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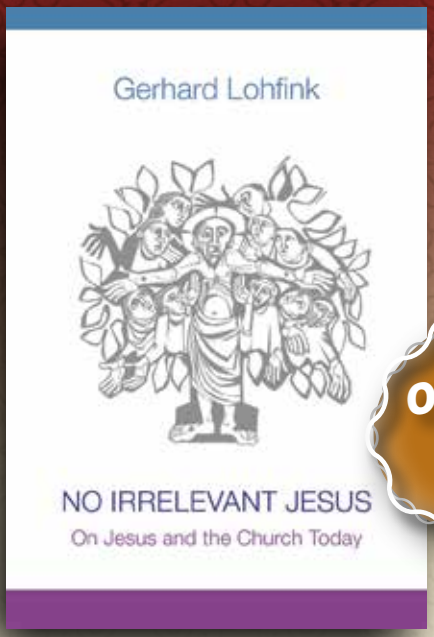


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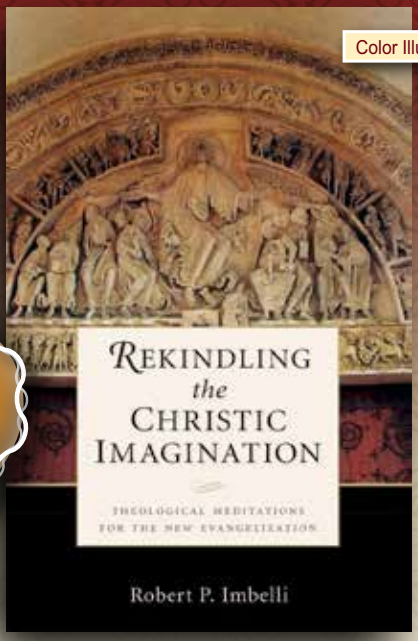


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## ARTICLE



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# LETTERS

## *The Polish Underground, tithes & alms, etc.*

### AN UNASSUMING HERO

Thank you for the book review of *Story of a Secret State: My Report to the World* by the late Jan Karski ("Witness," January 24). Karski was a professor at Georgetown University, and I had the privilege of taking some graduate courses with him during the late 1950s. He was dedicated to his students and highly respected by them. At that time, he was passionately anti-Communist, but he was also very mild-mannered, unassuming, and gracious. To my recollection, he never mentioned his exploits in the Polish Underground during World War II. I learned about them later. I regret that U.S. officials did not listen to his warnings and heed his information about the Holocaust.

ROSALIE E. L'ECUYER
*Fairbanks, Ark.*

### GRASSROOTS EVANGELISM

I agree completely with what Fr. Nonomen writes in "A Hole in the Basket" (February 7). Some pastors may say they can't afford to give away a piece of the collection, but the heart of the matter is they can't afford not to. It works, and it allows lots of good to happen. It is real evangelism at the grassroots level.

I would take Fr. Nonomen's suggestion a bit further and also apply it at the diocesan level. When dioceses make their annual appeal, why not have them pledge a certain percentage of the money they're given to charity? Rather than being hidden in financial statements, the pledge could be part of the collection and known upfront. It would bring many people on board who have opted out of annual diocesan collections. Local needs like housing, heating bills, and food-pantry supplies, for both children and adults, could be addressed by individual dioceses with these funds. This, too, would be a very good tool for evangelization. Like parishes, dioceses may find they can't really thrive without giving a portion of their funds away. People will respond generously when they see that their church's teachings about the poor are more than rhetoric.

(REV.) PAT CAWLEY
*Vanderbilt, Mich.*

### NEVER AGAIN

I read Bernard G. Prusak's "Just Warriors, Unjust Wars?" (February 7) with a mixture of interest and exasperation. Later that evening I watched *From Here to Eternity* on TCM and it moved me to tears.

I find it difficult to accept that we are now pressing the Japanese to re-arm, that a reunited Germany furnishes us with young men to bolster our failed occupation of Afghanistan, and that we have lately failed in our effort to rescue the old British Imperial Mandate in Iraq. Meanwhile we demonize the Chinese and Russians, no doubt in preparation for future military interventions. Enough is enough. In October 1965 Pope Paul VI, in an address to the United Nations in New York City, put the case succinctly: "No more war, war never again."

BERNARD F. REILLY
*Villanova, Pa.*

### WHAT ABOUT LEE?

Bernard G. Prusak's discussion of when it is morally permissible for soldiers to fight is fascinating, but—perhaps inevitably—it leaves some unanswered questions.

What do we make of an honorable person fighting on behalf of an evil system for reasons of his own?

Prusak says that Franz Jägerstätter, who was executed by the Nazis for refusing to join the army, would have cooperated with evil if he had fought, and that it "is hard to see how we could hold that he would have acted rightly" if he had fought. In the next paragraph, Prusak

*continued on page 26*

*From the Editors*

# Missed Opportunity

Last month, the United Nations committee that monitors compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child issued a stinging report criticizing the Vatican for its handling of the sexual-abuse crisis. The committee accused the Holy See of "systematically" placing the reputation of the church ahead of the welfare of children, and adopting "policies and practices which have led to the continuation of the abuse by, and the impunity of, the perpetrators." In addition the report made several important recommendations the Holy See would do well to heed. But the UN committee weakened its case by weighing in on doctrinal matters unrelated to abuse. The committee's scattershot approach has united critics across the ideological spectrum in criticizing the report as counterproductive, if not worse.

The committee's first mistake is that it treats the Holy See like any other signer of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which contains fifty-four articles covering a range of issues. Wherever the committee sees that a signer is failing to abide by the convention, it makes recommendations to bring them into compliance. For example, the report recommends that the church provide "family planning, reproductive health, as well as adequate counselling and social support, to prevent unplanned pregnancies." And it asks the church to review canon law "with a view to identifying circumstances under which access to abortion services can be permitted." Even though the committee refers to the Holy See's "special nature," it seems not to grasp that Catholic canon law is not just an administrative tool; it is informed by deeply held religious beliefs. In some cases, changing canon laws would require changing Catholic doctrine, a fact the UN seems not to appreciate.

It's strange enough for a UN committee to make doctrinal recommendations to a religious organization. But it's even more puzzling that the committee seems to forget that the Vatican has never hidden its objections to certain aspects of the convention. When the Holy See signed the treaty in 1989, it stated its reservations about provisions that don't conform to Catholic teaching. The Holy See explicitly warned that the only family planning it would promote was natural family planning. Several other signatories registered similar reservations—including Islamic countries that promised to ignore parts of the treaty they deemed contradictory to Sharia law.

Even when the committee offers sound suggestions, it shows little interest in context. The report asks the Vatican to establish "clear rules, mechanisms and procedures for the mandatory reporting of all suspected cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation to law enforcement authorities." That's a good idea. But the UN committee fails to acknowledge that not all countries have trustworthy law-enforcement agencies. That's one reason some dioceses—in Africa, for example—have not implemented mandatory-reporting rules. Shouldn't a UN committee show some awareness of that?

Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi, SJ, has highlighted the committee's misunderstanding of the "specific nature of the Holy See." He complained that the report failed to acknowledge the Vatican's ongoing efforts to address the sexual-abuse scandal. "Few other organizations or institutions, if any, have done as much," Lombardi wrote. In fact, the UN committee does "welcome" some of the those efforts—including the Holy See's new Commission for the Protection of Minors and changes to Vatican City State law regarding the abuse of minors. And while Lombardi is correct in noting that the Catholic Church has lately gone to great lengths to address the crime of sexual abuse, Rome didn't lead the charge. Bishops were shamed into action by victims of abuse and by the media.

The generally moderate tone of Lombardi's response is to be welcomed, but it was a mistake for him to suggest that the report's shortcomings are proof of anti-Catholic bias. Historically, that charge has too often been used by Rome to dismiss the gravity of the sexual-abuse crisis. Despite its flaws, the UN report contains legitimate criticisms that the Vatican needs to hear.

The sexual-abuse crisis is far from over. Pope Francis still hasn't named the members of the sexual-abuse commission he created in December. With the Italian bishops recently refusing to adopt mandatory-reporting rules for their clergy, and some U.S. bishops still mishandling abuse claims with impunity, the pope's commission has its work cut out for it. The UN report could have helped by reminding the entire church that reform is still needed. Because of the report's obtuse recommendations concerning church doctrine, however, it is likely to strengthen the hand of those who think the sexual-abuse crisis has been overblown by enemies of the church. These hardliners are still looking for an excuse to keep things exactly as they are. The UN report's lack of focus has unintentionally given them one. ■

*February 18, 2014*

*Mollie Wilson O'Reilly*

# Not So Fast

## BREASTFEEDING IN THE BIBLE, AND IN THE CHURCH

The year I got married, Ash Wednesday fell less than a month after the wedding. Too soon for fasting and repenting, I thought, but the first reading, from Joel, says otherwise: "Proclaim a fast, call an assembly.... Let the bridegroom quit his room and the bride her chamber." No excuses, newlyweds. Now, as chaperone to two small boys, I'm on the prophet's guest list once again: "Gather the children and the infants at the breast." Technically, as a nursing mother, I am exempt from the obligation to fast this year (and don't think I'm not grateful). But I'm still expected to show up. Lent is the opposite of a party, but still, everybody's invited.

