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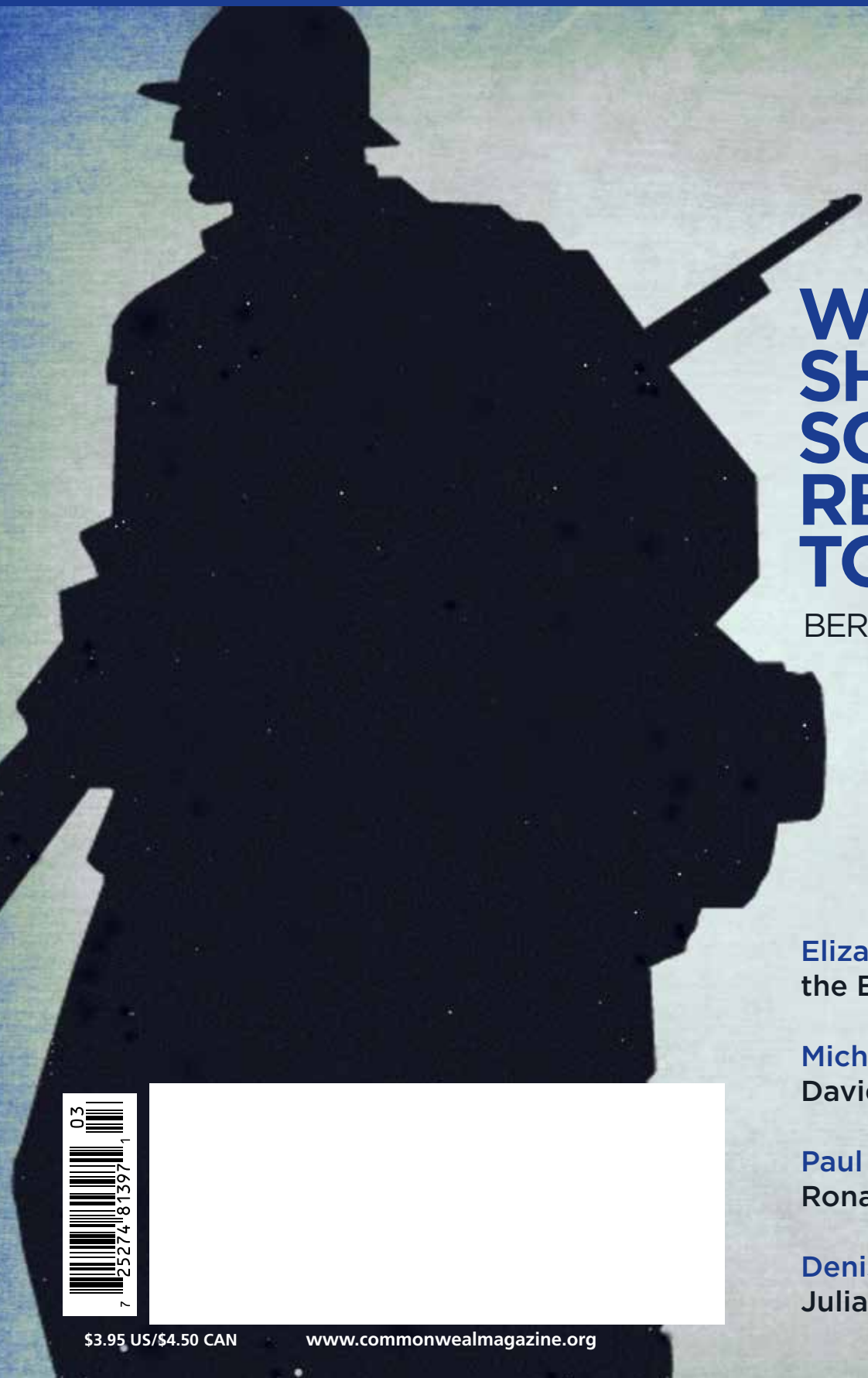

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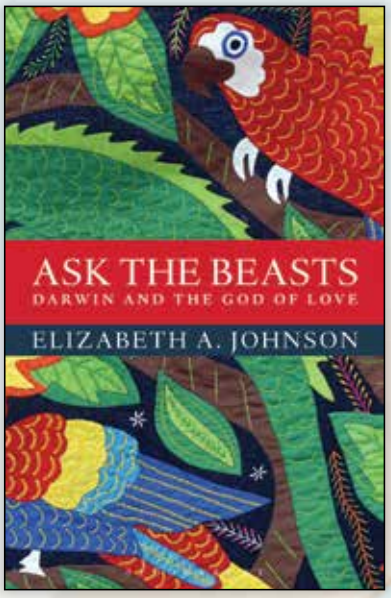

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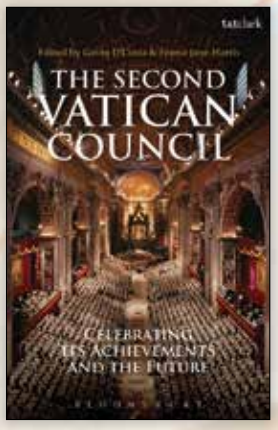

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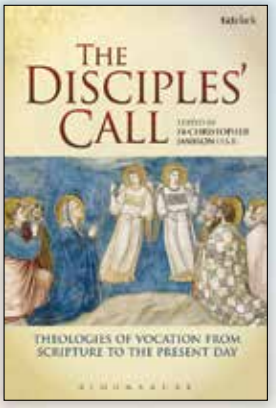

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COLUMNIST

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LETTERS

Catholic schools, Catholic hospitals, etc.

THE OLD WAYS STILL WORK

Regarding "Rethinking Catholic Schools: Who Needs Them?" by Fr. Nonomen (December 6, 2013): The elementary school of Fr. Nonomen's parish is not representative of all Catholic suburban schools. Many Catholic schools around the country are still thriving, such as the ones outside the city of Philadelphia. In my archdiocese, Catholic schools were built at the turn of the twentieth century to teach the large number of Catholic immigrants, but eventually they spread to the suburbs for the baby boom of the 1950s and '60s. Many of these suburban Catholic schools remain vibrant today.

I agree with Fr. Nonomen that "Catholic schools distinguish themselves from public schools by integrating gospel values in academics and extracurricular activities," and if he were to ask students, they would say that they've also found friendship and a feeling of community that comes from a shared faith tradition. This sense of community gives them a security that strengthens their sense of worth. Sharing the same values builds a strong foundation from which purposeful learning can develop.

I disagree with the way Fr. Nonomen characterizes most Catholic-school teachers as "fresh out of college and, therefore, ill-equipped to teach." On the contrary, many faculty members in our suburbs have been teaching in Catholic school for several years, even though their salaries are well below that of their public-school counterparts. I've been teaching in Catholic school for thirty-five years. We were trained by the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, otherwise known as the IHMs, or "master teachers."

New teachers in Catholic schools can be an asset. They bring contemporary expressions of prayer to Mass for our students. And young teachers can more closely connect with the students who face extraordinary challenges today, especially in social media, ones that older teachers did not have to confront when we were growing up. These technological "natives" on staff help their older colleagues, as we, the mentor teachers, guide our younger apprentices in Catholicism. In other words, we support one another.

Parents who send their children to Catholic school know that it is well worth the tuition. Structure and discipline in the classroom, along with drill and review in the core subjects, are still effective today. We've added new "project-based learning" and "understanding by design" methods that are more progressive. Students work cooperatively and creatively to meet the Common Core standards, which provide them with twenty-first-century skills. A Catholic-school curriculum includes classes not only in religion and the basics but also in art, music, technology, science, math, foreign language, and physical education. We emphasize the importance of teaching the whole child.

Fr. Nonomen also contends that Catholic schools have to compete with good public schools for enrollment. But in many of our suburban school districts, Catholic grade-school graduates who go on to attend public high school are often placed in the honors track when they begin ninth grade. That's why many parents consider it a wise investment to spend the money in the elementary-school years. The parents of our Catholic-school students are mostly Catholic, attend Mass every Sunday, and contribute financially to their parish.

Fr. Nonomen's notion of an interfaith school replacing Catholic schools to "[nurture] a deeper understanding of common values and beliefs" is commendable and thought-provoking, but should not be the model for all Catholic suburban parishes. I would not want readers of *Commonweal* to be misinformed about the conditions of suburban Catholic schools today. I hope that, unlike Fr. Nonomen, my pastor never hesitates to write that monthly parish check.

MARY ANNE FILANO
Newtown Square, Pa.

continued on page 35

So Far, So Good

In November, the West and Iran agreed in principle to an interim agreement that would loosen economic sanctions for a six-month period in exchange for the dismantling of Iran's high-level uranium-enrichment programs (see our editorial "The Threat of Peace," December 6, 2013). The details of that pact have now been worked out, and inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency have begun verifying the regime's compliance. This diplomatic breakthrough is something to be guardedly hopeful about, not to scorn as hawks in Congress and Israeli leaders are doing. In threading this needle, President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry have shown both a necessary skepticism about Iran's intentions and a sober understanding of the costs and limitations of military action.

In the next six months, the IAEA will routinely inspect Iran's nuclear facilities to make sure that the operations of its centrifuges have been recalibrated and that construction at its plutonium nuclear reactor remains suspended. Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium must also be diluted. If the IAEA is satisfied that Tehran has disabled its high-grade enrichment capabilities, Iran will be allowed to sell a limited amount of oil on the international market and retrieve a few billion dollars now frozen in foreign banks. This process is designed to build confidence on both sides as a more permanent agreement is negotiated, one that would make any Iranian effort to enrich uranium to weapons-grade levels extremely difficult and easily detectable.

No one thinks a permanent agreement is a foregone conclusion. President Obama gives it a fifty-fifty chance of succeeding. Those opposed to the interim deal believe that the mullahs in Tehran cannot be trusted and that regime change is the only way to ensure that Iran does not acquire nuclear weapons. But if one considers negotiations a naïve gambit, one should be even more skeptical of seeking regime change. Iran lost hundreds of thousands of men in its war with Iraq, a catastrophe that cost half a trillion dollars, yet the regime remained resolute. It has already spent perhaps $100 billion on nuclear development, and endured another $100 billion in losses from sanctions. Obviously, Iran is willing to pay a very high price to exercise its right under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes. Nor is a preemptive attack by the United States or Israel likely to destroy Iran's well-defended nuclear facilities or deter it from rebuilding them if damaged. Even Iranian dissidents support the nation's right to nuclear development. If they are attacked, or if sanctions are made more onerous, Iranians are likely to think the acquisition of a nuclear weapon is more necessary than ever.

This possibility has not stopped Senators Chuck Schumer of New York and Robert Menendez of New Jersey, both Democrats, from urging the passage of a bill that calls for additional sanctions. Pressure is doubtless being brought on Senate Democrats by AIPAC, the Israeli lobby. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has denounced the administration's sanctions policy from the beginning and condemned the interim agreement, insisting that Iran must be stripped of any nuclear capability. Additional pressure is being applied by the Gulf's Sunni kingdoms, eager for the United States to deter the regional influence of Iran's Shiite regime.

Obama has threatened to veto the Schumer/Menendez bill, yet Congress may override his veto. The Iranians say they will walk away from negotiations if new sanctions are imposed. Nor is it likely that the international coalition backing sanctions will hold together if the Schumer/Menendez bill becomes law or Iran is attacked. New sanctions, the administration has warned, will not compel the Iranians to submit but will merely sabotage the interim agreement. If senators want a military confrontation, one administration adviser has said, "they should be upfront with the American people and say so."

It is not clear if Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid will bring the Schumer/Menendez bill up for a vote. Undermining the foreign policy of a president of one's own party is hardly good politics, let alone sound diplomacy. When the president and Congress pursue separate and conflicting foreign policies, the result is confusion and uncertainty for our allies and enemies alike. President Obama has been criticized for his use of military force, and also for his determination to extract the nation from futile military engagements and his wariness of future entanglements. Yet if the new memoir by former secretary of defense Robert Gates is to be believed, Obama is neither afraid to make tough military decisions nor under any illusions that there is a military answer to every threat. Iran's nuclear ambitions are a serious problem that the United States cannot walk away from, but demanding complete Iranian capitulation, either at the negotiating table or on some future battlefield, is no solution. ■

January 21, 2014

LISTEN UP

From the dotCommonweal post "What We Don't Already Know," by Rita Ferrone:

When I read in the *National Catholic Reporter* that thirteen German moral theologians and pastoral theologians had signed a document critiquing Catholic moral teaching on sexual issues, it did not surprise me or raise my expectations for the upcoming Synod on the Family. After all, theologians have been reflecting on sexual morality in various thoughtful and rigorous ways for years. Not all of their conclusions match those that have been proposed by the magisterium. But almost no one in the hierarchy seems to listen to those whose conclusions do not match theirs, so it has virtually no effect on deliberations in Rome.

To be sure, the theologians made some worthwhile suggestions. These included a "new paradigm for evaluating sexual acts" that would consist of at least three dimensions: a caring dimension to protect what is fragile; an emancipatory dimension that takes "the side of those who lose in relationships, the ones who are left and hurt to the core"; and a reflexive dimension that honors the joy of intimacy along with the vulnerability it entails. All good thoughts. But who is listening?

On the other hand, I was surprised by the recent observations made by Martin Gächter, auxiliary bishop of Basel in Switzerland, which were published in his diocesan newspaper and the Swiss Catholic publication *KIPA*. Gächter candidly describes the extent of the problem and admits that the church doesn't have all the answers. He says we must seek a common understanding through respectful, open exchange and patient listening. In his own words:

> There is today, within and outside the church, no common understanding of marriage, family, and sexuality. In order to arrive at one, we presently need much exchange, openness, and patience. Each must listen closely to others. Every life experience must be taken seriously. It is important in this that we not reject or judge others. Only God can rightly evaluate a person. And also the church can never say of someone that God condemns them, or certainly not that they are going to hell.

Can you imagine an American bishop saying something like that? I can't. Our episcopate may contain bishops who think such thoughts, but they would never say so in public. The expression of anything other than total affirmation of traditional magisterial certitudes concerning sexual morality has been taboo for decades. And indeed many give the impression that they are fine with this state of affairs. Why listen if you already know all the answers? You'd only be encouraging error and false hope of changes in church teaching.

Martin Gächter

CHRISTOPH WAGENER

In fact, so cold has been the deep freeze on free discussion around such topics that when I first heard about the Synod on the Family I wondered who would speak at all, except to echo the church's already-decided positions. I thought everyone who had a different point of view had been silenced or dismissed long ago.

It certainly is true that Pope Francis has been attempting to change the frame by the pastoral priorities he embodies and the words he speaks. In his worldview, the experience of the poor is important. Mercy is important. Advancing a bishop's career is *not* important. Speaking the truth is important. Listening is important. Maintaining appearances is *not* important. What I have been waiting for, however, is some sign that there are bishops out there who are ready to step into that new frame. Because if they don't, the Synod on the Family will be nothing more than an echo chamber, another chance to reaffirm What We Already Know.

One Swiss bishop does not a discussion make, of course. If Bishop Gächter is the only one convinced there is something bishops must discover by means of listening, we might as well resign ourselves to a lot of surveys filled out in vain. But maybe there are other bishops who believe that "each must listen closely to others. Every life experience must be taken seriously." If so, the synod might actually turn out to be interesting. ■

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Fr. Nonomen

A Hole in the Basket

WITH SUNDAY COLLECTIONS, YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE

Whenever I'm with a group of fellow priests, especially pastors, the conversation usually gets around to the Sunday collection. A tough economy, high unemployment, and a general decline in Mass attendance have resulted in lower collections at many parishes. Finance committees and pastors are struggling to pay the bills, let alone expand ministries. But when my colleagues trade hardship stories and debate the merits of hiring a professional revenue-raising company, I tend to keep quiet or leave the room to check my cell phone. You see, our parish collection has been increasing dramatically for the past several years. If I try to explain why this has happened, my colleagues eye me with suspicion, as though I've just disclosed that we started baptizing pets as a fundraiser. Nobody seems to believe me, but in my experience the secret to increasing the parish collection is a simple one: Start giving the money away.

I know my strategy doesn't seem logical, and there are a million reasons why it shouldn't work. This "tip" wasn't whispered in my ear by a Carmelite statue or revealed to me in a road-to-Damascus Moment. As I think about it, I was primed to consider it by two experiences that are separated by thirty years. The first was a parish assignment while I was still in the seminary. It was a poor, inner-city church staffed by truly joyful men and women. They worked hard, laughed a lot, and worried about a lot of things—but never about money. "God will figure it out," they often said. "We have to concentrate on doing our work well, and God will worry about financing it." Sure enough, clothes, food, and checks for substantial amounts would appear. Sometimes the gifts were anonymous, but more often the money arrived thanks to personal relationships or connections that only God could make possible. Those months provided me with a priceless lesson about ministry and trust, both in God and in people.

The second moment came in the form of a handmade banner that I happened to see while walking out of a church a thousand miles away from where I live. The words on the banner were simple and straightforward: *We give 7 percent of every collection to the poor.* Impressive, especially considering the banner was hanging in another inner-city parish with few financial resources.

I did not put those two experiences together until about six or seven years ago, when someone in my parish told us about some children a few towns away who needed new clothes for school. After discussions with the staff and the pastoral council, we decided to dedicate a percentage of the profits from our largest annual fundraiser to this cause. It seemed natural and right, and I was eager to see whether combining fundraising with charity would work in my particular suburban parish. That year, the profit from the fundraiser broke all records. We tried the same approach again—a different fundraiser, a different charity—with the same result. Slowly, over the years, a sense of generosity began to build. Through individual benefactors, we've been able to sponsor events at which every single dollar raised goes to a charitable organization. And people began sending checks to be "given to someone in need." Because our parish staff is in touch with folks across our community, these funds have quietly helped with mortgage payments, tuition costs, and house repairs. Although the privacy and sense of dignity of those helped is strictly respected, word about such good deeds gets out, even more people want to participate, and more checks come in.

