A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

Commonweal

DECEMBER 14, 2018

$3.95 US/$4.50 CAN

www.commonwealmagazine.org

Founded in 1924
Commonweal

Subscription Information
845-267-3068
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540-935-2172
Publisher
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Commonweal [ISSN 0010-3330], a review of public affairs, religion, literature, and the arts, is published biweekly, except in April, July, August, and November, when it is published monthly, by Commonweal Foundation, 475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 405, New York, NY 10115. Telephone: (212) 662-4200. E-mail: editors@commonwealmagazine.org. Fax: (212) 662-4183. POSTMASTER: send address changes to *Commonweal*, P.O. Box 348, Congers, NY 10920-0348.

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Book Review Digest, and Book Review Index. *Commonweal* articles are available at many libraries and research facilities via ProQuest and OpinionArchives. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional offices. Single Copy, $3.95. Yearly print subscriptions, U.S., $65; Canada, $70; other parts of the world, $75. Special two-year rate: U.S. $108; Canada, $118; other parts of the world, $128. Add $45 for airmail.

Cover design: Cecilia Guerrero Rezes
Raphael, *Madonna of Loretto*, 1509

LETTERS

Continuing the conversation on Brett Kavanaugh

TOO MUCH SUSPICION

If I were a senator and I had had to vote for or against Brett Kavanaugh, I would have voted Nay ("Injudicious," October 19). I, too, have concerns about his integrity, and I believe he obfuscated the truth in his September 27 hearing. This carries even further rhetorical value in that Judge Kavanaugh's legal theory is congruent with my own. While I found much agreement with your editorial, I'd like to point out a few dissonances.

While it is quite easy to depict Judge Kavanaugh as petulant and partisan from his opening statement, what if (and fairness demands such an evaluation) this is an innocent man who was thrust into some extremely difficult conversations with his wife and two daughters? And, as he fought to make sure trust wasn't broken with those closest to him, he had to endure the immediate crumbling of the reputation he spent years building? While all this is happening, he and his family must handle the many death threats being made against him. I can't imagine it completely unreasonable for him to be angry with the Democratic side of the dais. And while it is legitimate to question how he, a nominee to the highest court in our land, should handle such pathos, I believe it is quite unsympathetic and uncharitable to merely depict him as a bellicose and entitled person without any empathy for this possible context. Simplistic writing that does not seek for such evenhandedness just continues to add fodder to the ridiculous partisan drivel currently dividing our country.

My final observation about this editorial centers on the paragraph listing the "reasons to oppose Kavanaugh's elevation to the Supreme Court." To me this paragraph exactly captures the problem of some current views of the Supreme Court nominating process. For instance, if I were a senator, my job would not be to vote Nay on this judge because his previous rulings have carried political conclusions I don't share. Even if her judicial philosophy is antithetical to my own, it would not warrant a Nay. The president gets to pick the nominee. If we don't like Kavanaugh and Gorsuch, then we need to get Clinton elected, or if we don't like Kagan or Sotomayor, then we need to get McCain elected. The bench isn't a place to whirl up activist tides. Instead, my job as a senator is to make sure the candidate in front of me is scrupulous in her work and in her integrity: a judge who is consistently dedicated to the rule of law as she views it, and expresses that through tightly constructed, logical opinions; a judge with no moral stain in breaking the laws of the land and without a hint of biased or bribed decisions. The way we oppose the elevation of judges who don't see the law the way we do is at the voting booth, not the Senate chambers. The Senate does need to keep immoral and perjurious judges from the highest bench in our land, and it is precisely here where Judge Kavanaugh has created too much suspicion to be confirmed.

DERICK PULLEN
Wallingford, Conn.

SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE

Like many Americans, I have more than a passing interest in the U.S. Supreme Court. I care deeply that the Court functions in a manner that aligns our nation with our very best, albeit imperfect, understanding of God's will.

I am also an attorney, and I have come to realize that my legal training has affected the way I view the world. After decades of hearing multiple versions of a historical event, I have come to the firm belief that the truth is always somewhere in the middle of the competing accounts and never resides solely in any one version. The passage of time from the event itself serves to amplify that effect. With the passage of time, the memory alters slightly each time it is recalled. These alterations seem, to the witness, to be clarifications, the recollection of additional details, a sharpening of the memory,

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when, in fact, they are just as likely a gloss that binds pieces of subsequent life events, emotions, and other foreign matters to the recollection of the actual historical event, making the memory less accurate while convincing the witness that he or she is remembering more and more clearly. This alteration by degrees of the memory is not a deliberate act on the part of the witness; it is simply the way our minds integrate experiences from the distant and middle past with the present.

So we would all do well to bear in mind that the best-intended testimony is never an accurate accounting of the true event, no matter how honest the witness. With that awareness, I watched Dr. Ford's testimony as well as Justice Kavanaugh's. It does not take much imagination to come up with scenarios that are compatible with the essence of both Ford's and Kavanaugh's accounts, but that do not match either account precisely. And if we were somehow able to reconstruct the actual event, we might well see that both accounts presented at the Senate hearing were the most honest recounting of the past each of them is now capable of expressing.

Your editorial overlooked the probability that neither witness accurately recounted that historic event in every detail. Instead you described Ford's testimony as "forthright," "'incredibly credible'," and "courageous." It was, in fact, all those things, but that doesn't mean it was the full truth of her past experience.

Of Kavanaugh's testimony, you used language such as "distortion of the truth," "perhaps he truly cannot remember doing what he is accused of," and "possibly perjurious." These all go to the truthfulness of his account and find it lacking. I submit that it was indeed lacking, as any representation of past events necessarily must be, but that it was not necessarily dishonest.

You opined that Ford's testimony was motivated by her "sense of civic duty," yet Kavanaugh was motivated by "partisan fury," "disdain," and "intemperan[ce]." I searched in vain for any reference to the attacks that Judge Kavanaugh and his family endured during the ten-day public investigation of his

sexual behavior. Perhaps the tenor of his testimony was motivated by a very human desire to rehabilitate his honor.

I searched for some mention of the noteworthy accomplishments in the spheres of university, community, and career that show Kavanaugh's impressive arc to maturity, but found nothing beyond disparaging descriptions of the teenager Kavanaugh once was.

You chose to base your opposition to Kavanaugh's confirmation on his lack of judicial temperament. This was the safe route, pointing out his temperament in a singular situation rather than accusing Justice Kavanaugh of having been a teenage wannabe rapist, but you effectively got your message across. Similarly, you noted your dissatisfaction with his legal views on voting rights and executive power, as well as his apparent partisan behavior when working on the Starr Report and working in President George W. Bush's administration. Yet these perceived flaws were really just side issues compared to the really big flaw of overreacting during a hearing where his career, aspirations, reputation, and honor were all on the line. At this point, I should grant you that your piece was expressly an opinion piece; nevertheless, an opinion must be well supported to be convincing.

If we want to look at Justice Kavanaugh's judicial temperament, we can review his temperament while actually serving on the federal bench for more than a decade. We can ask his colleagues, lawyers who argued in his courtroom, his students, clerks, and staff. In fact, we did do all those things and his temperament was unassailed. We can choose to overlook his years of judicial service where his judicial temperament was actually on display, or we can look at the worst day of his life; but wouldn't that be "injudicious"?

BETH RODRIGUEZ
Evanston, Ill.

THE EDITORS REPLY:

It is reasonable to expect a person who believes he has been falsely accused and mistreated by the public to defend himself by responding directly and honestly to specific allegations. Brett Kavanaugh had an opportunity to do this. Instead, he opened his testimony with an explicitly political broadside against the Democratic senators who had dared to confront him with Christine Blasey Ford's accusations. He evaded many of their questions, or angrily turned them back on the senators themselves. Of course, it would be unfair to expect either him or his accuser to remember everything about the night in question, but our complaint was not about his imperfect memory. Kavanaugh plainly misrepresented facts at several points during his testimony. The "witnesses" who "refuted" the alleged attack on Ford or "said it never happened" (his words under oath) did no such thing; they merely said they did not recollect seeing an attack themselves, or know about it. His explanations about the meaning of crude language in his high-school yearbook entry were patently absurd. Whether Kavanaugh should have had to face questions about his pre-collegiate past was an issue decided when the bipartisan Senate committee agreed to hear Ford's testimony. We still believe that the belligerent and disingenuous way he answered those questions told us something important about his temperament, and that this has to be weighed against his "years of judicial service." It was, to be sure, a stressful moment for the nominee, but life on the nation's highest court is full of stressful moments, and we don't expect a justice to react to them with partisan fury.

Climate's Black Friday

If you lived through historically deadly wildfires in California this fall, or catastrophic flooding and storm surges from Hurricanes Florence or Michael, or record-setting heat and rainfall that afflicted large swaths of the country for much of the year, then the main message of the U.S. government's National Climate Assessment released the day after Thanksgiving may come as little surprise: "The assumption that current and future climate conditions will resemble the recent past is no longer valid." Of course, the vast majority of the scientific community, along with a growing number of ordinary citizens, have been working their way toward this sober conclusion for some time now. Climate science can be complicated, as climate-change deniers are fond of pointing out. But a general trend is clear even to non-scientists. The past thirty years have included twenty of the hottest ever recorded; entire ecologies seem to be transforming before our eyes. The president can tweet ignorantly about a brief, localized cold snap or hold to the wholly uninformed opinion that the climate will "probably change back," but the government's report is a damning verdict on the damage that fossil-fuel emissions have wrought: "It is very likely that some physical and ecological impacts will be irreversible for thousands of years, while others will be permanent."

The climate assessment—which is required by Congress—draws on the work of hundreds of scientists, synthesizes thousands of studies, and is endorsed by NASA, the Department of Defense, and eleven other federal agencies. In warning that drought and sea-level rise could cause severe humanitarian crises by the middle of this century, it echoes the dire findings of the U.N.'s October report on climate change. It also lays out the potential financial toll. Climate change could reduce projected U.S. gross domestic product by 10 percent before the end of the century, costing the economy twice as much as the 2008 recession. Heat-related deaths and infrastructure damage are likely to impose hundreds of billions of dollars in costs. Trade and agriculture are particularly at risk. Extreme weather events will damage factories and disrupt supply chains, leading to shortages in critical goods worldwide. Higher temperatures and heavier rainfall will reduce the yield and quality of crops and livestock. By 2050, the agricultural productivity of the Midwest will fall to 1980 levels. It is already too late to avert some of these effects, the report says; at best, we can try to mitigate them.

The timing of the report's release—on the afternoon of Black Friday and two weeks ahead of its originally scheduled public presentation—was clearly an attempt by the Trump administration to bury politically inconvenient news. After all, it contradicts the president's pronouncements and the position of many Republican politicians in the pocket of the fossil-fuel industry. Trump officials, seeking to undermine the report, are calling it "made-up hysteria" and a product of the deep state. Their response to the findings, summed up literally by a member of the EPA transition team, is: "We don't care." Oil companies—ExxonMobil most notoriously—long hid their own research about the damage their product was doing to the planet and instead ran public campaigns to sow confusion about climate science. Now an American president and his party are openly deploying the same strategy. This is not good-faith disagreement with data, but denial of the facts in the name of profit and political gain.

Yet the con might work for only so long. Princeton University's Mark Oppenheimer, who helped author the October U.N. report, told PBS NewsHour that "the science is so compelling and the consequences have been so vivid that in a way this has liberated the scientists who are doing these kinds of assessments to really say what's been on their minds for the whole time.... The clear messages are coming through." Experts say the report is likely to be used in court to challenge federal energy and environmental policies, and could be used to garner further legislative support for a "Green New Deal" that would fully ween the United States off fossil fuels within a few decades. Polls show that by a large margin Americans believe more needs to be done to combat climate change. Alternative energy technologies are getting cheaper and more efficient, while activism is on the rise worldwide. Anger over denialism is appropriate, but we cannot wallow in it. Nor should we succumb to despair. The same science that proves we are responsible for climate change gives us reason to believe that we can do something about it. This is not an Act of God but a human mistake, and one we know how to fix. What are we waiting for? ■

Mollie Wilson O'Reilly

Don't Get Drafted

TIME TO DROP THE WAR ON CHRISTMAS

A few days after the October 27 mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, I scrolled through the headlines of a major newspaper to catch up on the latest horrors. Near the top were several stories about the aftermath of that attack, including President Donald Trump's visit to Pittsburgh despite community leaders' requests that he stay away. I read again about how the murderer had reportedly shouted, "All Jews must die!" as he killed eleven people and wounded seven others. And then I scrolled down a bit more and saw a photo of red-and-green coffee cups from Starbucks, with a headline that asked, "Are these cups Christmassy enough?"

