those in isolation. Recently, New York announced new regulations to ensure that juveniles in solitary remain in their cells for only nineteen hours—and receive more exercise outside their cells. New York prisons will no longer place pregnant women in isolation, will institute greater due process for segregation decisions, and will be prohibited from putting mentally ill inmates into segregation.

Such reforms represent small changes to an enormous nationwide system. Yet they demonstrate that institutional security doesn't require the use of long-term solitary confinement. Yes, in rare cases—during a riot or outbreak of mass violence—prisons must put inmates in temporary isolation. But instances of this extreme punishment should be few and far between. Prisons can place inmates in single cells to protect them or prevent them from harming others. They can institute short-term lockdowns to restore prison order or deal with violent inmates. Scholars and activists around the world have proposed ways to maintain prison order without resorting to long-term solitary confinement—pointing, for example, to Europe, where most nations have nothing like the American system of solitary. In 2011, Juan E. Méndez, a United Nations expert on torture, called for "safeguards" and "guiding principles" to govern the use of solitary confinement in the United States. He acknowledged that the tactic could be legitimate in exceptional circumstances—for example, to protect an especially vulnerable prisoner—but recommended that inmates never be isolated for more than fifteen days at a time.

Contemporary solitary confinement aims at degrading the personality, breaking the will, and forcing an inmate to submit to institutional regulations. The policy may help contain some violent criminals and bring about temporary order. But we know little about its long-term efficacy. More important, we must recognize moral limits to how we treat human beings. Solitary confinement amounts to a systematic and intentional assault on human dignity. The United States, as the country with the world's highest incarceration rate, should be particularly alert to the human dignity inmates retain, despite their crimes. Our penal system disregards that dignity in consigning tens of thousands of Americans to the hell of solitary confinement. ■

Richard Alleva

Artful Schlock, Arty Dreck

'UNDER THE SKIN' & 'ONLY LOVERS LEFT ALIVE'

SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

As I watched Jonathan Glazer's critically acclaimed *Under the Skin*, I suddenly found myself wanting to write an essay titled "In Praise of Schlock." For the basic story unfolding on the screen—an alien who has taken on the appearance of an attractive female human seduces and destroys hapless men who wander into its clutches—was the very stuff of schlock. In fact, this story had served as the basis for more than one gratifyingly cheap entertainment. Remember the first and best of several versions of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, directed with no-frills savvy by Don Siegel and culminating with lovely Dana Wynter arising from her transformative pod to seduce a bewildered Kevin McCarthy into sharing her new extraterrestrial soulessness. And even closer to *Under the Skin*'s plot, there was *Species*, an unabashed roll in the cinematic gutter by the talented Australian director Roger Donaldson. *Species* featured supermodel Natasha Henstridge as a drop-dead-gorgeous compound of human and alien DNA who goes club-hopping through Los Angeles in search of horny men to help her procreate. No one who's seen that movie can forget Forest Whitaker staring at a slime-oozing cocoon on a wall and muttering, "Something bad happened here."

Yes, cinematic schlock can be ridiculously entertaining as long as it revels in its own lowbrow features: overblown special effects, titillating sex, preposterous plot twists, pseudo-scientific explanations, outrageous dialogue, and over-the-top acting. But when all these easy pleasures are excluded because a filmmaker believes he's creating a work of art, while the filmmaker also forgoes the elements of serious drama (e.g., coherent narrative and compelling characterizations), then what we get is a film like *Under the Skin*.

Here we have the sci-fi scenario of Scarlett Johansson driving her car through drizzly Yuletide Scotland (captured to dank perfection by Daniel Landin's cinematography), enticing young men with implicit sexual promises, and then taking them to her abode, which is equipped with a pool filled with dark… uh, liquid plastic? Alien muck? There she watches as the men are absorbed by the mysterious substance. For what purpose? I haven't the slightest idea and, probably, neither does Jonathan Glazer. We never find out where this creature came from or what her ultimate mission is. And who, or what, is that mysterious motorcyclist who seems to be disposing of the bodies that the Johansson alien apparently can't deal with?

The scenes of seduction provide the film's only interest—but for reasons having nothing to do with artistry. According to interviews with the director, the young men in these scenes are nonprofessionals who weren't aware they were being filmed as Johansson charmed them into her car. The moviegoer in the know can get a kick out of guessing what's going through the minds of these ordinary-looking blokes as this more than ordinary looking young woman shows such interest in them. But the amusement of this candid-camera device turns sour when Glazer uses a young man afflicted, I assume, with neurofibromatosis, to show that the alien can feel the stirrings of compassion. Even though the young man obviously gave his permission (after the fact) to have this scene included, it reeks of both condescension and exploitation. And it also makes no sense, since we've already seen the alien murder people without compunction and leave a crying baby exposed in the wintry Scottish air. So why the sudden access of empathy? From its sense that a deformed man is as much an outsider as an alien? Can an extraterrestrial really be so sentimental, or so sociological?

That's just one of many unanswered questions raised by *Under the Skin*, and apparently Glazer has convinced himself that a movie filled with unanswered questions must be profound. But profound art doesn't leave us with unanswered questions; it raises *unanswerable* questions, which is a completely different matter. Is Christian love akin to madness? Read Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* and you get no conclusive answer, yet the question is vividly probed, and that's what makes the novel great. Is human personality something real and solid, or is it just an easily shattered social construct? See Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* and you won't arrive at any conclusion, but your spiritual plunge into one human heart will make the question seem urgent.

What's particularly sad about *Under the Skin* is that Jonathan Glazer is capable of truly good films that do pose unanswerable questions—witness his second feature, *Birth*. Perhaps the most underrated movie of the past decade, *Birth* asked if deeply felt grief can ever really be healed sanely and securely without resort to false hopes. Glazer probed this mystery by employing some of the same cinematic devices used in *Under the Skin*: long silent sequences; the use of tight, lengthy close-ups of the lead actress's face to detect small changes in her character's consciousness. But that actress, Nicole Kidman, was playing a complex modern woman

confronted with choices we all have to face sooner or later. Glazer may have chosen an alien for his latest protagonist in order to ask what human life feels like when it's experienced by a nonhuman who hasn't been jaded by our quotidian routines. But how can the viewer sympathize with an alien's consciousness when we haven't been made familiar with its previous world and present capabilities? (Another sci-fi movie, Nicholas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, succeeded precisely by giving its alien some background and motivation.) Glazer may want to escape the gravitational pull of the everyday, but his interplanetary vehicle *Under the Skin* has no launch pad.

Jim Jarmusch's vampire movie, *Only Lovers Left Alive*, goes right where *Under the Skin* goes wrong—by giving audiences something recognizably human with which to empathize in the midst of supernatural doings. So I have to restrain myself from overpraising it just because it proves a point. It's an interesting second-rate movie, a bit of fun that keeps congratulating itself on being so cool. Jarmusch seems rooted in the same 1970s Bleecker Street CBGB milieu and sensibility that nourished Robert Mapplethorpe and Patti Smith. Like them, he worships artists not just for their works but for their lifestyles and aloofness from society's mainstream, an attitude that shows both real courage and sheer snobbishness. And, like them, he seems to long for the late-nineteenth century Paris of Rimbaud and Verlaine, of absinthe and ambiguous sexuality.

This, at any rate, is the atmosphere of *Only Lovers Left Alive*. Jarmusch's two protagonists, Adam (Tom Hiddleston) and Eve (Tilda Swinton), are glamorous, ultra-refined, etiolated vampires who have drifted through the past three or four centuries. Mostly nonviolent, they obtain blood not from necks but from the black market, and they drink it from long-stemmed wine glasses. Sometimes they live apart, sometimes together—at Adam's residence in Detroit (a dying city that, like a vampire, never quite dies) or hers in Tangiers. Their best friend is Christopher Marlowe (played with delicious deliquescence by John Hurt), who, it turns out, did indeed write Shakespeare's plays after faking his own death and now lives on as a fellow vampire. In fact, the film implies that most of the great European and American artists have been either vampires or fellow travelers of bloodsuckers. (Adam, a musical genius, contributed the adagio to Schubert's great string quintet.) As for all those billions of nonartists and nonvampires our poor lovers have had to share the earth with, they exist only to consume or ignore the beautiful things produced by the chosen few undead, who disdainfully refer to mortals as "zombies" and deplore the way they "fear their own imaginations." (Marlowe refers to the real William Shakespeare as "that illiterate zombie philistine.")