Pope Francis caused a stir—yes, again—in December with a story about an encounter with a young mother at a papal audience. "She was shy and didn't want to breastfeed in public, while the Pope was passing," he recalled. "I said to her, 'Madam, I think the child's hungry.... Please give it something to eat!'" A few weeks later, at a baptism ceremony in the Sistine Chapel, he tapped his inner La Leche League leader again: If the babies are hungry, he said, "mothers, feed them, without thinking twice. Because they are the most important people here."

For those of us who regularly show up to church with nurslings in tow, that papal permission slip is a welcome gift. The medical establishment may be firm in its conviction that "breast is best," but the culture that converted to formula-feeding a few generations ago has been slower to come around to the new standard. There's a lingering sense that breastfeeding ought to be as private as any other thing involving breasts: Feed your baby that way if you must, but don't do it where anyone else can see. Given that newborns need to eat around the clock, telling a new mother not to nurse in public is essentially telling her not to *be* in public. Still, nurse a baby in church and you risk dirty looks. Of course, letting a hungry infant cry is also risking disapproval. It's enough to make a new mom want to stay home.

*Pope Francis baptizes an infant in the Sistine Chapel*

Yet, while breastfeeding has only recently made a comeback in Western culture, it's a recurring theme in Scripture. Homilists rarely dwell on those passages when they come up in the readings (can you blame them?), but they are refreshingly relatable to a distracted, sleep-deprived parent. My younger son was just a month old when a reading from Isaiah caught my attention one Sunday—a vision of paradise in the New Jerusalem: "Oh, that you may suck fully of the milk of her comfort, that you may nurse with delight at her abundant breasts!... As nurslings, you shall be carried in her arms, and fondled in her lap; as a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you."

That's an image of God we could stand to hear more of, "abundant breasts" and all. And hearing it at Mass made me feel less like a distraction and more like a visual aid: *This* is how a mother comforts her child; *this* is what a nursling in a mother's lap is like. Not that my own mothering is especially heavenly—see me when the baby's in a biting phase—but it's a pleasure to be able to draw so deeply on my own experience in developing my understanding of God. Talk like that is enough to make a new mom want to stick around.

Likewise, what made Francis's remarks about feeding babies so encouraging was not his attitude toward nursing per se, but his interest in young mothers and his sensitivity to their needs—his concern that they feel welcome and comfortable in places of prayer. Whatever else he may do, or not, to advance the presence of women in the church, he is at least demonstrating by example that women's experiences are significant, and not just as metaphors.

The reading from Joel we hear every Ash Wednesday is the ultimate "inclusive" text: everybody is invited to join the assembly, no exceptions. It's a challenge, too, to the self-absorbed among us—and who's more self-absorbed than a new parent? Maybe newlyweds? You can add your own items to Joel's list: Let the toddlers come with their goldfish crackers; let the teenagers quit their texting; let the grad students abandon their primary texts. Just don't leave out the infants at the breast. And remember, when they do show up, they don't have to fast. Pope Francis said so. ■

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*Rand Richards Cooper*

# Give It to Us Straight, Doc

## WHY CAN'T POLITICIANS BE HONEST ABOUT OBAMACARE?

Can we please get some clarity on the politics of the Affordable Care Act?

A front-page article in the *New York Times* recently described Democratic officeholders facing fall elections "anxious about an onslaught of television ads hitting vulnerable Senate and House candidates for their support of the new health law." The conventional wisdom seems to be that masses of Americans, feeling ripped off by the new policy, are ready to pounce. But does this correspond to reality?

To the extent the ACA has been misrepresented by proponents, the dishonesty boils down to a reluctance to identify winners and losers. This reluctance is hardly restricted to Obamacare. On issue after issue, our politicians fail to treat us like grownups in this regard. Truth is, all major policy changes create winners and losers; the goal is to maximize overall benefit by creating more of the former than of the latter. But lonely is the politician willing to say, straight out, that there will be any losers at all—never mind tell us who they'll be! Instead we get pie-in-the-sky rhetoric about Policy X being "good for America" and "good for Americans." Well, which Americans?

What President Barack Obama should have said was: "The ACA will help the 40 million Americans who currently have no health insurance. Those who stand to gain are the poor, the unemployed and underemployed, those with preexisting health problems, and working-class citizens barely earning enough to put food on the table.

"This will have to be paid for. If you are a healthy young person who previously opted not to buy health insurance, you'll face an expenditure. If you're a wealthy person with a Cadillac health plan, you can expect it to cost more. And if you're a self-employed person currently paying for a bare-bones, ripoff catastrophic plan with an enormous deductible, you can also expect to pay more —in exchange for much better coverage."

Can you not sell that in this country?

I think you can. Because the ACA creates far more winners than losers. I know a lot of ACA skeptics who go onto the health-care exchange website and are startled by what they find. One friend, self-employed like me, formerly got health insurance through his wife, but when she lost her job they were out in the cold. They've just signed up for a plan costing $180 per month.

Let's look at cases. The federal poverty level for a family of four is a household income below $24,000. At that income level, health care in my state, Connecticut, is free. Let's say you fall a full 50 percent *above* the poverty line, with a household income of $36,000. Well, you and your kids still all qualify for Connecticut's Medicaid plan—low-cost or free. And what about the middle class? Median household income in Connecticut is $64,000. If that's you, with two kids, you're looking at $306 per month for the Bronze plan, $440 for the Silver.

In my family's case, we have an eight-year-old daughter, my wife is in her forties, and I'm in my fifties and have racked up impressive medical bills in recent years. We make more

*An anti-Obamacare ad subtly makes its point.*

than the state median income, though not all that much more; pop in our figures, as I did five minutes ago, and we get the Bronze plan for $269 and the Silver for $512. Cheap? Not exactly. But it's way more affordable than the monthly COBRA payment we made last year—$1,200!—when my wife was between jobs.

Finally, let's look at the "Young Healthies" whose forced enrollment is helping fund the system. This mandate is a linchpin of the ACA, but—again—proponents have cravenly avoided stressing its mandatory nature and the escalating penalties for those who do not enroll. They shouldn't; young people need insurance just like the rest of us. I know, I know, healthy twenty-somethings tend to view themselves as immortal, and their decision to refuse health insurance can be viewed as rational. Yet they are *not* immortal. My wife has a friend whose twenty-four-year-old uninsured son suffered a horrific car accident that left him and his family saddled with years of debt. He should have had health insurance, as should all Young Healthies. And how onerous is it, actually, to buy in? In Connecticut, a twenty-five-year-old making $28,000 can get a Bronze plan for $93 per month.

Is the picture of Obamacare becoming clearer? The fact is that federal subsidies will make winners of the unemployed, the working poor, and the true middle class, while the wealthy will be able to cover premium increases without pain. The primary losers will be those self-employed who prefer a bargain-basement, catastrophic health-care plan that covers little; and the Young Healthies, though as we have seen, many of them will pay only modest premiums and get insured in return—a win on any scorecard except the GOP's.

It's not that opponents won't continue to find issues to demagogue as the program unfolds; for instance, as a means of keeping premiums down, some new plans do shrink provider networks and out-of-network coverage. But every policy analyst knows that rationalizing health-care provision—and, in some measure, rationing it—are essential to curbing the runaway rate of cost increases in our system. And preliminary evidence suggests that Obamacare is already helping do this by contributing to what Douglas Elmendorf, head of the Congressional Budget Office, calls "structural changes in the health-care system."

Demagoguery notwithstanding, the ACA poses an overall benefit to our society, bringing millions of Americans in from the cold of being uninsured, with millions more to follow. That is something to stand up for—and run on—in this election year. ■

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**Rand Richards Cooper** *reviews movies for* Commonweal *and restaurants for the* New York Times.

*Nick Baumann*

# Catastrophic Coverage

## THE MEDIA OVERREACT TO OBAMACARE'S GLITCHES

Barack Obama, it seems, is a big believer in the power of nagging. "I ask every American who knows someone without health insurance to help them get covered by March 31st," the president said during his recent State of the Union address. "Moms, get on your kids to sign up. Kids, call your mom and walk her through the application. It will give her some peace of mind—plus, she'll appreciate hearing from you."

The president wants you to call your mom because March 31 is the end of the open-enrollment period for the Affordable Care Act; most people who don't sign up for health insurance by then will have to wait until October for another chance. The deadline will no doubt launch a thousand columns lamenting the chaos of Obamacare. But in fact, things are looking up for the ACA; and with enrollment numbers rising and the federal government's troubled enrollment website stabilized, perhaps it's worth looking back at the madness that gripped America's pundits just a few months ago—when choruses of Chicken Littles claimed not only that the health law's troubles would cost Democrats the 2014 midterm elections, but that they endangered the future of liberalism itself.


Washington hates the month of November, dread focal point of convulsive worries about job security for members of Congress and their staffs. Though last November didn't feature a federal election, it nonetheless offered plenty to worry about, at least for Democrats. That's because on November 13, the Obama administration released data about the number of Americans who had signed up for health insurance during the first month of enrollment for the ACA. The numbers were terrible. A mere 106,000 people—around two-tenths of 1 percent of America's 48.6 million uninsured—had signed up in October, with fewer than 27,000 using the federal government's enrollment website. The website, in short, was essentially nonfunctional.