The War on Christmas, as you know, is an annual ritual in which American conservatives fret and fume about the alleged disappearance of Christmas and its trappings from the public square. The whole thing is obviously ridiculous—Christmas is not threatened, and neither is the supermajority that white Christians maintain in this country. When the complaints swelled in years past, I sometimes wrote about them, but more often just rolled my eyes and laughed it off. I have only so much energy to burn during the holidays, and I don't like spending it getting angry about bogus reasons to be angry.

I can't laugh it off anymore. Now I know even the pettiest forms of white racial resentment can be dangerous. Fear and hatred of minorities has led to lethal violence more than once during the Trump administration, and Trump, for his part, seems basically fine with that. He spent the months leading up to the November midterms warning about the hordes of foreigners trying to "invade" this country and undermine our elections. Marginalized communities now live in justifiable fear of being deported, targeted, and attacked by agents and supporters of the government. In such an environment, it is worse than insensitive to whine about a lack of explicit references to Jesus in public spaces. It is complicit in hate.

If the War on Christmas has become an annual tradition for you—if December in your home is a monthlong festival of imagined slights to sulk over—harken to the glad tidings of John Lennon and Yoko Ono. War, or at least *that* war, is over! Trump himself says so. "We're saying 'Merry Christmas' again," he has boasted, because he is a president who gets results.

If it helps you to think that Trump is somehow responsible for the return of Christmas cheer to America, then fine, believe that. The important thing is accepting that Christmas is not under attack. Because there is another war on. It has led to actual deaths. And white Christians are not its targets.

So, please, stop simmering when you see "Season's Greetings" on a sign in a store. No more grumbling about how "Hanukkah isn't even that significant of a holiday." Do not share that Facebook image about how Barack Obama celebrated Kwanzaa, but Trump at last has returned a Christmas tree to the White House, because it's only lies—you must know it's lies. Recognize that the whole War on Christmas campaign was never anything but an excuse to provoke white Christians and marginalize and intimidate already vulnerable groups. And then pledge not to go along with it.

The U.S. bishops have written a welcome pastoral letter on combating racism, "Open Wide Our Hearts," that should be read and preached on in every parish this Advent. It takes its title from a saying of St. Katharine Drexel: "Let us open wide our hearts. It is joy which invites us. Press forward and fear nothing."

How much more joyful our Christmas preparations could be if we stopped being afraid that "they" might steal what's "ours." There are so many things worth getting upset about, so many reasons to be somber this holiday season. People are dying, victims of avoidable tragedies. Hate crimes are on the rise. The president refuses to denounce his racist supporters and advisors and continues to spread anti-Semitic smears and slogans. The government is immiserating immigrant and refugee families just to show that it can. When you hear the angels of the Gospel say, "Do not be afraid!" think of everyone who is more afraid now than they were two years ago. Think of the neo-Nazis who marched on Charlottesville shouting, "Jews will not replace us!" And then think of the Tree of Life victims and their families. They deserve so much more from the rest of us than wishes for a Merry Christmas. ■

Charles R. Morris

Holding Dreamers for Ransom

HOW TRUMP'S IMMIGRATION POLICY MAKES A BAD SITUATION WORSE

Luis Bracamontes, an undocumented immigrant, killed two California policemen in 2014. Bracamontes was a thoroughgoing bad guy, a drug dealer who had twice been deported from the United States. His second deportation was facilitated by Joe Arpaio, then the loudmouthed Republican sheriff of Maricopa County in Arizona. President Donald Trump used Bracamontes to rally his base. "Democrats let [Bracamontes] into the country," and "Democrats let him stay here." Even Fox News, after running a midterm campaign ad featuring footage of Bracamontes, was shamed into dropping it.

The immigration debate is tangled with ironies. For one thing, despite Trump's fulminations, the king of deportations was Barack Obama. During his first term, Obama was mostly focused on health care, but in his second term he tried to make quiet arrangements with Republicans. He struck a deal with them that involved a major upgrade of the government's two immigration enforcement arms—the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), whose writ goes just to the border, and the U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which tracks down undocumented immigrants already in the country. The new hardware and staffing also allowed for a sharp escalation in both agencies' tactics.

Obama was by no means anti-immigration. In general, he thought that adding working families strengthened the country. But his primary objective was to protect the "Dreamers"—about eight hundred thousand young people who had been brought to the country as children by undocumented parents and had grown up here. Legislation for the Dreamers was first introduced during the George W. Bush administration, with strong support on both sides of the aisle. To qualify, the Dreamers had to be at least eighteen, and they had to have entered the country before they turned sixteen and resided in the United States for at least four consecutive years. They also had to have graduated from high school or passed a GED, joined the military, or enrolled in a higher-education program.

Early in his administration, Trump made sympathetic noises about the Dreamers, as almost anyone would. The ones who came as young children, who didn't get in trouble with the law, and who had parents who paid taxes, are getting a raw deal. Anecdotally, many of the Dreamers are weak in their native languages, and are facing a traumatic return to an alien country.

More ironies: the implicit quid pro quo of tougher immigration enforcement in exchange for special treatment for promising young people was a fraud. The Republicans got the tougher enforcement they were demanding, but the Dreamers were left empty-handed. Trump's sympathy for the Dreamers lasted only as long as he could exploit their plight—the new quid pro quo for Dreamer citizenship is to fund Trump's beloved Wall. (Trump insists the Wall is coming along nicely, although no one can find it, and there is little chance of its being funded by the new Democratic House of Representatives.)

Fortuitously, two federal-appeal suits on behalf of the Dreamers were recently decided in their favor. For the time being, the deportations are suspended. The two appeals circuits that issued those rulings, however, are among the most liberal, and Trump is pushing hard to bring a Dreamers case to the Supreme Court in the current session. With the addition of Brett Kavanaugh to the bench, there is a good chance that the Dreamers will lose. The attitude of the current administration toward immigrants was the hardest that could be conceived, involving forcible separation of children from their parents. Jeff Sessions, the former attorney general, and Kirstjen Nielsen, Secretary of Homeland Security, announced a no-exception policy: an adult immigrant who did not go through a sanctioned asylum port of entry would be considered a criminal and could be imprisoned. Repeated offenses could draw up to ten-year sentences. Because federal prisons cannot accept children, the children of those immigrants had to be separated from their parents, with little regard for human decency. Around two thousand children were separated from their parents, and some were sent to another part of the country.

In a press conference, Nielsen smarmily insisted that there had been no policy changes since the Obama administration. In fact, the contrast is striking. In the previous administration, first priority was given to known criminals, who were "removed" from the country; second priority was given to the most recent immigrants, who were "returned," ideally before they had built an in-country social network. That dovetailed with Border Patrol protocols to discourage illegal crossings. According to those protocols, which remain in force, every apprehended border-crosser is fingerprinted and traced for a criminal record, and about a fifth are remanded to the local authorities. The rest of the would-be immigrants are subjected to meaningful penalties. Many Mexican nationals who enter the United States illegally also have an application for a U.S. green card. Being caught in an attempt at illegal entry adds five years to the waiting period.

Immigration policy is fiendishly difficult, especially when families are involved. The Trump and Sessions no-exception rule only makes a bad situation worse. The pleasure they seem to take in the process is disgusting. ■

Sr. Carol Keehan, DC

'Let Church Be Church Again'

Sr. Carol Keehan, DC, recently announced her retirement after thirteen years as president and chief executive officer of the Catholic Health Association. On October 22, 2018, she received the Commonweal Catholic in the Public Square Award. This piece is adapted from her acceptance address.

It is a challenging time. Between politics, church issues, climate change, and the loss of civility in discussing these issues, we can be overwhelmed.

We have to admit, it has gotten to many of us, some even admitting to being discouraged, depressed, or just in a real funk about it.

I am not sure what most of you do to get out of this kind of situation, but my go-to cure is no longer available. For years when the problems of life and the situations in the world weighed me down, I knew what would cure me: a Maeve Binchy novel. Now I know she is not Dostoevsky, and I probably should not admit this in this literary crowd. But: Did you ever read one? There are wonderful people in them, really vicious people in them, impossible situations—and it all works out better than you could imagine. You can probably take only one a year, but it is a real upper, and even the church does the right things in her books.

Sadly, Maeve has gone to God, and I am searching for another mood-elevator.

In the meantime, it is critical to look at what we can do to help the people of our country and our church. *Commonweal* has a profound mission statement that begins "Since 1924, *Commonweal* has staked a claim for Catholic principles and perspective in American life, and for lay people's voices within the church." Has there ever been a moment when we needed you more?

Another way to look at it might be: Is this what you were born to do? We know that profound and lasting change is necessary for our church to be what it claims to be, more importantly to be what Christ calls it to be.

This can be a wonderful moment, especially for the church in America, and it can also be a healing moment. I find myself thinking about that beautiful poem by Langston Hughes, "Let America Be America Again." Langston Hughes wrote this poem as an African American man who had never been able to fully participate in the opportunities and promise of America, and yet he still believed. He wrote:

O, let America be America again—
The land that never has been yet—
And yet must be—the land where *every* man is free…

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!...

We, the people, must redeem…

As I thought about that and the pain of the many victims of abuse, both sexual abuse and the abuse that comes from clericalism and church politics, I thought many people in the church have never had the opportunity to experience church with all its promise and commitment, and so I took the liberty of rewording Langston Hughes's poem:

SOFIA NEGRON

Sr. Carol Keehan accepts the Commonweal Catholic in the Public Square Award.

O, let Church be Church again—
The community that never has been yet—
And yet must be—the community where *everyone* is free…

O, yes,
I say it plain,
Church never was Church to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
Church will be!...

We, the people, must redeem…

I believe that if we can join with our brothers and sisters who have experienced such pain in a journey to authentically reform the church, it might be the best way for them to heal and to heal the church. This is a privileged opportunity, and *Commonweal* is exceptionally well positioned for leadership in that. Think about it! What other group in our country has such a strong collection of Catholic intellectuals who love their faith? Look at your history, how much you did to advance understanding and acceptance of Vatican II, your honest and respectful debates over issues and priorities. For decades, you have enriched the church. Maybe it has not always been appreciated, but you have enriched it.

The church has finally canonized a saint who was so clear on the essential service that people like the *Commonweal* family can give to the church: Saint Óscar Romero. Romero wrote in his book *The Violence of Love*:

We bishops, popes, priests, nuns, Catholic educators—
we are human, and as humans we are sinful
and we need someone to be a prophet for us too
and call us to conversion
and not let us set up religion
as something untouchable.
Religion needs prophets, and thank God we have them,
because it would be a sad church
that felt itself owner of the truth
and rejected everything else.
A church that only condemns,
a church that sees sin only in others
and does not look at the beam in its own eye,
is not the authentic church of Christ.

What a privileged opportunity to help our church be "the authentic Church of Christ." Pope Francis has been clear that we need correction in the church. I maintain that we must do this the way one corrects somebody whom one loves, not with the abusive, headline-grabbing, scorched-earth tactics we are sometimes seeing that are often designed to advance personal agendas. It can be an exciting and joyous journey.

In October 2018, *Commonweal* contributing writer Rita Ferrone commented on the gospel passage "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it" for *Give Us This Day*, and she captured what an exciting and joyous opportunity this could be. What should our response to this passage be, she wondered: More Bible study groups? *Lectio Divina*? More Scripture reading, more study of the authors of Scripture? And she concluded: "All these things are good and we should do them. Yet I cannot help but think that attention to the written word of God is above all a preparation for hearing the word of God as it is spoken in our life. We must learn the scriptures well because they teach us to discern the living word of God, proclaimed in the events and people around us."