It's all rather corny in a preening way. So what makes *Only Lovers* watchable and occasionally enjoyable? First, though the protagonists aren't conceived with any great originality, they are recognizable as the decadents we know from life or literature, and so we can understand what moves and frightens and attracts them. If the movie skimps on psychology, at least the vampiric conventions are in place (the shunning of daylight, Eve staring hungrily at a fellow plane passenger's accidentally bloodied finger). Second, these arty monsters are funny in a way that Scarlett Johansson's blank alien can never be. Third, Jarmusch is enough of an entertainer to know that he must provide plot complication and suspense, which he does by introducing Eve's sister, Ava, who is anything but nonviolent and gets our heroes into trouble.

But the real trump card here is Tilda Swinton. With her formidably long, loping body—she looks great stalking through Tangiers in a stylish hijab—her mezzo purr of a voice, and those eyes that never seem to alight on anything in particular yet convince us that they see everything, Swinton endows this movie with a dangerousness and an unearthly beauty that lifts it above its own preciousness. ■

John Connelly

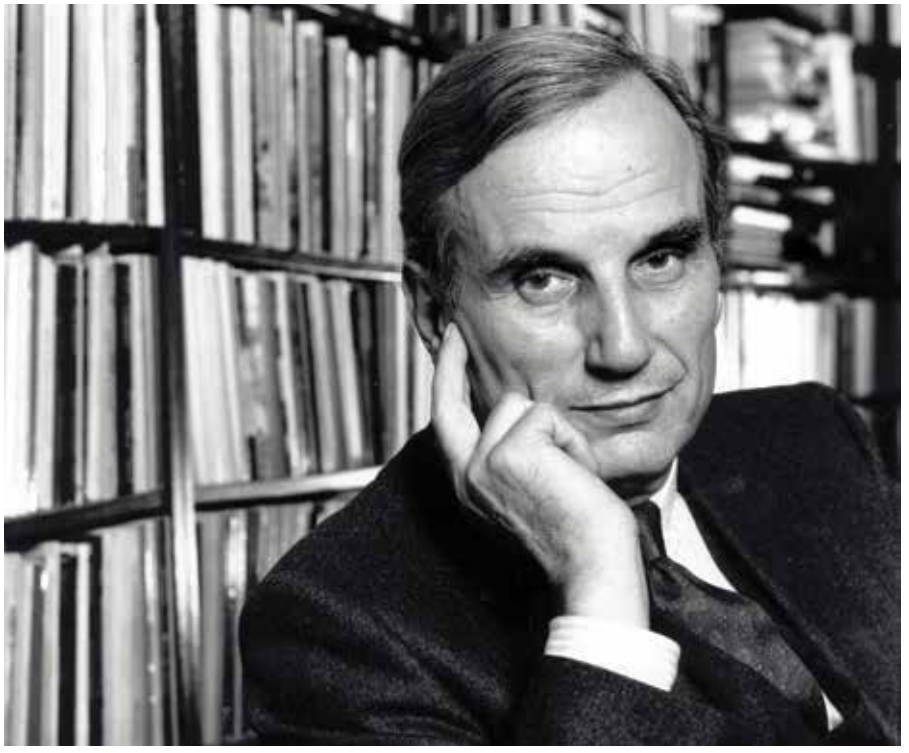
Family Values

Not I
Memoirs of a German Childhood
Joachim Fest
translated by Martin Chalmers
Other Press, $16.95, 464 pp.

In Berlin on the evening of December 5, 1930, Nazi brownshirts staged an assault on Weimar democracy. Their target was not this or that political rival, but rather a movie theater—the one premiering *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Lewis Milestone's adaptation of the bestselling Erich Maria Remarque novel that had drawn the ire of Nazi Gauleiter Joseph Goebbels for its denunciation of war. Many Germans considered Remarque a traitor for revealing the German army's cynical disregard for life. Yet his novel invited readers to share the lives of ordinary German soldiers suffering in the trenches of World War I; war itself was the enemy, and readers were meant to empathize with a lost generation, regardless of nationality.

Joachim Fest's memoir invites similar acts of sympathy. Fest (1926–2006), one of Germany's most respected historians and publishers, was a veteran of WWII, and readers of *Not I* will share his grief over the loss of young friends. This is an important service, as little in American popular culture has done for WWII what Remarque's novel did for the prior war. Remarque himself did contribute a post-WWII novel—*A Time to Love and a Time to Die*—later made into a movie by the German-born American director Douglas Sirk. The impression it gives is of decent people drawn into complicity despite their better selves.

Were Germans culpable for what their nation did? Fest's absorbing memoir is an unprecedented attempt to take American audiences deep into Hitler's Germany from the point of view of Germans who rejected Hitler. The author's father, Johannes, was a Catholic democrat and teacher who was sent into early retirement in 1933 for evident disdain of the Nazi movement. He then witnessed the consequences of this opposition, as bit by bit his family's comfortable *bürgerlich* life disappeared: the maid was let go; rooms of their spacious apartment were surrendered; and his wife, who loved theater and music, was forced to clean, cook, and sew patches on the fraying clothing of the family's five children.



Joachim Fest

OTHER PRESS

Johannes and his friends blamed Catholic Center Party politicians for surrendering to Hitler. But those leaders themselves had been surprised—caught sleeping when, instead of the Nazi coup they had anticipated, a small group of politicians brought Hitler to power legally, making him chancellor on January 30, 1933. Contrary to all expectation, the little known Austrian corporal proved adept at ruling one of Europe's largest and most complex states, putting millions back to work and scoring one foreign-policy triumph after another. From the autumn of 1936 Fest recalls a "big defection" to the National Socialists, even in middle-class Berlin-Karlshorst where he grew up.

Amid this enthusiasm, the stubbornly non-Nazi Fest family seemed an embarrassment, and people began crossing the street to avoid them. Mrs. Fest pleaded with her husband to relent. The regime held his quiet dissent against the family, and she feared for the children's future. But Johannes's principles were adamant. He could not abide silence on politics and culture, and each night he invited his older children

to a "second supper" of critical discussion of politics, culture, and history. All others might praise Hitler and his successes, but they would not: "Not I," the book's title, was the motto Johannes passed on to his children. It supposedly derived from Matthew 26:33, where Peter at the Mount of Olives proclaims that all others might abandon Christ but he would not. As the translator notes, this is a liberal rendering of Matthew, which in fact reads: "though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." But arguably Johannes got the deeper meaning.

Herr Fest was principled but also lucky. Calling the regime a "band of criminals," as he did in the refuge of the family dining room, would invite a death sentence if the words leaked outside. One Sunday morning officials showed up at the Fest residence demanding that Johannes enroll his sons in the Hitler Youth. He sent the men packing with undisguised contempt. That took courage—virtually every German family signed their children up for Nazi youth groups—and, but for the protection of a friendly Nazi party official, Johannes would have been arrested.

Sensing the coming war and mass murder, Fest advised Jewish friends to escape (some did). Until it became too dangerous, he and his friends collected money for those in desperate straits. When war came, Johannes watched helplessly as his sons did service in flak batteries, compulsory labor brigades, and finally the armed forces. Like other Germans, the Fests suffered staggering losses. Some 5 million German soldiers lost their lives, including Joachim's older brother, Wolfgang. Mrs. Fest was so shaken that even twenty years later Joachim could not mention his name in her presence.