America's pundits lost hold of their senses. Ignoring the fact that numerous provisions of the ACA were already in place and broadly popular (allowing children to stay on their parents' insurance until age twenty-six, forbidding discrimination against children with pre-existing conditions, narrowing the Medicare "doughnut hole," ending lifetime limits on payouts, etc.), many commentators chose to see in the paltry enrollment numbers an impending apocalypse. On November 4, just thirty-five days after Obamacare's insurance exchanges opened for business, *National Journal*'s Ron Fournier asked whether "insularity, incompetence, and deception" would "doom" the health law; two weeks later he followed up by warning that Obamacare "may be Obama's Katrina [or] Iraq." On November 18, *Politico*, the publication that prides itself on "driving the day" in D.C., warned of "Obamacare's danger to liberalism," quoting conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer. And on November 24, the *New Republic* ran a story by editor Franklin Foer direly predicting irreversible damage caused by the "impressions of government ineptitude" linked to the ACA's rollout. Even the *Washington Post*'s normally level-headed Ezra Klein warned that the law's problems could cost Democrats the 2014 elections—never mind that the party of a sitting president almost *always* loses midterm elections. Liberalism, it seemed, had suffered a key defeat, one that endangered not only the rest of Obama's presidency but also the Democratic Party and all future prospects for government social action.

Some of this panic was born of disappointment. There's no doubt that the Obama administration and its contractors badly bungled the ACA rollout. The president himself had called a successful rollout his top priority, reportedly telling advisers that "nothing else matters" and "we've got to do it right." Yet the White House seemed blindsided by the website's problems. The president accepted blame, and rightly so. The *New York Times* and CBS News reported that he and his senior staff had delayed work on key parts of the website until December 2012, for fear that negative coverage might hurt his reelection effort—an act of political cowardice that came back to bite them. Nor should the president or his allies have made a promise—"if you like your plan, you can keep it"—that they couldn't keep. (The truth is that many Americans whose plans have been canceled will end up getting better plans for less money—all the more reason Obama and his team should have been honest.)

But important as it is to call out the administration's fail-

ures, it's also important to see the November panic for what is was: silly. There's no excuse for comparing a health-insurance program to a hurricane that killed nearly two-thousand Americans, or a war that killed even more. Nor was it wise to draw conclusions about the future of a massive government program from its first few weeks. As many commentators have noted, Medicare Part D, the prescription-drug benefit created under George W. Bush, was less popular at its outset than Obamacare. And when Medicare itself launched, in 1965, no one was sure whether it would succeed—then, in less than a year, 93 percent of eligible seniors signed up. Like these social-insurance programs, Obamacare will no doubt be improved over the coming years (remember, it took nearly half a century for Social Security to cover 90 percent of Americans).

In addition to being ahistorical, prognostications of doom for the Affordable Care Act also ignored the fact that President Obama won reelection in 2012, and any changes to the law will have to win either his approval or a veto-proof majority in Congress. But silliest of all, perhaps, was the idea—advanced by pundits ranging from Krauthammer to *TNR*'s Foer—that the government incompetence evidenced in the botched ACA rollout presents some sort of existential threat to liberalism. Unlike some others who weighed in on this issue, Foer is well aware of how previous liberal social programs rebounded from troubled rollouts. But this time, he argued, is different:

> Fortunately for the New Deal, Twitter didn't broadcast every farmer's sad encounter with the Agriculture Adjustment Act. But the culture of modern Washington, with its hyperventilating media and legislative saboteurs, takes pornographic pleasure in magnifying failures—which in turn erodes the public's willingness to give liberalism another shot.

Actually, it's far from clear that this "magnifying" effect has undermined the public's support for liberalism. In fact, Gallup's polling on American ideological identity suggests the opposite trend: in 2013, 23 percent of Americans self-identified as liberals, the highest percentage since polling on the subject began in 1992.

So while the culture of Washington and its hyperventilating media may have changed, the difficulty of changing people's politics hasn't. After all, it's not as if people simply read a bunch of tweets on some issue and then change their beliefs. When new legislation is introduced, we don't consult policy experts in order to make up our minds; rather, we tend to muster whatever evidence we can find to back up what we already believe. Politically, this means following the lead of your party. Most people who hate the Affordable Care Act hate it *because* they vote for Republicans, and most people who like it like it *because* they vote for Democrats.

Breaking out of these ideological fetters is no small feat, and if there's any evidence to suggest that Twitter and the twenty-four-hour news cycle make it easier, Foer doesn't present it. If anything, the segmentation of media into left-wing and right-wing outlets means that ever more Americans are hearing news that reinforces what they already believe. Yet Foer, extrapolating from the questionable claim that the incessant reporting of Beltway scandals actually affects Americans' opinions, concludes that "the earliest days of a policy's existence have even greater significance"—and that as a consequence, liberals in the future will have to be more or less perfect. The next president's challenge, he writes,

> will be to ensure that her biggest legislative achievements—curbing carbon emissions perhaps, or expanding the Affordable Care Act—are impeccably implemented with the precision that her ancestors celebrated. She must contend with the new expectations that technology has set, with all of those devices that arrive in our hands seemingly glitch-free. That's what the Obama administration somehow failed to grasp and what liberalism requires if it ever wants to replicate its greatest victories.

This is bananas. The next president's ancestors did not, in fact, implement their government programs with "precision," unless you count the ruthless efficiency with which they denied black people and women the protection of the state. We have simply forgotten the mistakes made by our liberal ancestors along the way, or at least Foer has. And forgive me if I fail to worship at the shrine of Blessed Steve Jobs. Even Apple has messed up—remember Apple Maps? Human beings are fallen. And governments, like corporations, are made of people. Those people sometimes go home early, get sick, pay more attention to their families than their jobs, zone out and skip a crucial bit of code, indulge in political cowardice, lie to their colleagues, lie to their bosses; they even lie to the president, who no doubt lies, too.

What the doomsayers of November couldn't foresee was that more Americans would sign up for Obamacare in the first two *days* of December than in all of October. And hundreds of thousands more signed up during the first two weeks of January, pushing enrollment even higher. America's top health insurers, meanwhile, have told the press and their shareholders that they don't expect the law's problems to hurt their 2014 profits—an indication that they expect enough enrollees (and the right kind) to make the law self-sustaining.

Government is messy because people are messy. The liberal project says that despite all that, some problems are so big and so pressing that they require collective action. The century-old liberal goal of health care for all isn't about winning elections or scoring political points. It's about making sure that sick people can get the care they need, regardless of their ability to pay. There will be setbacks along the way, but they don't mark the end of the effort—just a signal to try again, to push harder, to make different mistakes. Eventually, we'll get it right. ■

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# Opting Out

## *How the Amish Have Survived in America*

Donald B. Kraybill

For a long time, most Americans knew little more about the Amish than that they made finely crafted furniture and pursued a quietly stubborn resistance to modernity. But lately, against all expectation, an avalanche of Amish romance novels and myth-making TV "reality" shows like *Breaking Amish* and *Amish Mafia* have turned the mighty gaze of popular culture toward this small Christian group numbering just over a quarter-million people.

The Amish have traditionally piqued our interest with their slow and simple way of life. They are not in fact Luddites, merely hesitant and discriminating in their adoption of new technologies. Some fifty years after the telephone first appeared in Amish communities, a grandmother told me, "It's still on probation." A single Amish hymn, sung at a torturously slow pace, may stretch over fifteen to twenty minutes in a three-hour worship service. Where speed permeates modern life, with its instant downloads and constant tweets, its express mail, fast food, and lightning-quick microprocessors, slowness characterizes Amish culture. What better countercultural symbol of slowness and simplicity could there be than a horse-drawn buggy plodding along a country road as GPS-guided cars swoosh by?

Although all Amish communities use horse-drawn transportation, speak the Pennsylvania German dialect, worship in their homes, and ordain lay leaders, a diversity of other practices abounds in the Amish world. In fact, each of some forty different affiliations or tribes has a distinct identity shaped by its dress styles, color of carriages, use of technology, and degree of separation from popular culture. Rooted in the Anabaptist movement that emerged during the Reformation in sixteenth-century Europe, the Amish church formed in 1693 as a branch of Swiss Anabaptism. Seeking religious freedom and economic opportunity, Amish families migrated to North America between 1730 and 1850. Their last congregation in Europe closed its doors in 1937, and today Amish people live only in the United States and Canada.

As with the early Anabaptists, the paramount question of faith for the Amish is this: What does it mean to follow Jesus in daily life? The tradition focuses on Jesus' words to his disciples: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Beyond discipleship, the Amish church accents the values of humility, obedience, community, pacifism, and separation from mainstream society. The Amish seek to practice the teachings that Jesus articulated in the Sermon on the Mount, such as forgiveness and love of enemy. Only those who voluntarily confess their faith in Christ and pledge to follow church regulations (*Ordnung*) for the rest of their lives are baptized—typically in their late teens or early twenties. Baptismal candidates renounce three things: self, the devil, and the world.

The Amish fear that affection for worldly things will pollute the purity of their church and lead to cultural assimilation. They hold deep reservations about worldly culture, reservations they find legitimated by biblical texts such as "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15) and "Be not conformed to this world" (Rom 12:2). This sharp dualism crystallized in the sixteenth century, when Anabaptists were tortured and executed as heretics. For the Amish, separation from the world means shunning violence, war, promiscuous sex, pornography, abortion, greed, fraud, divorce, and illegal drugs.