Ferrone continued: "'God's word is not chained.' It speaks anew in every generation. We hear it quietly in the gift of compassion. It resounds in the miracle of forgiveness. It sings in the glory of creation. God's word may be spoken in an unexpected kindness or when we discover a wellspring of love in our heart. This living word will shape us if we let it. Are we listening?"

Do you see why I claim the *Commonweal* family has so much to contribute at this important moment in the church? *Commonweal* family, we need you more than ever. We look so forward to what you can contribute at this important time in the life of our church. I want to thank you for all you have already done and for this incredible honor which I accept on behalf of all those in Catholic health care who passionately believe that health care is a human right. ■

ALL OF ADVENT

Again we drag out the colored lights,
sing together of all the Holy births,
joyous despite our deep knowledge
that our steps to the Cross
are foreshortened. We sense this
there in the dark corners of the stable.
Every angel's and mother's hallelujah
will turn to tears, and our own tragedies
are only blessed as we hold them,
precious gifts, kneeling here,
together, sharing the long journey
with the taste of sweet milk
and vinegar on our tongues.
We kneel with thanksgiving
this night, kneel here embracing
both the Cradle and the Cross.

—Carol Hamilton

Carol Hamilton has taught in Connecticut, Indiana, and Oklahoma. She is a former Poet Laureate of Oklahoma.

Marcia Pally

'The Invention of the Antichrist'

KARL BARTH, ERICH PRZYWARA, & THE ANALOGY OF BEING

In the 1920s and '30s, Karl Barth, the renowned Swiss Reformed theologian, began what became a decades-long critique of the important Polish-German Jesuit, Erich Przywara. But with the rise of fascism, their disagreement soon reached beyond the theology classroom and took on some of the confessional tensions of Reformation-era contests. Barth, looking at the growing appeal of Nazism, held that humanity retains little of the goodness it had before the Fall. Przywara, though forcefully anti-Nazi, was less bleak. Their debate went on for decades, and though much of it took place under the shadow of war and genocide, it ended up in a surprisingly hopeful place.

Karl Barth (1886–1968), the son of a Basel theology professor and violinist, was educated in the liberal Protestantism of the day, which followed Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) in emphasizing religion as private, inner feeling. Barth rejected this view when he saw Christians claim divine support for their side in World War I. His own teachers, including the prominent theologian Adolf von Harnack, signed a 1914 declaration supporting the German war effort. If this is how Christians interpret God's Word when left to their own inner feelings, Barth decided, then the Word will be tweaked to suit private and political advantage. He concluded that humanity could not be guided by its feelings. We must instead adjust our thoughts and feelings to God's revelation in Christ and Scripture. Barth developed his strong Christology in his thirteen-volume *Church Dogmatics* (1931–1967), and his views on humanity's sinfulness became the linchpin in his debate with Przywara. Barth was also the principal author of the Barmen Declaration (1934), urging Christians to resist Nazism. He imprudently sent the letter directly to Hitler. In 1935, he was forced to leave Germany and took a position at the University of Basel, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Erich Pryzwara

Przywara (1889–1972), the son of a Polish father and German mother, was educated in music and theology in the Netherlands, taught in Austria and Germany, and was a rising star in Catholic thought when he, like Barth, began protesting fascism. In 1933, he explained that the Christian "Kingdom" was absolutely incompatible with the Third Reich. In 1934, while Barth was writing the Barmen Declaration, Przywara argued against church accommodation of Hitler's government. By 1935, the Nazis had him under surveillance, eventually closing down his work and causing medical and emotional problems from which he never fully recovered. He nonetheless remained prolific through the 1960s, writing forty books and eight hundred articles and reviews, and influencing such thinkers as Karl Rahner and Josef Pieper.

Karl Barth

It was Przywara's work on human nature that provoked Barth's initial criticism. Przywara set out his ideas in his 1926-7 *Polarity* and more fully in his 1931 *Analogy of Being*. But it was not Przywara who first came up with the idea that human nature partakes *analogously* of God's "being." That idea began with Thomas Aquinas. Its premise was that God is the ground and reason for everything. There could have been nothing at all, but instead there's something; and the reason that there's something is God. One might say God is what makes existence itself possible, from the existence of time to the existence of peaches. So something of God, the source of existence, can be found in everything and everyone that exists. God, Aquinas wrote, is "intimate" within us. In the charmed phrase of German theologian Christian Link, God cannot be found in the world any more than Charles Dickens can be found in his novels, yet he is there throughout and is the reason they exist.

But of course God is also radically different from humanity. We are material beings; he is immaterial. We live in time; he is outside

time. Nevertheless, there is a kind of kinship between us. As Scripture puts it, we are made in his "image." Or as Przywara puts it, following Aquinas, we are "analogous" to the divine "being." Drawing on both Aquinas and Augustine, Przywara held that God is both "in us" *and* "beyond us."

One important consequence of this is that, even after the Fall, humanity retains something of our original kinship with God. Because of our intimacy with God, we have the capacity to understand his Word. Przywara was careful to say what this does *not* mean. It does not mean we can develop moral living in our own way solely through human abilities. But we do have the capacity to grasp *God's* way as it is revealed in Scripture. So grace comes to us "doubly," through God's redemptive work and through our created capacities to follow his Word in our worldly activities—for instance, in fighting for love and justice against Nazism.

This was what Barth would not countenance. In his 1931 *Christian Dogmatics I*, he called Przywara's analogy of being "*the* invention of the Antichrist" and declared that "*because of it* one *cannot* become Catholic."

But this is not where the debate really began. In 1929, Barth had invited Przywara to lecture to his seminar on Aquinas at the University of Münster and, again, in 1931 in Bonn. The 1929 course protocols show that Barth's reception was warm. In a letter to the Swiss theologian Eduard Thurneysen, Barth called Przywara's presentation "a masterpiece." Yet in two lectures later that year, he began to criticize Przywara's position.

Barth's issue was fallenness. He thought Aquinas's "analogy of being" was a dangerous idea because it placed fallen humanity too close to God. Przywara, Barth said, aggrandized humankind, allowing us to imagine ourselves as "like" God, and therefore capable of acting rightly on our own. Any look at modern European history should dispel that illusion. In Barth's view, the analogy of being downplayed God's otherness. The only real bridge between humanity and the wholly other God is Jesus, fully human and fully divine. But the analogy of being suggests that human nature itself offers us another bridge to God. It suggests that, because we are in God's image, we can understand God's nature just by using our natural capacities.

Barth could not accept this. All we know of God and world, he insisted, comes from his Word and revelation in Christ, not from reason or other natural capacities. This knowledge is not "given to us in the givenness of history." If we could figure God and the world out on our own, the Gospel would be reduced to a kind of public-service announcement reminding us to do what we already know we should.

This was also Barth's objection to Augustine, whose work substantially influenced Przywara. Augustine included good works (along with grace) in the path to redemption. Barth feared that this implied a continuity between human efforts and God's saving acts, whereas, in his view, grace and human effort are *opposed*. To save us, God sets "a barrier against all

THE ASTRONAUT'S BODY

Up. Down.
Words without meaning.

I only know there's no need
to work hard to push blood to my head,

no need for these muscles, these bones.
Here, they are a burden.

I let them thin.
They flow away in my urine.

From now on, I'll float.

I can barely remember what it was like
to rise, to walk,

the effort it took
to clamor to my feet.

—Bill Ayres

Bill Ayres is working in his seventh bookstore. His poems have appeared recently in Plainsongs, The Windhover, Bird's Thumb, *and the* Anglican Theological Review.

that is our own action" and "cuts *against* the grain of our existence." The ugly grain of our existence was on full display in the politics of the day. Despite their supposed kinship with the Creator, human beings in Europe were flocking to fascism. If this was not evidence of man's radical depravity after the Fall, what would be? Between December 1935 and March 1936, the Nazi police put Przywara's offices at the journal *Stimmen der Zeit* (*Voices of the Day*) under surveillance and closed it permanently in 1941.

Przywara was puzzled by this line of argument. How did we get from Augustine and Aquinas to Hitler? Przywara had already written in 1927 that the analogy of being doesn't suggest an undue similarity between humanity and God. It means only that the wholly other God reveals something of himself both in revelation *and* in creation. This means that our God-created humanity and God's revelation cannot be altogether opposed as Barth had suggested they should be. They work together. To use the traditional formulation, "Grace does not destroy but supports and perfects nature." Przywara repeated: grace comes "doubly," through God's revelation and the human capacity, endowed by God, to receive that revelation.

Barth, for his part, continued to insist that grace came singly, through revelation alone, but this yielded an unintended consequence. If we can rely on nothing in our created nature to understand revelation, how do we know that we understand it right? How do we know that our moral judgments, based on *interpretations* of Scripture, are sound?

Barth had painted himself into the same kind of corner that Immanuel Kant had. Kant had claimed that the human mind comes equipped with preset categories like length and time that we project onto the world. Because our minds conceptualize things as having length and enduring in time, we project those features onto the world "out there," but the human mind has no direct access to that "outside" world. It produces only internal images—a "home screening," in the theologian John Betz's wonderful phrase. So how do we know whether that home screening is accurate? Like Kant's philosophy, Barth's theology seems to isolate fallen humanity from God—or at least to prevent us from knowing if we are understanding his revelation the way he intends for it to be understood. Perhaps another bridge between God and humanity—one that would allow him to communicate his will to us—was needed after all.

In spite of this weakness in Barth's argument, his critique did prod Catholics to clarify their own positions. Gottlieb Söhngen, influential in advancing the career of Joseph Ratzinger, emphasized that we are like God only *analogously*: the analogy of being kept the proper *distance* between God and his creation. On the other hand, he worried that Barth's position ruled out the proper closeness. It would turn whatever relationship we had with God into what he called "a purely external allocation"—an add-on rather than something foundational to human existence. No one, including Barth, wanted to say that. Everyone agreed that our relationship with God was a constant feature of the human condition. So what the analogy of being allowed us to understand, according to Söhngen, was our own nature, not God's. To understand anything about God, we needed revelation. This was a small move toward Barth and away from Przywara, who held that our nature as creatures in God's image *does* permit us knowledge of him.

Would Barth be persuaded by Söhngen's overtures? In *Church Dogmatics II*, Barth conceded that if Söhngen was right, "then naturally I must withdraw my earlier statement that I regard the *analogia entis* (the analogy of being) as 'the invention of the Antichrist.'" But somewhat cagily, Barth added that he wasn't sure Söhngen's views represented those of the Catholic Church: "I am not aware that this particular doctrine of the *analogia entis* is to be found anywhere else in the Roman Catholic Church." In a sense, Barth was right. Never having been called upon to defend Aquinas's analogy of being against a critique like Barth's, the church had not yet laid out a thorough, modern explanation of it.

Hans Urs von Balthasar, Przywara's student and the friend who, in 1947, brought Przywara to Switzerland to

recover from maladies provoked by continuous Nazi surveillance, took up the challenge. In *The Theology of Karl Barth,* Balthasar defended the analogy of being, explaining that God's transcendent otherness is undiminished by his intimacy in us. It is "a suspended middle" between an absolutely transcendent, unknowable God and an immanent, knowable God. Balthasar believed that after the publication of his and Söhngen's books "Barth's attitude gradually changed" to accept the analogy of being "within the context of an overarching analogy of faith."

Was he right? No one can be sure. Barth did not discuss the analogy of being in any book written after Balthasar's work was published. In his final years, Barth confessed to having said "nasty" things about the analogy of being. But at Princeton in 1962 and at Tübingen in 1964, he maintained his opposition to Przywara's *Analogy of Being.*

Yet in his late works, Barth did incorporate a different sort of analogy into his own theology—not the analogy of being but of being-in-Christ, in his grace. He recognized that, without some analogical connectedness to God, we could have no basis on which to choose one sin-distorted interpretation of Scripture over another. To avoid relativism and hopelessness, Barth wrote in *Christian Dogmatics III* that humanity is *created* with the capacity, even disposition, to receive God's Word and grace: our "being and nature…is destined, prepared, and equipped" for grace. This preparedness remains even after the Fall.