After the war Joachim Fest embarked on a career of increasing prominence, first in radio, then with the right-of-center newspaper, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. He became known for biographies of Hitler and other Nazi leaders; before dying in 2006 he also managed to complete a study of Hitler's last days, *Downfall*, that became a successful film.

Some criticized him for minimizing the complicity of ordinary Germans in the regime's atrocities. (The Holocaust features on just three of over twelve-hundred pages of his Hitler biography.) In the late 1980s Fest seemed to make excuses for Germans in the "historians' debate" (*Historikerstreit*), which addressed the question of whether the Holocaust had features in common with other genocidal crimes, or represented something historically unique. Fest stood with conservatives who emphasized Nazism's commonality with other totalitarian regimes; his essay appeared next to a photograph of a mound of skulls of the victims of the Khmer Rouge. Within this debate emerged the question of whether German soldiers fighting under Hitler could claim our sympathy. One right-leaning historian, Andreas Hillgruber, insisted they must. When studying the Eastern front of 1945, he wrote, historians should "iden-

tify" with the "sacrificial exertions" of Wehrmacht soldiers holding back the marauding Red Army. Harvard Historian Charles Maier objected that these soldiers also "preserved a monstrous regime and allowed prolongation of suffering and hundreds of thousands of further Jewish or other civilian deaths."

For Fest the question was not simply academic. His brother may have died with a weapon in his hand, but his aunts and cousins were among the hundreds of thousands of defenseless women brutally raped by Soviet soldiers in spring 1945; when one uncle attempted to shield his wife, he was shot through the head. An aunt, crippled by polio, was pulled out of her wheelchair and raped repeatedly before being thrown down the cellar stairs and left to die.

It may be too much to call Fest's book part of a trend, but German authors have produced more "German perspectives" of the war in the past twenty years than in the five postwar decades preceding them. These efforts, made almost entirely for internal consumption, have focused on such topics as the mass bombing of German cities (which killed some six hundred thousand civilians, including eighty thousand children); the starvation and mistreatment of German POWs; the rapes of women by Soviet soldiers; the expulsions of some 10 million Germans from the East; the loss of just under a quarter of German territory (to Poland and Russia); and the division of the rest into two states that lasted fifty years. Such efforts have given voice to stories that Germans quietly told themselves for decades but that never became part of a national conversation, let alone an international one—reflecting a bitter implicit assumption that the penalty for having perpetrated a war of aggression, in which millions were killed, was silence concerning Germany's own national suffering.

Ironically, but perhaps logically, as the war recedes deeper into the past, and Germans who lived under Hitler die away, portrayals of life under the Nazis have proliferated. Last year some 7 million Germans watched the miniseries *Our Mothers, Our Fathers* (released in the United States as *Generation War*), which told the story of five young friends and their experiences of war. The film presents its characters as "types": a sensitive intellectual, for instance, who as a soldier becomes a ruthless killer; an ambitious artist who climbs her career ladder via moral compromise; and so on. In comparison with such archetypes, Joachim Fest's father comes off as completely original, indeed almost impossible. Representative of neither Catholicism nor region nor middle-class education, he is a man no novelist could imagine.

As for his son, in an interview a year before his death, Joachim Fest rejected popular explanations for Hitler's rise to power—the social-history perspective, for example, which views fascism as a movement of the lower middle class. As Fest knew, most Germans endorsed the Nazis, even the working class, some of whose leaders congratulated Hitler when he beat unemployment. Firm support also came from the educated middle classes who loved Goethe and Schiller as much as Johannes Fest did. In the end only "character" was decisive—or, perhaps more accurately, stomach. The Nazis made Johannes Fest want to vomit.

And yet in the end he could not escape. In the war's final months, the regime had pressed teenage boys and old men into military formations called the *Volkssturm*, and Johannes was called to serve. In April 1945 Soviet forces took him prisoner after the battle of Königsberg. Half a year later he returned from Soviet captivity a shell of himself. "He was hardly recognizable," Joachim's mother recalled, "a man abruptly grown smaller, slighter, grey-haired. Most of the time he simply sat there, his eyes sunken…"

Germany was free, but Fest senior felt no sense of triumph. Despite the urging of his children, he refused to write his memoirs. He rejected all talk of his past, so as not to create the impression that he had been a resister. The task of depicting what the Nazis had created was beyond him; what had happened went beyond the capacities of human comprehension. Among the most incomprehensible features of the months after Hitler's seizure of power, Johannes recalled, was the "fact that state crimes [like massive arrests of political opponents] were the most natural thing in the world." The Germans had not chosen Hitler, yet they had made Nazism their own, in a sense, domesticating it.

After the war, Johannes not only had occasion to weigh what had happened, he had a certain duty. The Allies learned of his quiet resistance and made him a member of a denazification court. Yet he disavowed any right to pass judgment, for example on a father of three who had acted as head of the local Nazi party branch. "Life has reasons," he said, "which no court in the world can understand." During the war he had chastised Joachim for volunteering for the Luftwaffe. When his son pleaded that he had joined in order to avoid being drafted into the SS, Johannes replied, "One does not volunteer for Hitler's criminal war. This decision you must leave to God… it's not in your hands, even if that's what you assume."

Readers of *Not I* will understand that some choices faced by Germans under Hitler were not choices, and will have little difficulty feeling the pain of Joachim or Johannes. Still, the suffering brought upon Europe by Germany defies the powers of imagination, and any sympathy with Germans exists within a monstrous shadow of wrongdoing. As I pondered Fest's memoir on the train from Verona to Munich a few months ago, an employee of the Austrian federal railways brought me that day's *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. A front-page article, "Forgotten Crimes," told of German President Joachim Gauck's visit of conciliation to the Greek village of Lyngiades, where on October 3, 1943, German paratroops massacred everyone—from an unbaptized baby to a hundred-year-old patriarch—in reprisal for the killing of a German officer. Germans today still do not grasp the extent of the atrocities committed by the Wehrmacht. If Gauck

were to visit one village a day in Greece that German forces had destroyed, he would need over three months; extend the list to Italy, Yugoslavia, Poland, and the Czech lands, and he would be busy for more than a year. Then there are the millions of Soviet POWs starved to death, the citizens of Leningrad and countless other cities killed by brutal conduct of war and attrition—not to mention the Holocaust of the Jews, the full dimensions of which historians have yet to chronicle.

These horror stories were suppressed, and are surfacing now, because the men and women of Fest's generation refused to rebuild their lives and country while staring countless crimes in the face. Historians reduced the misdeeds to numbers and assigned blame to a few leaders—the antiheroes of Fest's best-selling biographies—thereby facilitating the "Hitler's henchmen" theory of the horrors of Nazism. The SS were the villains, in this view, but the German army supposedly "decent" (a myth perpetuated by *Generation War*). Between this view and outdated ideas of broad culpability, where does the reality lie? *Not I* gives us a glimpse of society beneath the guilty leaders. Yet Fest waited until a few months before he died to publish his own memoir, effectively escaping probing questions.

When President Gauck, born in 1940, appears in Greece, he does not need to squirm. Graced by what Chancellor Helmut Kohl memorably called *die Gnade der späten Geburt*—"the blessing of a late birth"—he never wore a uniform with a swastika. Still Gauck can wonder—as might we—how he would have behaved as an adult with children in Berlin-Karlshorst in 1933 or 1944. This is not sympathy exactly, but a humble recognition of our limits to comprehend what happened not that long ago and not that far away. ■

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Gregg Herken

One Oops from Armageddon

Command and Control
Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident, and the Illusion of Safety
Eric Schlosser
The Penguin Press, $36, 631 pp.

Thermonuclear Monarchy
Choosing Between Democracy and Doom
Elaine Scarry
W.W. Norton & Company, $35, 593 pp.