None of this has lessened the Sunday collection. It has increased significantly every year, along with Mass attendance and parish enrollment. I suppose it all has to do with trust. Even with fewer dollars at their disposal, people want to participate in good works. If it is evident that donations are used to meet real and urgent needs, people find a way to give even in pinched circumstances. We all have to trust that God is continually at work, figuring things out, planting ideas, making the connections, and passing the basket. Or, in other words, a good way to increase the Sunday collection is to put a hole in the basket. ■

Fr. Nonomen *is the pastor of a suburban parish. He has been a priest for more than twenty years.*

MOLLIE WILSON O'REILLY

Nathan Pippenger

Getting On with It

IN POLITICS, THE PERFECT IS THE ENEMY OF THE GOOD

Politics, the saying goes, is the art of the possible; yet this hard-earned bit of wisdom is too frequently forgotten by the very people most determined to bring about political change. Take, for example, the last-ditch effort to cripple health-care reform—by the left. Initially, progressives rightly insisted that any reform bill include a public option. When, after months of hard fighting, it became clear that the votes for a public option just weren't there, some advocates accepted the setback and moved on. But others, pronouncing the whole process irredeemably corrupt, turned against the Affordable Care Act. Thus former Vermont Governor Howard Dean, fresh off a turn as chair of the Democratic National Committee, declared in the final weeks of debate that any bill without a public option "is worthless and should be defeated." Just days before the Senate vote, he reiterated that "if I were a senator, I would not vote for the current health-care bill." The message was clear: Purity in defeat is better than victory through compromise.

Luckily, the "worthless" health-care bill survived its progressive critics and is now benefiting millions of Americans. Yet the ideological impulse that threatened to derail it lives on. It reemerged in the pious antipolitics that doomed Occupy Wall Street, as well as in a spate of foreign-policy broadsides from left-wing pundits (motivated by events in Syria) that effectively called for an end to liberalism's tradition of humanitarian intervention. With Democrats in control of the Senate and White House, the left's pragmatists are in the position to bail out its purists. But that could all change the next time the Democrats lose a big election. And if the left's purists do regain the upper hand, it could be a while before the Democratic Party recovers.

If you doubt the cost of indulging in political pieties rather than political organizing, compare the influence of Occupy Wall Street with its conservative counterpart. While Occupy largely fizzled out in less than two years, conservative activists are still jostling for control of the GOP nearly *five years* after Rick Santelli's infamous rant on CNBC calling for a "Tea Party." To be sure, the two groups are not exact parallels—and well-funded Tea Partiers found easier allies in the GOP than OWS did among Democrats. Even so, it's impressive to recall that in less than a year, Tea Party activists managed to snatch Ted Kennedy's Senate seat away from the Democrats. Occupy can claim no similar coup.

Indeed, most OWS activists actually disparaged political involvement as a game for patsies and stooges, a way of playing into the hands of the same corrupt system they were trying to change. Surprisingly, many liberals agreed. As one writer at the center-left *Washington Monthly* commented approvingly, "Protesters aren't demanding Congress pass a bill or approve a specific reform. They're shining a light on *systemic* problems that can't be fixed with one bill or one reform." And yet, however admirable, "shining a light" by itself changes nothing. Sadly, Occupy proved equipped for little else; like health-care activists stung by the defeat of the public option, most Occupiers concluded that political engagement would taint their cause. Trapped in this circular and self-defeating reasoning, the most promising left-wing protest movement in decades faded quietly into the background.

Antipolitical idealism also threatens to handcuff the Democrats in their efforts to formulate foreign policy. When the United States seemed ready to bomb Bashar al-Assad's forces in Syria last fall, liberals were almost unanimous in

CNS PHOTO / BASSAM KHABIEH, REUTERS

Damascus, December 26

their skepticism—or outright opposition. Unexpectedly, however, the president's interventionist threats—vigorously denounced by many on the left—led to Syria's capitulation on chemical weapons. In that sense, the deal was a success. But it was also a useful reminder that the exercise of power rarely escapes some complicity with evil: the deal came at the great moral cost of accepting the continuation of Syria's horrific civil war. Opponents of intervention in Syria have frequently failed to acknowledge these complications, or to admit that Obama's threat reduced the risk that chemical weapons will again be used against Syrian civilians.

A foreign policy that abandons America's moral commitments by renouncing humanitarian intervention will undermine the long-term interests of the United States while putting millions of innocent lives in danger. Yet on the left, the political momentum is with those who are opposed to a broad range of interventioins (and not just military ones) intended to prevent mass killings. In these pages, for instance, David Rieff charged Samantha Power, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, with "enthusiasm" for intervening in Syria, and accused the Atrocities Prevention Board that she helped found at the White House of bearing a "hubristic" name ("Reckless Ardor," June 14, 2013). Such criticism unhelpfully blurs the distinction between interventionists like Power, whose goals are humanitarian, and people like *Weekly Standard* editor William Kristol—borderline neoimperialists who long for American dominance. After all, one major purpose of the Atrocities Prevention Board is to stop crises before they descend into outright slaughter—leading to *fewer* occasions for possible military intervention. (Indeed, the APB has recently been praised for its unprecedentedly rapid response to violence in the Central African Republic, which may yet stop a genocide before it starts.) By treating Power's initiative with hostile suspicion, anti-interventionists are helping to undermine any real distinction between humanitarianism and imperialism.

An eagerness to dismiss that distinction was evident in much of the opposition to strikes against Assad. The *New York Review of Books* published a piece by David Bromwich titled "Stay Out of Syria!" There Bromwich accused writers who wrung their hands over U.S. inaction in Syria, like the *New Yorker* reporter Dexter Filkins, of "looking for reasons to intervene." Meanwhile, "in honor of the coming Syria intervention," the editors of the journal *n+1* re-posted a piece originally written about Libya that objected to the frequent use of words like "slaughter" and "massacre" in Samantha Power's 2002 book on genocide, *A Problem from Hell*. "The function of these words," they wrote, "as well as the word 'genocide'…is to place the evil people beyond the pale of politics, of negotiation, of human intercourse…. Thought, strategy, negotiation shut down; there is only right and wrong, only fight or flight." Toeing the anti-interventionist line, they implied that to wonder whether the people of Homs deserved our help—and not merely our pity—was to become a reckless proponent of American empire. The editors closed with a question that loomed over the entire left-wing debate on Syria: "*Has there ever been a truly successful, truly humanitarian humanitarian intervention?*" (their italics).

That loaded phrase, "truly humanitarian," captures the spirit of a moral purity that would—in a macabre irony—effectively condemn millions of defenseless people around the world to exile, torture, rape, and death. Even to pose such a question is to fail to understand that there is no such thing as clean hands in politics, let alone in international affairs. The editors of *n+1* complain that genocides in Cambodia and Bangladesh were halted by armies with their own less-than-pure reasons for intervening, and that Kosovo remains unstable more than a decade after its rescue by NATO. But there is no contradiction in mourning these outcomes while still insisting that they are preferable to mass slaughter. Even the strongest skeptics of intervention should be able to acknowledge that fact.

This is not to argue that U.S. intervention in Syria would have been wise or effective—in fact, the anti-interventionists were right in this case. There are many instances where intervention is simply not possible. But does that mean liberals should rule out *ever* intervening, no matter how grave the crisis? As *n+1*'s critics pointed out, the magazine was in effect advocating outright pacifism. The moral zeal of that position tends to blur distinctions between armchair imperialists and those who feel morally compelled to acknowledge the possibility that U.S. military action might sometimes be necessary.

In 1947, while lecturing on Shakespeare at the New School in New York City, W. H. Auden reflected on *The Tempest* and its protagonist, Prospero. Much preferring the solitude of his library to his political duties, Prospero entrusts his day-to-day tasks to his brother and retreats into his studies—only to be overthrown by his treacherous sibling and sent into exile. To Auden, the message was clear: "Prospero wished to improve himself, and that takes time, but government has to go on now." He repeated the point for emphasis: "It is desirable for the best people to govern, but we can't wait—government must go on now."

Prospero's temptation is all too familiar to American liberals, who since 2008 have been engaged in a very public struggle with the burdens of power. When liberals have failed in recent years, it has often been because they have demanded moral purity when they ought to have accepted political efficacy. Certainly, there is wisdom in understanding that power is difficult to reconcile with justice. But as Prospero learned, it is worse still to wait around for perfection, if only because history itself does not wait. Some compromises, of course, are impossible to accept. But we can't wait for all our moral dilemmas to be resolved before acting. Government has to go on now. ■

Nathan Pippenger *is a doctoral student in political science at the University of California, Berkeley.*

Paul Moses

Enlightened Self-Interest

WHY NEW YORKERS MADE BILL DE BLASIO MAYOR

"Bloomberg fatigue" is the explanation frequently presented for progressive Democrat Bill de Blasio's landslide victory in the New York City mayoral race. But voter ennui hardly explains why New Yorkers, having elected pro-business candidates running on the Republican line for the past twenty years, this time chose a mayor inspired by liberation theology—and by a 3-to-1 margin, at that.

It's a dramatic change in direction, and "Bloomberg fatigue" is sometimes a coded way of minimizing its significance. The phrase implies that the public's desire for change sprang from attention deficit rather than any shortcomings on the part of Mayor Michael Bloomberg. "I liken it to hemlines—you know, hemlines are fine, but next year they move them up or down, because people want a change," Bloomberg said in an interview with WOR Radio.

Please. Let's give New Yorkers some credit for recognizing what their own interests are. De Blasio won because he appealed to the many New Yorkers who had come to feel alienated in their own city. Voters were given very clear choices on issues at the core of local governance—how to run the police department and schools, and whom to tax—and roundly rejected the Bloomberg approach.

The result is likely to resonate across the country. Any mayor of New York quickly becomes a national figure, and the Big Apple's experience has been nationally influential on matters such as policing, housing, health policy, and education. When voters clearly reject a key strategy of the NYPD—in this case, a massive stop-and-frisk program that Bloomberg says is essential to maintaining low crime rates—it's bound to have an effect on the national conversation about policing.

De Blasio recognized that the Police Department's stop-and-frisk program was one cause of the public's estrangement. What began in the 1990s as a more focused effort to get guns off the streets had swollen into a massive, quota-driven intrusion into the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent people. That those subjected to searches were rarely white (9 percent of the 685,724 stops in 2011) and were mostly under twenty-four years old meant that many minority voters knew that they or their children were constantly at risk of having a rattling encounter with the police.

De Blasio, married to a black woman, was in a good position to respond to that anxiety. His campaign highlighted his wife and two children, featuring an ad in which his fifteen-year-old son Dante called him "the only one who will end a stop-and-frisk era that unfairly targets people of color." (An admiring President Barack Obama said of the impressively coiffed Dante: "My Afro was never that good.")

De Blasio split the black vote in the Democratic primary with Bill Thompson, a black candidate who was the former city comptroller, and took an astonishing 96 percent of it in the general election, according to exit polls. (The city's first African-American mayor, David Dinkins, won 91 percent of the black vote.) Eighty-seven percent of Latino voters also supported de Blasio. That suggests once again the rising influence of black and Latino voters in many places across the country. It also shows that populist surges are not limited to the Tea Party; there is a left-wing version that in this case swept aside some well-established Democratic contenders.

Beyond the stop-and-frisk policy, there were other reasons large numbers of voters felt alienated from city government. One is that many parents of the city's one million public-school students had come to feel voiceless as Bloomberg made abrupt changes in the schools. Bloomberg is a leading proponent of the corporate-backed, foundation-supported, bipartisan national school-reform movement that champions

CNS PHOTO / LUCAS JACKSON, REUTERS

New York's Mayor Bill de Blasio and Cardinal Timothy Dolan

charter schools, tougher teacher evaluations, and heavy reliance on standardized testing. He succeeded in winning mayoral control of the schools, and eliminated the venues where parents and community groups could exercise influence or just vent their frustration.

De Blasio capitalized on this discontent. He said he would lower the stakes on standardized tests and end Bloomberg's simplistic practice of assigning an annual letter grade to each school. He pledged to increase parents' role in school decision-making and restrict the growth of charter schools, Bloomberg's pet project. Charter school advocates and their supporters in the news media assailed him, but it was an effective political move: 94 percent of the city's public-school students are *not* in charter schools, and their parents often feel left out. If the nation's largest public-school system turns away from charter schools and standardized testing, that's bound to influence the national conversation.

Another source of voters' frustration is the rising cost of housing. Many New Yorkers now worry about being displaced from their own homes. As Bloomberg's zoning policies accelerated gentrification, affordable housing disappeared faster than it could be replaced. De Blasio said developers should be required to build housing that is affordable for low- and middle-income New Yorkers in exchange for zoning bonuses. On economic matters, he called Bloomberg "a free marketeer, never willing to be interventionist with the power of the most powerful local government on earth."

Running aggressively against Bloomberg's record—or, to be fair, against a simplified version of Bloomberg's complex record—helped de Blasio win the Democratic primary. He kept that up in the general election, but he also ran against Bloomberg's Republican predecessor, Rudy Giuliani. This made sense because the GOP candidate, Joe Lhota, was closely associated with Giuliani.

A former chairman of the MTA who was credited with speedily restoring mass transit after Hurricane Sandy, Lhota had served Giuliani as budget director and deputy mayor. On paper, he was a formidable candidate; he played a major role in steering the city through the crisis following 9/11. His policies on business, policing, and schools were similar to those that had won elections for Giuliani and Bloomberg on the Republican line. As a reporter who covered City Hall for *Newsday* during the Giuliani years, I couldn't help but notice how closely Lhota stuck to the Giuliani script—right down to the rhythm and vocabulary of his speech.

Lhota's inexperience as a campaigner and his previously low profile no doubt contributed to his defeat. But that doesn't explain the overwhelming margin. This time, voters were not buying arguments that had won the day for Giuliani. The most telling campaign moment came when Lhota and de Blasio clashed over the merits of Giuliani and Dinkins during the second of three debates. Dinkins's term in office from 1990 to 1993 is often portrayed as ineffective. Although Giuliani's popularity waned during his second term, it's widely accepted that his mayoralty from 1994 to 2001 marked a turnaround for New York City because of the huge drop in crime.

"Rudy Giuliani did divide us, very consciously," de Blasio said during his debate with Lhota, "and it hurt this city and held us back." Lhota turned away with a look of disbelief. "Held us back?" he said, holding out his arms. "Held us back? What color is the sky in your planet?"

New York's political world had turned upside down. Giuliani had always been accused of divisiveness, but if someone had told me in the 1990s that this argument would one day help carry a mayoral candidate to a 3-to-1 victory, I would have thought it impossible. De Blasio even won a majority of the white vote.

De Blasio didn't phrase it this way, but he ran on a "preferential option for the poor," decrying income disparity and calling for an increased tax on those earning more than $500,000 a year (to pay for universal pre-kindergarten). That might be expected from a man who said in an interview with WNYC Radio that he was "deeply influenced by liberation theology." De Blasio, who describes himself as spiritual but not a member of any religion, attributed that influence to the community organizing he did for the Catholic-influenced Quixote Center during the 1980s. He helped fill shipping containers with food, medicine, clothing, tools, bicycles, and other humanitarian aid sent to Nicaragua (the Quixote Center's answer to the millions of dollars the Reagan administration spent in support of the Contras' revolt against the left-wing Sandinista government).

After the *New York Times* reported on this work, Lhota jumped on the opportunity to accuse his opponent of supporting Communism. While raising a bit of controversy, the matter seemed only to strengthen de Blasio by showing that his support for the poor was deeply rooted and not merely a contrived campaign message.

Dolly Pomerleau, co-founder of the Quixote Center, said that even though de Blasio did not consider himself Catholic or religious, it was not surprising that he worked for the center as a young man. "Given Bill's values, it makes a lot of sense, because his values are for justice and peace, and the advancement of people who are poor," she said, adding, "I've been totally impressed with how he's been consistent."

It remains to be seen how this commitment translates into his policies as mayor. Success will require maintaining low crime rates while improving police-community relations; showing real improvement in the schools while repairing the relationships Bloomberg frayed with teachers and many parents; and creating affordable housing at a rate that well outpaces its loss to gentrification. None of this will be easy, but if the success of his campaign is any indication, de Blasio is not without his resources. ■

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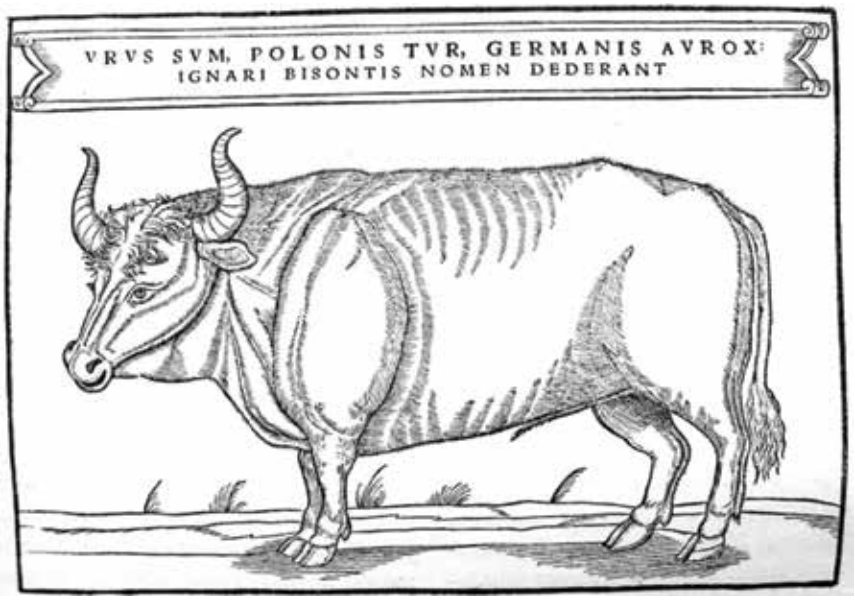
At Our Mercy

The Tree of Life Now Depends on One Twig

Elizabeth A. Johnson

In the previous issue of *Commonweal*, I explained how Charles Darwin's account of the origin of species revolutionized our understanding of nature and humanity's place in it ("Darwin's Tree of Life," January 24). Many of his contemporaries held to the notion of special creation—each species designed by the Creator and descending from its original ancestor without variation over time. But Darwin posited something truly bold: that complex organisms evolved "not by means superior to…human reason [that is, God], but by the accumulation of innumerable slight variations." The audacity of that theory was not lost on its author.