For Aquinas and Przywara, what remains after the Fall is human nature, analogous of God. For Barth, what remains is God's grace. Because God was determined to redeem us all along and this determination always remained "in" us, we are equipped to receive Christ and Scripture and be redeemed. Moreover, because humanity is created to receive God's Word, each of us can be a partner in God's grace. While we cannot add anything to that grace, our faith can bear witness to God's determination to save humanity. The one who bears witness in this way refers "not to himself, but to God who points him to his neighbor."

This was a far more optimistic outlook than might have been anticipated from Barth's oft-repeated opposition to Przywara. Looking at humanity's violent record, Barth was right to insist that we could not be left to our own devices. Przywara replied, *But we are not alone*: our very nature connects us to our Creator. This prodded Barth to develop his own understanding of how God makes it possible for us to receive his revelation. In the end, Barth—for all his insistence on human sinfulness—did recognize that God must have given us something that allowed us to understand and respond to his Word. ■

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Has Liberalism Failed?

An Exchange

Bryan Garsten, Samuel Moyn, Matthew Sitman, Patrick J. Deneen

Although there's always more than one good way to write about any book worth reviewing, Commonweal *does not usually review a book more than once. Sometimes, however, a book takes on an importance beyond itself—by provoking a new discussion or marking a cultural shift—and then we may make an exception. Patrick Deneen's* **Why Liberalism Failed** *(Yale University Press, $30, 248 pp.) has turned out to be just such a book. Alan Wolfe reviewed it for us (rather dismissively, it must be said) in the February 12 issue of the magazine, but the editors agreed that there was more to say about some of the questions Deneen raises. First, has liberalism failed, as he claims? And if so, why? Is the liberal tradition equipped to correct its own shortcomings, or must it be abandoned altogether? In that case, what are the alternatives? In the age of Trump, when liberal democracy appears to be on the ropes in much of the world, such questions suddenly seem less speculative. We asked three people—Samuel Moyn and Bryan Garsten of Yale University and* Commonweal*'s own Matthew Sitman—to respond to Deneen's arguments. Deneen himself kindly agreed to answer their criticisms and, somewhat less kindly, offers* Commonweal *a few criticisms of his own. The magazine, he informs us, is about as moribund as liberalism. Hospitality requires that we give him the last word, at least for now.*

—The Editors

Bryan Garsten

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness – That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men…"

These famous lines from the Declaration of Independence capture well America's most iconic and influential idea, which is that individuals have rights and that one of the government's most fundamental jobs is to protect those rights. This is the idea that has failed, according to Patrick Deneen's formidable book.

Professor Deneen believes that this liberal idea, rooted in the philosophy of John Locke, has led Americans to create a giant and ultimately destructive force in social and political life, "the state as agent of individualism." Other writers blame the Democrats for the growth of the state, but Deneen believes Republicans have been almost as complicit in that development. While each political party emphasizes different rights (civil rights for Democrats, property rights for Republicans), both parties empower the state to defend their favorite rights against interference from families, churches, and traditional communities. Both parties are complicit, Deneen argues, in using the liberal language of rights to justify strengthening the state and weakening the authority of local communities.

When we accept "the state as agent of individualism," we think we are securing for ourselves the freedom to try to shape our lives as we wish. Professor Deneen warns us that we are only indulging an adolescent desire to become a "self-fashioning expressive individual." We like to think that we will flourish once we are finally freed from the domineering clutches of tradition and community, but Deneen thinks that we will tend to end up unhappy and unfree. With some caricature, but also penetrating insight, he describes people living under liberalism as morally unserious, unburdened by a sense of duty, quick to disrespect parents and community elders, insensitive to the virtues of traditional religion, and willing to spoil the natural world out of lust for security, comfort, and cash.

For much of our history, Deneen allows, Americans were more "Burkean" than our official philosophy recognized. By this he means that in spite of celebrating the Declaration of Independence every Fourth of July, we were not especially revolutionary in our daily lives. We followed paths cleared by family and tradition and did not insist on rebelling against the authority of custom at every moment. Gradually, however, the philosophy of Locke and the Declaration worked on us. It delegitimized every inherited authority, progressively empowering the government to wean us off our various traditions, loosening us from the support of local communities, leaving each of us nominally freer but in fact more alone,

rootless, atomistic, materialistic, and powerless against both state and corporate power.

Deneen seems to think that liberalism necessarily corrodes community. The logic is never spelled out clearly, but it might go something like this. Liberalism asks us to accept only authorities we have chosen. But we can't have chosen an authority unless we had the option to leave it behind. We can't truly consent to our house of , for example, if we have no chance to leave it. Liberalism therefore tends to produce menus of options. Even in the realm of religion we are treated to a marketplace of denominations, congregations, and sects. Once we find ourselves in a market, it is hard not to always be looking over our shoulders for better opportunities. ("I heard the congregation downtown has a better choir—should we give that one a try?") The liberal principle of choice requires that we have escape options, and seeing those possibilities sparks second thoughts about whether we are satisfied with our current situation. In liberal societies we are therefore surrounded and lured by alternative ways of life, and we spend our time shopping for better communities rather than working to improve the ones we happen to find ourselves in. Deneen suggests that a social world designed to protect our rights of free choice tends to make us impatient with the inherited and lasting ties that human beings need to live well with one another.

Alexis de Tocqueville

These complaints about liberalism have a long lineage on both sides of the political spectrum. In 1832—just as liberalism came into the lexicon as a political alternative—Pope Gregory XVI launched an attack in *Mirari vos,* an encyclical condemning "Liberalism and Religious Indifferentism." Gregory condemned the freedoms of conscience, opinion, speech, and the press, as well as the separation of church and state, portraying the whole package of liberal rights as a recipe for anarchic egoism.

Just eleven years later Karl Marx hit some of the same themes from the other side of the political spectrum in his own critique of rights, an essay titled "On the Jewish Question." Like the pope, Marx thought that individual rights sanctified selfishness. More fundamentally, he thought that the U.S. Bill of Rights and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man stranded individuals from one another, leading them to relate to one another indirectly (by asking the state to enforce rights claims against one another) rather than to deliberate with one another directly. Some readers may be surprised that Professor Deneen's book has gained an appreciative audience on the left as well as among traditionalists on the right, but Deneen's complaint about "the state as agent of individualism" is a recognizable variant of Marx's critique of the liberal state. Pope Gregory XVI wanted to go back to traditional authority while Marx wanted to move forward toward a new, more democratic social authority, but both objected to liberalism for roughly the reason that Deneen does: both thought that governments devoted to protecting individual rights destroyed communal social life.

What all of these critics of liberalism reject is the hope that was once associated with the United States—the hope that individuals freed from an oppressive feudal past can consciously *reconstitute* their communities to make them fairer, the hope that liberated individuals can sift and choose among the traditions they have been freed from to find new ways of living together that are more compatible with freedom and equality than the old ways.

Professor Deneen's book demands that we think harder about the viability of that hope. Are the principles of choice and consent at the heart of liberalism compatible with deep commitments and lasting social ties? How much does the ever-present possibility of leaving a community infect and corrupt our lives within it? Does the ready availability of divorce make us less committed to our marriages? Does a competition among sects for worshipers undermine the moral authority of any particular religious community? I found myself reflecting on my own religion: conservative Judaism arose as an effort to self-consciously reconstitute traditionalist religion in a world of other options, to *choose* what had formerly been viewed as inherited commandment. Can this form of Judaism offer a coherent and compelling source of guidance, or does the element of choice in it undermine its authority? Edmund Burke, friend of tradition that he was, nevertheless wrote of "a choice of inheritance" in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. The phrase has a paradoxical sound to it, but is it impossible to live by? These are serious questions and Deneen is right to raise them, but I don't think he's right to assume that liberals can't answer them.

The famous nineteenth-century French writer Alexis de Tocqueville shared many of Professor Deneen's concerns about democratic liberalism. Still, when Tocqueville wrote the first volume of his great book *Democracy in America,* he thought the United States might offer a way out of these quandaries. He saw in America hope that modern individuals enjoying liberal freedoms could construct and maintain communities of meaning with the materials left to them by earlier traditions.

Tocqueville pointed out that Americans did not stay within traditional churches but also did not simply reject religion. Instead they crafted for themselves new sects and churches to which they were intensely devoted and which helped to structure their communities and their morals. Outside religion, Americans lacked the old-world inheritance of medieval guilds and aristocratic intermediary bodies, but they founded towns and voluntary associations that provided the human-scale contexts for meaningful lives. What Tocqueville thought he found in America was the possibility of a "democratic social state" in which free and equal individuals practiced "arts of association" that kept them from falling into the hopelessly atomized and unsocial existence, the liberal "anticulture" that Deneen seems to think is now almost unavoidable.

Professor Deneen is a wonderful reader of Tocqueville and his book demonstrates how reading Tocqueville well can help us see beyond the partisan debates of the moment to more fundamental issues. Because he is such a good reader of Tocqueville, it is especially arresting to find in *Why Liberalism Failed* a judgment that Tocqueville was ultimately wrong about the promise of America.

I myself think it's too soon to count Tocqueville out. The only alternatives to liberal society that are treated favorably in *Why Liberalism Failed* are relatively closed communities of meaning (almost always Christian ones, I notice). What justifies the closedness of these communities? What explains Deneen's sympathy for the Amish practices that restrict members' ability to know about and experiment in the world outside their home, for example? The book never quite explains. I think the justification must be the old and venerable view that what human beings most need to flourish is to be raised by, cared for, and ruled by a loving and wise community or church, one in which we may play some participatory role but over which we should expect to have no definitive influence—and one from which we should not expect to escape. This is ultimately a feudal view of the world: we are happier when we are ruled well than when we rule ourselves or set out on our own. The resurgence of this view would indeed mark the failure of liberalism. But I doubt that many of Deneen's readers are really willing to go so far with him, and I can't go there myself. I'm not willing to give up the escape hatches that liberalism offers to people trapped in oppressive circumstances. I would prefer to try to make modern liberty work better.

I therefore suggest that we read Deneen's book as a challenge for liberalism rather than an epitaph. Of course rights are sometimes co-opted into crude defenses of selfish materialism, but when people are oppressed those rights offer a powerful justification for resistance and a guarantee of the right to flee. What we do after we rebel or flee is up to us. Liberalism poses a unique set of psychological and moral demands, but it does not damn us. The possibility that the young Tocqueville glimpsed may still be waiting. For Americans not ready to give up on the Declaration of Independence, Professor Deneen's book should serve as a spur to exercise our rights more wisely and so to prove, through our example, that liberated individuals can in fact live well together.

Bryan Garsten, *a political theorist at Yale University, is the author of* Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment *(Harvard University Press).*

Samuel Moyn

When I first heard about Patrick Deneen's new book, *Why Liberalism Failed*, I assumed it was one more version of the standard reactionary talking points. Over the decades and centuries, the illiberal bill of particulars is pretty consistent, making up a by now dog-eared breviary dusted off for mass consumption in moments of crisis. This one, I assumed, would narrate a declension, after high medieval plenitude, from William of Ockham to the opioid crisis.

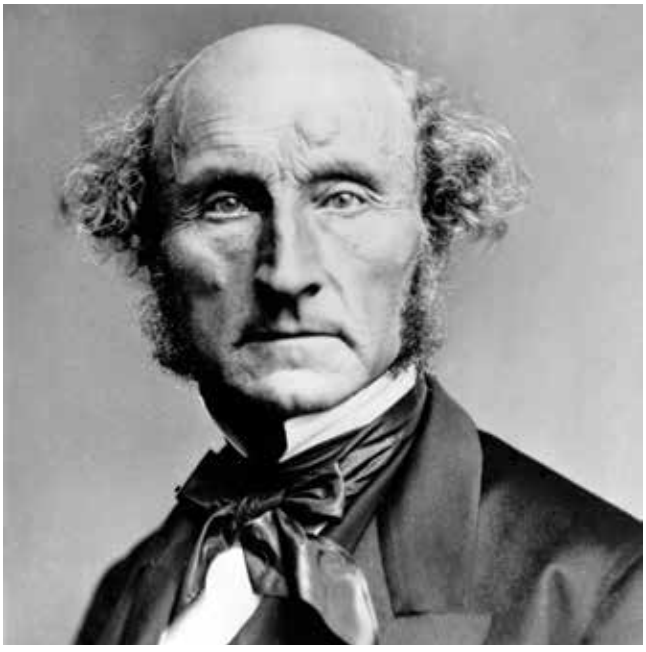
This now-hoary countertradition bowdlerizes liberalism, and then compares it with some allegedly superior alternative, past or future. And there is a paradox about the critique of liberalism. It is probably most relevant and useful at times of complacency, precisely when nobody is paying attention to its exaggerated complaints and admonitions. Even then, the totalistic bent and utopian solutions of most such critiques miss the point of any authentic reckoning with liberalism's current situation. And then the breviary of illiberalism risks becoming noxious when crisis allows it a new look—precisely when even thoughtful and well-meaning opponents of liberalism risk becoming defenders of the worst outcomes, or at least paving the road to hell with their good intentions. Something like this occurred in the 1930s, and there are lessons there.