The presence of the Amish in America poses a conundrum: How do a people who espouse a slow and simple way of life—who reject high school, ownership of motor vehicles, TV, and public-grid electricity—not only manage to survive in a hypermodern world, but actually thrive? The Amish today are defying those observers who long forecast their demise. From a mere six thousand in 1900, their population has now ballooned to more than two-hundred and eighty-five thousand across thirty states and Ontario. Over the past twenty years their population has increased 120 percent, their congregations multiplying from 932 to 2,060. During this period the Amish have spread into nine new states and added 242 new geographical settlements. About half today live in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana, while

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growing numbers call Wisconsin, New York, Michigan, Missouri, and Kentucky home.

The robust growth is driven by sizable families of six to eight children on average. But producing babies is not enough: young people must be persuaded to join the church. At the age of sixteen, Amish youth for the first time are permitted to socialize with their peers on evenings and weekends without parental supervision. This period of *rumspringa* (running around) continues until they are baptized into the church. During this liminal stage they are betwixt and between parental and churchly authority. For the most part teenagers live at home and engage in such traditional activities as baseball, hiking, fishing, and Sunday-evening singing. In some of the larger settlements, however, the youth drive cars, organize boisterous parties, and delve into drugs and alcohol. (This small slice of rowdy rebelliousness is what gets featured on "reality" TV shows like *Breaking Amish*.)

Eventually all teens face the big question: to be or not to be Amish. It's a monumental choice, because baptism is a lifelong commitment to the faith and the Amish church. Despite its Old Order ways, the Amish Church pivots on the idea of voluntary adult membership. On average, 85 to 90 percent of young adults kneel for baptism and remain in Amish life. Those who decide not to are not excommunicated or shunned. If, however, an Amish person joins the church and then later exits, he or she will face excommunication followed by shunning, a shaming practice intended to remind the wayward that they have broken a holy baptismal pledge to God and to the church. Ex-members may need to sit at a separate table at a wedding or stand last in line at a funeral to view the body of a deceased parent.

For those wishing to return to the church, the back door is always open; ex-members will be restored into fellowship upon public confession of their transgressions. Indeed, a few former members have returned to full fellowship twenty or thirty years after abandoning the church. Outsiders are also welcome to join if they affirm Amish beliefs, learn to harness a horse, and speak the dialect. Several dozen outsiders have successfully stepped across this cultural gulf. But most seekers with idyllic views of Amish life eventually become disillusioned by the physical labor, the difficulty of learning the dialect, a lack of extended family in the Amish fold, and the process of making collective decisions, and they drop out.

Apart from America's toleration of religious diversity and the robust rates of Amish reproduction and retention, the persistence and growth of the Amish can be explained by two interconnected tendencies: their resistance to assimilation and their astute ability to negotiate with modernity.

To fortify their way of life, Amish leaders have constructed cultural fences around it: plain dress, horse-drawn transportation, religious rituals, and a distinctive dialect. Some forms of resistance—especially the Amish challenge to consolidated schools in the mid–twentieth century—have been costly. In the 1950s, when Amish parents refused to send their children to public high schools, some faced fines and short-term imprisonment. Similarly, members of an ultraconservative subgroup in Kentucky served prison time in 2010 for refusing to display the state-required "Slow-Moving Vehicle" sticker on their buggies.

Amish people today continue their centuries-old tradition of meeting in their homes every other Sunday for worship. Their spirituality is grounded in church districts (congregations) marked by roads, streams, and fence lines. The district, with its seventy-five to a hundred-fifty people, is the locus of ecclesiastical authority, and ensures that Amish life remains anchored in small-scale, face-to-face interactions. Ordained but unpaid lay leaders—a bishop, a deacon, and two preachers—with no formal theological training serve the congregation. Women may vote in church business meetings and nominate men for ordination, but they do not serve in formal leadership roles in the congregation or in the larger Amish community, except as schoolteachers. In homes the pattern of power varies. Wives exert considerable influence in some families, but the husband typically is the spokesperson to the outside world. Amish views of gender roles in family and church are rooted in traditional Christian teaching, and any talk of change is perceived as a feminist threat from a secular world. In recent years some Amish women have gained greater economic clout as they have acquired small businesses such as quilt shops, greenhouses, and fabric stores.

The elders have constructed a fortress around the most traditional practices of their faith—music, worship, weddings, funerals, and selection of leaders—keeping these rituals safe from outside influences and the press of progress,

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at least for now. They have avoided ecumenical dialogue, formal theological training, and the Anglicization of their worship. And they have persistently rejected large-scale organizations typical of Christian groups—colleges, church agencies, seminaries, mission boards, and even church buildings themselves. While bureaucratic organizations have proliferated in modern America, there are few of them—if any—in Amish life. The Amish church does not have a national office, an annual convention, or a general secretary of Amish affairs, let alone an office of media and public relations. One Amish man quipped, "We don't have pope, just a lot of bishops."

This congregation-based ecclesial authority has its limits—a fact underscored by the recent slew of beard-cuttings that drew extensive media coverage. A few years ago, Samuel Mullet, renegade bishop of a clan-like congregation of twenty-five households in Bergholz, Ohio, was disciplined at a meeting of Amish leaders from several states. Defiant, he retaliated in 2011 by encouraging some of his members to snip the beards of a few leaders and other critics. Mullet and fifteen followers were found guilty of federal hate crimes, among other crimes, and landed in federal prison.

The absence of centralized authority makes it difficult for the Amish to mediate conflict and restrain such rogue bishops. Conflict arising within local congregations, over questions about the use of new technology (the ownership of rotary tillers, for example) or other matters, is more easily resolved. Each fall and spring, a members meeting is devoted to reconciling differences, seeking forgiveness, and affirming harmony in preparation for Holy Communion. This biannual ritual reinforces the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation in the life of the community. Indeed, if the congregation is fractured or filled with malice, communion will be postponed, sometimes for a year or so, until reconciliation is achieved. This willingness to postpone the sacrament—unheard of in Protestant and Catholic churches—reveals a deep commitment to communal well-being and a theological understanding that Communion is not merely an individual transaction with God, but a celebration of unity.

To preserve their cultural separateness, Amish people have staunchly avoided urban life, living only in rural areas that, in pre-internet times at any rate, offered isolation and shelter from many temptations. Keeping an arm's distance from the world has enabled them to avoid excessive consumerism in personal technology, household furnishings, leisure, dress, and the fads of popular culture. Moreover, they have successfully insulated themselves from social movements, such as feminism, pluralism, and multiculturalism, that would have transformed their lives in dramatic ways.

Separation from the world restricts their participation in the political system. Though they are permitted to vote, their voting rate typically falls under 10 percent. Those who do vote are more likely to cast ballots in local elections than national ones. (As conscientious objectors to war, some

consider it hypocritical to vote for the commander-in-chief.) They refuse to hold public office for fear it may entangle them in litigation, which the church forbids; use of the law is considered a form of force that violates Jesus' teachings on loving one's enemies and praying for one's persecutors. This has been costly to some Amish business owners who could not engage in litigation to collect debts, protect their brand, or solve other disputes. Similarly, Amish will rarely litigate to protect their interests in conflicts with the state. Typically outsiders will assist them and file lawsuits, if needed, on their behalf.

Amish people pay all taxes, except for Social Security, which they view as health insurance; in 1965 the U.S. Congress exempted them from Social Security—both taxes *and* benefits—and they are also not subject to the Affordable Care Act. They contend that church members have a Christian duty to care for the physical and material needs of other members. As strict church-and-state separatists, they reject both commercial and government insurance and other forms of government subsidies, even ones for agriculture.

Throughout the past century, Amish people tenaciously guarded their traditions, viewing modernity as a divisive force that might tear their families and communities asunder. That worry is not an idle one, for social analysts have long noted that the pervasive specialization of modern life dissolves social bonds that hold traditional societies together. Higher education, for example, promotes professional mobility that often scatters family members far and wide. People live in suburbs and commute long distances to cities for work. The elderly are cloistered in retirement homes and rarely see their grandchildren. Pastors and priests trained in faraway seminaries are assigned to congregations and parishes unknown to them. In contrast, the Amish prefer to live in small geographically rooted communities, anchored in local congregations of twenty to forty families, where face-to-face conversation is the currency of the day. The important "social work" of the horse and buggy is to keep the members tethered to their community throughout the week.

Had the Amish simply rejected all things modern, they would surely have dwindled away, a fossilized remnant buried by time. Instead, they reached across their cultural fences to the world outside and borrowed the use of detergents, insecticides, high-precision milling machines, in-line skates, and in some communities, cell phones. In village stores and in Walmarts they buy sugar, coffee, pizza, deodorant, toys, and dozens of other consumer products. The more progressive Amish groups accept state-of-the-art LED lights, trampolines, new gas grills, solar panels, and battery-powered hand tools. By adopting such "worldly" products they have enhanced their lifestyle and increased the productivity of their farms and shops. The fact that Amish people speak English fluently also facilitates economic ties with the modern world.

In navigating the rapids of modern America, they faced innumerable choices. To Amish elders, television clearly promised more harm than good. Other choices were more difficult to make, their long-term impact on community life more uncertain. In sorting out such murky issues, the Amish have negotiated with modernity, rejecting some aspects of a new technology while accepting other parts. They installed landline phones, for example—but kept them in shanties outside the house.

How will the Amish fare now that temptation lurks not only in the city or at the movie theater, but also on handheld devices in backcountry fields? Some Amish teens on *rumspringa* already have Facebook pages and smartphones.