The aurochs, now extinct

But Darwin knew it was sound. After all, he had done the hard work of traveling, observing, cataloguing, and then deciphering what most of us now take for granted: today's organisms evolved over eons from common ancestors. He didn't labor under the illusion that his theory would be swiftly adopted by the scientists of his day. Yet he held out hope that a future generation would come to share his vision of the interrelatedness and interdependency of all life on earth. In many ways, that has come to pass. The idea of natural selection has gained widespread acceptance. Scientific knowledge has advanced understanding of humanity's place in, and effect on, creation. Despite this awareness, we have failed utterly to protect our planet and those who share it with us. For Christians, this constitutes a profound break with God.

Loving life on earth is not foreign to Christianity. Indeed, it is supported by the tradition's beliefs about God as these are revealed in Scripture and condensed in the creed. (I expand on this in the central chapters of *Ask the Beasts*, where I discuss the sacred character of the natural world in light of the indwelling of the Spirit, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and the Creator God who is the beginning and goal of the universe.) Still, critics have rightly censured Christianity for long abetting the ecological crisis. Indeed, with some exceptions, Christian churches often choose not to face this calamity with the energy they spend on other matters. It's as though the planet were undergoing its agony in the garden, and we, the disciples of Jesus, are curled up fast asleep. Waking up to our own role in this crisis will require a dramatic course correction, a reorienting of our ethical compass away from ourselves alone and toward all creation. In a word, ecological conversion requires profound humility.

Darwin can help. From a scientific perspective, human beings evolved as a twig on the tree of life. Out of colonies of single-celled creatures in the ancient seas came diverse species of creatures—plants, insects, birds, mammals. The mammalian branch grew into various hominid forms, and from one line of descent emerged humans. With all other species, we share a biological kinship encoded in our very

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ILLUSTRATION: SIGISMUND VON HERBERSTEIN, 1556

cells. Yet our cognitive powers mark us as singular. With *Homo sapiens*, evolution has brought forth a creature able to understand the very process of evolution. And by virtue of their intellect, humans can massively affect the evolution of other species, for good or ill.

The extent and quality of this influence now goes beyond anything Darwin envisioned. The human species is having a dramatic impact on the evolution of the rest of the natural world—not simply by selective breeding of animals and plants, but by propelling vast numbers of other species toward extinction. Humans are accelerating natural selection by changing the environment so rapidly and variously that many species simply can't keep up. By any measure, our late-arriving species is a marvel. We have advanced capabilities to respond to other beings, to imagine the perspectives of others, to respond aesthetically to the beauty of nature, even to praise the Creator of that beauty. Yet despite these unique capacities, the human legacy is becoming the erasure of others on the tree of life.

From the beginning, the advent of humanity had momentous consequences for the planet. A bird's-eye view of its development is astonishing. *Homo sapiens* continuously elaborated new ways of interacting with the natural world: domesticating plants and animals, taming fire, forging metals into tools, building complex structures, and processing foodstuffs and skins in an array of skilled crafts. The Industrial Revolution accelerated human use of natural resources, with machines powered by fossil fuels doing what had been the hard, slow work of people and animals. For a time, earth could replenish the resources we used, but no longer; we are depleting them too rapidly. For a time, other species could largely regrow their populations after human predation. Not anymore. Humanity has become a geophysical force capable of raising the planet's temperature, thereby causing devastating droughts, floods, fires, storms, and rising sea levels. We have traumatized the atmosphere itself.

There are three mechanisms of destruction: overpopulation, consumption of resources, and pollution. From our first appearance sometime in the past one to two hundred thousand years until 1650 CE, humans grew to number about half a billion. Today there are about 7.1 billion of us. Predictions vary as to where this growth might top out—perhaps ten billion by the middle of this century, fifteen billion by the next. Technology may extend the ability of certain resources to support life, but earth's resources are not infinite.

While the question of how to control population growth has always been divisive, it is important to note that in recent decades the Catholic Church has endorsed the idea that it is legitimate to limit human births. Addressing the responsibility of married couples to determine the number of children they will have, the Second Vatican Council teaches in *Gaudium et Spes*:

> Let them thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which the future may bring. For this accounting they need to reckon with both the material and the spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life. Finally, they should consult the interests of the family group, of temporal society, and of the church herself.

In 1984, Pope John Paul II—while disavowing the use of artificial contraception—stated that the church "fully approves of the natural regulation of fertility and it approves of responsible parenting." He continued, "This morally correct level must be established by taking into account not only the good of one's own family, and even the state of health and the means of the couple themselves, but also the good of the society to which they belong, of the church, and even of all mankind." If the good of future children, the material conditions of the times, and the interests of society are factors in weighing the ethical rightness of reproductive activity, then the good of the ecological world that sustains human society must also be relevant.

Of more significance for other species are the resources we deplete and despoil: topsoil, fresh water, vegetation—and prey species that serve as food sources for other creatures. Ecosystems can normally assimilate a certain degree of pollution. But the level of human-generated pollution in many places now exceeds the capacity of natural systems to regenerate. This has devastating effects. Oil-soaked aquatic birds, collapsing bee colonies, tainted fish—all give mute testimony to pollution's ruinous effects. Rising temperatures are altering the habitats where species thrived for generations—including our own.

Darwin's theory holds that extinction plays an essential role in the process of evolution. In addition to the infinitesimally slow disappearance of species over millions of years, the earth has seen about five mass-extinction events. Scientific consensus increasingly holds that the planet is on the verge of, or even well into, a sixth. This time, however, death is not being caused by the breakup of continents, a chance asteroid collision, or a chain of naturally occurring climatic shifts. Instead, *we* are the cause of these deaths.

The first documented case of extinction in modern times was that of the aurochs, a type of giant wild cattle. The last known herd lived in the Polish Royal Forest west of Warsaw. In 1557 there were about fifty. Even though they were considered precious and carefully protected, forty years later their numbers had dwindled to twenty-five. The last female died in 1627. Since that time, extinction has been proceeding rapidly—far faster than pre-human levels. Earth's normal background rate of extinction is about one species every year. Today, anywhere from 150 to 200 species become extinct *every day*, according to a 2010 calculation by the UN Environment Program. Current forecasts predict that as many as one-quarter to one-third of the world's animals and plants will be extinct within the next hundred years.

Why is human-induced extinction of species so terrible,

given that the history of the planet is replete with large-scale die-offs from natural causes? Because the unparalleled scope and pace of extinction in our day could have been avoided. Species that should be alive are being eradicated by a disastrous failure of human wisdom and will. Rather than allowing their deaths to come naturally after millions of years of evolution, we are permanently terminating their lives.

The best analogy taken from the human world is murder. Most people die from sickness or old age, and some die from tragic accidents. But some have their life snuffed out prematurely by an act of violence. So too with nature. In the course of evolution, most species have died out in old age as a result of natural selection or suddenly by tragic accident. Today species are becoming extinct prematurely by the deliberate action of a fellow species. It is not natural, and we could stop our murderous behavior if we loved the world enough.

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The fossil record shows that biodiversity has always recovered. But it also indicates that recovery proceeds slowly. Following mass extinction, it can take 5 to 10 million years before an array of new species can evolve. This means that in the case of the current mass extinction, more than 200,000 generations of humans will have to live and die before levels of biodiversity comparable to those we inherited at the start of the twentieth century might be restored, if ever. If we change our behavior today, much of the current die-off could be slowed. But the crisis appears to be accelerating. We're driving species to extinction faster than new ones can evolve. The tree of life is thinning out.

Why should anyone care? Self-interest, for one. If we continue to eradicate species and destabilize ecosystems, we're going to lose many of the planet's valuable services, from cleaning and recirculating air and water to providing sources for new medicines. The fact that the argument from self-interest does not galvanize action casts humanity's self-designation as *Homo sapiens*, or the wise human, in a deeply ironic light. But beyond self-interest, there is the importance of the living world itself as a reality of enormous promise. No one has developed this argument with more intellectual rigor and eloquence than the theologian John Haught.

Recall how *On the Origin of Species* lays out a compelling narrative of the way life has felt its way forward toward greater complexity, beauty, and sentience over billions of years. While there was no blueprint, Haught notes, humans discern a sort of direction to the story of life. "It is undeniable that matter has gradually become alive," Haught writes in *The Promise of Nature* and *The Cosmic Adventure*. "And within the last 200,000 years it has even begun to think and pray." Even before the appearance of humans, life displayed an anticipatory quality, reaching forward toward more sophisticated organization and function. It is no accident that this cosmic dynamism now finds a new blossoming in human beings, with our sense of adventure and our longing for fulfillment.

From the beginning, the universe was seeded with promise, pregnant with surprise. This promissory character of the natural world, according to Haught, comes from the inexhaustible vitality of its Creator: "From a Christian theological point of view, life and evolution are the universe's response to the presence and promise of divine persuasive love," he argues in *Making Sense of Evolution*. And the story is not over yet. Because the totality of nature and its long history are God's creation, we can assume that it holds meaning that we may never fully grasp. Before humans arrived, evolution had brought forth countless creatures, most of them having little or nothing to do with our own existence, yet loved by God. Who knows what further developments the future holds? Creation is not finished. That is why we have the responsibility to leave ample room for more unknown outcomes. "Even if these outcomes have little relevance to our own lives and interests at the present moment," Haught writes, "a robust creation faith demands that we rejoice in the prospect that other natural beings have a meaning and value to their Creator that may be quite hidden from our human powers of discernment. This universe, it bears constant repeating, is God's creation and not our own."

To destroy other species carelessly is not only to violate the sacramental nature of creation; it is also to turn away

To a large extent, earth's future is now at the mercy of human decision and indecision. If ever there was a sign of the times to be interpreted theologically, this is it.

from the promise embedded in all of creation. On a journey toward unimaginable fulfillment, the promise already glimpsed in nature's beauty needs to be safeguarded for the sake of its future in God.

When we fail to protect our planet, when we hasten the demise of species, we erase testimony to divine goodness in the world. According to the theologian William French, our driving vast numbers of species toward extinction is idolatrous, brought about by policies that place lesser goods—in particular the gods of money and comfort—above God. In this light, we see that the ongoing destruction of life by human action, intended or not, amounts to a deep moral failure. By acts of commission and omission, we pull against the will of God. Ethicists have coined new words to name the sin: biocide, ecocide, geocide. Desecration is not too strong a designation.

In a message for the 1990 World Day of Peace, John Paul II declared that "*the ecological crisis is a moral issue*," supporting that judgment with descriptive phrases such as "dramatic threat of ecological breakdown," "uncontrolled destruction of animal and plant life," "reckless exploitation," and "the profound sense that the earth is 'suffering.'" At root, he suggests, the problem stems from a failure to respect life.

> Often, the interests of production prevail over concern for the dignity of workers, while economic interests take priority over the good of individuals and even entire peoples. In these cases, pollution or environmental destruction is the result of an unnatural and reductionist vision which at times leads to a genuine contempt for human beings. On another level, delicate ecological balances are upset by the uncontrolled destruction of animal and plant life or by a reckless exploitation of natural resources.

Social injustice and ecological degradation are two sides of the same coin. Both result from policies that reward greed. John Paul articulates a compelling new principle of moral behavior: "Respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation, which is called to join humanity in praising God." That implies that moral consideration must be given to nonhuman species, and ascribes moral standing to ecological systems as a whole. John Paul invites us to apply the Catholic moral tradition—developed in terms of the dignity of the human person—to another set of living creatures.

Leaders from many religious traditions urgently preach the need for people to mend their ways. The traditional term for such a change is conversion. In a broad sense, conversion is a continuous characteristic of the life of faith, an ever-deepening fidelity in relationship with God. As the New Testament term for conversion (*metanoia*) indicates, this also means a turning, a change of direction. We sin when we speed the demise of other species, reduce biodiversity, break up integrated ecosystems, and cut off future possibilities. Facing these evils in a spirit of repentance, we need the grace to be converted to God's way. We need an authentic spiritual conversion to the earth.

Intellectually, this entails moving past an anthropocentric, mostly androcentric view of the world to a broader theocentric one. We must make room for other species in the circle of what's religiously meaningful. We must let go of a hierarchical dualism that prizes spirit over matter, and embrace a philosophy that intensely values physical *and* bodily realities as God's good creation. Emotionally, being converted to the earth means turning from the delusion of humanity as isolated from the rest of our environment to a deeply felt relationship with other beings as fellow creatures of God. Ethically, ecological conversion entails the view that a moral universe limited to human persons is no longer adequate. Recognizing that we are kin, we should behave not only with utilitarian intent—though that has its place—but also with intent to preserve and protect creation, precisely because of its intrinsic worth, because it is God's.

The time is past when humans could ignore the impact of their behavior on the ecological systems that support life on earth. In the context of Christian faith, ecological practices bespeak a profound turning to the God of life. As I write, many "green" initiatives are already underway—private and public recycling programs, a new ethic of energy efficiency, a preference for locally produced food. These are not enough to reverse the losses. But they *are* signs of hope. In the midst of the ruination of the tree of life, faith in the living God can spur us to action that makes a difference.

The story of the evolving world is not over. To a large extent, earth's future is now at the mercy of human decision and indecision. If ever there was a sign of the times to be interpreted theologically, this is it. Do we want to be converted from dominion over the earth toward care for it? The question is not just an ascetic or moral one. Rather, it is an urgent invitation to align our hearts with God's love so that all may have life. A flourishing humanity on a thriving planet in an evolving universe, all together filled with the glory of God—this is the vision that must guide us at this time of earth's distress, to practical effect. Ignoring the crisis keeps people of faith and their churches locked into irrelevance while a terrible drama of life and death is played out around them. But living the ecological vocation sets us off on a great adventure of mind and heart, expanding the reach of our love. ■

Just Warriors, Unjust Wars?

Deciding When It's All Right to Fight

Bernard G. Prusak

The philosopher Jeff McMahan opens his extraordinary 2009 book, *Killing in War,* with a reflection on Ludwig Wittgenstein, "generally regarded as the greatest philosopher, and certainly the greatest philosophical iconoclast, of the twentieth century." This great philosophical iconoclast did not question whether it was right to enlist as a soldier in World War I. Wittgenstein's country, Austria, had declared war, and the philosopher believed himself morally obligated to fight. Remarkably, he believed the same for Englishmen: he had studied at Cambridge, and disagreed with the decision of his friend and former teacher, Bertrand Russell, to oppose the war.

Note that Wittgenstein believed it morally permissible and even obligatory for both Austrians and Englishmen to fight, without regard to the question of which side, if either, had just cause to go to war. For Wittgenstein, considerations of *jus ad bellum*—the principles governing the resort to war—were apparently independent of considerations of *jus in bello*—the principles governing the conduct of war. Though one's country could be in the wrong in resorting to war (for example, by lacking just cause or right intention), one would not *do* wrong in fighting on its behalf, so long as one discriminated between civilians and combatants and did not use violence excessive to one's ends (that is, so long as one observed the principles of *jus in bello*). Recall the soldier in Shakespeare's *Henry V* who asserts that "if [the King's] cause be wrong, our obedience to the King wipes the crime of it out of us," since "we are the King's subjects."

McMahan, a professor of philosophy at Rutgers University, is a former student of the influential Oxford philosopher Derek Parfit. According to Larissa MacFarquhar's fascinating profile in the *New Yorker* (September 5, 2011), Parfit is singularly devoted to progress in philosophy. McMahan shares his mentor's belief, especially with respect to moral philosophy, and thinks that philosophers, including great ones like Wittgenstein, have done a bad job in securing and transmitting what he calls "moral knowledge about war." Bringing together three decades of McMahan's thinking on war, *Killing in War* puts forth the claim that "the theory of just war in its received form…is not a reliable source of guidance," and has stimulated a lively debate in philosophical and legal circles. McMahan's thesis, in short, is that orthodox just-war theory is too permissive.

Catholics have special reason to care about McMahan's work and the debate it has sparked. The just-war tradition was classically formulated by Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* and systematically developed by later scholastic thinkers like Francisco Suárez, Cardinal Cajetan, and Francisco de Vitoria. To be sure, the tradition cannot be considered simply Catholic: it has also seen development in the hands of Protestants from Hugo Grotius to Paul Ramsey and of secular thinkers like the political philosopher Michael Walzer, whose excellent 1977 book *Just and Unjust Wars* has for decades been the text of reference on this topic. (See my article "On Earth, Not in Heaven," *Commonweal*, November 9, 2012.) Yet as the scholar James Turner Johnson has emphasized, the concept of a just war owes its framework to Augustine's

CNS PHOTO / NATIONAL ARCHIVES

German troops march through Warsaw in September 1939.