It is not as though we haven't been warned. In April 1945—three months before their invention was tested, and before they could know if it even worked—the scientists who had built the first atomic bomb warned American policymakers that it was likely others, too, would soon make a nuclear weapon: "As a result, it is extremely probable that the future will make it possible to be constructed by smaller nations or even groups."

It is a warning that has gone unheeded ever since. During the Cold War, the great fear was of a history-ending conflagration, a "nuclear exchange" between the United States and the Soviet Union. Since 9/11, concern has centered on the use of a nuclear weapon—or of radiological poisons—against a civilian population by a terrorist cell: the unspecified "groups" of the scientists' jeremiad. Now, journalist Eric Schlosser has given us the raw material for a new nightmare: the likelihood of a catastrophic mishap culminating in the unintended explosion of a nuclear weapon. As a declassified Air Force history cited in Schlosser's book observes with admirable understatement, the result would be "an accident for which a later apology might be inadequate."

Although he is the author of two *New York Times* bestsellers—*Fast Food Nation* and *Reefer Madness*—Schlosser seems an unlikely authority on a topic that traditionally has been not only top secret, but the near-exclusive purview of so-called defense intellectuals, wonks who inhabit the Pentagon and the nation's military-funded think tanks. Nonetheless, *Com-*

ASPERSIONS / WIKIPEDIA

An intercontinental ballistic missile loaded into the silo of the Titan Missile Museum

mand and Control is a brilliant book, and the author's emperor-without-clothes approach is precisely the right one to demystify a subject whose importance seems inversely proportional to the public's understanding of it.

While the book breezes along in journalistic, even novelistic style, it is not a comfortable read, for Schlosser's focus is on those occasions—uncomfortably many, it turns out—where there have been significant slip-ups in the oversight of the nation's nuclear arsenal. One such near-catastrophe occurred on January 23, 1961, when a B-52 bomber crashed near Faro, North Carolina. In the course of the plane's death spiral, two Mark 39 hydrogen bombs, each having the explosive equivalent of 4 million tons of TNT, were ejected from the aircraft. One of the bombs penetrated more than seventy feet into dense mud. The other floated gently to earth and was found hanging by its parachute from a tree. Every safety mechanism that had been built into that bomb to prevent an accidental detonation had failed, except one: a simple low-voltage switch of the sort that one could buy in a hardware store for less than a dollar.

The author describes a multitude of similar close calls involving nuclear weapons. But the centerpiece of the book is the Damascus accident, which occurred in a missile field outside Damascus, Arkansas, on September 18, 1980, when a careless technician servicing a Titan-II intercontinental ballistic missile dropped a nine-pound socket wrench. The tool penetrated the missile's thin skin, causing highly-volatile fuel to leak into the surrounding concrete silo. Atop the Titan was a nine-megaton thermonuclear warhead. Schlosser skillfully builds suspense by alternating a blow-by-blow, almost minute-by-minute account of efforts to avert the impending disaster with chapters that recount the long history of efforts aimed at avoiding nuclear accidents like the one at Damascus. Both are stories of remarkable individual heroism and jaw-dropping bureaucratic ineptitude. Among the heroes of Schlosser's tale are not only the Air Force enlisted men and local first responders, but engineers like Bob Peurifoy, an employee of Sandia Laboratory—one of the nation's three nuclear-weapons labs—who has repeatedly put his career at risk fighting complacency and his colleagues' false confidence in order to ensure the safe design of America's nuclear weapons.

As Schlosser points out, the essential challenge that Peurifoy and other weaponeers face is the "always/never" dilemma—the bombs must always go off when they are supposed to, but never detonate as the result of an accident. In early 2008, this conundrum was succinctly summed up by General Kevin Clinton, then head of the U.S. Strategic Command, when he admitted that STRATCOM's mission was one "where we as human beings are challenged to be perfect. We are not perfect."

Clinton's frank if disturbing admission comes not in Schlosser's *Command and Control*, but in *Thermonuclear Monarchy* by Elaine Scarry, the Cabot Professor of Aesthetics and the General Theory of Value at Harvard University. In contrast to Schlosser's journalistic take on recent nuclear history, Scarry's critique of the existential dilemma created by nuclear weapons is that of an ethicist, legal scholar, and philosopher. The two books could not be more different in tone and approach. Going beyond Garry Wills's *Bomb Power: The Modern Presidency and the National Security State*, Scarry argues that the concentration of power which the decision to use nuclear weapons has vested in the Executive Branch is fundamentally antidemocratic. Not only is it at odds with the social contract the government makes with the electorate; it is also a direct violation of the Constitution, which requires congressional authorization for a declaration of war and, according to Scarry's reading of the Second Amendment, gives to the country's entire adult population responsibility for the use of the nation's "arms"—including nuclear arms. Particularly egregious, in the author's view, is the "first-use" doctrine in American defense planning—the declared right to initiate the use of nuclear weapons in a conflict, which every president since Truman has maintained. (In 2010, President Barack Obama announced that the United States would not be first to use nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear state, if that state was in compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.)

Scarry's use of academic jargon occasionally creates some tough sledding for the reader. One example: "Finally, the mistaken sense that constitutionally designated acts of verbal performance can be shifted among branches is perhaps heightened by the belief that such shifts are reciprocal." And a familiarity with philosophical treatises is certainly helpful—the author cites Plato, Locke, Kant, Hobbes, and Leibniz, among others, in arguing that nuclear weapons are immoral and should be abolished. In the end, Scarry's legal, ethical, and philosophical case against the bomb seems more principled than practical: "Nuclear weapons cannot be reconciled with governance," she writes at the start of one chapter. After 538 pages, the author's call to action—to rid the world of these potentially world-destroying weapons—comes in the book's final two sentences: "We should use whatever tool can best accomplish the dismantling. If there is a better tool, please tell us what it is, and help us to see how to use it."

Ironically, if there is a glimmer of hope for the future at the end of these two very different books, it lies in the actions of individuals, imperfect humans like those who rushed to the chaotic scene at Damascus, and who work still to ensure that such accidents don't happen again. ■

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Charles M. A. Clark

Blessed Are the Rich

Tea Party Catholics
The Catholic Case for Limited Government, a Free Economy, and Human Flourishing
Samuel Gregg
Crossroads, $24.95, 260 pp.

Christianity has always been skeptical toward arguments that defend the selfishness, greed, or self-interest of the rich and powerful as a necessary condition for the peace and prosperity of all. In his first apostolic exhortation, Pope Francis denounced a contemporary version of this kind of argument, describing "trickle-down economics" as an opinion that "has never been confirmed by the facts." This theory has failed, he writes, to bring about "greater justice and inclusiveness." Recent economic history supports the pope's judgment. In the past three decades, deregulation and tax cuts for the rich have not helped the poor, while cuts to social-service programs have predictably hurt them.

But not everyone has noticed. The Acton Institute, a Catholic think tank based in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is devoted to reconciling trickle-down economics with the church's social teachings. In the gospel according to Acton, the church's preferential option for the poor is really a preferential option for laissez-faire economic policy, which they believe is a sure path to universal prosperity. Blessed are the poor, for they shall enjoy the fruits of free enterprise if only governments will get out of the way.

The institute's director of research, Samuel Gregg, has recently written a catechism of the Acton creed, *Tea Party Catholic: The Catholic Case for Limited Government, a Free Economy and Human Flourishing*. Despite the book's title, Gregg wisely ignores much of the Tea Party's actual political agenda, which even the Acton Institute might have trouble defending, based as it is on ignorance of basic economic realities and anxiety about the loss of white privilege. Instead, Gregg expounds the theory that "limited government" will allow a "free economy" to promote "human flourishing." Since no one is in favor of unlimited government, "limited government" wouldn't seem to be a very useful term. But in Actonese, "limited government" really means minimal government: a government that upholds the rule of law, paves the streets, and throws a few crumbs to the starving. Capitalism will do the rest.