But I had to give up my assumption that Deneen was merely recycling this illiberal countertradition yet again—though that *is* a large part of his agenda—when I read Adrian Vermeule's review of the book for *American Affairs*, which weirdly gave me a kind of hope. Like revolutionaries, reactionaries police one another for impurity, and because Vermeule found Deneen's critique of liberalism still too

liberal for his taste, I suspected there was something more in Deneen's book to work with. And there is. Deneen mounts his case in a way that ultimately saves it from becoming the boring rehash of reactionary memes one might otherwise fear.

But it does have to be read with an admittedly large squint to reach this conclusion. "Panicked responses from people who are so unnerved by the things we point out," Rod Dreher wrote in a blog post about Deneen's book, "resort to wildly distorting, even lying, about our books to keep the chaos they portend at bay." Possibly, but it is also fair to read an argument that strays into reactionary *Kulturkritik* against its own purposes, if it can serve better ones. After all, today stands in need of a measured and sober critique of dominant forms of liberalism, rather than either an unthinking defense or rejection of them.

Let me advance my reading by scrambling the expected roles of this author and this reader. For it turns out that Deneen's errors are due mostly to Karl Marx, while the most beneficial truths in his book are due to Alexis de Tocqueville—and there are more truths where these came from. Swapping out Marx for more Tocqueville allows the baby to be saved from the bathwater of Deneen's argument. For those who want to celebrate their Christian roots, it is nonetheless possible to defend some embattled liberal ideals, and even to denounce how many liberals have allowed those ideals to be compromised. If my rereading of *Why Liberalism Failed* is convincing, Deneen will have written, not yet another tedious screed against liberalism, but a valuable contribution to our common future.



John Stuart Mill

Deneen's Marxist errors consist in three premises—first, that there is something called liberalism that is a take-it-or-leave-it system, and second, that it has dug its own grave to make way for some allegedly beneficent successor. Neither of these first two premises (I'll get to the third later) is credible.

Amazingly, there is something valuable left in the book once you give up these first two dubious premises. In fact, for what it's worth, I don't think Deneen really believes them anyway. He not only concedes that liberalism conserves some good things from the past, but also that is a permanent bequest for any future. And while arguing that liberalism has self-destructed, in the end Deneen, unlike some other critics of liberalism, is sensitive to the high costs of many foreseeable alternatives, starting with our current leader's politics. For both reasons, it turns out that Deneen is an advocate of saving liberalism from its own worst tendencies. Once you drop his incredible premise that there is some unified system producing these pathologies through its own workings, a system that will stand or fall as a unit, it turns out that he recognizes the real challenge of today as to isolate the bad and replace it with the good.

Which is where Tocqueville comes in. There is a lot of Tocqueville in Deneen's book, but mostly the wrong parts. Repeatedly invoked are the bad claims about the freestanding genius of local community—since Tocqueville understood localism to make sense only in relation to non-local ideologies and structures. Even more unconvincing are the Cold War platitudes about the lurking threat that arises when atomized individuals submit to governmental tyranny, as if the contemporary neoliberal state were not a dysfunctional and shambolic mess. Gone, meanwhile, is Tocqueville's clear sense that modernity is a providential event that realizes God's plan on earth by recognizing the freedom and equality of individuals in a way Christendom itself had failed to do. (Sadly, Deneen is a touch—or more—euphemistic on this point, writing that the Middle Ages canonized freedom and equality but did "not always consistently recognize and practice" them. I suppose that is one way to put it.) Lost, too, is Tocqueville's belief that remedies are possible within modern liberalism to bring out its virtues and contain its vices. Missing, above all, is Tocqueville's Romantic commitment to individual self-creation as the chief good contemporary life allows to more people than ever, a goal that can be reconciled with democracy, and around which the latter ought to be organized.

Instead of sifting the possibilities of modernity as Tocqueville did, Deneen calls the game. The main reason he does so is that he mistakes libertarianism for liberalism, and takes his Marxism a fateful step further. Among other things, *Why Liberalism Failed* is a new version of Marx's "On the Jewish Question," in which liberalism is condemned for its frequent reduction to transactional egoism and material hierarchy. But if liberalism is not take-it-or-leave-it, then it need not entail a break with premodern metaphysics that leaves the individual permanently alienated from nature and society.

Rather, as Tocqueville understood, liberalism also emerged

in a Christian form that saw individual distinction as what made human beings most godly, even when they found the need to depart from religion to achieve it, or strove to describe their ideals in secular terms. In my favorite passage in *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville renounces painterly naturalism, praising Raphael for "trying to do better than nature," precisely by depicting the incarnated God in man. Those who insist on enforcing some alleged natural constraints or treating our children as sites for the endless reproduction of social norms might (again Tocqueville) "copy the models before their eyes wonderfully well," but when they do so "imagination seldom adds anything more." In other words, it was liberals who rescued the kernel of the Christian project for secular times—the achievement not only of a community of free equals, but one that put the premium on individual and collective originality on earth, which is as close as humans get to what religion once forced people to worship as if it were in the skies.

It is true that *libertarianism*, unlike Tocqueville's liberalism, creates hierarchy and is undemocratic, but only insofar as it is a disaster for, and heresy within, liberalism. Deneen's reductionist Marxism keeps him from seeing this. He talks a lot in this book about how liberty is not the same as license and how inequality is bad. That liberalism too requires a theory of constraint as well as a commitment to freedom, and must search for devices to keep itself from devolving into a vulgar economism, is not a reason to junk liberalism. It is a reason to pursue it in its most persuasive guises.

Deneen offers page after page of coruscating attack on John Stuart Mill. Like his great British successor and student, however, Tocqueville dreamed of reconciling individual self-creation with community and democracy, and with a modern political economy of abundance—one Mill ultimately concluded would have to be socialist. As Deneen knows, Tocqueville was much more sensitive than Mill to conservative institutions that could be defended on new grounds once one recognized the service they provide to liberals. We can debate which of them was right about particular institutions, but surely there is no reason to believe that all the forms of custom and community that Deneen prizes are irreconcilable with individual distinction, or with democracy. The challenge is locating the right institutions, whether inherited from the past or invented afresh. But it is much better to face this challenge than to follow Deneen and Dreher in ruefully counseling people to drop out, or reactionaries like Vermeule in insisting on a full-blown replacement of liberal institutions with an "integralist" order.

In summary, I prefer to read Deneen's book under a new title, *Why Neoliberalism Failed*. The real problem with the book is not that Deneen depends on freedom of speech, a liberal achievement, to say what he wants, or that he denounces the tyranny of states that are barely able collect taxes or run trains. It is not that he relies on ultramodern technology like passenger jets and Twitter accounts to spread his gospel of technological enslavement. No, these are just ordinary hypocrisies of which all moralists (including myself) are guilty. Rather, the problem is that Deneen takes such a Marxist view of liberalism as a total system that has dug its own grave that he neglects the real task, which is an ideological rescue mission and an institutional reform. This task involves saving our political parties from their neoliberal codependency, which has led one to lose control of who its leader is, while the other dithers, flirting with a new Cold War to avoid accounting for its own confusions. And, in Tocqueville's spirit, this task involves figuring out how to distinguish among different forms of liberalism in order to save the best of these forms from the worst, focusing on the Christian message liberalism brought down to earth for the sake of a less conformist and prostrate form of individual and collective existence.

Samuel Moyn *teaches law and history at Yale University, and is the author of* Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World *(Harvard University Press).*

Matthew Sitman

Both Samuel Moyn and Bryan Garsten turn Tocqueville, an abiding presence in Patrick Deneen's *Why Liberalism Failed*, against Deneen's own conclusions. Both are generally more sympathetic to liberalism than Deneen, and believe that, as Moyn puts it, "remedies are possible within modern liberalism to bring out its virtues and contain its vices." Finally, both Moyn and Garsten pick up on the book's curious ambiguities. Moyn insists that Deneen doesn't seem to actually believe his more extravagantly pessimistic claims. After all, at the end of his more or less unrelenting polemic, Deneen admits that whatever replaces liberalism will have to acknowledge its achievements, though he is rather vague about how one might separate these from liberalism's vices. Garsten expresses pointed concerns about the favor shown to "relatively closed communities of meaning"; and while Deneen admits we can't go back to the Middle Ages, it's also true that his chief criticism of liberalism is that it undoes traditional habits and ways of life and the virtues that supposedly support them. He also occasionally concedes that liberalism is a richer tradition than his rhetoric sometimes suggests—that it is the inheritor of ideals from both the classical and Christian traditions, and that its aspirations have often been quite noble. By the end of *Why Liberalism Failed*, I confess that I was frustrated that these nuances were mostly tacked on to the beginning and end of the book—why not actually have them inform the main argument?

It's important to realize, however, that this is typical of anti-liberal polemics from the traditionalist right. It's easy

to rail against an amorphous thing called "liberalism," to which you attribute much of what's wrong with the world; it's significantly harder to specify which features of liberalism we should reject and to grapple with the consequences of doing so. Which rights and freedoms associated with liberalism—or more precisely, *whose* rights and freedoms—should be curtailed? What sacrifices will have to be made, and by whom? Far safer to leave it all rather vague, expressing dismay about "the sexual revolution" or "multiculturalism" and "diversity," than to specify just who would bear the costs of finally putting liberalism behind us. We know who suffered in traditional communities, and the inequities and prejudices that the past can hand down to us. We should not forget the injustices that have been all too traditional. I wish more anti-liberals would think harder about what defending "tradition" against the claims of equality meant even just a few decades ago.

Isaiah Berlin

Why Liberalism Failed is also a surprisingly abstract book. It portrays a world in which almost no one makes actual political decisions; liberalism just inexorably works itself out, a magical, corrupting essence. In its very first pages, Deneen invokes "a political philosophy conceived some 500 years ago," before noting that "some 70 percent of Americans believe that their country is moving in the wrong direction"—thus drawing a straight line from Hobbes and Locke to our present discontent. In one of the book's most telling features, liberalism is consistently assigned a peculiar agency: liberalism *does* this or that, *demands* this or that, and so on. As someone who writes about ideas, I admit it's easy to slip into that kind of shorthand. But in this case it's not just shorthand: the device is actually essential for the book's conception and execution.

If Deneen were to attribute agency to real people who make decisions about how to live together, rather than making them the mere plaything of ideas, then he would need to be more specific about where we went wrong. Instead of (not unreasonably) lamenting the role of "technology" in our lives, he might have to decide whether we should blame liberalism for antibiotics as well as for the smartphones to which we're all so addicted. Is the former part of the sinister, Promethean desire to seek "mastery" over nature that sprang from the mind of Francis Bacon? If not, why? Instead of conflating liberalism and unbridled capitalism, Deneen would need to tease out their complicated relationship in history—and decide whether or not the recent "populist" revolts were fated centuries ago (from Locke to "Lock Her Up," one might say) or have more recent causes, such as four decades of neoliberal economics. In short, Deneen would have to grapple with specific choices in the history of recent politics—choices that were never inevitable—instead of making sweeping claims about the unavoidable consequences of "liberalism." Of course, it might turn out that all these slopes really are quite slippery; maybe we can't have antibiotics without also expecting smartphones, or maybe once we move beyond a world of yeoman farmers we are destined for the most rapacious forms of global capitalism. But rather than proving that liberalism has a *destiny*—that it always will grow more destructive over time—Deneen simply assumes it.