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political theory, according to which the sovereign authority has the responsibility to secure what Augustine called the *tranquillitas ordinis*—order, justice, and peace. A "pacifist" in this Augustinian tradition is not one who abjures war, but one who works for the tranquility of just order, which sometimes calls for the use of force by duly authorized persons. From this point of view, as the *New Republic*'s Leon Wieseltier has written with regard to the chaos in Syria, "war is not the only, or the worst, evil." Worse evils can justify, and even morally require, the sovereign authority's decision to open the iron gates of war, despite what fury and bloodlust (in Virgil's searing image from the *Aeneid*) lie howling behind.

Another reason Catholics should care about the new debate over the morality of war is that, arguably, the just-war tradition they helped shape over the centuries has facilitated the recourse to war by disguising its reality—that fury and bloodlust—with a veneer of theological and philosophical respectability. Whether this charge is finally fair or not, it is certainly remarkable that it can be plausibly leveled at followers of Jesus, with his radical rejection of violence. In contrast to this rejection, the principles of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* suggest that war can be governed by clear heads and minds, tamed and defanged by the stipulation of limits. This notion has many critics. Writing after the invasion of Iraq under the George W. Bush administration, and in view of the carnage and havoc the Iraq war wreaked, the Marquette University theologian Daniel Maguire mordantly suggested renaming just-war theory, in the interests of honesty, the "justifiable slaughter theory" or "justifiable violence theory," and charged that all too often, justifications for war are but "shady rationalizations for the failure to build peace."

Finally, it is only right to recall that both in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and throughout the Iraq war, there occurred what the Duke University philosopher and theologian Paul Griffiths called an "intense debate" in Catholic circles "about the meaning, history, and contemporary applicability of just-war theory." As Griffiths notes, much of that debate was conducted in the journal *First Things*, and a central figure in it was the Catholic public intellectual (and frequent *First Things* contributor) George Weigel. In a series of articles and exchanges from 2002 through 2007, Weigel sought to rescue what he termed "the classic Catholic just-war tradition" from the distortions he believed it had suffered at the hands of "religious leaders" like the National Council of Churches and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Weigel, who supported the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq, accused his opponents of "forgetting" the framework of just-war theory, which "starts with a 'presumption for justice,' not a 'presumption against violence.'" Drawing on the work of James Turner Johnson, Weigel inveighed against the view that "the use of even proportionate and discriminate armed force is, at the outset of the moral analysis, presumptively deplorable." This view, he claimed, wrongly "uncouples just-war thinking from statecraft" and smuggles into the tradition a "pacifist premise" foreign to the Augustinian understanding of the responsibility of the sovereign to secure the tranquility of just order.

One other plank of Weigel's argument is worth noting. After disputing that the just-war tradition includes a presumption against war and underlining that it is intended to serve statesmen, Weigel claimed, in a January 2003 article titled "Moral Clarity in a Time of War," that "what we might call the 'charism of responsibility'" to judge whether a war is justified lies not with religious leaders and public intellectuals, but with "duly constituted public authorities." Such authorities, he went on, enjoy "a charism of political discernment that is unique to the vocation of public service." Religious leaders and public intellectuals, lacking this charism, must exercise "a measure of political modesty" in presuming to judge whether the principles of *jus ad bellum* have been satisfied in a given case.

It is interesting to note that no Catholic bishops joined the debate in *First Things*. But the then-Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, replied at length to Weigel's argument, questioning whether his defense of preemptive action could be accommodated within the just-war tradition and retorting, against what he called Weigel's "really startling theological novelty," that "there is no charism [that is, gift of the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Kingdom of God] that goes automatically with political leadership." Jeff McMahan likewise challenges the claim that only political leaders have the competence and authority to make judgments about *jus ad bellum*. But he would have us go further and question Shakespeare's soldier's claim that, "if [the King's] cause be wrong, our obedience to the King wipes the crime of it out of us." In other words, McMahan challenges the very separation of the principles of *jus ad bellum* from the principles of *jus in bello*—an orthodoxy that Weigel does not even think to defend.

Toward the beginning of *Just and Unjust Wars*, Michael Walzer writes that "the moral reality of war is divided into two parts": *jus ad bellum* (the justice *of* war) and *jus in bello* (justice *in* war). But this "dualism," he allows, is "puzzling," for how can a soldier fight rightly when the war that he is fighting is not itself right? Walzer's principal answer is to ground what he calls the moral equality of soldiers in "shared servitude." "The enemy soldier, though his war may well be criminal, is nevertheless as blameless as oneself," he writes. For "war isn't a relation between persons but between political entities" which have turned human beings into mere instruments—"food for powder, food for powder," Shakespeare's Falstaff says in *Henry IV, Part 1*. Soldiers are not responsible for the war they now have to fight, but they are also not innocent in the technical sense of "not harming." It is civilians who are not *nocentes* in this sense: they do not pose a threat of harm. Instead, as soldiers in arms do threaten one another, Walzer claims that they may rightly attack one another, like

the gladiators of old. But they are innocent of the evil of the war. It is the political leaders of the state in the wrong who bear the guilt for this.

A simple way to explain McMahan's challenge to the current orthodoxy of just-war theory is to say that he condemns the dualism that Walzer seeks to understand. Indeed, scarcely a claim in support of this dualism escapes McMahan's withering criticism. To begin with, he argues that, while we can agree that a given enemy soldier is blameless and not criminal for fighting an unjust war, such blamelessness implies "nothing more than that an unjust combatant is excused," and not that he or she is *justified* in fighting. The unjust combatant may act impermissibly, yet not culpably and so not criminally. Duress, limitations in knowledge, and diminished responsibility (think here of child soldiers) very often exculpate soldiers in present-day wars, so that even though one's cause be wrong, "the crime of it" falls on one's leaders. Yet this may not always prove true, and McMahan argues in favor of an authoritative, international court that could limit or even eliminate the excuses available to soldiers by publicly judging—in advance—a state's cause for war. (He fleshes out this proposal in a 2012 paper entitled "The Prevention of Unjust Wars," pushing back against the "councils of despair" that "take the frequent inability of soldiers now and in the past to reach reliable judgments about matters of *jus ad bellum* as an unalterable feature of the moral landscape," and calling for "moral vision as well as creativity in the design of new institutions.")

Walzer's analogy of war to gladiatorial combat fares no better. McMahan points out that "gladiators fought only for self-preservation" and not in service of an unjust cause threatening ill to many; that gladiators who refused to fight would be killed, unlike soldiers in states like ours today; and that while all gladiators were expendable, rendering bootless any mass refusal to fight, no state can kill all its soldiers. And even if we assume that a state might well execute soldiers who refuse to fight—as the Nazis executed Franz Jägerstätter—do we want to say that Jägerstätter would have been *justified* in fighting for the Nazi cause? McMahan notes that Jägerstätter's fellow Catholics, including the bishop of Linz, "offered him the familiar forms of advice that still constitute the received wisdom on these issues: that he lacked the competence to judge the war unjust, that as a citizen he had no responsibility for the acts of the government and could therefore participate in the war with a clear conscience." Perhaps Jägerstätter would have been excused for joining the fight; how many of us would have the courage to refuse and suffer beheading as a consequence? But he surely would have been cooperating with evil had he fought, and it is hard to see how we could hold that he would have acted *rightly*.

Finally, Walzer's account of when and why soldiers may rightly attack one another also does not escape scrutiny. In McMahan's view, threatening harm, as soldiers do to one another, does not make one liable to attack *without regard to which side, if either, has justice in its cause*. (As McMahan

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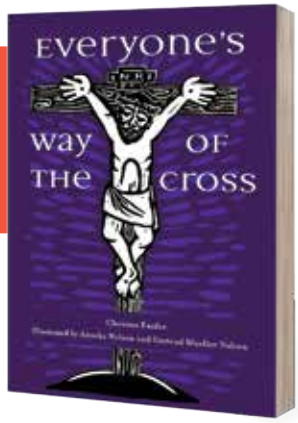

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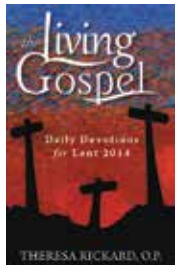

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explains, a person is "liable" to attack when "he would not be wronged by being attacked, and would have no justifiable complaint about being attacked.") For example, a person acting in self-defense clearly threatens harm to his or her assailant. But it is *not* the case that, because the person acting in self-defense threatens harm, he or she may be rightly attacked. There is no right of self-defense against a person acting in self-defense. McMahan puts the point succinctly: "One does not make oneself morally liable to attack by posing a threat if one is morally justified in posing that threat." Instead, one is liable to attack by virtue of one's moral responsibility for an *unjustified* threat. So, should attack be necessary to the end of preventing harm, terrorists and assailants are liable to attack, as are soldiers bearing some measure of responsibility for an unjustified threat. But here is the rub: soldiers serving a just cause, through just means, are *not* liable to attack—they are like the person acting in self-defense. And so a soldier like Jägerstätter would have acted wrongly, though perhaps not culpably, had he fought and killed for the Nazi cause.

Other implications of this argument may be more unsettling. As McMahan notes, the doctrine of absolute civilian immunity from attack holds that "if posing a threat is the criterion of liability to attack in war, then [all] combatants are liable but [all] noncombatants are not." But, as we have seen, McMahan rejects the notion that merely threatening harm suffices to make one liable to attack. If, instead, what matters is "moral responsibility for an objectively unjustified threat," then not only are just combatants not liable to attack, but—conversely—civilians responsible for unjust wars and unjust acts of war *could be* liable. In other words, attacks on civilians could be justifiable, if these attacks would contribute to the achievement of a just cause.

This argument opens the way to attacks not only on munitions workers (which orthodox just-war theory has been tinkered with to allow), but on (among others) professors of physics, chemistry, computer science, and anyone else doing research that will lead to more destructive bombs, more deadly chemical weapons, viruses, and so on. Whereas for orthodox just-war theory, "innocent" has the technical sense of not posing an immediate threat of harm, for McMahan—following here, it should be noted, medieval theorists like Suárez and de Vitoria—the innocent are those *not morally responsible* for a wrong and as such immune to direct attack. By contrast, with responsibility comes liability.

A clear difference between McMahan's revisionist theory of the morality of war and Weigel's account of "the classic Catholic just-war tradition" is that where Weigel reserves considerations of *jus ad bellum* to statesmen ("duly constituted public authorities"), McMahan addresses his theory to soldiers and conscripts. His practical aim in undermining "the idea that no one does wrong, or acts impermissibly, merely by fighting in a war that turns out to be unjust" is to make it more difficult for states to fight unjust wars, and to do so by articulating for soldiers in such circumstances moral reasons to resist going along. He believes "we must stop reassuring soldiers that they act permissibly when they fight in an unjust war, provided that they conduct themselves honorably on the battlefield by fighting in accordance with the rules of engagement." His hope is that, once what he calls the doctrine of "the Permissibility of Participation" has been discredited, "an important resource for the prevention of unjust wars" will become available, one which to date has been eliminated by the separation of *jus ad bellum* from *jus in bello*: "namely, the moral conscience of individuals." Readers of literature might consider in this regard Tim O'Brien's novel *The Things They Carried*, whose narrator struggles with whether "to fight a war I hated," the American war in Vietnam. What difference would it make for such a man if it were *not* a prevalent belief in our political culture that a soldier does no wrong in fighting honorably for his country, right or wrong? And how much more responsible and transparent would our political leaders have to be in making the case for war?

It could be objected—as McMahan anticipates—that "if the Permissibility of Participation were widely repudiated, soldiers would be more likely to disobey when ordered to fight in a war that was just." But this seems unlikely to occur in wars of national defense or humanitarian intervention, when political leaders could clearly make the case that intervention was the lesser of two evils. (See, on complications with respect to Syria, David Rieff, "Reckless Ardor," *Commonweal*, June 14, 2013.) McMahan concedes that extending provisions for selective conscientious objection to active-duty soldiers could well impair the ability of a state to fight an unjust war, or a war of doubtful justice, but this does not concern him. His worry is rather that the recent and accelerating development of robots for military uses will allow a state to "reduce its reliance on soldiers with consciences." Drones, after all, at least require operators. Robots threaten to enable political leaders to make war without stopping to persuade—or anaesthetize—anyone's conscience.

While I doubt that McMahan would go so far as pacifists like the moral theologian Stanley Hauerwas and claim that the history of the nation-state "is the history of godlessness," his view of the state is clearly more skeptical than Weigel's and more in line with Daniel Maguire's. His revisionist theory means to redress precisely what Maguire finds problematic about just-war theory: that it has facilitated recourse to war. Without calling for the abolition of war—he allows that, tragically, war may sometimes be the lesser evil—McMahan wants to make it harder for soldiers to fight in wars without qualms, and so harder for states to initiate wars like the ones the United States fought in Vietnam and Iraq. While his argument faces many challenges—including clarifying just causes for going to war and the proper relationship of the morality of war with the laws of war—it certainly looks like progress in philosophy to me. ■

Richard Alleva

The Art of the Con

'AMERICAN HUSTLE' & 'THE WOLF OF WALL STREET'

We've all seen movies in which con men don disguises, but when Irving Rosenfeld, the fraudster-hero of David O. Russell's rambunctious comedy-drama *American Hustle*, reappoints the top of his head—with numerous hair pieces and a comb-over—he isn't really disguising himself for a specific swindle. He's just firming up his daily persona. With his awful 1970s coiffure and lounge-lizard apparel, Rosenfeld (played by Christian Bale) has turned himself into a wheeler-dealer of the disco era. Like Jay Gatsby, he's putting together an ideal version of himself.

That's why Sydney Prosser (Amy Adams), his lover and confederate in crime, is the perfect partner for him. Having come from the Midwest determined "to become anything but what I was," she begins her New York working life honestly enough (like Irving, who's inherited his father's glazier business). But when her own talent for self-invention meshes with Rosenfeld's, she becomes "Lady Greensleeves," a British visitor whose tony accent and distinguished airs help Irving lure suckers into his fraudulent investments and art-forgery deals. Sydney herself is entranced by her alter ego and keeps slipping into the aristo accent even when talking in private with her accomplice. It's as if she's found a way to make money from a multiple-personality disorder. And though Irving still possesses a sense of responsibility toward his wife Rosalyn (Jennifer Lawrence), whose life and personality seem taken from *The Real Housewives of New Jersey*, it is Sydney's manufactured elegance that makes him feel he's living a Manhattan dream of glory.

Then the Feds pounce. But the con artists luck out: the head of the sting operation that nabbed them, Richie DiMaso (Bradley Cooper), is himself a kind of hustler and needs their help to entrap Carmine Polito (Jeremy Renner), the morally vulnerable mayor of Camden, New Jersey. Polito is sincerely devoted to promoting his city's welfare, but DiMaso wants to nudge him into the company of gangsters and corruptible congressmen. (This scheme is very loosely modeled on the ABSCAM affair, but *American Hustle* remains fiction.) Since Irving dislikes DiMaso (who's a rival for Sydney's affections) and sympathizes with Polito, how is this scam going to affect his self-image? He's used to thinking of himself as a swashbuckling trickster bilking only the greedy. Is he now just a government shill luring a good man to ruin?

The film's reconstruction of the period is spot on. The hairstyles and clothes help the actors define their characters. Mayor Polito's Elvis pompadour, for example, makes him look like the man who could turn Camden into the next Las Vegas. Even more impressive is the film's use of pop music to tap into fantasy life. Irving spots Sydney's innate classiness when he discovers that she shares his enthusiasm for the great *Duke Ellington at Newport* album. Then, exhilarated by their new partnership, he lip-synchs the Broadway song "I've Got Your Number" ("We'll break the rules a lot / We'll be damn fools a lot"). Later, when Rosalyn contemplates betraying her husband to the mob, she lip-synchs the title track of *Live and Let Die*, and her face takes on the self-dramatizing, glamorous ferocity of a James Bond villainess. This is a movie in which every main character has an inner soundtrack. But don't we all?

Not that the actors let the hairstyles and music do all their work for them. The four principals have all worked with Russell before (Cooper and Lawrence in *Silver Linings Playbook*, Adams and Bales in *The Fighter*). Here Russell subtly modifies the qualities he drew out of these actors in their earlier collaborations. Bradley Cooper's poignant bravado from *Playbook* now becomes whiney and less sympathetic. Lawrence's comic mouthiness takes on a touch of brass. Bale's volatility in *The Fighter* gets tamped down, so that we can feel Irving seething behind his know-it-all exterior. And Amy Adams' steely sexiness, so heroic in *The Fighter*, makes Sydney enigmatic enough to keep us guessing.

The dialogue by Russell and Eric Singer has a loopy, out-of-left-field comic eloquence, as when Irving describes his wife as "the Picasso of passive-aggressive karate." As director, Russell is a master at orchestrating voices raised in anger or self-vindication. ("Thank God for me!" brays Rosalyn at one point.) No moviemaker since Preston Sturges has made the din of recrimination this funny. And no living director (except Pedro Almodóvar) so risk-

COLUMBIA PICTURES

From left: Amy Adams, Bradley Cooper, Jeremy Renner, Christian Bale, and Jennifer Lawrence in American Hustle

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ily walks the knife-edge between hilarity and pain.

Yet there is something missing from this exhilarating movie. If fails to answer, or even ask, some obvious questions about its own characters, especially in its second half. Why does Irving, so ruthless toward his past victims, get so dewy-eyed about Mayor Polito as the confidence trap springs shut? Because the mayor cares about his constituents? When did Irving become so civic-minded? Or is it because Polito has a nice wife and many children? Did none of Irving's previous targets have a family? True, Polito does gift Irving with a microwave, but surely the swindler received more expensive gifts in the past from those for whom he felt no pity. This relationship between knave and gull needed to be explored earlier in the story—and with more than just a few close-ups of Christian Bale staring regretfully at his future victim.