The negotiating metaphor captures the dynamic give-and-take between the Amish and modernity, with internal debates that may stretch over years, and in some cases with ultimately transformative results. Fifty years ago most Amish were farmers, but that has changed. A few decades ago, when some men started working in "English"-owned factories, church leaders feared that such intimate contact with an alien culture would tempt them to leave the church. And yet the growing Amish population and the increasing expense of land, cattle, and machinery were putting an economic squeeze on traditional family farms. Thus the compromise: Amish-owned and operated micro-enterprises. By establishing enterprises in rural areas, Amish families could still work together and control the terms and conditions of their work—while keeping profits within the community. This negotiated compromise propelled a mini–Industrial Revolution during the past thirty years of Amish life, and today only about a third of households rely on farming for their primary income. Many own or work at small businesses. There are

some twelve thousand of these—from manufacturing to construction, greenhouses to craft shops. These enterprises are profitable despite numerous restrictions on technology. They benefit from the hard work of family labor, low overhead, a distinctive brand identity, and niche markets.

The Amish are capitalists who buy and sell products in the public marketplace. And yes, the phrase "Amish millionaire" is no longer an oxymoron. (Though, in case you wondered, there's no "Amish mafia" in real life—sorry!) While the Amish continue to practice religious and cultural separation, their economic forays have thrust them into the larger world of commerce. Amish contractors, for example, bid against "English" builders on residential and commercial construction projects. Furniture manufacturers compete in the national market to sell upscale products. And some Amish companies, seeking to reduce manufacturing costs, contract with Chinese factories to build component parts for battery-powered lights and fans used in many Amish communities.

Technology is yet another arena of negotiation. Amish people are not technophobes; while they spurn technologies—television, cars, computers—that they think will harm the welfare of their religious community, they readily accept and even invent new technologies (such as a wheel-driven alternator to recharge the batteries on their buggies), which they think will enhance the well-being of their society. Many Amish adapt mainstream technology to fit within their moral order. For example, they strip off electric motors from large sanders in furniture shops and replace them with pneumatic motors, powered by an air pump run by a diesel engine, to provide "Amish electricity."

These negotiations often strike outsiders as inconsistent, if not hypocritical and downright silly. What is the point of keeping a telephone outside the house, using tractors for stationary power at the barn but not in the fields, or tapping electricity from batteries but not from the public grid? Another apparent inconsistency is the Amish distinction between *use* and *ownership* of technology. Examples include riding in cars but not owning them, using a computer in a public library but not permitting one at home, tapping electricity from the public grid in a rented building for a quilt shop, and so on. Such compromises appear strange to moderns. Yet they have their own internal logic that makes sense in the context of Amish history and the goals of the church community. The distinction between use and ownership, for instance, keeps technology at arms-length and serves as a constant reminder of its risks.

Amish people thus spend much more time than their fellow Americans pondering and assessing the long-term impact of new technologies on human relationships. They also argue that the church needs to be involved in regulating technology because individuals are not wise enough to make good choices on their own—a notion that vexes modern Americans, who would never think of consulting their priest or rabbi about the wisdom of buying a new smartphone. In some ways the Amish are not unlike ultraconservative Jewish and Muslim groups that use dress codes and behavioral taboos to enhance the solidarity of their communities and to separate themselves from a larger society they consider threatening to their way of life. Seeking a balance between isolation and accommodation, the Amish have struck cultural compromises that blend aspects of tradition and modernity in ways that have enabled them to maintain their identity while flourishing economically.

In his book *Liquid Modernity* (2000), sociologist Zygmunt Bauman argues that modernity has morphed from solid to liquid forms. "Solid" modernity, rooted in social norms and structures, limited human freedom and expression, using stable traditions that affixed people to a particular place or nation-state by invoking God's blessing of social hierarchies, including human-made rules about race, gender, caste, and class. Solid modernity provided social security through slow-to-change bureaucracies and factories, where employees played specialized roles as components of an assembly line whose only purpose was efficient production. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, new and far less stable forms of modernity began to appear. Transitions from still photos to video, from landline to mobile phones, from a factory-based economy to internet commerce, from manufacturing to service industries, and from paper books to e-books all signal the meltdown. The internet, with its vast virtual universe, exemplifies the weightless, mobile, ephemeral, ever-changing liquidity of twenty-first-century modernity.

This fluidity complicates the Amish future, and the future of most traditional religious communities, including the Catholic Church. Much of Amish identity is rooted in a rejection of the solid forms of modernity: telephones, cars, tractors, and consolidated public schools. How will a people so slow to change fare in an ever-changing hypermodern world, where temptation lurks not only in the city or in the movie theater, but also on handheld devices in backcountry fields? Some Amish teens on *rumspringa* already have Facebook pages and are using smartphones.

In his 2005 critique of contemporary materialism, *Hypermodern Times*, the French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky argues that our culture wants everything faster and faster. The speed and complexity of modern life stand in stark contrast to Amish simplicity. Will the Amish need to shift their coping strategies in order to survive in this swirling sea of fluid modernity? Will they be able to?

It is impossible to predict the future of the Amish in America. Despite their deft ability to negotiate with the outside world, the Amish way of responding to social change in the past may no longer guarantee their future. With surprising skill the Amish have successfully steered their way through the twentieth century. But what about their fate in the twenty-first? ■

*Richard Alleva*

# Bottled-Up Yearning

## 'THE INVISIBLE WOMAN' & 'GLORIA'

In the paperback copy of *Great Expectations* I read as a boy, the introduction informed me that Ellen "Nelly" Ternan was a teenaged actress whose affair with the much older Charles Dickens broke up the author's marriage, and that Nelly's taunting wiles made her the probable prototype for the novel's icy Estella. Here were the movie makings for a Victorian version of *The Blue Angel*!

But Abi Morgan's screenplay for Ralph Fiennes's *The Invisible Woman*, drawn from a book of the same title by Claire Tomalin, treats both Dickens and Ternan with tenderness and tact. Dickens comes across not as lecherous or manipulative, but simply as a bottled-up man yearning to be embraced by a kindred spirit, while Ellen, uncertain of her place in the world, is both dazzled by the celebrity's attentions and understandably resentful about having to keep herself "invisible" to preserve the novelist's status as supreme champion of Victorian family life. All the ancillary characters are also treated sympathetically. Ternan's mother tacitly encourages the liaison, but her concern for her daughter's material welfare is so keenly projected, by both the script and Kristin Scott Thomas's excellent performance, that we can pardon her. Dickens's fellow author and right-hand man, Wilkie Collins, approves of the affair only because he regards it as a blow against societal hypocrisy. And Joanna Scanlan plays Mrs. Dickens with such quiet intelligence that we can't credit her husband's dismissive judgment that "she understands nothing, she feels nothing."

Such gentleness and tact are welcome, but one can have too much of a good thing. Dramatic restraint can drift into mere gentility, as it threatens to do here. Dickens was not known as "the Inimitable" for nothing, and the fact that he himself invented the nickname indicates the size of the man's ego. In fact, Fiennes's Dickens is supremely *imitable*; he might be any nice, furtive gentleman yearning for the forbidden. One gets little sense of the daemonic energy behind his genius, an energy sometimes channeled into acts of cruelty. Morgan's script tiptoes around Dickens's less forgivable deeds. At one point, a bracelet Dickens bought for Ellen was accidentally delivered to his wife instead. The author ordered Mrs. Dickens to redeliver the gift to his mistress in person! We see the encounter between the wife and mistress, but not Dickens dispatching his spouse. The cruelty of the episode is soft-pedaled. Similarly, we see Dickens building a partition in the bedroom to shut himself off from

SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

*Ralph Fiennes as Charles Dickens and Felicity Jones as Nelly Ternan in* The Invisible Woman

his wife. Fair enough. But we don't get to see the great man later turning his wife out of their house, setting her up in a separate residence (with a pension, to be sure), and virtually commanding the children to choose between their parents. I'm not saying a biopic has to slavishly follow the historical record—in that case, I would have to despise *Amadeus*, a movie I admire—but if filmmakers cherry-pick facts to make their protagonists either agreeable or egregious, they aren't likely to wind up with a compelling drama.

The problem is compounded by both the direction and the lead performances. In the first third of the film, before the affair is consummated, Fiennes and Felicity Jones nicely convey semi-buried feelings with sidelong glances, catches in the throat, and all the other nuances of frustrated love. But once the affair is underway, the actors fail to put more kindling on the fire. Fiennes remains gentlemanly and Jones never gets beyond quiet seething.

I don't fault Fiennes for the film's lack of Dickensian bustle and comedy, for the people in the author's real life didn't live in the pages of a Dickens novel. And Fiennes does show a flair for finding suitably melancholy landscapes to serve as backdrops for melancholy emotions. But the soundtrack is so hushed, the interiors so uniformly shadowy, the scenes so tightly composed that the movie often teeters on the brink of boredom, though it never quite falls over. Whether or not the Ternan affair actually inspired *Great Expectations*, I wish that more of that great novel's reverberant anguish had roiled the smoothness of *The Invisible Woman*.