It's not surprising, then, that he doesn't have much to say about what might come after liberalism. How could he? It would require a totally different style of analysis. He does endorse Rod Dreher's "Benedict Option," and recommends more robust "home economies." But if liberalism is as pervasive and destructive as Deneen says it is, I doubt such experiments in localism will be an effective response. Won't the supposedly jealous god of liberalism cut them down before they can gain a real foothold? I understand the impulse to avoid constructing just one more "ideology," but surely setting forth political principles and suggesting what institutional arrangements might sustain them is not too much to ask. I want anti-liberals to describe what the world they want to live in would actually look like.

I don't want to be unfairly critical of Deneen, who is a beloved former teacher (without a doubt the most generous and engaged professor I had in graduate school). *Why Liberalism Failed* is a bracing read; it pushes us to ask first-order questions about the foundations of liberalism, about the assumptions that might lurk behind contemporary debates. But liberalism is not all, or only, Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke; it is not just progressives who assume they are on the "right side of history"; it is not all technology run amok. It's also the belief, to cite Thomas Jefferson (perhaps dubiously), "that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of god"; it's also Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, Isaiah Berlin's pluralism, and Judith Shklar's demand that we avoid cruelty. And given the rising tide of anti-liberal politics all around us, it is important to write about these matters with nuance and precision.

I make these claims from the Catholic left and as an editor at a Catholic magazine that has long struggled to hold the Catholic faith and liberal democracy in creative tension. So I share at least some of Deneen's criticisms of liberalism, especially liberalism at its most individualistic and most subservient to propertied interests and existing structures of power. I, too, am wary of "libertarian" iterations of liberalism, and I've argued, in agreement with Deneen, that liberal politics can easily become too technocratic, too prone to an illusory "neutrality," too ignorant of the way its health can depend on moral resources outside of itself. Only, I don't believe any of this means that liberalism is simply a poison tree. Liberalism is a rich and varied tradition, not reducible to "possessive individualism." For these reasons, I'm not willing to declare that liberalism has "failed." I still want its best ideals to be realized, and think they can be. I want to extend liberalism's promises to those it has not yet reached.

Deneen, for example, laments the inequality that ravages our society, as do I. But I don't know how appeals to traditional communities and the disciplines they impose will fix that. Instead, I look to the burgeoning set of arguments on the left about, say, Medicare for All, the necessity of robust unions, better and more democratic corporate governance, a universal basic income, and investment in infrastructure. I mostly agree with Daniel Bell that one can be liberal in politics and socialist in economics. What liberalism proposes *formally*—equality—I want to make a *substantive* reality. That often entails going beyond liberalism's own modest requirements. Such proposals, though, constitute a different stance toward liberalism than Deneen's, one that is both more dialectical and also less fearful of "the state," viewing it not as an agent of individualism but as the vehicle to achieve a more decent and just society. We have to confront capitalism, not hide from it. Something like democratic socialism is in this sense not the negation of liberalism, but its fulfillment.

Critics of liberalism, whether those like Deneen who have a fondness for the Benedict Option or those Catholics now agitating for "integralism," tend to imagine communities in which all social problems are settled ahead of time. Maybe by defending liberalism, whatever my criticisms of it, I'm defending politics as an ongoing, open-ended endeavor rather than a menu of self-sufficient theories that wish away our most pressing dilemmas and challenges.

Matthew Sitman *is associate editor of* Commonweal.

Patrick J. Deneen

I am honored that *Commonweal* has invited three thoughtful and eloquent thinkers to reflect on my book, *Why Liberalism Failed*. Each poses significant and important challenges to a number of claims in my book, yet each acknowledges that liberalism's defenders must take seriously the challenges that I pose regarding its inherent flaws. It is any author's wish for such engagement, and one's hope for acknowledgement at least of the importance of one's book's claims, even amid anticipated criticism. I thank *Commonweal* for the opportunity to respond briefly to these important reflections.

Two of my respondents—Samuel Moyn and Bryan Garsten—strive to defend liberalism by using Tocqueville against me. Garsten cites Tocqueville's admiration of America in Volume One of *Democracy in America*, while Moyn offers a reading of Tocqueville according to which it was liberals who "rescued the kernel of the Christian project for secular times." To quote Moyn against himself, if you squint, that's one way to see it. Both authors invoke an "optimistic" Tocqueville who believed (to quote Moyn) "remedies are possible within modern liberalism to bring out its virtues and contain its vices." Both ignore Tocqueville's insistence—especially in Volume Two of *Democracy in America*—on the inexorable logic of "democracy" toward individualism, materialism, "restlessness," short-term thinking, and a kind of civic infantilism fostered by a tutelary state. Insofar as there are "remedies" for these things, Tocqueville argued, they mainly include non-liberal and pre-modern inheritances, such as: a non-liberal definition of liberty derived from Christianity; religion as the main carrier of that definition; a dedication to common law that is protected by elites (lawyers, no less) who maintain stability and tradition; strong local and associational liberties that flourish largely due to the irrelevance of, and disinterest in, national politics; and, potentially, philosophers and statesmen who, with the cooperation of the citizenry, resist democracy's inherent tendencies. Yet Tocqueville is clear that each of these "remedies" is subject to liberal democracy's corrosive logic, and mainly recommends that one should seek to retain what liberalism has not made, since liberalism will not have the resources to reconstitute such counterweights. A sound reading of Tocqueville forces us to face the difficult question: Once all Tocqueville's "remedies" have been destroyed by the logic of liberal democracy, what can be done? The answer is much more difficult than these Yale scholars suggest.

Largely agreeing with Moyn and Garsten, Matthew Sitman writes, "I still want [liberalism's] best ideals to be realized." Like Moyn, he points to neoliberalism and libertarianism as the main challenges to liberalism, but expresses the hope that if these bad forms of liberalism could simply be excised—preferably through the establishment of economic socialism—liberalism would be saved. What strikes me in these identical arguments is how exactly they mirror the claims with which I am frequently confronted by "conservative" liberals. Countless reviews by conservatives have insisted that liberalism can be saved if only we excise the socialist impulse and reject "progressivism" in favor of the verities of classical liberalism. This argument reflects a cottage industry of contemporary conservatism: the effort to salvage liberalism by rooting out an unnatural and eliminable

tendency, the "progressivism" that arose due to the baleful influence of historicist German philosophy. Strikingly, these essays in *Commonweal* exhibit the same tendency among progressive liberals: liberalism can be saved by correcting a recent deformation. In this case, the deformation has been dubbed "neoliberalism" in order to mask the fact that its basic premises have been part of the liberal tradition from its very outset. There is nothing "neo" about this development: it is, simply put, a constitutive element of liberalism.

One of the more insistent claims throughout my book is that these two "sides" of liberalism—"conservative" and "progressive"—are really just different expressions of the same phenomenon. They advance together, and they both garner adherents by opposing themselves to "bad" liberalism. Part of liberalism's success has been the ongoing belief that its pathologies could be solved by "perfecting" liberalism through elimination of its "bad" side, while in fact our politics have simply been an oscillation between conservative and progressive flavors of liberalism, each "side" gaining the upper hand when the proposals of the other side appear to fail. The consequence of each advance is the further enlargement of each side's preferred impersonal mechanisms—the state for progressive liberals, the market for conservative liberals—both acting as a solvent on human relationships, civic capacities, and a shared sense of our common fate.

A growing number of Catholics—particularly younger Catholics—have concluded that liberalism in both forms is based upon a false conception of human nature, as the church understood from liberalism's very outset, though some hoped that the church's understanding of the human person could moderate and even correct liberalism's falsehoods. These new Catholic critics of liberalism tend to be drawn to one of two opposite positions—either toward a form of withdrawal from allegiance to the liberal state, as proposed by Rod Dreher in *The Benedict Option*, or toward a Catholic "takeover" of the liberal state, as proposed by Adrian Vermeule. While apparently opposed, these two positions are both predictable responses to a growing Catholic rejection of liberalism. Among some on the Catholic Left there is the appeal of socialism—articulated most artfully by Elizabeth Bruenig, who understands that Catholicism fundamentally rejects liberalism's premises, even as she avoids confronting head-on the Catholic teaching against socialism.

This backdrop helps explain why *Commonweal* has commissioned *four* essays arguing effectively the same position against my book—that all is well, liberalism is salvageable, pay no attention to that man behind the curtain. The editors of *Commonweal* expressed to me their conviction that the review they published a month after my book's publication ("Loving the Amish," Alan Wolfe, February 12) should not be the magazine's final word on the subject; they said they wanted to engage my ideas more fully. I was quite pleased that so important an American Catholic journal had decided to devote more space to what I expected to be a discussion of liberalism's relationship to Christianity, its historic and contemporary hostility to religious belief, and its tensions, if not incompatibility, with Catholicism in particular. I expected a discussion of how, and whether, an America after liberalism might be conceived, and how Catholics would play a key role in such a post-liberal future. Instead, I read three essays that were all more or less of a piece, and more or less similar to Wolfe's earlier review. In fact, all three of them might be summarized by a sentence from Wolfe's review: "Liberalism has a great deal to achieve before it has run its course." Having already published a review that expressed this view, why would the magazine devote considerable space to three more pieces that effectively make the same point? None of these pieces seem interested in a robustly Catholic engagement with the book.

Matt Sitman claims that he writes "as an editor of a Catholic magazine that has long struggled to hold the Catholic faith and liberal democracy in creative tension," but there is little if any "creative tension" to be found in any of these essays—nor, truth be told, much evidence of that "struggle" in the pages of *Commonweal* these days. Regrettably, as the very similarity of these essays attest, the magazine has become a cheerleader for left liberalism while glossing any tension between this ideology and Catholicism. It appears stunningly uninterested in developments taking place within the Catholic world that tell a different story about the current state of relations between Catholicism and liberalism. It increasingly resembles a left version of *First Things* in the 1990s, desperate to hold American liberalism and Catholicism together. The fact that this exchange did not include at least one left Catholic who would explore this "tension"—whether creative or destructive—is as disappointing as it is revealing. Instead, *Commonweal* commissioned three of these responses (including Wolfe's review) from non-Catholic authors understandably uninterested in this particular question, and one from a former student of mine who was once as committed to his conservatism and Protestantism as he is today to his Left Catholicism, a combination in which he believes with the fervent certainty of a recent convert.

Commonweal has both the tradition and the potential to engage this most pressing question of our time for Catholics, and I regret that this symposium was a lost opportunity. I hope the journal might yet become an important voice of deep engagement with the "creative tension" between liberalism and Catholicism in contemporary America, and if nothing else, that this exchange inspires readers who discern there is indeed such a tension to engage with the extraordinary, stimulating, and energetic debate that is taking place in the Catholic intellectual world, for the moment at least, beyond the pages of this magazine. ■

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A Bronx Tale

Recollections of B.I.C.

Peter Quinn

"Breathes there the man, with soul so dead, / Who never to himself hath said, / This is my own, my native land! / Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd, / As home his footsteps he hath turn'd…"
—Sir Walter Scott

Native land means different things to different people. To some it's a nation with well-defined borders, like France or Sweden; to others, it transcends borders, à la Ireland or Korea. For many, I think, native land invokes something more intimate and parochial: a patch of earth that, no matter where life takes us, stays synonymous with home. For me, that place is the Bronx of the 1950s and '60s, a lower-middle/middle-middle-class agglomeration of apartment houses, single-family homes, and small businesses sprawled between Long Island Sound to the east and the Hudson River to the west, a so-called bedroom borough whose north-south subway lines transported its inhabitants to and from jobs in Manhattan.

Reeking of exhaust and incinerators, the Bronx was chockablock with pizzerias, German and Jewish delis, Irish bars; blessed with spacious parks, a world-class zoo and botanical garden; and possessed of the Ruthian diamond—the crown jewel of major league baseball—Yankee Stadium. The skyline looming to the south was the imperial city, a dream-big place, proximate yet far away. Ours was the workaday, no-illusion city, its concrete precincts filled with cops, firemen, pipefitters, clerks, mechanics, motormen, taxi drivers, teachers, housewives, shop owners, wire lathers, civil servants, and union members, the everyday people who kept the place running.