In fact, minimal government always turns out to be government for the rich and powerful, protecting their property, investing in services that help their businesses, and leaving them free to exploit the poor—and leaving the poor "free" to be exploited. In the past two centuries, greater justice and inclusiveness—economic, social, and political—has come through collective action, not individual striving. It was democratically elected governments that came up with minimum-wage laws and programs like Social Security, public education, and universal health care. It has been the bargaining power of labor unions, another form of collective action, that has forced big employers to provide decent wages and benefits to their workers. *Pace* the Acton Institute, it simply isn't true that whatever benefits the rich will also help the poor. But it is true that policies that help the poor and middle class also help the whole economy by creating greater demand for the goods it produces. Conservatives often claim that governments do not create wealth, that only businesses create wealth. In fact, no wealth can be created or secured without extensive government involvement. And it's not only roads and law enforcement that modern economies require from governments; they also need a healthy and educated workforce.

Samuel Gregg

This is not to say that government should take over all the functions of the economy. Most economic activity is best carried out by individuals, small groups, and businesses, with the government playing the supportive role of referee, as well as providing goods and services the private sector cannot effectively provide. Exactly how much the government should do is always a question of prudential judgment, as Gregg's book often acknowledges. But prudence requires careful and honest observation. There can be no prudential judgment about economic policy without reference to the actual historical and social context of economic activity. Absent such context, all you have is one-size-fits-all ideology. *Tea Party Catholic* does not seriously address the available evidence about the economic issues we face at the beginning of the twenty-first century; nor does it attempt to engage with the "social-justice Catholics" with whom Gregg disagrees. Instead, he just amplifies the old talking points of free-market ideology, presenting it as the cure for every ill, including the ills it has caused. In the wake of the financial meltdown of 2008—a disaster made possible by deregulation—and in the midst of growing economic inequality, to go on repeating these points is odd, if not pointless.

For someone so inclined to stick to an abstract theory, Gregg is strangely careless about the history of economic theory. He misrepresents the distinction all economic theory makes between value and price—the distinction that makes economic theory possible in the first place. He misrepresents not only Marx's theory of value but also Adam Smith's (in fact, Smith had two theories, neither of which is the one Gregg attributes to him). He claims that St. Thomas Aquinas believed that "the normal measure of value" is the price "in the settings of 'the market.'" But "the market" as Aquinas knew it was nothing like the theoretical competitive market Gregg has in mind; thirteenth-century markets were controlled by guilds and tradition and not "market forces" as economists understand them. But even in modern terms, value is different from the market price on a given day. If it weren't, price and value would be equivalent terms. Value, as economists use the term, is the long-term equilibrium price—the point toward which prices will tend if there is sufficient competition. This term allows economists to view the economy as an orderly system, but real economies often suffer from conditions that keep free markets from producing the best social outcome. This is called a market failure, and, as the term suggests, real markets can fail: in the real world of conflicting human interests and imperfect information, they are not infallible, self-directing systems. Sometimes markets don't function well because of too much government interference, sometimes because of too little. What matters most is not the degree of the government's involvement but the purpose of its involvement.

Besides getting the theory wrong, Gregg's use of history is highly problematic. He mentions Charles Carroll as an early example of Tea Party Catholicism. Carroll was the only Catholic to sign the Declaration of Independence, and Gregg presents him as one of a group of Catholics in colonial Maryland who, because Catholics were excluded from public life, put all their energy into business pursuits and became very successful. At the time of the War of Independence, Carroll was reportedly the richest man in the colonies. But that's only part of the story. Gregg doesn't mention that, while Carroll was by all accounts a very good businessman, he owed his inherited fortune to the insider trading of his grandfather, who was Lord Baltimore's land agent. And much of Carroll's wealth consisted of the human beings he owned. In fact, he was the largest slaveholder in Maryland. In short, Carroll was hardly an example of a free-market success story.

The quality of Gregg's analysis does not improve when he gets to the contemporary scene, partly because he insists on the continuing relevance of eighteenth-century ideology in a world whose economy has little in common with that of our nation's founders. Gregg says the gold standard is something Catholics "are free to argue about among themselves"—yet another question of prudential judgment. But of course the stupidity of promoting a gold standard has nothing to do with Catholic moral principles. A commodity-based currency only makes sense in an economy where most people are self-sufficient farmers, and where commercial exchange is the exception rather than the rule. In an economy like ours, you need an elastic money supply that grows and shrinks according to the needs of commerce.

Debates about the best scope and scale of government are fundamental to collective deliberation about our future. Such debates change from one generation to the next for the simple reason that our society is continually changing. It's no use imagining that these debates could have been settled once and for all by a thirteenth-century Dominican or our eighteenth-century founding fathers. No doubt there are things we can still learn from these people, but they have nothing to tell us about problems they could not have anticipated: Aquinas doesn't discuss credit-default swaps or health insurance or automation. We can only hope to be as attentive to the facts that surround us as those intellectual giants were to the facts that surrounded them—and as open to new possibilities. The goal should be economic policies that suit our current needs, not slavish devotion to theoretical models designed to meet the needs of economies very different from our own. Free-market fundamentalism—an economic ideology that does not fit existing economic realities and often ignores them—is really an enabling myth for the 1 percent, designed to keep those without economic power from questioning the status quo. It is both tragic and farcical when this myth is confused with Catholic social teaching and presented as a defense of freedom. ■

Charles M. A. Clark *is professor of economics at St. John's University in New York.*

James P. McCartin

God Bless Americanism

Divided Friends

Portraits of the Roman Catholic Modernist Crisis in the United States

William L. Portier

Catholic University of America Press, $39.95, 408 pp.

This fine book highlights four once-prominent U.S. clerics—John Slattery, Dennis O'Connell, William Sullivan, and Joseph McSorley—who were involved in an early-twentieth-century theological controversy that sent Catholic intellectuals scrambling for cover. The spirit of Isaac Hecker, the nineteenth-century convert and founder of the Paulist Fathers who inspired each of them, pervades the narrative, securing him a starring role in the book, too. Theologian and historian William Portier, a regular *Commonweal* contributor, meticulously illustrates how these men collectively nourished a distinctive, though now sadly underappreciated, American theological and spiritual tradition, one that appeared to be doomed a century ago. Along the way, he makes a strong case that academic theology programs in the United States have unduly favored European theologians and shortchanged the vision and accomplishments of the homegrown Hecker.

What got these men into trouble? In one sense, the answer is simple. In 1907, Pope Pius X denounced something he called "Modernism," a fearsome "synthesis of all heresies" issuing from the incursion of contemporary historical, philosophical, and scientific methods into the domain of sacred theology—a development that, he concluded, threatened to demolish the "deposit of faith" the church was duty-bound to protect. The pope's denunciation affirmed his continuity with his immediate predecessor Leo XIII, who had declared thirteenth-century Thomism the template for all theological studies. It also unleashed a torrent of investigations and recriminations that left even orthodox scholars who toyed with newer ideas vulnerable to zealous enforcers with Vatican ties.