There have been plenty of films about recently divorced, middle-aged women finding a new lease on life, but the heroine of the Chilean film *Gloria* fiercely maintains an old lease. Gloria, played by Paulina García in a justly acclaimed performance, has been divorced for more than a decade, and her two children, now in their thirties, have long since made independent lives apart from her—a little *too* apart for her emotional comfort. Gloria is a woman who depends on her senses to make her feel truly alive: she enjoys food and drink, sings along with the car radio when it plays love songs, takes laugh therapy and yoga classes, cruises bars both for dancing and occasional sex. In her review for the *Village Voice*, Stephanie Zacharek sums it up nicely: "Gloria doesn't *need* a guy; she just wants one." Finding a promising long-term lover in the recently divorced Rodolfo, who owns an amusement park, she's delighted to try out his tame version of bungee jumping and paint-ball marksmanship. Given her intense physicality, it's a bitter irony when Gloria discovers she may have glaucoma, but she doesn't panic. She applies her eye drops and awaits what fate will bring her.

The love affair with Rodolfo turns out to be a sad study of contrasting natures. Despite his surface courtliness and romantic ardor (he reads Neruda's love poems to Gloria), Rodolfo is stuck in his unhappy past. His manipulative daughters keep him on a tight leash and he runs to them whenever they tug at it, not hesitating to leave Gloria in the lurch, sometimes in ways that acutely embarrass her.

Even in the way they smile, the two lead actors make it clear that the characters they play are not on the same wavelength. Paulina García's smiles are sensual and avid, an invitation to one and all to come and astonish her. But Sergio Hernández, who plays Rodolfo, usually smiles as if he felt a panic attack arriving and would appreciate a little pity to keep it at bay. Rodolfo is facing backwards, Gloria straight ahead. Trouble looms.

The director, Sebastián Lelio, who also wrote the screenplay, gets his actors to supply each scene with such an abundance of tiny, expressive gestures and inflections that his camera can just catch crucial moments on the fly as it pans over a dinner table or zooms in on a dance floor. That makes him the right director for a story about a woman whose way of surviving is to live on the fly, to rise on every wave of feeling and let it take her where it will. ■

*William H. Pritchard*

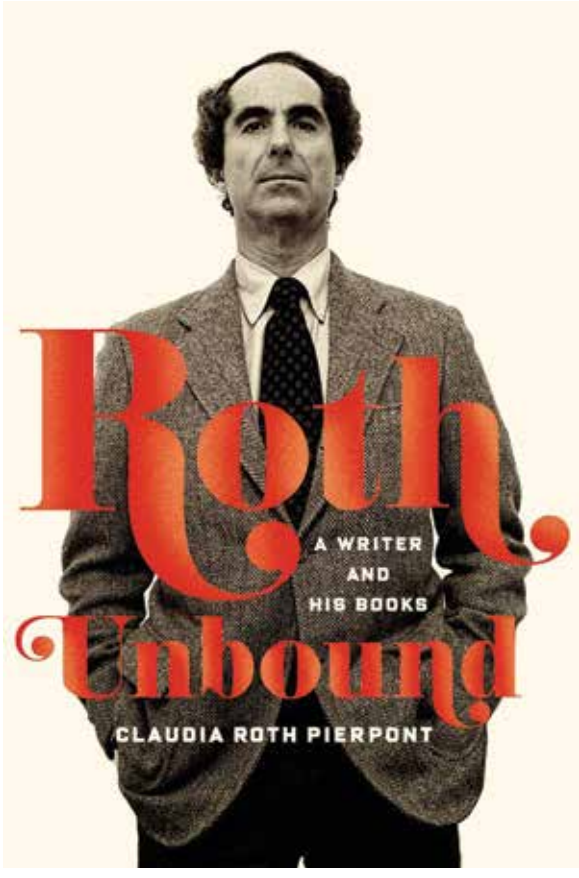
# Roth at Rest

**Roth Unbound**
**A Writer and His Books**
*Claudia Roth Pierpont*
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $27, 368 pp.

More than a year ago, Philip Roth announced that his work as a novelist was finished—that the volume *Nemesis*, published in 2010 and consisting of four novellas, would be his last. Henceforth he would devote himself, in part, to assisting his biographer, Blake Bailey, in providing a definitive view of his life and work. At his eightieth birthday celebration in Newark in March 2013, he gave a reflective talk on his life as a writer and the welcome feelings he was experiencing in seeing that life concluded. When Claudia Roth Pierpont, the author of *Roth Unbound*, suggested to him in 2012 that after his impending back surgery he might write another novel he replied, "I hope not." Thus far he has kept his word.

Some years ago, when Pierpont became acquainted with Roth (they are not related, and Roth once asked her, deadpan, "Did I used to be married to you?"), the novelist invited her to read a manuscript he was at work on. Understandably, she professed herself honored, to which Roth snapped, "Don't be honored or you'll be of no use to me." Now she has written a "survey of the writer and his books," under an agreement that, while allowing her access to his papers and other material, Roth would not read a word of what she was writing until the book was published. The result is a fluid and graceful portrait. Pierpont presents an overall picture of Roth's works that, while strongly positive, contains necessary qualifications and discriminations: there is no dutiful approval of every word the master has written. You can tell that she likes some books more than others, and the judgments she makes about them are nuanced and sure-footed.

Overall her version of his literary career is one with which I think most readers would agree. Roth's first three books—a collection of short fiction (*Goodbye, Columbus*), and the two novels that followed (*Letting Go*, *When She Was Good*)—for all their good moments (especially the fine story "Defender of the Faith"), were written in a relatively conventional idiom, including omniscient narrators, which he would not use again. This mode was eventually "overthrown" (Roth's own word for it) by the best-selling dazzle of *Portnoy's Complaint*. A triumph of the performing self, especially in its narrative voice, *Portnoy* made it impossible for Roth henceforth to write in a straightforward, "realistic" way. The immediate results were *The Breast*, *Our Gang*, and *The Great American Novel*, three novels that don't feel much like novels, but rather creative fantasies, comic skits, and outrageous violations of good taste. None exists as a satisfying achievement in fiction; while the novel that followed—*My Life as a Man*—for all its drive and energy, is too full of what Pierpont describes as "resentment" (directed mainly at Maggie Williams, the woman whom Roth had unhappily married) and "sexual biliousness" to combine those elements into a satisfying whole.




FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

It would be tedious to run through Pierpont's commentary on the fifteen or so novels Roth was to write in the four decades to come, but her survey suggests to me a way of describing the two focal points of his artistic power and achievement. The first is *The Ghost Writer*, which ushers in the sequence of novels with Nathan Zuckerman as protagonist: *Zuckerman Unbound*, *The Anatomy Lesson*, and *The Counterlife*. It may well be, as Pierpont suggests, that Roth's relationship with Claire Bloom, beginning in 1975, along with his purchase a few years ear-

lier of the eighteenth-century farmhouse in Western Connecticut that would continue to be his home away from New York City, fueled his creative energies. The beauty of the Connecticut landscape surely provided impulse toward the new "magic" (Pierpont's word) found in *The Ghost Writer*, while Roth's increasingly monk-like habits of composition animate its hero, E. I. Lonoff, with Bloom contributing to the portrait of Lonoff's wife, Hope. When Roth asked Bloom (with Hope Lonoff in mind) what it was like to live with a writer in the country, she replied, "We don't go anywhere! We don't do anything! We don't see anybody!" (Not quite the whole story, since Bloom continued to lead an active life in theater and film.) These four Zuckerman books show Roth—especially in *Zuckerman Unbound*—at the peak of his comic genius even as they explore the deeper issue of the notoriety and loneliness of a writer's life.

The second point of maximum literary energy is *Sabbath's Theater*, written after Roth had undergone a serious depression and separated, unharmoniously, from Bloom. The novel became notorious for its sexual explicitness, compared to which *Portnoy* seems child's play. Yet the book's great sequence are its pages devoted to Sabbath's rediscovery of his boyhood at the New Jersey seaside, especially as it is bound up with the death of his brother in World War II. Pierpont singles out the wonderful catalogue of seasonal and daily change ("There was sand and ocean, horizon and sky, daytime and nighttime—the light, the dark, the tide, the stars, the boats, the sun, the mists, the gulls") and compares it to Proust in its capturing of time. The range of tone in this longish section, mainly elegiac, is astonishing and moving in its depth. Roth had never written anything quite like it, and the release of creative ambition this sequence and the whole book gave him would be confirmed in the American trilogy (Roth's eventual title) that followed: *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, *The Human Stain*. These books—granted, as Pierpont notes, the "less engaging" voices in *I Married a Communist*—are a major achievement.

Pierpont wisely withholds judgment on the Roth-Bloom fracas, but has lots to say (often quoting Roth) about his relation with John Updike, a relation that ended when Updike in print seemed too credulous of Bloom's view of her marriage to Roth in her own book. Yet his admiration for Updike the writer seems to have survived it, as it had survived the offense he took earlier at Updike's mixed review of *Operation Shylock*, which contributed to the syndrome that precipitated Roth's breakdown in 1993. "Roth often says that Updike had the greatest natural gift of all of them," writes Pierpont, and he admires "the gush of prose" (Roth's words) in Updike as distinguished from his own "gush of invention, dialogue, event, but not of prose." Perhaps the funniest thing Roth ever said—in a lifetime of saying funny things—is his imagining himself as a Jewish author of Updike's Rabbit novels, which he retitled "Rabbi, Run, Rabbi Redux, Rabbi Is Rich." Pierpont describes Roth as breaking up after uttering this bon mot.