In *American Hustle*'s first half, Irving and Agent DiMaso are both portrayed as comic monsters. But later, Russell starts to play favorites by making the agent so clownish that it strains our credulity (despite the gusto of Cooper's performance), while allowing the con artists at least some shreds of decency. After the final sting, Irving sums up the results: "The big leagues…the money men…you got none of them." But in the film as in the real ABSCAM story, some corrupt congressmen face indictment and the shoddy side of Washington deal-making is laid bare. Is this really nothing? And in view of how many investors may have been ruined by Irving in his pre-ABSCAM days, who is he to be so self-righteous? David O. Russell seems to have been scammed by his own fictional character.

Watching the first hour of Martin Scorsese's 180-minute *The Wolf of Wall Street*, I kept thinking, "Wow, one great scene after another! This is going to be a masterpiece." By the third hour I was groaning, "Oh no! One damn scene after another! This is going to be torture." It wasn't. The brilliance never lets up, and there are just as many great moments toward the end as there are near the beginning. But, despite all the great scenes, the film lacks dramatic progress. *Wolf* dazzles while going nowhere.

The Wolf of Wall Street tells the (mostly) true story of Jordan Belfort, who made millions for himself and his stock-pitching underlings by a "pump and dump" operation: pump up the value of "penny stocks" by lying to investors, watch the stock prices temporarily rise, then dump them for a huge profit just before they fall and leave your investors hanging. At the beginning of this film Belfort introduces himself to us as "a money-crazed little shit." At the end of three hours he is a money-crazed, sex-crazed, dope-crazed little shit. All the stimulants and endless parades of hookers don't seem to do much damage to his character, if only because he was so damaged to begin with.

I suspect this is a case of a director starting to make one kind of movie and then discovering, mid-production, that he wanted to make a different kind. When young Jordan begins working at a relatively respectable brokerage, his mentor (a superb Matthew McConaughey) advises him that his only real objective should be to "keep the clients on the faro wheel." So we can see the resemblance to the more blatant hustle of Scorsese's *Casino*. But as *Wolf* unfolds, with Belfort launching his own operation, the script doesn't focus on the details of how these unscrupulous financiers make their money but on the sick pleasures they spend it on: fellatio in glass elevators, public copulation on the sales floor, parades of animals (monkeys, pythons!), not to mention dwarf-throwing. This movie has less in common with Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* than with Fellini's *Satyricon*.

Yet the actors wring an amazing amount of comedy out of all this sordidness. Leonardo DiCaprio is inexhaustible as Belfort, and there's not a dud among the supporting performances. Rodrigo Prieto's photography dazzles, Thelma Schoonmaker's editing makes the film pulsate, and even the soundtrack's golden oldies take on new life with accelerated tempos and techno burnish. Every cinematic element in *The Wolf of Wall Street* keeps your eyes riveted to the screen, even as your mind begs for mercy. ■

Michael Robbins

He Is Who Is

The Experience of God
Being, Consciousness, Bliss
David Bentley Hart
Yale University Press, $25, 376 pp.

Rilke's Malte Laurids Brigge asks, "Is it possible that there are people who say 'God' and think it is something they have in common?" This would have made an apt epigraph to David Bentley Hart's brilliant, frustrating new book, which he says he wrote from the conviction that

> while there has been a great deal of public debate about belief in God in recent years… the concept of God around which the arguments have run their seemingly interminable courses has remained strangely obscure the whole time. The more scrutiny one accords these debates, moreover, the more evident it becomes that often the contending parties are not even talking about the same thing; and I would go so far as to say that on most occasions none of them is talking about God in any coherent sense at all.

The "public debates" Hart has in mind were the subject of his 2009 work, *Atheist Delusions*, an unanswerable and frequently hilarious demolition of the shoddy thinking and historical illiteracy of the so-called New Atheists (Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris). As Hart and several other critics—including Mark Johnston, Marilynne Robinson, Charles Taylor, and Terry Eagleton—have demonstrated, whatever the New Atheists don't believe in, it's not God, at least not God as conceived by a single one of the major theistic traditions on the planet.

Instead, the New Atheists ingeniously deny the existence of a bearded fellow with superpowers who lives in the sky and finds people's keys for them. Daniel Dennett wants to know "if God created and designed all these wonderful things, who created God? Supergod? And who created Supergod? Superdupergod?"—thereby revealing his lack of acquaintance not only with Augustine and Thomas but with Aristotle.

It was Aristotle who wrote that "one and the same is the knowledge of contraries." Denys Turner, in his recent *Thomas Aquinas* (which makes a fine companion piece to *The Experience of God*), puts the matter like this: "Unless…what believers and atheists respectively affirm and deny is the same for both, they cannot be said genuinely to disagree."

There are, then, a great many people who say "God" and mistakenly believe that they have the notion, at least, in common. Hart is interested in clarifying the notion, and one of his deeper points

Ariane Sherine and Richard Dawkins at the launch of the Atheist Bus Campaign in London, 2009

is that the major theistic religions do indeed have something in common when they say "God." In a churlish review for *Harper's*, Jane Smiley writes that Hart "is robustly convinced that there is only one definition of God, and that is his own." She then quotes Hart's "own" definition: "one infinite source of all that is: eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, uncreated, uncaused, perfectly transcendent of all things and for that very reason absolutely immanent to all things."

As Hart makes plain, however, and as anyone even slightly familiar with the history of metaphysics is aware, that definition is not Hart's, but one shared by most major religious and philosophical traditions. It is as much Aristotle's definition as it is Moses Maimonides's and Thomas Aquinas's and Mulla Sadra's and, indeed, Spinoza's. It describes equally Brahman and Yahweh. Nor is Hart here proposing a dilution of the real differences among religions, à la Huston Smith; he is interested in what the theistic traditions disclose, a common conception of the ultimate transcendental ground of being. For Bahá'ís as for Sikhs, God is not one being among others, not even an especially powerful and wise being (this, Hart points out, is what differentiates God from gods). As Aquinas puts it, God is *ipsum esse subsistens*. In fact, Aquinas's definition of God at the outset of the *Summa*, which uncannily anticipates Hart's, has made more than a few Christian theologians uneasy precisely because it is a philosophical definition that could apply just as easily to Allah or Yahweh as to the Trinity.

Hart is an Eastern Orthodox Christian, but *The Experience of God* is, as the above suggests, wonderfully ecumenical: he draws with ease on the Upanishads, Sufi poetry, Islamic philosophy, and the Church Fathers to support his thesis that "naturalism—the doctrine that there is nothing apart from the physical order, and certainly nothing supernatural—is an incorrigibly incoherent concept, and one that is ultimately indistinguishable from pure magical thinking." He grounds his argument in three chapters: one on being ("Why is there something rather than nothing" is not a question about what processes within nature—quantum fluctuation, say—gave rise to the universe, but about being as such, a question for religion and ontology rather than for a materialist cosmology); one on consciousness (despite the cocksure proclamations of certain pop neuroscience writers, we still have no idea how the activity of eighty-some billion neurons gives rise to the qualia of subjective experience; mind is obviously related to brain, but there is simply no credible rationale for ruling out the mental as a formally distinct reality); and one on bliss (a rather muddled discussion of epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics).

These sections compose "meditations on the meaning of the word 'God,'" but I do wish they bore less of a resemblance to repetitive chanting. For Hart, often a subtle and eloquent writer, has come down with Harold Bloom Syndrome, whose sufferers reiterate perfectly good themes until they lose their rhetorical force. He tells us, for instance, that God "is not a 'being'…not one more object in the inventory of things that are, or any sort of discrete object at all." And that "God…is beyond all mere finite beings." And that "God is not a being…but is absolute Being as such." And "God's being [is] different from the being of a finite thing." And "God is to be understood as the unconditioned source of all things, rather than merely some very powerful but still ontologically dependent being." We must not be deluded that "God is just another being among beings." For the God of the theistic faiths is not "any kind of object at all, but is himself the light of being." Also, God is not "a finite entity who can be classed alongside or over against the finite entities that belong to nature."

Now, this is a vital point, and it is precisely where most atheists go wrong. (After I published an article on the subject, someone wrote to protest that the laws of physics suffice to disprove the existence of God. This really is the philosophically illiterate level at which these "debates" take place.) But the above is a mere sampling of the morass of repetition into which Hart repeatedly falls back. At crucial junctures, he will restate some thesis, disclaim the desire to prove anything, and self-consciously gesture toward his bibliography.

These faults, however, do not sink *The Experience of God*. Hart is a phenomenally gifted thinker who recalls believers of all faiths to the best of their traditions, challenges unbelievers to examine their own metaphysical presuppositions, and does these with tremendous gusto. He has written a necessary book in a bad time. In this country, for instance, the transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich continues unabated while the CIA assassinates Pakistani grandmothers tending their gardens. Yet a great many American Christians are content to ignore their own Scripture's not exactly subtle precepts regarding economic justice and state murder, preferring to fret about the age of the earth and the calamitous threats posed by same-sex marriage. And non-Christians are likely to believe all sorts of dumb things about a religion unbelievers used to actually study for its sociocultural relevance.

Hart, on the other hand, will suffer no fools of any creed. He notes that biblical literalism—a very recent phenomenon, as he points out—requires one to believe "that Adam could have hidden from [God] behind a tree," while Origen, in the third century, thought it was self-evident "that these are figural tales, communicating spiritual mysteries, and certainly not historical records." And Hart is right to hold "young earth creationists…who believe that there really was a Noah who built a giant ark to rescue a compendious menagerie from a universal deluge" partly responsible for the proliferation of lazy atheist manifestoes.

Of course, showing up American fundamentalism is about as hard as shooting the deck of an aircraft carrier when you're standing on it, and it is the absurdities of popular scientism that Hart was put on this earth to expose. Here he is on Dawkins's vacuous concept of the "meme":

Genetic materials are propagated by physical transactions because they themselves are physical realities; at their level, no conscious acts need be present. Whatever else "memes" might be, however, if such things really did exist, they would most definitely be composed of intentional content and would exist only as objects of mental representation. They would not therefore be metaphorically "selected" by nature, in the way the units of biological evolution are said to be, but would literally be chosen (even if often a little passively) by a conscious mind.

What's astonishing isn't that Dawkins can't see that the meme is merely a metaphor, but that he doesn't realize it's a metaphor that presumes intelligent design. (Hart dismisses the Intelligent Design movement, though more kindly than it deserves.)

Hart is at his impish best when prompting us, with understandable exasperation, to remember that the natural sciences study nature—which is to say, what exists within spacetime. There is no doubt that they are very good at this: I'm typing these words on a new MacBook Pro, and antibodies are developing in my body in response to a flu vaccine, and I can hear an airplane in the skies above Chicago. Thomas Aquinas was in no more doubt of science's validity within its sphere than is Dawkins. But "within its sphere" is easily misread in the dim light naturalism casts upon metaphysical questions today, when science is said to explain Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and R. Kelly's "Ignition (Remix)" and why I love both so much. (You won't be surprised to learn it has something to do with natural selection.)

The central folly of scientism is the assumption that "Why is there something rather than nothing?" is a question for science—whose proper field is, after all, "something"—or, even more perniciously, that it isn't a question worth bothering about, isn't really a question at all. Hart borrows a delightful illustration of the problem:

> How is it that any reality so obviously fortuitous—so lacking in any mark of inherent necessity or explanatory self-sufficiency—can exist at all? The American philosopher Richard Taylor once illustrated this mystery…with the image of a man out for a stroll in the forest unaccountably coming upon a very large translucent sphere. Naturally, he would immediately be taken aback by the sheer strangeness of the thing, and would wonder how it should happen to be there. More to the point, he would certainly never be able to believe that it just happened to be there without any cause, or without any possibility of further explanation; the very idea would be absurd. But, adds Taylor, what that man has not noticed is that he might ask the same question equally well about any other thing in the woods too, a rock or a tree no less than this outlandish sphere, and fails to do so only because it rarely occurs to us to interrogate the ontological pedigrees of the things to which we are accustomed.

This is certainly the dark wood in which we seem to find ourselves. But while I agree with Hart that naturalism appears incoherent—its incoherence is the external warrant for my belief in God—I think he is too hasty to dismiss the possibility that our bafflement before ontological mystery is the result of our being the particular kind of limited animals we are. A badger cannot understand differential equations, but that tells us something about badgers, not equations. I'm not sure I share Hart's confidence in human "reason's power to illuminate reality." My own beliefs notwithstanding, there might be some natural but unfamiliar perspective from which the question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" simply dissolves—as from our perspective differential equations pose no insurmountable obstacle to understanding.

Still, the badger doesn't know there is a problem to be faced in the first place. And the giant translucent spheres that surround us everywhere we turn are astonishing indeed. ■

Michael Robbins *is the author of the poetry collections* Alien vs. Predator *(Penguin, 2012) and* The Second Sex *(Penguin, forthcoming). He's at work on a collection of criticism,* Equipment for Living, *forthcoming from Simon & Schuster. He received his PhD in English from the University of Chicago.*

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Paul Horwitz

Dworkin's Jisei

Religion Without God

Ronald Dworkin
Harvard University Press, $17.95, 192 pp.

Ronald Dworkin, who died this year at eighty-one, was one of the leading legal philosophers of his generation. He was also widely known outside the field thanks to his perch at the *New York Review of Books*, where he offered what one obituary called "bracingly liberal views" on current issues in U.S. constitutional law. Even his sparring partners greatly admired him. Cass Sunstein, a Harvard Law professor who shared Dworkin's liberal politics but disagreed with aspects of his constitutional method, dubbed him "one of the most important legal philosophers of the last hundred years," adding, "He was not only a giant but also a good and gracious man."

Given his iconic status, the news that Dworkin had completed a book before his death came as an unlooked-for gift. That book, *Religion Without God*, is a lovely swan song. It is short—it's based on the Einstein Lectures delivered at the University of Bern in 2011—but eloquent and rich. One wants to praise it unreservedly, if only for "de mortuis nil nisi bonum" reasons. The book raises many important questions and explores them with grace and care. Unfortunately, it also purports to answer them. And there it falls short.

Dworkin is as direct and clear as the subject matter permits. "The theme of this book," he begins, "is that religion is deeper than God." Religion "is a deep, distinct, and comprehensive worldview: it holds that inherent, objective value permeates everything, that the universe and its creatures are awe-inspiring, that human life has purpose, and the universe order." This conviction is available to atheists and theists alike. Its motto is Einstein's statement that understanding "that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty," lies "at the center of true religiousness." If we understand religion in this light—if we "can separate God from religion"—we might find some common ground between theists and "religious atheists" that is "more fundamental than what divides them." This is a lovely, important, and hopeful theme.

For Dworkin, a "religious attitude" has two aspects. The first holds that "human life has objective meaning or importance." For the religious atheist, "it matters objectively how a human life goes and that everyone has an innate, inalienable ethical responsibility to live as well as possible in his circumstances." Values are not a matter of perspective or an artifact of evolutionary psychology; they are "as real as trees or pain."

Belief in objective value is a deep commitment—a form of faith. It ties together all "religious" individuals, whether they believe in a personal god or not. Drawing on David Hume and on Plato's *Euthyphro*, Dworkin argues that the objectivity of values must be independent of God and his existence. "Such a god's existence," he writes, "cannot in itself make a difference to the truth of any religious values." God's existence, like the existence of other facts about the world, is just "a very exotic kind of scientific fact." But God "cannot of his own will create right answers to moral questions or instill the universe with a glory it would not otherwise have."

Second, the religious attitude holds that the natural universe "is not just a matter of fact but is itself sublime: something of intrinsic value and wonder." This is the territory of many scientists who write for general audiences. They stand on the shoulders of Einstein, who said that a person "who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe" at the universe's grandeur "is as good as dead: his eyes are closed." It's also the bailiwick of the Romantics and other writers who draw heavily on the concept of the sublime.

Of course, beauty itself could be nothing more than a human imposition on an accidental universe, perhaps just an evolutionary drive to discern patterns in one's environment. But Dworkin insists that the scientists he discusses "think that the beauty they sense in the cosmos is as real as electrons and headaches and galaxies." Even if these individuals are being sincere, there is a problem with this data point. Publishers know that books like *The Elegant Universe* will sell better than titles like *Workaday Physics* or *Quarks Are Aesthetically Indifferent*. Still, it is fair to say that most of us experience

Ronald Dworkin

PHOTO BY LEO SOREL

a sense of awe at the universe, that its beauty at least *feels* real, and that our conviction that it is can be described as a form of faith. Taken together, these two convictions, about the "inherent value" of both human life and nature itself, form a religious worldview. Because it is shared by both theists and "religious" atheists, it may lead to a cooling off of the culture wars.

If there is any hope of common ground, it will come from the second part of Dworkin's "religious attitude," not the first. The first part—the belief in the unity and objectivity of human life and values—is beset from too many sides. Many atheists—and many theists too, for that matter, at least on a day-to-day level—will doubt that this proposition is true. More to the point, many will doubt that it's necessary. It's possible to be religious and a value pluralist; it's possible to doubt that there is a unity and reality of value, or hold the question in suspense, and still be struck by a sense of mystery and sublimity in the universe.

Dworkin writes that those who think "our claims to objective truth are just whistles in the dark" are not so much arguing against the religious worldview as they are rejecting it. These people "just do not have the religious point of view," he concludes. My response is the same as Mark Twain's response when asked whether he believed in infant baptism: "Believe in it? Hell, I've seen it!" Dworkin's insistence on the unity and reality of moral value is clearly important to his own monistic worldview, which is best expressed in his penultimate book, *Justice for Hedgehogs*. But there are more things in earth—and in heaven—than are dreamt of in his overly integrated philosophy. There is room in the "religious" camp for those who find a deeper beauty and unity in the universe, but question whether human values are a necessary part of it—and yet continue to stumble toward whatever light there is, without confidence that right answers on those questions exist.