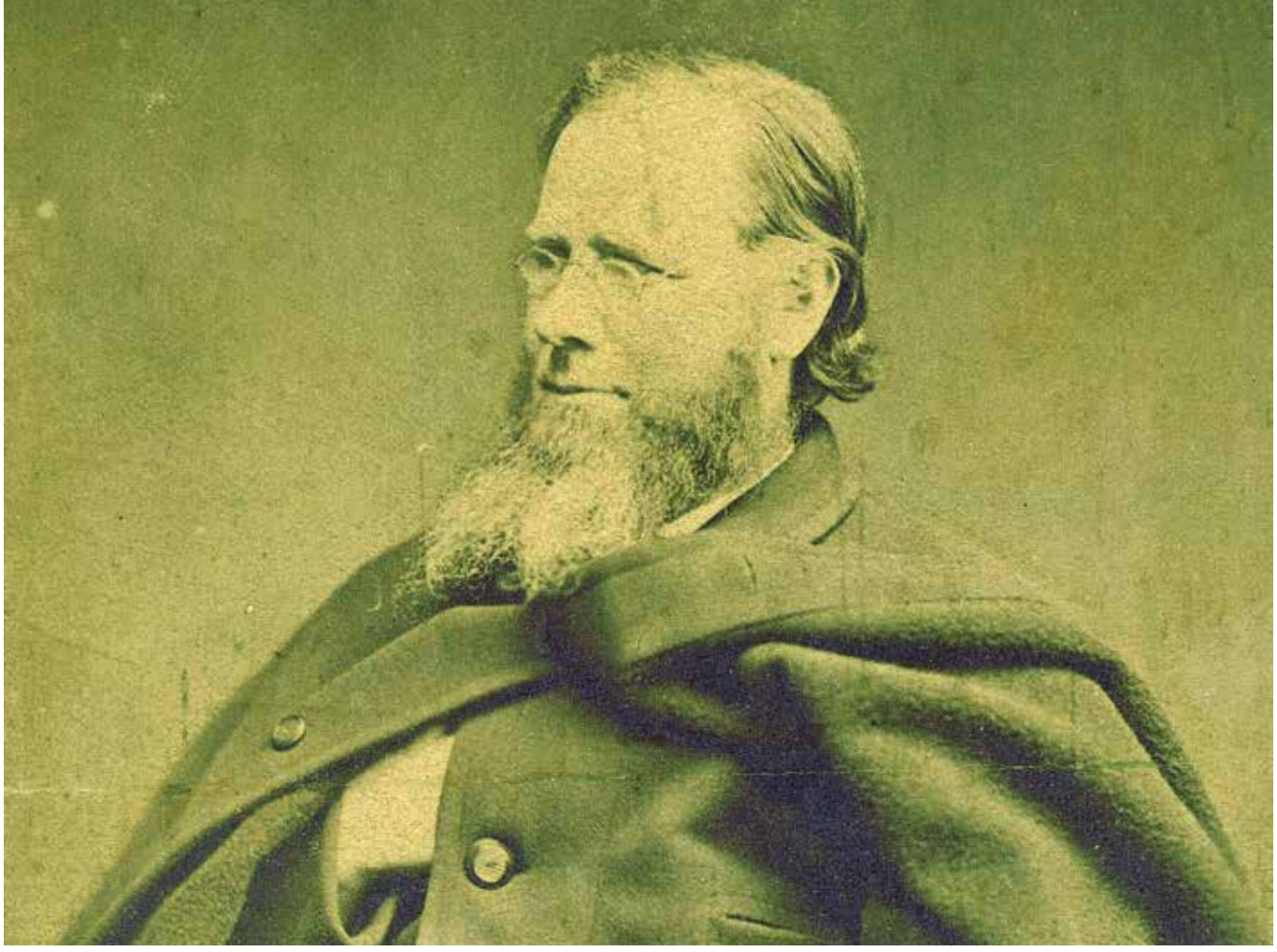
In another sense, it's hard to say what all the trouble was about. Pius X lumped together an array of intellectuals, many traditional in belief and piety, under a single banner that unfairly damaged, even destroyed, reputations. Few supposed Modernists saw themselves the way the pope did—as practitioners of "a thousand noxious arts" determined to "lay the ax not to the branches and shoots, but to the very root" of the Catholic faith. Many sought merely to demonstrate how post-Enlightenment intellectual developments could not only deepen appreciation of church teaching, but also help translate it into modern idioms and thus increase evangelical potential.

The anti-Modernist purge unleashed in 1907 brought about extreme volatility and polarization, sending longtime comrades reeling toward opposing sides—a story Portier tells with due sympathy for all involved. Some found safety, for example, by withdrawing their support for using historical methods in biblical studies or integrating the insights of psychology into moral theology. Others were intransigent and found themselves, first, alienated within the church, then embittered outside of it.

John Slattery and William Sullivan followed the latter course. Slattery, a clerical Lone Ranger and a pioneer in ministry to African Americans, ended his life as a married, agnostic lawyer, enraged at ecclesiastical corruption and disillusioned by his good friend Dennis O'Connell (probably also agnostic), who shrewdly covered his intellectual tracks and won an episcopal appointment before the fateful year 1907 was out. Sullivan, once a Scripture scholar and popular seminary professor, likewise married, and he went on to become the most eloquent Unitarian preacher of his day—interestingly, a conservative within his new denomination and a man unwilling to reconcile with Joseph McSorley, erstwhile Paulist confrere and ally on the frontiers of Catholic theological renewal.

McSorley, who remained a priest and a scholar, is the hero of Portier's narrative. Right up to his 1963 death, he remained devout, temperate, pastorally sensitive, intellectually nuanced, capable of steadying the plow on rough terrain. Though he was chastened by the anti-Modernist onslaught, his 1909 book *The Sacrament of Duty* eschewed "blind conservatism" and, breaching the newly imposed boundaries, nimbly referenced psychology, biology, and history to explicate a rich theology and spirituality.

McSorley (who once did a stint as Dorothy Day's spiritual director) thereafter took up ecclesiastical history, out of a sense of obligation as much as interest.



Isaac Hecker, circa 1887

For him, history was the "priestess of truth" that enabled believers to "face all the facts, whether creditable or discreditable." Its study would inoculate them against defensive triumphalism, which had proved a liability for Catholicism and enabled the anti-Modernist crackdown. Change within the church had been "enormous, amazing, almost incredible," McSorley concluded in 1943, but over two millennia it "never destroyed the substance" of the faith. For decades McSorley patiently nursed this insight, which sometimes gasped for oxygen between the Modernist crisis and Vatican II.

McSorley's crowning achievement was his retrieval of Isaac Hecker's theological and spiritual vision, an accomplishment that, Portier points out, nicely paralleled the *ressourcement* of European theologians who mined musty theological sources anew after the Modernist crisis. Hecker, who died in 1888, had fallen into disrepute in 1899 when Leo XIII decried "Americanism," a precursor to Modernism closely associated with Hecker and sometimes called "Heckerism." Americanism was essentially a mindset that affirmed the compatibility of Catholicism with modern intellectual life and liberal democracy—the latter a phenomenon with which Roman authorities did not make their peace until 1965. Rehabilitating Hecker in the shadow of the Modernist crisis was thus a perilous prospect that McSorley nevertheless saw as a sacred trust.

The most fraught aspect of Hecker's neglected vision was his emphasis on the "indwelling Spirit"—his belief that the Holy Spirit dwells within each individual. "The radical and adequate remedy for all the evils of our age," Hecker wrote in 1887, "and the source of all true progress, consists in increased attention and fidelity to the action of the Holy Spirit in the soul." To Roman officials jealous of their authority and evidently terrified of most aspects of modernity—including this kind of turn to the individual subject—the mystical, optimistic, democratic Hecker spelled danger in big red letters. But McSorley's careful reading of Hecker showed him to be firmly within the Catholic tradition yet faithful in pushing it to the horizons of the contemporary world. Hecker's vision, which could easily have been buried amid the anti-Modernist storm, was thereby carried forward as part of what Portier calls a "usable past" for the American church.

Is Portier right that Hecker is inadequately appreciated today? Certainly. Newly minted American PhDs in theology are likely to have plumbed Rahner, Balthasar, and de Lubac, but know little or nothing about Hecker, their towering forebear (whom David O'Brien brilliantly treats in *Isaac Hecker: An American Catholic*).

In presenting the stories of four interesting, complicated men, Portier exposes the regrettable consequences of allowing anxieties about authority to trump the faithful search for deeper understanding. In highlighting the crucial place of Hecker, he may inspire a younger cohort of scholars to reclaim this visionary's legacy. ■

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Patrick Jordan

Mission Applaudable?

Junípero Serra
California's Founding Father
Steven W. Hackel
Hill and Wang, $27, 327 pp.