The most interesting "gossipy" item in a book pretty much free of such trivia is that in 1964 Roth escorted Jacqueline Kennedy to a dinner party. Returning her home, in a black limo with the driver up front, he is invited upstairs and wonders whether a kiss would be appropriate. ("I know all about Lee Harvey Oswald, am I supposed to kiss her? What about the Cuban missile crisis? Am I supposed to kiss her?") When he finally did kiss her, he said it was "like kissing a face on a billboard." Although they only saw each other a couple of times afterwards, Roth admits that he "would have loved it if she could have been the correspondent in Maggie's lawsuit," one more instance of the vibrancy of Roth's voice in Pierpont's fine book. ■

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**William H. Pritchard,** *a frequent contributor, is the Henry Clay Folger Professor of English, Emeritus, at Amherst College. Among his books is* Updike: America's Man of Letters *(Steerforth).*

*Jeffrey Meyers*

# The Byron of Our Time

**Patrick Leigh Fermor**
**An Adventure**
*Artemis Cooper*
New York Review Books, $30, 448 pp.

Sir Patrick Leigh Fermor (1915–2011) achieved three impressive goals in travel, war, and art. In 1933 and '34, in his late teens and after expulsion from school, he walked southeast across Europe, passing through nine countries: Holland, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece. This 1,700-mile ramble (about the distance from New York to Denver), while not the equal of the agonizing treks made by Henry Morton Stanley across Equatorial Africa or by Wilfred Thesiger across the Empty Quarter of Arabia, was a feat of social and cultural exploration.

In the course of his journey, Fermor, a penniless wanderer and frequent guest, met many interesting down-at-heel aristocrats, who, bored on their crumbling country estates, welcomed the company of a well-read, high-spirited, and entertaining young man. In castles and libraries, with hot baths and good wine, he indulged his curiosity about genealogy, his great capacity for drink, and his sexual desires. His principal lover was a Romanian princess, Balasha Cantacuzene, whom he described as "so fresh and enthusiastic, so full of color and so clean." By contrast, in the wilds of Bessarabia he met the Skopzi, adherents of a religious sect who "castrated themselves to achieve a closer union with God."

In April 1942 Fermor set out on his second and most famous Byronic adventure. Fermor, who spoke modern Greek, joined a handful of British Special Operations officers sent into the mountains of Nazi-occupied Crete to fight with the resistance and unleash a guerrilla uprising. He gathered intelligence, attacked airfields, and blew up a fuel base. He also watched helplessly as the Nazis took revenge by destroying whole villages and massacring hundreds of civilians. While on Crete, he fired a rifle he thought was unloaded and killed a Greek comrade, and the blood feud was not settled for many decades.

Fermor's greatest wartime achievement was the daring capture of a German general, Heinrich Kreipe, in April 1944. Dressed in German uniforms, Fermor and his men set up a roadblock. As Kreipe's car rounded a sharp curve, the armed soldiers poured out of the darkness and restrained the general, who shouted, swore, and lashed out until he was handcuffed and shoved into the back of the car. They then smuggled their prisoner through the main town and down to the coast. He was shipped to Cairo and then sent on to Canada, where he sat out the war in a POW camp. The capture inspired a novel and the film *Ill Met By Moonlight* (1957), with Dirk Bogarde playing Fermor. When Fermor and Kreipe were reunited

*Partick Leigh Fermor*

JOHN MURRAY ARCHIVE

on Greek television in 1972, the general said he'd been treated chivalrously, like a medieval knight.

Olivia Manning's brilliant novels *The Balkan Trilogy* (1965) and *The Levant Trilogy* (1982) describe the same geographical area where Fermor lived, fought, and worked before, during, and after World War II—Romania, Greece, Egypt, and Palestine—and provide a useful background to his adventures. After the war Fermor worked for the British Cultural Institute in Athens; met his wealthy future wife, who supported him; and traveled in the Caribbean. He thought "all the Caribbean islands have something wrong with them. All are founded on bloodshed and slavery, and are now miserable." Nevertheless, they inspired his first travel book, *The Traveller's Tree* (1950), and his only novel, *The Violins of Saint-Jacques* (1953).

As Artemis Cooper writes in her new biography, Fermor then "embarked on a ten-year odyssey in which he was rarely in one place for more than a month or two, shifting mainly between Italy, Greece, England, and France." In Crete, he was rather embarrassed by the way he constantly had to live up to his image as a war hero and said, "I have to conform to an outgrown tradition of myself—but how one changes!" Cooper has difficulty making these endless nomadic wanderings seem interesting.

Finally, in 1964, Fermor came to a halt in the Peloponnese, where he built a home that he called "a loose-limbed monastery and farmhouse with massive walls and cool rooms." In October 1984, at the age of sixty-nine, he imitated Byron's feat and swam a turbulent mile across the Hellespont, the winding Turkish channel that separates Asia from Europe. Cooper's biography fizzles out at the end and covers Fermor's last twenty years in only six pages.

The first third of Cooper's book mainly paraphrases Fermor's three widely spaced travel books about his youthful journey across Europe, which appeared decades later and were his third major achievement: *A Time of Gifts* (1977), *Between the Woods and the Water* (1988),

and the unfinished *The Broken Road*, which has just been published in the United States. A slow, procrastinating writer, blocked for much of his life by the weight of too much material, he resembled Penelope, unraveling at night what he had woven by day. His wanderings abroad to write, often in Benedictine and Trappist monasteries, were also an escape from writing. His mannered, Mandarin prose, which Lawrence Durrell called "truffled and dense with plumage," was influenced by the work of Charles Doughty, T. E. Lawrence, and Norman Douglas. The elaborate style clashed with his descriptions of primitive gypsies and bandits, all rioting, singing, drinking, and firing their rifles into the air.

I corresponded with Paddy (as everyone called him) when writing my lives of Errol Flynn, John Huston, and Somerset Maugham. Paddy had written the screenplay of one of Flynn's best movies, *The Roots of Heaven* (1958), and was on the scene during the disastrous filming in French Equatorial Africa. Flynn, Trevor Howard, and Paddy were all drinking heavily, and there was considerable conflict when Paddy fell in love with the French singer Juliette Gréco, the co-star and mistress of his boss, the producer Darryl Zanuck. For Fermor, Hollywood screenwriting was a lark that enabled him to hang around and drink with colorful characters in an exotic setting.

In a vivid letter of May 5, 2000, Paddy described the horrendous conditions—heat, disease, swarming insects, and dangerous animals—while making the movie in the tropics. He got on well with the flamboyant Flynn—like Paddy, a congenial companion and ladies' man—enjoyed his conversation, and gave a perceptive account of his character:

> Errol seemed distinctly more intelligent than the run of actors. Full of original tangents, a great narrative gift, and a great sense of humor. He often referred to his learned father, a marine biologist at Belfast University. We talked about nearly everything, often until very late. He loved reminiscing, largely about Hollywood. I asked him what the leading and most beautiful stars of the day were like. "Well, pretty good," he said. "They've all got my scalp, I'm afraid."

When working on a biography of John Huston, who directed *The Roots of Heaven*, I made use of Paddy's sharp memory of Bangui, now in the Central African Republic. Here's how he described the savage Darwinian scene in the same letter:

> The forests near Bangui were inhabited by very intelligent pygmies. We were "shooting" in the forest when the clouds broke and a large deluge of rain came down. Our procession of vehicles headed back to the ultra-modern hotel, like an upended mouth-organ on the banks of the Shari river, which was full of crocodiles. I got there with Errol and his girl, and we were astonished to find the whole of the ground floor a foot deep in termites, over which small bright green frogs from the Shari were leaping about in parabolas, while Juliette's mongoose ran riot among them, killing and swallowing as many as he could, two legs sticking out of his mouth. A strange sight.

I got in touch with Paddy again as I was writing a biography of Somerset Maugham. Paddy was an Old Boy of Maugham's alma mater, the King's School in Canterbury. He was also a close friend of Ian Fleming's wife, who was Maugham's confidante. After the war he visited Maugham's luxurious Villa Mauresque on Cap Ferrat. The visit turned out to be a legendary disaster. Since Paddy lived in Kardamyli in the Peloponnese and my daughter was then a Foreign Service officer in Athens, it seemed a good time to see him—and ask him about his encounter with Maugham. In May 2002 my wife, daughter, and I rented a flat overlooking the sea and a few kilometers from Paddy's village.

I rang him up from a local shop and he immediately invited me to come round for an interview. Since his house was hidden away and hard to find, he walked up to the main road and hailed me as I approached. Tall and straight, white-haired and suntanned, he was at eighty-seven still a virile and impressive figure. He'd designed his low, rambling, white-washed and red-tiled house himself. It had a shaded patio facing the Mediterranean, a flourishing garden, and a huge library filled with books in ancient and modern languages. He'd created the setting he wanted and the life he wished to lead, traveled widely and wrote well, charmed everyone and seemed content.

Paddy wanted to correct Ann Fleming's version of his embarrassing visit to Maugham, which she'd exaggerated—with shattered drinking glasses and blood

on the floor—to amuse Evelyn Waugh. Maugham had asked Ann to bring Paddy with her for dinner and had invited Paddy to stay on as his guest and write at the Villa. Unnerved by Maugham's severe expression and icy manner, Paddy drank far too much and ended up talking about the one thing he was strictly forbidden to mention, Maugham's debilitating stammer. Paddy quoted the absurd belief that everyone in the College of Arms (a.k.a. Herald's College) had a stammer. That was bad enough. But noting that the day was the Feast of the Assumption, Fermor mentioned Correggio's painting on that subject in the Louvre and repeated a stammering friend's bon mot: "*That* is a m-most un-un-w-warrantable as-assumption."