Solid, stolid, often the butt of jokes ("The Bronx, no thonx," wrote Ogden Nash), the borough was a small-scale Yugoslavia: ethnic enclaves interspersed with areas in which, though physically mingled, groups lived psychically and culturally apart. Jews, by far the most numerous population, branched out from the Art Deco stem of the Grand Course. Highbridge, Kingsbridge, and Woodlawn were heavily Irish. Fordham, presided over by the Jesuit Gothic of the eponymous university, was bordered to the west by the well-heeled Irish parish of St. Nicholas of Tolentine; to the southeast by Belmont, a tight-knit Italian village of modest apartment buildings and meticulously tended one- and two-family homes.

The once-Irish/Jewish South Bronx filled with newly arrived Puerto Ricans and African Americans. The East Bronx was a trifecta of Jews, Irish, and Italians. Riverdale, in the borough's northwest corner, felt like an appendage of suburban Westchester County. Fieldston, adjacent to it, was a privately owned enclave of privilege and palatial homes.

Home to almost a million-and-a-half people, the borough had only one real hotel, the Concourse Plaza. It was often referred to as the "Bronx's Waldorf Astoria," a description more aspirational than exact, which is not to say it wasn't a fine place to spend the night. Around the corner from where my wife was raised and a Mickey Mantle home run away from Yankee Stadium, the Concourse Plaza is at the center of the 1956 movie *A Catered Affair*, a tale of working-class Irish-Catholic parents in conflict over their daughter's wedding reception.

In an improbable feat of casting, the taxi-driving, Irish-Catholic dad is played by Ernest Borgnine, the daughter by Debbie Reynolds, and the mother by Bette Davis, whose attempt at a Bronx accent is somewhere between a misfire and weird. (Barry Fitzgerald, her brother, has a rich Irish brogue, a discrepancy left unexplained.) The movie was based on a television play by Bronx-native Paddy Chayefsky, who the previous year had won the Academy Award for best screenplay for *Marty*, another Bronx tale with Ernest Borgnine in his Academy Award–winning role as an Italian-American butcher.

I recall *Marty* receiving accolades from relatives and neighbors. Scenes shot in the Bronx and mention of places like Fordham Road and Arthur Avenue sprinkled Hollywood stardust over the borough's prosaic precincts. As opposed to *Marty*, which had a ring of authenticity, *A Catered Affair*

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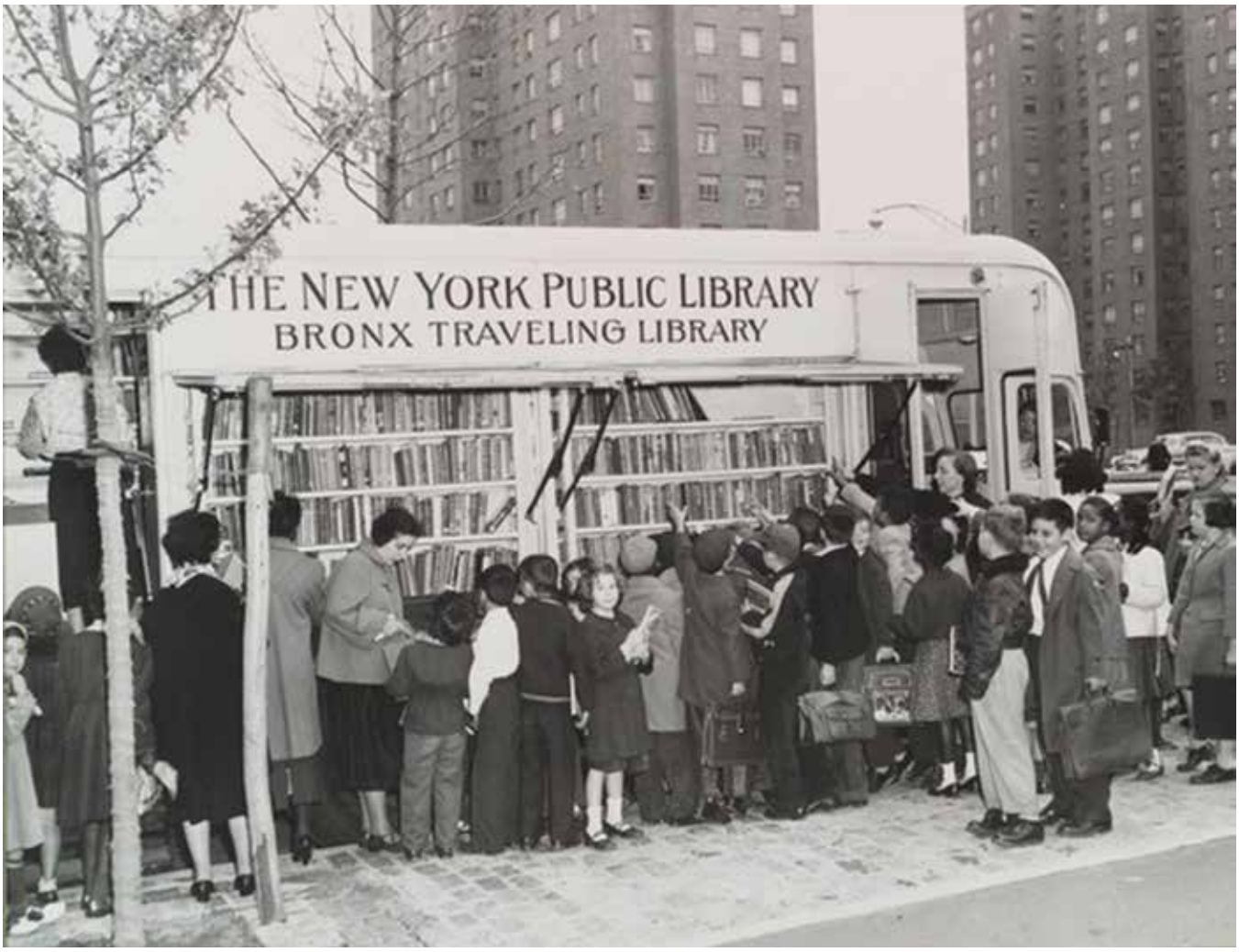

Bronx bookmobile, 1950

was a blatant attempt to piggyback on the success of its predecessor, with Irish characters substituted for Italian. The screenplay was written by Gore Vidal who, if pressed, could probably have located the Bronx somewhere between Montreal and the Upper East Side. The movie earned mostly Bronx cheers.

We Bronx Irish defined ourselves as much by parishes as neighborhoods. I was from St. Raymond's, in Parkchester, in the East Bronx. Founded in 1842, it was the first Catholic church in Westchester County. (The Bronx became a separate county in 1914. The five boroughs of New York City are coterminous with state counties.) In the burial yard in front of the church were three towering Celtic crosses, monuments to the half-century reign of a triad of Irish monsignori. Despite all belonging to the genus of B.I.C. (Bronx Irish Catholic), we at St. Raymond Elementary School considered ourselves distinctly different from our counterparts in the neighboring parish of St. Helena's.

A planned community of 12,000 apartments spread across 171 buildings between 7 and 13 stories, Parkchester was created by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, which also financed construction of Stuyvesant Town in Manhattan. Parks and open spaces were strategically placed. The main means of transportation were subways and the extensive system of city-owned bus lines. But in anticipation of a rapid increase in car ownership, there were multistoried garages and copious parking spaces.

Parkchester's residents were overwhelmingly Jewish and Catholic—Irish in the main. The few Protestants who lived there were regarded with curiosity. Up until the 1960s, Metropolitan Life excluded African Americans from both Stuyvesant Town and Parkchester. This was of a piece with the intransigent residential segregation that prevailed (and still prevails) across large swathes of the city. Desperate to increase the supply of middle-class housing—at least for whites—New York's progressive mayor, Fiorello LaGuardia, reluctantly went along. (Ironically, the oval at Parkchester's center once contained the ballfield on which the Negro League's Lincoln Giants played their home games.)

Parkchester was built on the site of the old Catholic Protectory, which was founded in 1863 by Archbishop John Hughes, the Ulster-born hierarch who established Fordham University, initiated the building of St. Patrick's Cathedral, and made the New York Irish into a political as well as religious constituency. The Protectory housed orphans and abandoned children, mostly Irish, whom the Children's Aid Society had begun shipping west on "Orphan Trains" to be settled among God-fearing, Anglo-Saxon Protestants.

Bordering Parkchester, Morris Park to the west and Castle Hill to the east were heavily Italian. A step behind in terms of assimilation and economic advancement, Italians generally preferred houses with small gardens rather than apartments. Parochial schools brought us together. Friendships blossomed and so did fights. I remember the schoolyard of St. Raymond's as an asphalt Serengeti where the weak were bullied and Irish toughs battled tough Italians. (Pugilistically inept, I did my best to be inconspicuous.)

Sometimes the rivalries were humorous. One Italian carting company emblazoned on its garbage trucks "We Cater Irish Weddings." When I heard talk of "intermarriage" it referred to Irish-Italian nuptials. It wasn't until later that miscegenation escalated into ethnic meltdown and bred a new strain of Hiberno-Mediterranean offspring notable for their good looks.

Over the years, I've heard from Jewish Bronxites about suffering verbal harassment ("kikes," "sheenies," "Christ-killers") and physical abuse from, as one friend put it, "Irish pogromists." Without doubting their accounts, that wasn't my experience. Through all my years of parochial school, I never heard anti-Semitic professions by teachers or clergy. We were told it was our sins that nailed Jesus to the cross. If either of my parents suspected we were cursing or bullying Jews, retribution would have been swift and severe. Yet I had no Jewish friends. We lived separately together. One thing shared by gentiles and Jews was a familiarity with Yiddish. To be a Bronxite was to schlepp and kibitz, and to understand the difference between a schmuck and a mensch.

I had no acquaintance with Jewish girls, except one. We rode the 20 BX bus together, she to Walton Girls High School in Kingsbridge, me to all-male Manhattan Prep in Riverdale. I sat in the back with my school buddies, she in front with her classmates. The first time I saw her, I was smitten by her thin and graceful figure, clothes loose and flowing (our style then was tight), thick black curls (the fashion was long and straight), an early-blossoming flower child. It was part of growing up in the Bronx to figure out, as quickly as possible, a person's tribe. I identified her Jewishness in the same way, if she bothered to notice, she perceived my goyishness.

We never spoke. And then, one September, she was gone, off to college I presumed. I spent months bereft. Recently, for the first time in fifty years, I rode a bus along the old route, and it all flooded back, my lonely-hearts Bronx tale, unbridgeable worlds in the same borough, on the same bus.

> Why the past means so much to some and not much—or not at all—to others is hard to figure. I think it involves history as therapy, as a key to understanding self as well as society, as a restless desire to uncover what we don't know about ourselves, however partial or fractured that must be.

My first ancestors arrived in New York when Margaret and Michael Manning fled the Great Famine. Margaret Manning, their daughter and my paternal grandmother, was born in 1863, in the village of Fordham—at that time part of Westchester County—and baptized in the university church. (It was then called St. John's College.) My grandfather Patrick Quinn, a union organizer, was born in Tipperary in 1859. His family emigrated to New York in 1870. He married Margaret Manning, a seamstress, in St. Brigid's church, on the Lower East Side, in 1899. They moved to the Bronx in 1914, where they bought a small house in the West Farms neighborhood which, despite its name, was absent all things agricultural.

Contra the notion of Irish obsession with ancestry, my family showed little interest in the past. My mother had an active disinterest, routinely tossing out documents and obfuscating or bowdlerizing the fate of relatives who fell victim to impoverishment or their own misbehaviors (or both). The primary focus of my parents and grandparents wasn't on the Irish past but the American future, and their children's role in it.