Perhaps more centrally, Dworkin's argument that God is not a necessary part of the "religious" belief in the truth and unity of values will clearly fail to convince many theists. It should not be rejected out of hand, certainly. What philosophers call the "Euthyphro problem" has rightly engaged us for millennia. It does not require disbelief in God. And there is room within a religious worldview to accept God while arguing back at him—it is a rich part of my own Jewish cultural inheritance—or to insist, as in some natural-law traditions, on our own responsibility to reason our way to proper moral conclusions. Dworkin skillfully parses what he calls the "science part" and "value part" of religion. But many theists will strongly resist such a distinction, viewing the two as an inseparable unity of its own, a knot that the sharpest logical knife cannot undo. They may be wrong. But they certainly will not welcome Dworkin's intervention. Insisting on this point will intensify the culture wars, not ease them.

His other focus, on the importance of the sense of the sublime, is different. If there is hope of common ground, it lies there: not in reason but in awe. If anything unites us in our wildly plural age, it is the capacity to experience a sense of inexpressible mystery, whether in a single note of music or a vast nebula or the love of another human being. Whether that capacity comes from religious tradition, Romantic literature, or the marvels of the telescope—indeed, whether it describes anything "real" at all—is less important than the capacity itself, and the shared understandings it allows.

Our shared sense of the beauty of the universe, and the profundity of the human condition, is the seat of a true and lasting empathy that endures in even the most plural community. The experience of love and beauty, in art and nature, shows the confirmed atheist what it might mean for someone else to find love and beauty in God. And it ought to remind the religious individual that the atheist, too, experiences awe and wonder, even if she finds it in art or nature rather than Scripture. Call it religion, the human condition, or delusion. Whatever it is, it is universally shared, and the best hope of true common ground amid the deep divisions of the culture wars. I do not agree with all of Dworkin's analysis of the sublime, but he evokes it beautifully.

It's unfortunate, then, that so little of it carries over into Dworkin's chapter on religious freedom. Having expanded the "religious attitude" so broadly, Dworkin uses that expanded definition to diminish religious freedom itself. It is best understood, he contends, not as a strong "special" right but as a wide but shallow "general right to ethical independence." This turns out to be little more than a non-discrimination right, with barely any room for accommodation of religious practices that might be trammeled by a well-meaning majority. (Strikingly, having insisted on a broad definition of religion in order to water down religious liberty, Dworkin insists on a broad nonestablishment rule that singles out theistic religions for restrictive treatment and reserves

special suspicion for American religious conservatives.)

The notion that this approach might cool the culture wars, instead of fanning their flames, beggars belief. I share Dworkin's politics, more or less; and even I didn't find a single one of Dworkin's "reasonable" solutions to various legal controversies involving religion convincing. Given our shared "religious" sense, Dworkin concludes, atheists might "accept theists as full partners in their deeper religious ambitions." On the evidence, Dworkin apparently means that religionists are permitted to share religious atheists' own ambitions, but religious atheists need not empathize with the obligations of religious believers in turn, let alone accommodate them. That's not common ground; it's a regime of bare toleration. It's a shame that the empathetic, imaginative Dworkin of the first two chapters disappears in the third chapter.

Religion Without God closes with a short coda of mostly unremarkable musings on death and immortality. In the circumstances, it's poignant. But if you want to remember this towering figure most kindly, I suggest you ignore the last two chapters and focus on the first two. Right or wrong, they are Dworkin at his best: humane, incisive, thoughtful, and thought-provoking. In an important sense, they are a more powerful musing on life and death than anything in those last pages dealing more explicitly with death. In Japanese and Korean culture, there is a poetic tradition of deathbed compositions called *jisei*. They reflect on the beauty and brevity of life without directly mentioning death itself. Strip away the last chapter and dispense with Dworkin's uncharitable "solutions" to the question of religious freedom, and you are left with two beautiful chapters that can best be read and appreciated as Dworkin's *jisei*. They are, at last, a fitting monument. ■

Paul Horwitz *is a professor at the University of Alabama School of Law and author of* The Agnostic Age: Law, Religion, and the Constitution *(Oxford), and* First Amendment Institutions *(Harvard).*

Harold Isbell

Beyond the Cloister

A Silent Action

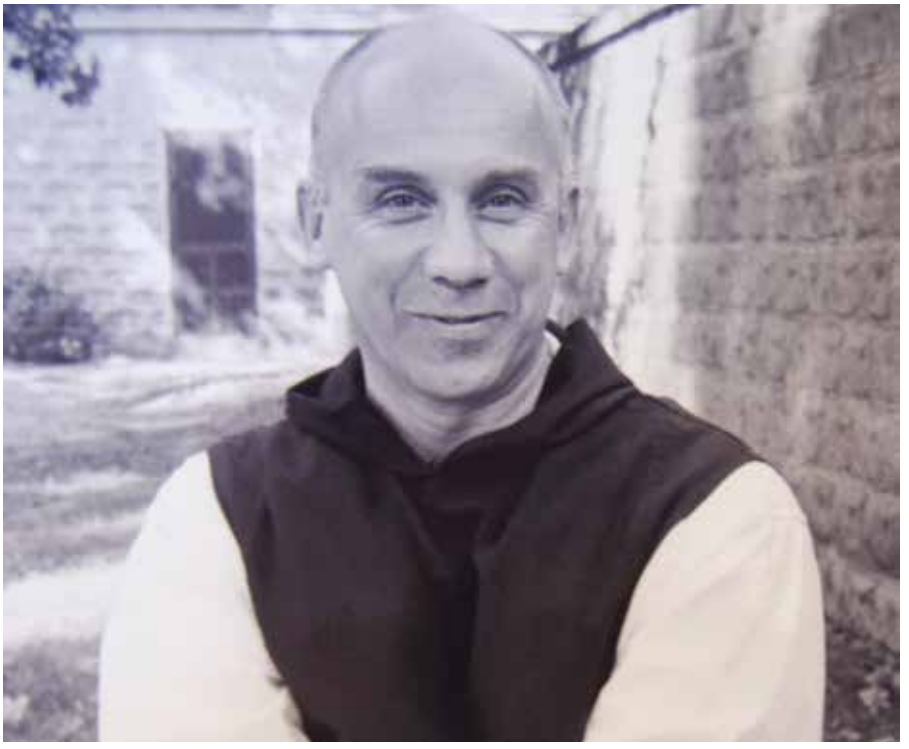
Engagements with Thomas Merton

Rowan Williams

Fons Vitae, $19.95, 96 pp.

Like most of us, Rowan Williams, retired archbishop of Canterbury, came to know Thomas Merton through his writings—through books, poems, reviews, and essays composed during his lifetime, and after his death principally through collections of his journals and letters. The story of Merton's monastic career has been told often and well: how in entering the cloister in 1942 he thought he had left his old life behind to become a new man; and how he did become a new man, but not quite in the way anticipated. Two books of poems were published in 1944 and 1946, *Thirty Poems* and *A Man in the Divided Sea*. His first published prose, in 1948, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, was a runaway bestseller. Soon afterward came *Seeds of Contemplation, The Tears of the Blind Lions, The Waters of Siloe, Elected Silence*, and a British edition of *The Seven Storey Mountain* (edited by Evelyn Waugh).

For Williams, the most striking aspect of Merton's work was the way his profound attention to humans as social beings, and the activism that followed from that attention, coexisted with his ongoing commitment to contemplative life and prayer. These two seemingly contradictory activities form the substance of this book. A chapter titled "Bread in the Wilderness: The Monastic Ideal in Thomas Merton and Paul Evdokimov" elucidates the trajectory of Merton's life and its impact on Williams. At a time when not many in the Western Church were reading the work of modern Orthodox theologians, Merton was enthusiastically reading *L'Orthodoxie* by Paul Evdokimov, a Russian Orthodox theologian living in Paris. Finding himself deeply



Thomas Merton

moved by a kindred spirit, and recognizing Evdokimov's deep commitment to ecumenism, Merton never ceased to ponder the monastic vocation and life. He became acutely aware of the possibility that the cloister too easily became a refuge from a world that desperately needed the chief treasure of the cloister—namely, its contemplative wisdom.

For Merton, a turning point came in Louisville, where one day in 1958, while standing at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, he experienced his famed epiphany, overwhelmed by the awareness that he "loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another." Emptying himself of an isolating and restraining individuality in order to embrace a liberating communion with all, he began a lifelong conversion. Merton's subsequent involvement in social-justice causes and the antiwar movement was at times subject to suppression by his superiors, including a prohibition on publishing. (I cannot help wondering if Merton's censors weren't as horrified by his wide-ranging erudition as by his insistence on stepping outside monasticism's well-established perimeters.) The publishing problem was solved by a wise abbot—with help from the mimeograph facilities of Gethsemani Abbey, which enabled Merton's writings to be circulated in samizdat to sympathetic friends.

Williams astutely alerts us to Evdokimov's proposition that the vows of a religious are analogous to Christ's response to the temptations in the desert. Yet true monastic solitude does not exist in a place, but in the person who proposes to live in that place; and while the focus here is on the vowed religious, both Evdokimov and Merton are talking about the spiritual and contemplative lives of *all* human beings. The monk's vows are not deprivations but rather liberation from the inauthentic self-will and self-knowledge brought into the cloister by the monk—remnants of the old life that are the very antithesis of loving one's neighbor as one's self. To observe every nicety of monastic praxis without attacking the radical interior falsehood the monastic rule is designed to dispel is to succumb to an illusion. And knowing and experiencing God depend upon knowing the image of God, our true selves.

To recognize that solitude is not local but intimately personal is to recognize the love that draws the monk into communion with God's ongoing actions of creation and incarnation—in the process extending the monastic life beyond the cloister to include all of creation as well as the God of creation. But finally we do not reach out to God and creation by being individuals; rather, we find salvation by being together before God. One can only go into the desert with Christ by being in communion with every created being. In the Christian experience, salvation is common, not individual.

Throughout his life Merton was preoccupied with seeking a real city, a city that permitted both community and companionship *and* the possibility of a grace-filled life of work and prayer. This hope was frustrated again and again. But Merton did not live in vain. Never hesitating to engage the imponderable, the impossible and the difficult, he made daily struggle the pattern of his life. In his underlying conviction that human beings exist as the image of God, and in his abiding fascination with the wisdom of God at play in the created universe, he found the comfort that made his search for reality possible.

Merton was not only a man of solitude but also a man immersed in companionship. That his published work, decades after his death, should be engaged so warmly by a younger man, Rowan Williams—a man deeply rooted in a similar theological tradition and in the same conundrums of solitude and society that Merton knew so well—is indeed a graceful affirmation of such companionship. ■

Harold Isbell *has been an academic, a banker, and a translator. He lives in San Francisco.*

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Gabriel Said Reynolds

When Martyrdom Isn't a Metaphor

The Global War on Christians

Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution

John L. Allen Jr.

Image, $25, 320 pp.

Toward the beginning of *The Global War on Christians*, John Allen tells the story of a Christmas Day 2011 bombing by the Islamist group Boko Haram that killed forty-five worshippers outside a Catholic church in Madalla, Nigeria. This attack, like so many others that Allen describes in his book, hardly made a blip in U.S. news coverage. Not many Christians in the West are even aware that in Nigeria and many other parts of the world Christians still risk their lives just by going to church to celebrate the birth of Christ.

This is precisely why Allen, a longtime columnist for the *National Catholic Reporter* recently hired by the *Boston Globe*, wrote *The Global War on Christians*—and why he gave the book such a dramatic title. For Christians, Allen writes, "there's a special obligation" to be concerned about attacks on Christians. Recalling that the Christian community is the body of Christ, Allen quotes Paul: "If one member suffers, all suffer together" (1 Corinthians 12:26). Thus Christians everywhere should know and care about the case of Nadia Ali and her seven children in Egypt, all of whom were sentenced to fifteen years in prison for converting to Christianity (the faith in which Nadia had been raised). They should also care about the fifty-eight Christians who were gunned down during Mass at a Syrian Catholic church in Baghdad in October 2010; about attacks on Christians in India by Hindu fundamentalists; and about the rising anti-Christian violence in Pakistan. (On September 22, 2013—soon after the publication of Allen's book—a church bombing in Pakistan killed seventy-eight people.)

Perhaps it is Allen's frustration that most Christians in the West don't even know about these incidents that causes him to employ such dramatic language. He describes anti-Christian persecution as a "war" and an "ecumenical scourge," insists that Christians are the "most persecuted religious body on the planet," and styles the "war" against them "the greatest story never told."

All of this contrasts with Candida Moss's *The Myth of Persecution*, which implies that Christians already care too much about stories of anti-Christian violence—and indeed that many such stories are fabricated or exaggerated (see Luke Timothy Johnson's review, "Prosecuting the Persecuted," August 5, 2013). While most of Moss's attention is on the early church, she begins her work by discussing a 2011 New Year's Eve bombing of a Coptic church in Alexandria, Egypt, which left more than twenty people dead. Moss is less interested with the victims of the bombing than with the way Christians declared the victims martyrs and insisted that Islamist groups had been responsible.

Allen discusses the same bombing and explains that the attack was a response to false rumors that two Christian women who had converted to Islam were being held by the Coptic church against their will. Allen notes that this incident was but one in a long series of Islamist attacks on Egyptian Christians in recent years. In Egypt, mosques can be built freely, but special permits are needed to build churches. Attacks often take place after Islamists accuse Christians of attempting to build a church without such a permit. Sometimes attacks are inspired by the accusation that a Christian man is sleeping with a Muslim woman and compromising the honor of her family. (In Egypt, as in most Islamic countries, Muslim men can marry Christian women, but Christian men cannot marry Muslim women.) In other words, Christians in Egypt—and in much of the Islamic world—regularly face obstacles and threats that are unimaginable in the West. And yet Christians in the West have done little to support them.

According to Allen, one reason Christians in the West have not done more is that the question of anti-Christian persecution is easily politicized: "In the post-9/11 era, anti-Christian violence by Muslims is a terrific rallying cry for hawks on the American right, which

Coptic Christian funeral for victims of sectarian violence at Samaan el-Kharaz Church in Cairo

CNS PHOTO / AMR ABDALLAH DALSH, REUTERS

may help explain why some liberals remain skittish." Allen replies that "if we want to see the global war on Christians clearly, we have to stop looking at it through the funhouse mirror of secular politics." Perhaps it is his concern to connect with readers of various political persuasions that leads Allen to define anti-Christian persecution so broadly. As he defines the term, the "war on Christians" includes not only attacks against Christians by terrorist groups and the anti-Christian policies of governments that forbid or restrict public expressions of Christian faith. It seems to include *any* incident in which Christians are victims, even when they have not been targeted because of their faith. If a Christian pastor of Muslim background, jailed for his apostasy by Islamic courts in Iran, is a victim of the "global war on Christians," so too, in Allen's view, is a priest in the Philippines who is shot for his political activism on behalf of the anti-mining movement. The war on Christians, so defined, exists not only where Christians are the minority, but also in countries—such as the Philippines (or Zimbabwe or Mexico or, indeed, the United States)—where they are the majority. This broad definition of the "global war" on Christians makes it seem like something other than a war. But Allen argues that the motives of the victim should matter at least as much as the motives of the attacker: "We also have to ponder what was in the heart of the believer getting shot."

This approach helps Allen avoid an exclusive focus on Islam. In a chapter titled "The Myth That It's All About Islam," he comments that a narrow focus on Islam would contribute to the idea of a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West. He also notes that many Muslims have been faithful defenders of Christians. As an example, he tells the moving story of Mahamud Osman, the Muslim driver of an Italian nun, Rosa Sgorbati, in Somalia. When Islamists shot at Sgorbati—apparently in reaction to Pope Benedict XVI's September 2006 speech at Regensburg—Osman jumped in front of Sgorbati to protect her. Later that day, Sgorbati and Osman both died of their wounds in a Mogadishu hospital.

Such stories are inspiring and deserve to be told more often. Yet one cannot easily sidestep the problem of Islamic anti-Christian persecution. As Allen notes, while the first country in the Open Doors World Watch List of places where anti-Christian persecution is most severe is North Korea, every other country in the top ten is Islamic. And while there are many stories of Muslims protecting Christians (and many stories of Muslims also suffering from Islamist extremism), it is nevertheless true that Christians living in the Islamic countries regularly face threats. In many of these countries, Muslims who convert to Christianity live in fear for their lives. Christians can be imprisoned for proselytizing and executed for an accusation of blasphemy against Islam. In many Islamic countries, including some with

officially secular governments, radical Islamist groups adopt and spread an ideology that encourages discrimination against, or vigilante attacks on, Christians.

Allen recognizes the problem of Islamic anti-Christian persecution, and insists that it should not be ignored. He writes, "Politically correct silence does no one any good." At the same time, the manner in which Allen groups together all sorts of things into one great "global war" on Christians doesn't appear to do justice to the particular situation of Christians in the Islamic world. The struggles of American Catholic business owners who have to decide what to do about the HHS contraception mandate shouldn't be conflated with the struggles of Iraqi Christians who pray each Sunday that a bomb won't explode during Mass. Moreover, if the "global war" involves any and every case where Christians face trouble, it's hard to imagine what exactly can be done about it. Movements like the one against apartheid in South Africa—or like the ones against anti-Dalit discrimination in India or anti-Roma discrimination in Europe—have been meaningful, and sometimes successful, because they have focused on a specific category of persecution, in which the persecuted and the persecuting are both clearly identified groups.