Journey to the Sun
Junípero Serra's Dream and the Founding of California
Gregory Orfalea
Scribner, $30, 480 pp.

To mark the three-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Padre Junípero Serra (1713–84), Stephen W. Hackel and Gregory Orfalea have each written critical biographies of the pioneering California missionary. Hackel concludes his scholarly study, published in 2013, by stating that his book will not be the final word on the controversial explorer: "Serra studies will continue to evolve as successive generations examine his life anew." Almost as if on cue, Orfalea responds in his book, published this year, that his and Hackel's Serras, "though similar at times, are essentially different, and our approach is vastly different." Here, then, is a tale of two Serras.

Both biographers closely follow the dramatic adventures of the peripatetic Spanish friar (proclaimed blessed by Pope John Paul II in 1988)—and Serra had many such adventures on both land and sea. The first half of his life was spent entirely on the island of Mallorca, off Spain's southeastern coast. Born to a poor farming family, Serra entered the Franciscans at sixteen, was ordained, and became a prominent professor of theology. But at his career's midpoint Serra embarked on a totally new venture, as a missionary to colonial New Spain. Finally, in 1769, he undertook what would become his crowning achievement as president and "Founding Father" of the Alta California Missions.

Both Hackel and Orfalea raise challenging questions about Serra's worldview, his motivations and legacy, and more generally about the Catholic missionary endeavor in the New World. But the gulf between the two authors quickly becomes apparent and is as wide as the Sea of Cortés. Hackel is a kind of modern-day devil's advocate, and his sobering perspective on Serra will dispel any pious notions that the Spanish friar was without blemish. Orfalea, while never playing down Serra's shortcomings and cultural blind spots, underscores his idealism and steadfastness under the most challenging of circumstances. Hackel questions Serra's interest in the California Indians' understanding of their own world; Orfalea argues that Serra was the quintessential hands-on Catholic missionary, spending himself "to put on Christ Jesus" for the sake of others.

Hackel, a highly respected academic, has written widely about the indigenous California tribes and the catastrophic effect the early Spanish and later American incursions had on them. A previous book-length study on the Indians of the Monterey region (*Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis* [2005]) treated the demise of several tribes. But here he focuses his justified anger at what befell the California tribes on one man. Serra becomes not only the agent responsible for imposing a self-negating, medieval Catholicism on an otherwise content, self-sufficient people, but also the architect of a mission-enclosure system that led thousands of unsuspecting natives to die from communicable diseases introduced by the Spaniards.

In Hackel's telling, Serra was "insular" in almost every respect: his place of birth, upbringing, religion, clerical training, spirituality, and academic discipline. He was a medievalist who, Hackel claims, continued to hold to a pre-Copernican cosmology. Furthermore, Spain was still patrolled at the time by the nefarious Inquisition, with its anti-Jewish, anti-Protestant, and anti-Moorish mindset. As a theologian, Serra held assignments with the Inquisition, both in Mallorca and New Spain. On top of all this, the Spanish Franciscan spirituality of that time emphasized the physical sufferings and death of Christ as a means of understanding and emulating God's self-emptying love for creation. This spirituality is Greek to Hackel. One of his book's serious flaws is a lack of appreciation for eighteenth-century Spanish Catholicism and Franciscan spirituality. Here Orfelea does a much better job, making insightful use of two early Franciscans key to Serra: St. Bonaventure (1221–74) and John Duns Scotus (1235–1308). Orfelea details how their approaches bolstered not only Serra's tolerance for others as a missionary, but also his relative independence as a thinker. Serra had his own run-in with the Inquisition (a fact Hackel fails to mention). Further, his record of association with the Inquisition turns out to be limited and mostly inconsequential—with the exception of one troubling incident.

As Hackel recounts it, Serra played an investigative role in the case of an innocent woman who was accused of witchcraft and ended up dying in custody. The events in question took place in 1766, while Serra was working in a mission region northeast of Mexico City. A local woman, María Pasquala de Nava, was accused of making a pact with the devil, performing voodoo-like rituals, and showing irreverence toward the Eucharist (among other things). Serra conducted several lengthy interviews with her, during which she gave him a near-total confession. However, as an investigator rather than a judge, he did not issue a verdict in the case. Instead, he remanded the woman to Inquisition headquarters in Mexico City. There, after five months in prison, she was tried and convicted. Late the same night, she was found mortally wounded in her cell. She died the following day. Serra was elsewhere in Mexico at the time. Still, Hackel concludes that "as an agent of the Inquisition," Serra

played a major role in her death.

From the record Hackel provides, however, such a conclusion doesn't seem warranted. Rather, the textual evidence simply demonstrates that Serra was an able detective who, in this case, got a confession. More telling are Hackel's pointed asides. "Serra was an unrelenting interrogator," "as inquisitorial as he was evangelical," who "would have been especially wary of María Pasquala simply because she was a woman and a widow." Furthermore, "María Pasquala's mixed racial background also raised Serra's suspicions." Such innuendo is not substantiated by Hackel and is unworthy of a scholar of his stature. More disconcerting still is his apparent lack of interest in determining how Pasquala died. Instead of pursuing this aspect of the tragedy—which Serra clearly played no part in—Hackel seems content to discredit Serra by mere association.

As for Serra's understanding of, and tolerance for, natives and their ways, Serra often told his superiors that the Indians impressed him as better Christians than the Spaniards were. Still, both authors find repulsive Serra's self-flagellations—he actually beat himself bloody in a pulpit in New Spain while conducting a Lenten "revival." Serra also walked thousands of miles across much of Mexico and Baja and Alta California on an ulcerated and excruciatingly painful leg. Hackel remarks that such self-inflicted and prolonged suffering (Serra refused treatment for his leg) was "perhaps the only kind of pleasure a Franciscan like [Serra] was allowed to know." This is nonsense. As Orfalea casually observes, Serra seems to have had a healthy affection for both snuff and chocolate. Nor does Hackel's emphasis on self-abnegation and rigidity square with many of Serra's diary entries and letters (see Maynard J. Geiger's *The Life and Times of Fray Junípero Serra, O.F.M.* [1959], which Hackel describes as "magisterial"). There Serra delights in the peoples, landscapes, flora, and fauna he discovered in the New World, and reveals great personal warmth for his fellow friars.

In *Converting California: Indians and Franciscans in the Missions* (2004), James A. Sandos noted that the missions Serra worked to establish in Alta California—he founded the first nine himself; there would eventually be twenty-one—sought to become self-contained economic units that permitted "the instruction, baptism, development, and maintenance of the religious life of the Indian neophyte." For Hackel, such settlements were inherently repressive and dystopian. For Orfalea, they represent Serra's communitarian impulse—one that nevertheless proved problematic. In seeking to protect the neophytes, the enclosure system unwittingly exposed them to a variety of fatal diseases. Hackel argues convincingly that, in compelling the natives to work at subsistence levels, adhere to Catholic liturgical practices and sexual mores, and submit to beatings if they broke the rules, Serra (who may not have administered corporal punishment himself, but allowed it) was partly responsible for grave injustices. As the late Franciscan historian Francis Guest noted, the beatings were "a form of degradation that violated human dignity."

Junípero Serra

While deplorable, these practices nevertheless pale in comparison with the violent crimes and murders inflicted by some of the Spanish soldiers and settlers during Serra's tenure. (The Indians responded by attacking several of the missions, burning and killing as they went. Serra pleaded for leniency for these renegades; the viceroy granted his request.) Hackel and Orfalea agree that Serra was a strong defender of the Indians and an unrelenting, sometimes caustic critic of the Spanish civil and military authorities. Yet deaths resulting from individual crimes were nothing compared to the diseases unleashed on the unsuspecting native peoples, both by the Spanish and later the American conquests.