Deeply offended, Maugham became even icier. Getting up from the table and taking his leave, he rescinded his invitation by saying: "Goodbye. You will have left before I am up in the morning." The wretched Paddy, who had had no intention of wounding his host, managed to make matters even worse. Instead of waiting for the butler to pack his bag, he hastily threw his things together and caught a monogrammed sheet, trimmed with Belgian lace, in the zipper of his suitcase. He frantically tore it off, rushed down the stairs, and escaped from the villa with the shreds hanging out of his bag.

After drinks at Paddy's house he invited all of us to dinner at a simple, traditional restaurant, set on a promontory overlooking the sea, which he'd bought for his former cook. I noticed that the cook's son Giorgos—who'd been to America, greeted us warmly in excellent English, and recommended the best dishes—was tall, fair, and very un-Greek looking. Cooper's biography reports that Fermor had no children, but years later my intuition that we had met his son that evening was unofficially confirmed by some of my daughter's Greek friends when she told them the story of having met a national hero. Paddy, who didn't see very well at night, asked me to drive him home in his battered old Peugeot, which had stiff gears and weak brakes. As we went down a steep hill, I had to swerve around a bend that was perilously close to the harbor's edge and had no barrier between the road and the deep blue sea. Paddy was jovial and unconcerned about the potential disaster.

Paddy was the Byron of our time. Byron's witty, racy, colloquial style was quite different from Paddy's ornate elaborations and digressions. But, as Cooper observes, both men had an idealized version of Greece, were scholars and men of action, could endure harsh conditions but loved to dress up, fought for Greek freedom, and displayed a reckless courage and panache that was greatly admired by their Greek comrades. ■

**Jeffrey Meyers** *is the author of many books, including* Remembering Iris Murdoch *(2013). His* Thomas Mann's Artist-Heroes *has just been published by Northwestern University Press.*

## LETTERS continued from page 4

considers the case of a soldier acting in self-defense and finds that "a solder like Jägerstätter would have acted wrongly, though perhaps not culpably, had he fought and killed for the Nazi cause."

But what about Robert E. Lee or any of the other Southern generals and soldiers who fought in an army that would have preserved an immoral system, slavery, but only because they could not afford to abandon their homes, their families, and their friends—no matter their private opinions of slavery? Was Lee morally culpable? Were the Union soldiers who wanted to preserve the Union but cared little about ending slavery?

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**A LEGACY TO BE PROUD OF**

Contrary to Nathan Pippenger's claims in "Getting On with It" (December 26, 2013), Occupy Wall Street has hardly been a failure. What is the number one issue of our time—one that both Democrats and Republicans feel compelled to address, if only with lip service? You can call it income inequality or you can call it lack of upward mobility. Whatever you call it, it's the living spirit of OWS.

Pippenger argues that the Tea Party has been much more practical and therefore more effective than OWS. By what measure? True, the Tea Party temporarily gained a Senate seat for the GOP. But since then, it has snatched defeat from the jaws of victory by nominating unelectable candidates.

Occupy Wall Street did the job that needed to be done. It awakened the conscience of America.

LARRY WEISENTHAL
*Huntington Beach, Cal.*



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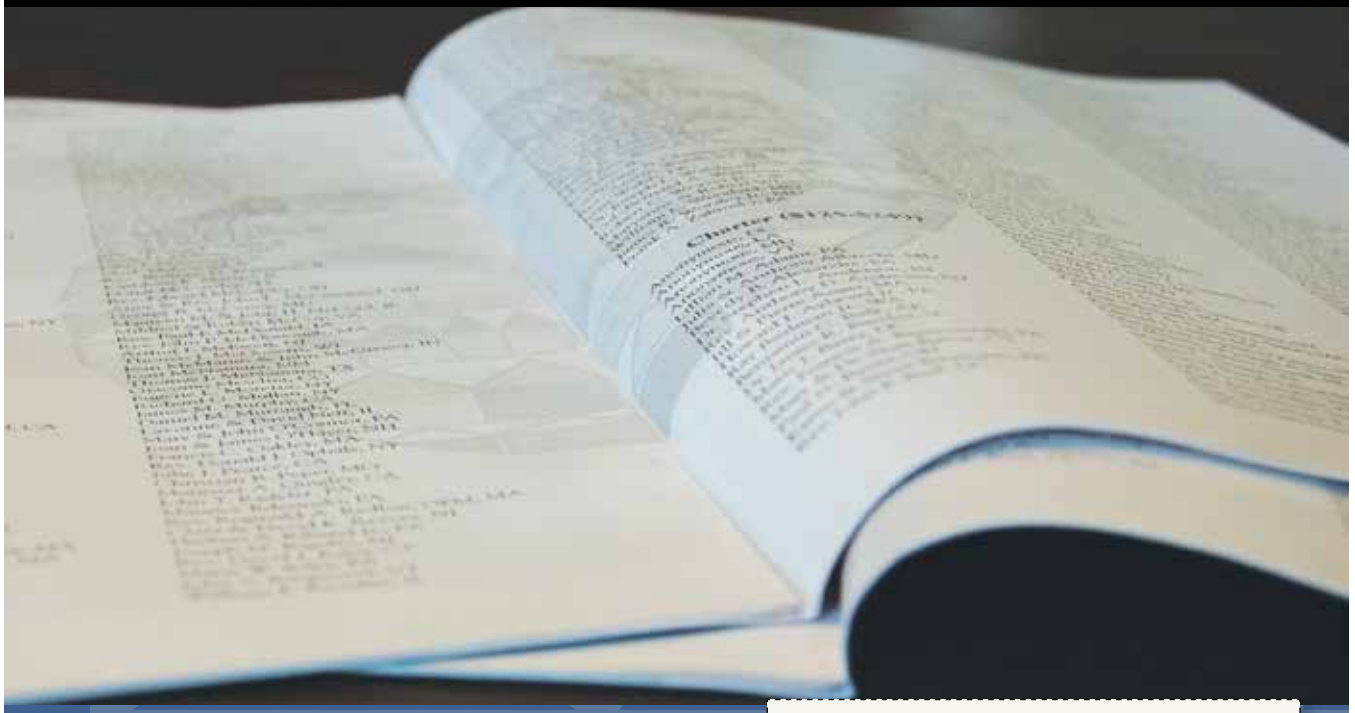

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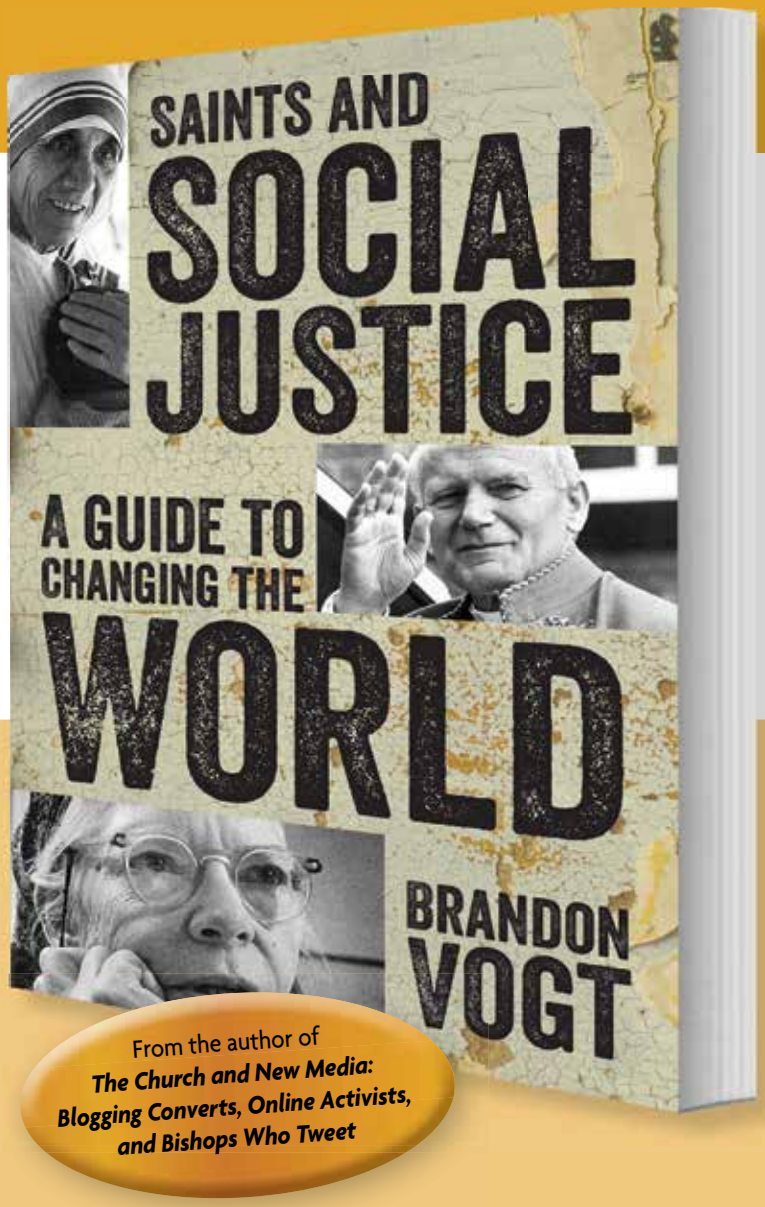


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