On the other hand, Allen succeeds admirably in raising awareness of the suffering of Christians who are too often forgotten in the West—such as the seven members of a poor family in Gojra, Pakistan, who were burned alive in 2009 by a mob of Islamists who accused their Christian settlement of burning a leaf of the Qur'an. No one was there to protect this family or their community. No prosecution of the perpetrators ever took place, and hardly a word of protest or lament was heard in the West. Indeed, the fate of this family was almost completely unknown in the West, until now. ■

Gabriel Said Reynolds *is professor of Islamic studies and theology at the University of Notre Dame.*

Denis Donoghue

Grief Detained

Levels of Life

Julian Barnes
Knopf, 128 pp., $22.95

Levels of Life consists of an essay, "The Sin of Height" (twenty-eight pages), a story of sorts, "On the Level" (thirty-six pages), and an elegy, "The Loss of Depth" (fifty-seven pages). The essay is an account of the nineteenth-century phase of hot-air ballooning, exemplified by Colonel Fred Burnaby of the Royal Horse Guards, who took off from the Dover Gasworks on March 23, 1882, and landed halfway between Dieppe and Neufchâtel; Sarah Bernhardt, who took off from the center of Paris in 1878 and landed near Emerainville in the département of Seine-et-Marne; and Félix Tournachon, better known later as the great photographer Nadar, who took off from the Champ de Mars in Paris on October 18, 1863 and crash-landed near Hanover. The main point of this essay is to introduce motifs of earth and sky, up and down, ballooning as vehicle of freedom, and the moral emblem of our looking at ourselves from afar, "with increasing truth."

The first sentences of the essay read: "You put together two things that have not been put together before. And the world is changed. People may not notice at the time, but that doesn't matter. The world has been changed nonetheless." Barnes does not go on to remark that the figure of such putting-together in literary discourse is metaphor. The first person who looked at a ship under sail and thought of it as ploughing the sea created a new way of thinking. Without this invention, Sir Thomas Wyatt could not have written: "They flee from me, that sometime did me seek / With naked foot stalking within my chamber." Nor Shakespeare:

> That time of year thou mayst in me behold,
> When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
> Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
> Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

Nor Barnes, who has been putting untold things together since *Flaubert's Parrot* and *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*. The first part of his novel *The Sense of an Ending* has Tony Webster living a circumstantial life, the second has him examining it, in sad retrospect. Nadar, the hero of "The Sin of Height," put together "two of his three emblems of modernity: photography and aeronautics." (The third was electricity.) As Walter Benjamin noted of him in "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," "Nadar's advance over his professional colleagues is characterized by his undertaking to take photographs in the sewers of Paris." Barnes apparently holds that Nadar "first put two things together," the two being hot-air ballooning and photography.

"On the Level" retains Barnes's three characters, describes their flat, daily existences, and imagines a romance between Fred Burnaby and Sarah Bernhardt. The imagining is perfunctory; one is not sorrowful when it ends. There is an amount of easy talk about the aspiring motive of love: "So why do we constantly aspire to love? Because love is the meeting point of truth and magic. Truth, as in photography; magic, as in ballooning." But neither of these is correct: photography is fiction, ballooning is science.

"The Loss of Depth," an elegy on the death of Barnes's wife Pat, is the best part of the book. Patricia Kavanagh was born on January 31, 1940, in Durban, South Africa. She moved to London in her

early twenties and soon became one of the most successful literary agents, with a long list of top-line authors. She met Julian Barnes in 1978 and married him in 1979. She died of a brain tumor on October 20, 2008: "We were together for thirty years. I was thirty-two when we met, sixty-two when she died. The heart of my life; the life of my heart."

I believe the last phrases, but the first sentence is evasive. It is common knowledge that sometime in the mid-1980s Pat Kavanagh left Barnes and went to live with the novelist Jeanette Winterson. The knowledge is common because Winterson disclosed it in an interview. After some time—I don't know how long, except that the relation with Winterson ended in 1989—Kavanagh returned to Barnes and resumed their marriage. They remained together till she died. There is not a word about this episode in "The Loss of Depth." Barnes may feel it's none of our business. True, but then "The Loss of Depth" contains several privacies that are also none of our business. I think he should have dealt with it, giving us the rough with the smooth.

Pat Kavanagh was sixty-eight when she died. My father died overnight, I assume of a heart attack, when he was sixty-nine. I have never thought his death untimely. My father was lower-middle-class. I don't think he ever consulted a doctor, or needed to. Nowadays, upper-middle-class people, or couples like Barnes and Kavanagh with two incomes, can easily afford medicines, specialists, hospitals, and if necessary nursing homes. They confidently expect to live well into their late eighties or early nineties. So Barnes finds it an outrage that his wife died at sixty-eight. Or perhaps that she would ever die. If Barnes believed in God—he doesn't—he would denounce Him for the injustice. As it is, Barnes foists his denunciation on something he calls Life or "the universe," finding it guilty of "stuff." This word, repeated more often than necessary, comes to sound like Donald Rumsfeld's famous explanation for looting in Baghdad: "Stuff happens." Near the end of "The Loss of Depth," Barnes says: "It is all just the universe doing its stuff, and we are the stuff it is being done to." The only hope, apparently, is that, after the universe has done its stuff to someone we love, a northerly wind may blow our balloons to Barnes's beloved France.

Self-portrait by Félix Tournachon—better known as "Nadar"

Meanwhile, Barnes grieves, as he is entitled to. Emily Dickinson has a poem that begins: "As imperceptibly as Grief / The Summer lapsed away." It is not true of Barnes's grief, which has not lapsed away, nor passed the time imperceptibly. He has detained it and surrounded it with broodings on dreams, memory, loneliness, pain, the work of mourning. Nor is it true, as another of Dickinson's poems has it, that "The Missing All—prevented Me / From missing minor Things." Barnes will not be prevented. Anything is sufficient provocation. Once or twice, he feels that Pat is indeed slipping away:

> A widowed colleague of hers assures me that this is not unusual, that my memories will return, but there are few certainties left in my life, and nothing follows a pattern, so I

am skeptical. Why should anything happen when everything has happened? And so it feels as if she is slipping away from me a second time; first I lose her in the present, then I lose her in the past. Memory—the mind's photographic archive—is failing.

Barnes's broodings are designed, I take it, to keep his wife alive by presenting her in many contexts—not just those they actually shared but new ones, new thoughts, new images, many places of fame and elegy.

Mostly these broodings are intelligent, often eloquent, and just to the elegiac occasion. But Barnes is sometimes hard. I wince when he tells of a "dinner-table conversation" in a restaurant "with three married friends of roughly my age." Each, he says, "had known her for many years—perhaps eighty or ninety in total, and each would have said, if asked, that they loved her":

> I mentioned her name; no one picked it up. I did it again, and again nothing. Perhaps the third time I was deliberately trying to provoke, being pissed off at what struck me not as good manners but cowardice. Afraid to touch her name, they denied her thrice, and I thought the worse of them for it.

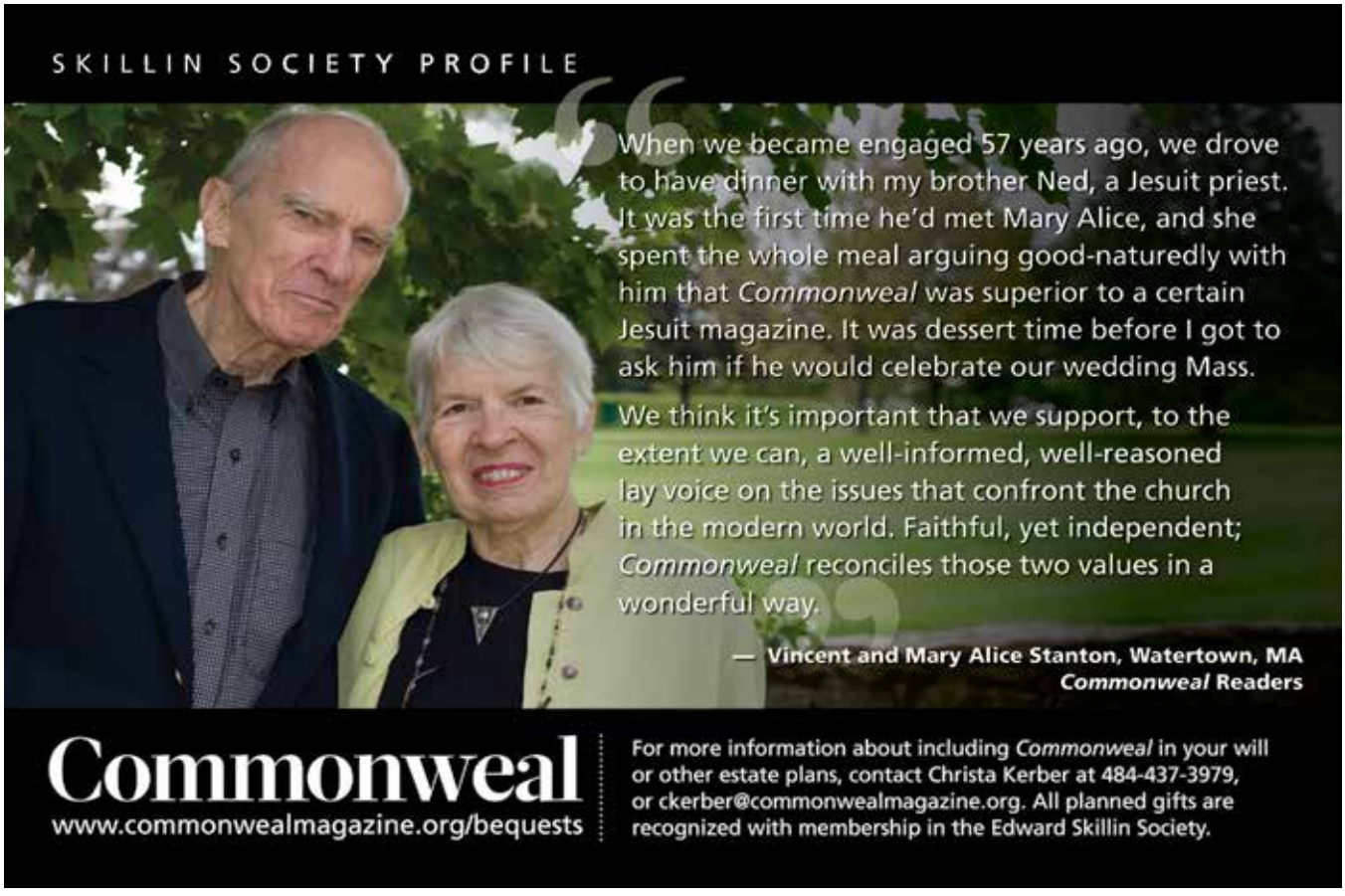
And I think the worse of him for putting his friends through such a horrible test, a morbid game. Obviously and decently, they didn't know whether to speak of Kavanagh or not, and decided it would be safer not to. I would have done the same. But the most indecent part of the passage is "they denied her thrice." Barnes would not use the word "thrice" in conversation. He would say "three times," as he said "the third time." "Thrice" is an allusion to the rebuke Christ delivered to Simon Peter: "Verily, I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice" (Matthew 26:34). The allusion is impudent, far too weighted for such a trivial social failing, if failing it was.

Elegies are hard to read. We don't know what distance we should try to keep. If the elegist tells us every detail, opens his privacy to us, we are gratified yet resentful, or at worst embarrassed: we didn't ask to be so invited. If, like Barnes, the elegist keeps something back and we find it out elsewhere, we resent his secrecy. Reading an elegy, we are in the position of a reader of a novel, as Benjamin describes it in "The Storyteller":

> The novel is significant, therefore, not because it presents someone else's fate to us, perhaps didactically, but because this stranger's fate by virtue of the flame which consumes it yields us the warmth which we never draw from our own fate. What draws the reader to the novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about.

What draws the reader to an elegy is the same hope, darkened by the squeamishness we know awaits us. ■

Denis Donoghue *has taught English, Irish, and American literature at University College, Dublin, Cambridge University, and New York University.*



A SACRIFICE WORTH MAKING

Like Fr. Nonomen, I am a pastor of a suburban parish. I have been a priest for almost forty years. Our parish, established in 1952, did not have a school when I was assigned here. When we began to investigate the possibility of introducing a parochial school in 2003, we heard the same arguments voiced by Fr. Nonomen. The local public school system is excellent and offers a better education. We can provide a quality religious-education program for those students at the parish. And the list goes on.

In spite of those arguments, we built a parish education center, which offers education from the cradle to the grave. The center includes a new parochial school for students from preschool through eighth grade. After only five years, our current enrollment is at capacity with six hundred forty students. Contrary to Fr. Nonomen's experience, we have created a Catholic culture in our school. We have hired qualified religion teachers to teach the faith. We include the poor of our area and tithe 5 percent of our annual income to a Hispanic parish that would not be able to afford a Catholic school without our help.

Our parish has been transformed through the addition of our Catholic school. More parishioners are involved, and the life of the parish is strengthened by those who understand that the school is an integral component of our wider ministry. Of course it is more difficult. Of course it is harder to allocate funds. But Catholic education has enriched our parish. The sacrifices are paying off.

(REV.) WILLIAM C. SCHOOLER
Granger, Ind.

KEEP OUR SCHOOLS OPEN

Fr. Nonomen's article is profoundly misguided, especially at a time when Catholic schools may be more important than ever before.

In the thirty years that I have been privileged to serve as a priest, I have spent nineteen of them as pastor. So I know first-hand that Catholic schools are the lifeblood of the parish, regardless of the prevailing socioeconomic status of the parishioners. I reflect fondly on my first assignment as a pastor at St. John Vianney parish in the Archdiocese of Phoenix. Its parish school serves hundreds of children, almost all of whom are Mexican or Mexican-American. That school is making a real difference in the lives of those children. Many graduates go on to Catholic high school and then enroll in a four-year college program. The overwhelming majority of those students will become first-generation college students. The data show that these children tend to remain faithful to the church and attend university. Their lives and the lives of their families will be forever different. St. John Vianney School is preparing students to be good citizens—in this world and in the world to come.

Catholic schools have been doing this for generations. Fr. Nonomen suggests that we should provide Catholic schools only for poor children in low-performing districts. To be sure, the poor—especially Latino families—need our Catholic elementary and secondary schools now more than ever. But the need for a quality Catholic school is not limited to those who do not have access to good public schools. The claim that children are better served by high-quality secular schools than by our Catholic schools could not be more mistaken. All children across the nation can and do benefit from Catholic schools, where academic excellence and formation in the faith are seamlessly integrated.

Fr. Nonomen argues that if we could close our Catholic schools we could use the money saved to make great religious-education programs in parishes everywhere. I might be tempted to believe that if I could find even one example where that has happened. On the contrary, I know of many parishes that have closed their schools and are now just trying to remain open because so many have left the parish.

Fr. Nonomen writes that he grumbles when he signs the monthly parish check to support his school. When I was pastor that was the first check I signed each month. I never saw this as subsidizing the school, but as an investment in the future of children and of the parish. I wish I could have signed two checks, not just one!

Our Catholic schools have been and remain the church's best way to evangelize. As long ago as 1885, the Vatican document *Spectata Fides* taught:

> For it is in and by these schools that the Catholic faith, our greatest and best inheritance, is preserved whole and entire. In these schools the liberty of parents is respected; and, what is most needed, especially in the prevailing license of opinion and of action, it is by these schools that good citizens are brought up for the state.

It is no secret that our Catholic schools are at a crossroads. The next two decades will be critically important to their survival and growth. The last thing they need are pastors who are not 100 percent supportive of them. "Rethinking Catholic Schools: Who Really Needs Them"? The People of God do!

JOSEPH V. CORPORA, CSC
Notre Dame, Ind.

THE AUTHOR REPLIES

I am delighted and even heartened that apparently there are some Catholic schools in this large country of ours that are supported with such fervor and passion. All the more reason, I believe, that it's time to stop relying on outmoded, one-size-fits-all models for Catholic education and ask the more difficult—and more comprehensive—question of how to provide education for the Catholic person as a whole, childhood through adulthood. Fr. Schooler's experience shows what can happen when a parish takes an honest assessment of its needs, prayerfully follows a vision, and believes that their budget is a theological statement! I applaud their efforts and hope that their parish education center will one day include a high school, a junior college, and a variety of continuing-edu-

continued on page 37

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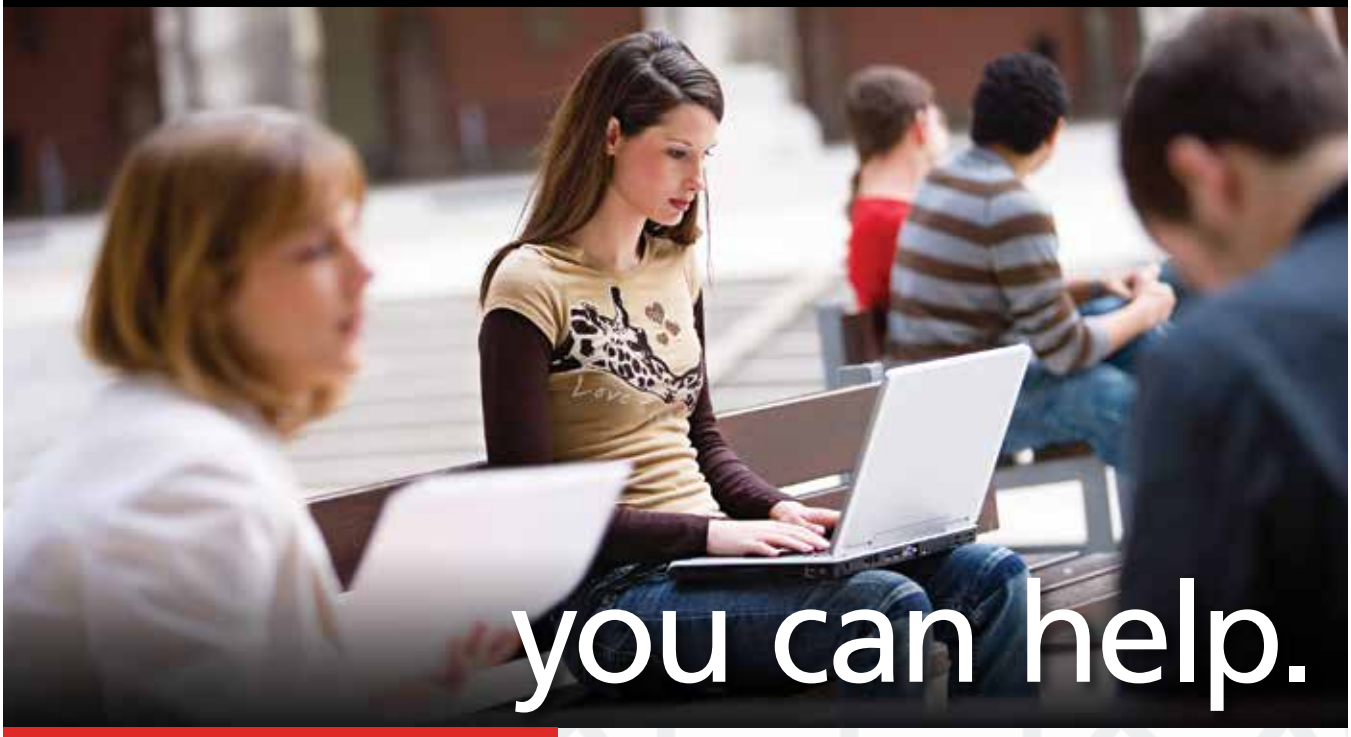

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cation programs for adults as well. May many more parishes and dioceses have open eyes and open conversations.