In sum, Hackel's book offers a broad criticism of Serra and of the Catholic missionary endeavor in New Spain and Latin America in general. He concludes that Serra was a "colonial imperialist" who misunderstood the Indians and saw the natives as "pitiful people, to be converted or removed." Removed? That is clearly too harsh a judgment. Here, perhaps, Orfelea's telling is the more balanced of the two, although his book is occasionally marred by sloppy editing and takes

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unnecessary liberties in reconstructing Serra's thoughts and feelings, and sometimes seems overly impressionistic. Still, Orfalea provides texture, verve, and a sense of place, and this is where Hackel falls short. Like Hackel, Orfalea traveled widely to retrace Serra's steps, and even unearthed several primary texts. A short-story author who has also edited a collection of Arab-American poets, Orfelea deftly uses literature, art, music, and architecture to explain Serra's interests and achievements. Like Hackel, he does not skirt substantive criticisms of Serra and his project, yet he often puts them in a broader, more reader-friendly context. His discussion of the Spanish Inquisition and Serra's involvement with it, for example, is not only thorough but more succinct and dispassionate than Hackel's politically correct approach. But both authors write admiringly of Serra's faith, the clarity of "his logical, focused mind" (Hackel), his indomitable will, and his physical endurance.

California has changed dramatically since Serra's time. In faulting the Catholic parochialism of the early missionaries, Hackel sees much to emulate in modern California as "a dynamic region, defined today by its diversity and integration into the global economy that transcends national boundaries." No one would deny that. But another paradox persists. The individualism and materialism Hackel applauds played a grave role in the destruction of the peoples he values. And as James A. Sandos noted a decade ago, the greatest decline in those native populations occurred fifty years after Serra's death, and decades after the missions themselves had been disbanded. In the twelve short years after California became a U.S. territory (1848), the indigenous population fell a staggering 80 percent. Thus, Sandos concluded, the Franciscans' "partial success" of sequestering the natives in mission enclaves looks better than the fate of California's "nonmissionized Indians." ■

Patrick Jordan *is a former member of the* Commonweal *staff.*

LETTERS continued from page 4

WRONG REVIEWER

The title of Denys Turner's book is *Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait*. On page 1 he explains the subtitle: "It is a profile sketched out in thin strokes of the pen, exaggerating a few features out of all proportion and omitting many more altogether. It is therefore a caricature…. My caricature, I hope, is no more distorting than any other work on Thomas Aquinas, just differently so." Then, on the second page, Turner writes: "This work, then, is specifically not intended for professional philosophers and theologians."

These qualifications are important for evaluating what Turner is doing and they should therefore be noted in any review. This is a book that scholars of St. Thomas will pick apart for its lack of rigorous exposition. So too will professional philosophers, for different reasons. But that is not fair to Turner because he tells you right at the beginning that his intended audience is not scholarly. Why, then, did *Commonweal*'s editors give the review to the kind of reviewer that Turner specifically said he was not writing for? If you had to give it to a scholar, why not a theologian familiar enough with Aquinas to be able to advise *Commonweal*'s readers whether Turner's portrait was worth pondering compared to the original?

(REV.) BRIAN J. SHANLEY, OP
Providence, R.I.

POPES & EMPERORS

There is an interesting historical perspective one can take on the emerging trend of popes canonizing their recent predecessors ("The Odd Couple," April 11, 2014). The basic administrative structure of the church is that of the later Roman Empire. The "diocese" was an administrative subdivision created by Diocletian in the third century. With the displacement of the last emperor of the West, the bishops of Rome took over much of that structure and even assumed one of the emperors' titles, "Pontifex Maximus"—originally held by Julius Caesar and passed down to his successors.

Roman emperors routinely deified their predecessors. That practice was obviously a nonstarter for Christians. But a Christian version of this custom, canonization, now seems to be catching on. In the long history of the papacy, few popes have been canonized other than those lost in the mists of the church's very early centuries. But now we have Saints Pius X, John XXIII, and John Paul II, with Pius XI and XII and Paul VI waiting in the wings.

ROBERT HARLEY
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Spontaneous Tolerance

Christopher Thornton

On a late December afternoon in central Kathmandu, children fresh from the confinement of classrooms play in a courtyard, called a *chowk* in Nepalese. The girls have strung rubber bands together to play an elaborate version of cat's cradle. The surrounding buildings resonate with the sound of their giggling. The boys furiously kick a soccer ball between improvised goal markers, one of which is a small Buddhist shrine that stands in a corner of the chowk. Their shouts punctuate the girls' laughter.

These are ordinary children playing after an ordinary day at school, but this is no ordinary chowk. Dominating it is a four-sided mound called Kathesimbhu Stupa, which is a sacred site for Buddhist pilgrims. They walk around it clockwise in representation of life's circular nature. Most of the children probably know little about this, since Nepal is about 80 percent Hindu. But a few of the children are probably Buddhist. Does it matter? Not here, and not in most of Nepal. In fact, they may still know nothing of the sectarian conflicts that have torn the social fabric of countries all around them. To the south, animosity between Muslims and Hindus continues to fuel a deadly and futile cycle of violence. In 2012, in not-so-distant Bangladesh, two hundred thousand Muslims needed state protection from a rampaging mob of Buddhists.

Not far from Kathmandu are the snowcapped peaks of the Himalayas, but far below, the Kathmandu Valley is studded with temples and shrines, some Buddhist, some Hindu. It would be hard, if not impossible, for most visitors to tell if any faith was dominant here. Hindu shrines are prominently placed in neighborhood squares, where local vendors set up shop to profit from the gods' proximity. Buddhist stupas offer retreats for meditation in the quiet chowks removed from the chaos of Kathmandu's streets. Overlooking the city atop a steep hill stands Swayambhunath, the largest stupa in Nepal. On the other side of the city is Pashupatinath, a venerated temple complex where Hindus cremate their dead and push the ashes into the Bagmati River, which flows into the Ganges. Some of these ancient monuments show signs of damage—not from religious strife but from a ferocious earthquake that rocked the city in 1934.

Nepal has not been immune from violence and instability: the decade-long Maoist rebellion that ended in 2006 left fifteen thousand Nepalese dead and forced those who lived in rural parts of the country to flee to the city, swelling Kathmandu to the breaking point. But, though there were a few reports of Buddhist priests being harassed and Buddhist temples attacked, the conflict never became a sectarian war. In the end the rebels were victorious and a "people's republic" was declared. A new constitution, drafted in 2007, proclaimed Nepal a secular state. Freedom of religion was guaranteed, and the word "Hindu" was removed from Nepal's formal name; the new "Kingdom of Nepal" represented all Nepalese—not only the religious majority.

Religion is in no danger of vanishing from Nepalese life. Christian aid organizations are allowed to operate schools and health clinics, and, though proselytizing is prohibited, religious conversion is allowed and officially recognized. On the Nepalese calendar, Hindu festivals are national holidays, but so is the birthday of Siddhartha Gautama Buddha, and government employees—Buddhists, Hindus, or Muslims (just 4 percent of the population)—can be excused from work on their religious festivals.

Swayambhunath

Ripu, a Hindu, works for one of the many guide services and adventure-travel agencies that pepper the cramped, dusty streets of central Kathmandu. I asked him whether he had been required to study other religions in school.

"We didn't study religions in the formal sense," he said, "but the teachers would take us on trips to visit temples and mosques, so it never felt strange to go into them.... In our culture, whenever we enter someone's house we always take off our shoes. It's a sign of respect. It's the same when entering a temple or mosque. And we would never say someone isn't allowed into our houses, no matter who they are. A guest is like a god."

It's sometimes assumed that religious intolerance is a natural tendency that modern liberal states have to correct, or suppress. But after one has spent some time in Kathmandu it begins to seem more like a deformity—a departure from the healthy and largely spontaneous norm. Children here don't have to be weaned from sectarian hatred and suspicion because it is something they are never taught. Here, where Hindu children play football in the shadow of a Buddhist shrine, familiarity breeds respect, not contempt. ■

Christopher Thornton *teaches at Zayed University in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.*

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