FR. NONOMEN

IN FORMATION

Andrew Koppelman's "Keep It Vague" (November 15, 2013) reminded me of my conscience-forming favorites—Robert P. George and Charles Taylor.

I went to Newark, New Jersey, to hear George on same-sex marriage rights, and decided neither my conscience nor my religion needed his arguments or his conclusions. His presentation seemed too tight, too intellectual to allow space to understand forgiveness, reformation, grace, and facts.

I went to Washington, D.C., to hear Charles Taylor (author of *A Secular Age*). Though the panel at the Catholic University of America was a disappointment, he was composed and confident.

Individual commitment to religion, in my experience at age eighty-four, is at the heart of the matter. How we perceive and receive the voices of leadership in the church depends on dealing with the many meanings of religious freedom, as we read and hear commentary on the words of Jesus in Scripture.

The fact that a large segment of Roman Catholic bishops followed George in advising (and at times demanding) that the consciences of others be in total agreement with theirs in order to be worthy for reception of the Eucharist gave me pause for serious reflection. In Canada, Taylor seems to have influenced emerging views on marriage rights. This is evidence of generous thinking about religious freedom in a secular culture.

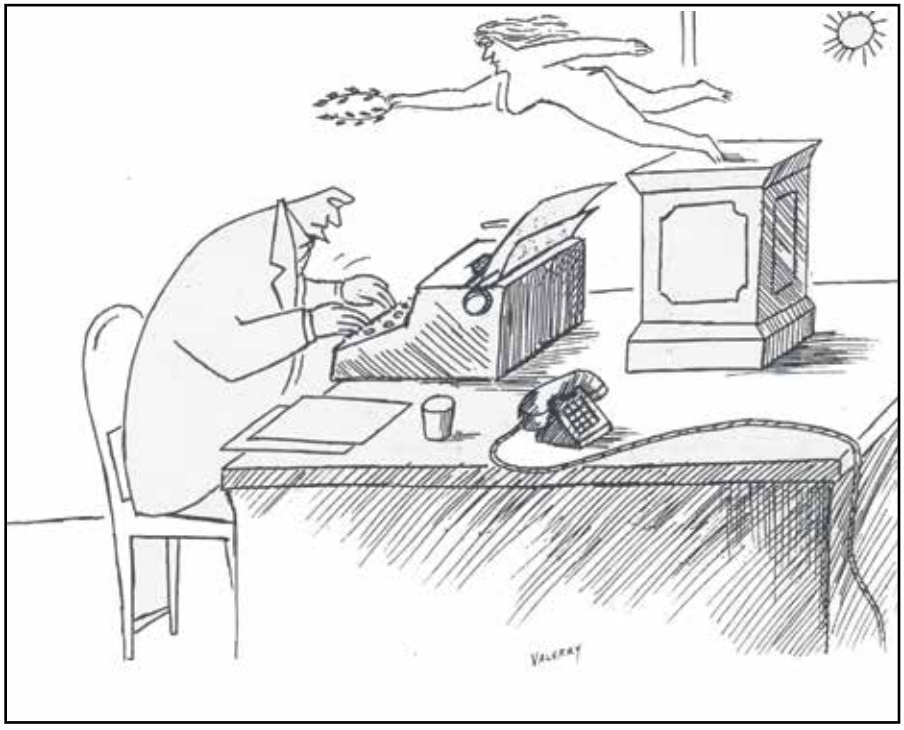
It was leaders like Pope John XXIII, Bishops Rodimer, Hunthausen, Dozier, and many others, who gave guidance to explore, connect, and experience the vision of the council. How graced we are to now have the voice of Pope Francis inviting a continuation of that Spirit.

WILLY MALARCHER
Englewood, N.J.

AS THE CHURCH ALWAYS TAUGHT

Richard Gaillardetz's argument for a married priesthood was cogent, concise, and comprehensive ("Married Priests," December 6, 2013). He presented well the logics and illogics of the history of the question, and advocated for an expanded, prophetic view of Christian marriage. All, I fear, to no avail, given that, as he says, many believe "a change in the church's current discipline constitutes… a capitulation to a secular culture," and, I would add, an admission of error. The immutable ecclesial axiom is "the church is never wrong." She has sometimes been bad, even evil, and for that we have apologized, but in error?—never! How else can we explain *Humanae Vitae* or a *Catechism* that hews to a literal reading of the opening chapters of Genesis?

(DEACON) BRIAN CARROLL
Berkley, Mich.



VALERRY

CATHOLIC HOSPITALS & WOMEN

In Cathleen Kaveny's column, "The ACLU Takes on the Bishops" (January 10), she writes, "Properly understood, Catholic moral teaching requires Catholic hospitals to try to save both mother and unborn child, and if that is not possible, doctors must save the patient that can be saved. In early pregnancy, that's the mother. The time has come for the bishops conference to revise the directives to make that crystal clear." I agree; that would go a long way toward countering the perception that the church is antiwoman. This is a gut-level issue that women see as potentially affecting them or their loved ones—as opposed to, for instance, ordination of women. However one feels about that issue (and I'm not making light of it), no woman will ever die because she couldn't become a priest.

After centuries in which the church was a pioneer in health care, especially for the poor, caring for those who had no one to care for them, I am troubled by what seems to be a prevailing perception that Catholic hospitals are not a safe place for women. The opposite should be true. The church needs to make every effort to reassure women that they are not going to be thrown under the bus, and to put in place directives to make sure that this isn't happening in any Catholic hospital.

KATHERINE NIELSEN
Via Website

PROMISES, PROMISES

John Garvey's column "'I Do' Undone" (December 20, 2013) could use a bit

continued on page 38

more nuance. He mentions the Irish loss of trust following sexual scandals—a reference to the abuse of children by priests and the cover-up by bishops. There is a huge difference between a priest breaking a vow of celibacy by engaging in a sexual relationship with another consenting adult and the criminal acts of sexual abuse against children. I doubt that the loss of so many older Catholics is the result of the occasional revelation that a priest or bishop has had an affair with another adult. The sexual abuse of children is not simply "breaking a vow"; it is a crime, and a crime of the worst kind.

Bishops and cardinals take vows to the pope and to the church—the oath taken by cardinals mentions Jesus/God once. It highlights loyalty to the pope and to the institution and even to "protecting" the institution by maintaining secrecy when necessary. Vows made to men should be broken when keeping them requires breaking vows to God.

Garvey writes that he is not the same person that he was when he was ordained; that's true of married laypeople too. These vows should not be broken lightly, but they should not be considered immutable under all circumstances either. A priest who is miserable will not be an effective priest. Some marriages are so miserable that the couple should separate or divorce, especially if there are children who are harmed by the parents' misery.

In some ways, it is more understandable when marital vows are broken. Most couples who marry make the decision after a relatively short time of knowing one another. They usually marry within six months to a year of becoming engaged. They are given very little preparation for marriage, and none for the demands parenthood will bring—being "open" to parenthood is a requirement for marrying in the church, which seems unconcerned about the suitability of the individuals to be good parents.

Priests are in formation—immersed in it and removed from the world—for years. Married couples are not removed from the world and immersed in marriage preparation for years. Priests and religious take temporary vows, leading to final vows. Couples who intend to marry do not have these "trial" vow periods, nor does the church approve of cohabitation, which would provide a sort of "immersion" experience for couples before taking "final" marriage vows.

Priests and religious who decide to leave the priesthood or religious life after final vows—even after years of preparation, immersion, discernment, and stages with temporary vows before making those final vows—are usually permitted to leave without being punished by the church through the withholding of sacraments, as long as they follow correct procedure. Couples who decide to divorce are usually told they may not participate in the Eucharist. They may be offered the expensive and painful option of annulment, which many refuse to do because it forces them to deny that the marriage was ever "valid," and many see that as a distortion of truth. They must also obtain the cooperation of a former spouse who may not wish to participate, and they must lay out their dirty laundry to a tribunal of strangers who will judge them and the "validity" of their marriage. It is not surprising that so many divorced people choose not to seek annulments.

In an ideal world, nobody would ever break religious or marital vows. But we don't live in such a world.

ANNE CHAPMAN
Via Website

IDEALLY

The exchange "American Innocence: Niebuhr, Obama & the Ironies of History," featuring James L. Fredericks and Andrew J. Bacevich (January 24, 2014), is interesting, and both writers make good points. But I hope I am wrong in my reading of Bacevich. Is he actually saying that there is no room left in politics for idealism or for the notion of building a better world? If so, I would invite him to visit France, where a very profound cynicism masquerading as realism now leaves the French incapable of addressing their socioeconomic problems. It is not simply that secularism has left many French with no concept of the transcendent; the disbelief in any possibility of building a better world has led large numbers of people to defend their current entitlements against all reasonable reform efforts. Confronted with the spectacle of a good-hearted man engaged in an act of generosity, a French friend of mine could only ask: "Qui profite?"

The French writer François Mauriac once said: "Strip away the spiritual striving from human beings and you will be appalled by how little remains." I wonder what Mauriac would say about France today? Graham Greene notwithstanding, I prefer to live in a society where some sense of idealism prevails. There are at least possibilities for regeneration.

DECLAN C. MURPHY
Via Website

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Rerouted

Dolores L. Christie

Pain in my left arm signaled something wrong with this seventy-something body. The doctor ordered tests. "Take some Ativan before you come," he said, "to lower your blood pressure." Just four minutes on a treadmill predicted a serious heart attack. He ordered a catheterization. The cardiologist called the day before to reassure me. I would be myself again. My husband had a stent years ago and cleaned the basement drains the next day. I could live with that. I could live.

I chatted briefly with the nurse and entered la-la land. Later, the doctor was not smiling. The heart muscle and other vessels looked pretty good, but the major arteries showed a tight community of plaque like that which killed my father at sixty-two. The pictures said it all: bypass. CABG, they call it, coronary artery bypass graft. Three days before surgery I cleaned the attic, shoveled snow, returned library books, and finished the book I was writing—all to ease my anxiety.

They invaded me with tubes. They stayed the bloody traffic of my heart and rearranged its roadways. They cracked my chest, pumped me with morphine, someone else's blood, lidocaine and lactose, glucose and glue. Family stood silently by. Finally they removed tubes, leaving tracks of tape and torn skin. They moved my body—was it still my self?—to a step-down room. After two more days they retrieved the remaining wires, took more pictures, and pronounced me "discharged." No more sleeping on the back of a sheeted rack that hospitals call a "bed."

But who came home? Was I the same person, or had she died when my heart stopped? The random winter fly in the house was drawn to the cadaverous smell of the surgical site. It seemed to believe I no longer existed.

Appointments with cardiologist and surgeon followed. The old me would have persisted when these men interrupted my questions with their medical wisdom. Now I felt infantilized, muzzled, and frustrated. I felt diminished when others told me when to walk, what to eat, what pills to take and when.

Although only a small scar remains where they took the left radial artery, I wonder if the complete *I* will live again? Is there a born-again me? There is still a pulse on the right wrist, but the left is silent. The arteries that nourished six children have been diverted to supplant crippled heart vessels clogged to worthlessness. The long scar down my torso reminds me of my expiration. I have been rerouted from my natural course toward death. It feels wrong.

Maybe there is efficacious work ahead. Survival from surgery, survival not only from the physical pain and mutilation but from the pain I see in the eyes of those who love me. My husband has suffered far more than I.

There is also the work of mourning my old life. Before the surgery I was prepared to die. "Please," I told the surgeon, "if I go sour, let me go. I do not want to live a vegetable life." We agreed to the lie that no resuscitation would be attempted in the OR. Every ethicist knows that even clear advance directives are suspended in the surgical suite. But now am I prepared to live?

Recovery from the surgery itself was easy. The psychic recovery less so. Several weeks ago, I found myself crying unreasonably about a bruised rib, unrelated to but near my healed sternum. Taken by surprise at an emotional response greater than the bruise deserved, I insisted to my husband that it was connected to the bypass. Yet I knew full well that it was not. Patients and families must not rush past the pain that is part of living—for Christians, it can be how we enter into the suffering of Jesus.

The dignity of the patient must be respected and honored. Between the assault on the patient's body and the insults to her intelligence, she can be reduced to a thing, a nonresponsible biological entity. The heart in Room 3. Of course, vulnerability accompanies any medical situation. But, when one is perceived—sometimes rightly—as less informed, it is difficult to formulate intelligent questions, much less summon the decision-making power, to take control of one's own medical destiny. Our health-care system must do more than remind patients of follow-up appointments and eagerly offer new medicines and treatments. Medical professionals must understand that patients continue to feel profound distress from the trauma their bodies experienced. Such wounds go deeper than scalpel cuts. And like the fading scars on my body, their healing may never be complete. ■

The Agnew Clinic *by Thomas Eakins, 1889*

Dolores L. Christie *is former executive director of the Catholic Theological Society of America. She has taught undergraduates at John Carroll University and Baldwin Wallace College, and has taught in the graduate departments of Ohio Dominican University and Ursuline College.*

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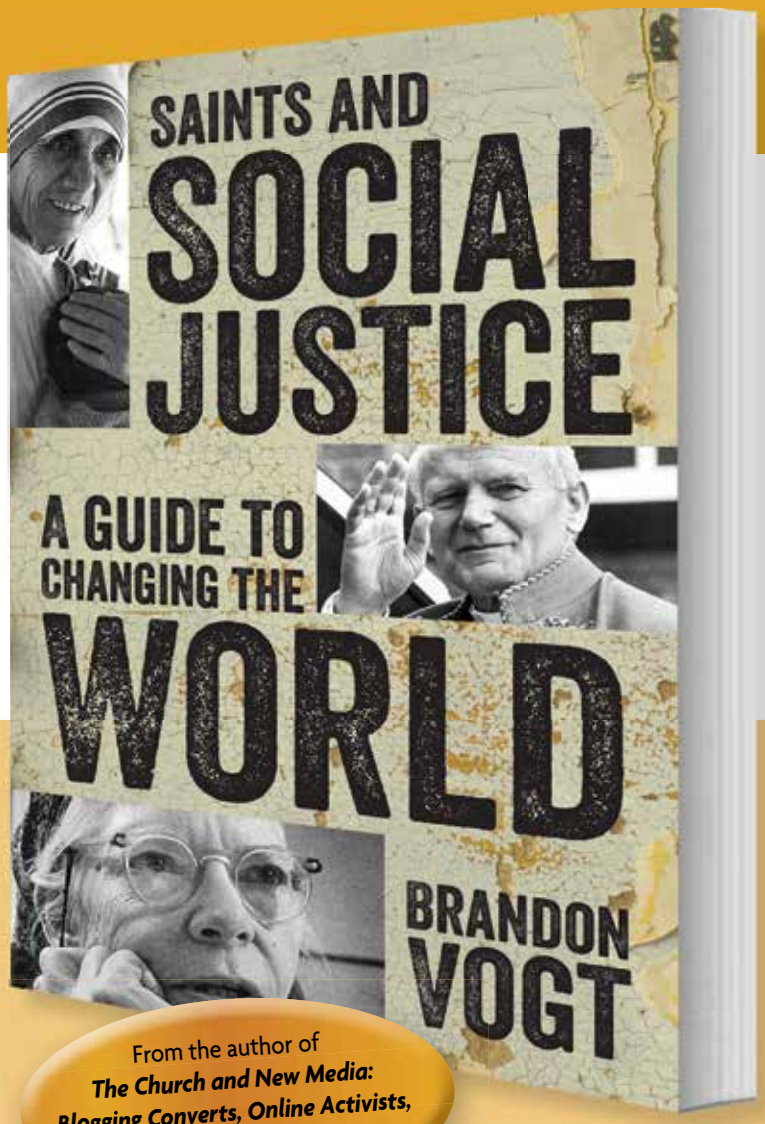

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A passionate, converted Catholic, Brandon blogs at BrandonVogt.com, runs StrangeNotions.com — the central place of dialogue between Catholics and atheists — and works as Content Director for Fr. Robert Barron's Word on Fire Catholic Ministries.

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