My father recalled that as a boy on the Lower East Side he shared a room with his older brother in which they rarely stayed. My grandparents hosted relative after relative as they arrived from Ireland, until none were left to bring over. If my grandfather heard anyone sentimentalizing about the old country his instant riposte was, "If you miss it so much, why don't you go back?" Romantic Ireland didn't ring very convincingly in crowded tenement rooms.

Catherine Riordan of Blarney, County Cork, landed at Castle Garden in 1888. (It would be four years before Ellis Island opened and processed its first immigrant, Annie Moore, also of County Cork.) Though Catherine claimed to be eighteen, it's more likely she was fifteen or sixteen and lied about her age so she could join her older sister as a domestic and begin sending remittances home to finance her siblings' journeys. She stayed at maid's work until she met James Murphy, a native-Irish speaker from near Macroom, who worked as a mechanic at Yorkville's Rupert Brewery.

My mother, Viola Murphy, the last of their six children, was born on the top floor of a four-story walkup on 149th Street, in the Bronx.

Coming of age in the 1920s, my parents belonged to the first truly modern generation. Electricity rolled back night and blazed the Great White Way. New appliances alleviated the burden of ancient drudgeries. Movies and radio revolutionized entertainment. Cars and airplanes shrank old barriers of distance. Credit and the installment plan made commonplace what were once luxuries. People's expectations rose exponentially. The population of the Bronx tripled to 1.2 million in 1930 from 400,000 in 1910. Progress and prosperity were presumed, with America in the vanguard, and Jazz Age New York ahead of all.

While none of my grandparents went beyond primary school, my parents graduated from college. My father received a B.S. in civil engineering from Manhattan College (despite its name, it's in the Bronx) and worked on the construction of the IND subway while attending Fordham Law School at night. My mother was a classics major at Mt. Saint Vincent, in Riverdale. They met in 1928 at a parish St. Patrick's Day dance in the Bronx. They loved nightclubs, the theater—musicals, the Marx Brothers, Shakespeare—and reveled in the speakeasy hubbub in which my mother's bartender brother was much admired for his skill as a mixologist.

The presumption that they had escaped their ancestors' world—a chronicle of unhappy endings that culminated in starvation and migration—was rocked by the Crash of '29 and the Great Depression. My mother lost her small savings as a teacher when the Edgewater Savings Bank folded. Her immigrant father lost his life savings, the accumulation of forty years working in a brewery. Pensionless, he worked until he died. My two aunts, one a teacher, the other a secretary, stayed unwed and at home to support my grandmother.

Though he had an engineering and law degree, my father struggled to find a full-time job. He volunteered with the local Democratic Club. Edward J. Flynn, the formidable Fordham-educated leader (aka "The Boss") of the Bronx Democratic organization and a confidante of Governor Franklin Roosevelt, took a liking to him. Flynn sent my father to the 1932 Democratic National Convention in Chicago as part of a contingent that worked behind the scenes to keep the New York delegation in line for FDR. My father campaigned hard for FDR, speaking around the city from the back of a flatbed truck. In 1936, he was elected to the State Assembly. A week after the election, eight years after they met, my parents were married.

My father spent the rest of his life in Bronx politics, serving in the assembly until 1944, then a term in the U.S. Congress (he was one of the two congressmen from New York who rode FDR's funeral train to Hyde Park), and the rest of his career as a judge of the Municipal Court, chief judge of the City Court, and a justice of the State Supreme Court. He was at home in the Bronx, in the parish in which he grew up.

His obituary in the *New York Times* states that his "associates described him as a witty and brilliant man who loved to sing Irish songs and tell Irish stories." My father and mother were both fine singers and dancers. The songs were mainly from Broadway shows or *The Great American Songbook*, the dances foxtrots and waltzes, not reels and jigs. The "Irish songs" weren't folk tunes but Irish-American favorites like "Harrigan," "Galway Bay," and their all-time favorite, "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?" (lyrics by Jewish songwriter E. Y. Harberg). The stories my father excelled at telling—stories salted with theatrical mastery of dialects—rarely involved Ireland (when they did, they were ghost stories) and rose instead from his life amid the mishegas of Bronx politics.

I took for granted that the Irish-American world my family existed in for over a century would remain as it was. The election of John F. Kennedy as president in 1960 felt like a capstone. Shortly before the election, Kennedy spoke at the Concourse Plaza. My father, running in his last election for the state Supreme Court, also spoke. Afterwards, Kennedy traveled up the Grand Course on the back of a convertible, a quaintly distant, pre-Dallas image. My friends and I stood in front of the Loew's Paradise, a movie palace that has since then been stripped and defaced, and helped swell the panethnic delirium that arose when Kennedy mounted a platform in front of the long-vanished Sachs Furniture and Krum's Candy stores.

Permanence of any kind is the grandest of illusions. What was different about the Bronx was the velocity with which the illusion crumbled. The origins of the Bronx as one of the city's five boroughs (the only one on the U.S. mainland) were obscure even to Bronxites. I heard passing mention among my elders of "annexation" and "consolidation," but the hardedge, unremitting brick-on-brick streetscapes disguised its overnight transformation from pastoral to metropolitan and made it seem pretty much the same since the Dutch forcibly evicted the peaceable, innocent Lenapes.

The centrifugal swirl that memory insists descended suddenly, like a fast-moving storm, had been building for some time. The pharaonic schemes of Robert Moses carried traffic around and across the Bronx to Long Island and New Jersey. The fund-starved, once-efficient public-transit system creaked and sputtered. FHA mortgages spurred the upwardly mobile, suburban aspirations of would-be homeowners and at the same time maintained and abetted the enduring injustice of residential apartheid that condemned minorities to a decaying, substandard housing stock.

Economic change drove social change, and reinforced it. Vatican II altered our unalterable church. Priests and nuns molted back into civilians. Parishioners moved away. Once-thriving parishes became enfeebled. Rock 'n' roll and the sexual revolution made the generation gap seem more like a chasm. Crime, and fear of it, escalated. The Concourse Plaza

became a welfare hotel. The celluloid Bronx of *Marty* and *A Catered Affair*, the home of good-hearted working-class stiffs, descended into *Fort Apache, The Bronx*, a crime-ridden wasteland ruled by drug addicts and crooked cops. Formerly a synonym for low-rent blah, the borough was now "the burning Bronx," a global synecdoche for urban ruin.

The future fled the Bronx. Friends moved away or never returned from college. Soon enough I followed, serving as a VISTA volunteer in Kansas City. Beckoned by the beautiful and new—everything the Bronx wasn't—I felt the lure of California. It was then, for the first time, I thought about what I was leaving behind: the saga of the Atlantic passover from poverty and subservience to steerage and immigrant tenements; those who made it, those who didn't, those whose names I knew, those I didn't. I turned my footsteps home and returned to New York.

I attended Bronx Catholic institutions from kindergarten to the last stages of a PhD. Though they were all founded or largely staffed by Irish and Irish Americans, my first encounter with Irish history was in a college course on Victorian Britain. The past was a blur. It was as if we emerged from the shadows and fully entered history when we came to the Bronx.

My threadbare connection to Michael Manning, my great-grandfather, was my father's memory of him as a blind old man, quiet and gentle, who never talked about what led him to emigrate other than to say that he would never think about going back "until they hanged the last landlord." Except that he was born in pre-famine Ireland and emigrated before the Civil War, all I knew of him was a line in the census—"occupation: laborer"—and the place of his death on January 10, 1910: 296 East 7th Street, a long-ago demolished tenement. I later learned the name Manning was an errant transcription of Mangan that, for whatever reason, stuck. The rest was silence.

When I returned to New York, any research I did was lackadaisical and accidental. So was my career. I worked as a Wall Street messenger, a court officer in Bronx Landlord & Tenant Court, an archivist at the New York Botanical Gardens (natives always refer to it as the *Bronx* Botanical Gardens), et al., until I found my way to a graduate program at Fordham. I was a graduate assistant to the late Maurice O'Connell, a scholar of Irish history and descendant of Daniel O'Connell, the Liberator, a towering figure in that history.

I traveled to Ireland and studied there. Though I felt an intimate connection to the land and people, I confronted the fact it wasn't home and I didn't belong. On one occasion, I took my mother to her father's village. Not a trace of the family remained. The journey my ancestors made was final and irreversible. Caught on the hyphen between this small island to the east and the vast continent to the west, I recognized that my native land was the interspace on America's Atlantic ledge.

Why the past means so much to some and not much—or not at all—to others is hard to figure. At bottom, I think, it involves history as therapy, as a key to understanding self as well as society, as a restless desire to uncover what we don't know about ourselves, however partial or fractured that must be. Perhaps that hope was best captured by New York novelist and memoirist Kathleen Hill when she wrote, "our journey toward understanding the selves we had considered lost forever or, worse, have never even missed, may be restored if we are patiently attentive to our inner promptings."

In the early-morning hours and in the time I could game or grift from my corporate day job, I began trying to reconstruct what I could of my ancestors' immigrant world. It gradually dawned on me that the history I sought belonged to lives too unimportant to record, people who suffered history rather than recorded it, servants, laborers, anonymous poor, ordinary moments that weren't written anywhere, the intricate tangle of existences shrunk to generalities, statistics, accidental mention, a census line.

Despairing of history, I decided to venture into the terra incognita of fiction and attempt a novel set during the Civil War Draft Riots, an epic explosion—part race riot, part insurrection—that tore New York City apart and exposed the perennial, often-feral struggle among those at the bottom of American society.

I copied paragraphs from novels I admired, scribbled the beginnings of the story I wanted to tell. I researched, wrote, despaired, rewrote, deserted, returned, persisted across an entire decade. I discovered in fiction truths I didn't in history. I grappled with the power of the past to bolt in place the exoskeleton that supported and shaped—sometimes misshaped—expectations and relationships far into the future. I came to grasp the human need to forget as well as to remember. I learned that what goes unspoken, unacknowledged, has the greatest sway of all. Everything around me, parish, school, politics, religion, the Bronx I grew up in and carry with me, sprang from and contained what came before. The past never goes away, I realized; it only goes ignored or denied.

My characters became my companions, comrades-in-arms, soulmates, a company of aspiring, compromised, lustful, decent, cowardly, ruthless, compassionate, befuddled human beings—Irish, African Americans, old-stock New Yorkers—that I gathered under a phrase from a prayer I said since childhood: "banished children of eve." Some were imaginary, some reconstructed from random facts and fragments inherited from my family, some, like Stephen Foster and John Hughes, real.

I listened as they mumbled, murmured, shouted, revealed themselves. They prompted me, guided me, led me through the vale of tears and weeping, laughter and rejoicing, that each generation travels in its own way. They gave me back the past and reminded me of what I thought I didn't know. They taught me that the borders of our native land are the borders of our hearts. ■

The Ring of Brodgar stone circle on Mainland Orkney

ANDREW RAY / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Paul Baumann

History Submerged

SEE THE ORKNEYS WHILE YOU CAN

In September of 2003, I took a trip to Scotland with *Commonweal*'s longtime contributor and movie critic Rand Cooper. As it happens, Rand and I are good friends, having known each other since we were both teachers in a private country-day school in New London, Connecticut, in the early 1980s. It is remarkable how little we have changed physically since those days, or at least that is what we keep telling each other. Actually, that is true only for one of us. The other guy looks like something from the Stone Age.

At the time of our trip, Rand was on assignment for *Bon Appétit*, where he served as a contributing writer for many years. As a travel and food writer, he was sent to glamorous spots around the globe, from Portugal and Berlin to the Caribbean as well as all over the United States. On our travels we first visited the lush Isle of Skye on the western edge of Scotland, then drove many hours north to the Orkneys before returning south to Edinburgh. I got to tag along with *Bon Appétit*'s most fearless eater because Molly, Rand's wife, was teaching school.

The Orkneys were the most memorable part of the trip, at least as far as I was concerned. The islands—there are seventy, most of them uninhabited—possess what is usually called a "stark" beauty, and if you are drawn to windswept and somewhat desolate landscapes, where the moods of the ocean and the sky seem to mirror one another, then this far-northern archipelago can't be recommended strongly enough. The islands are low-lying, and thanks to the Gulf Stream, the climate is mild. The fertile soil provides ample grazing for sheep and cattle. Perhaps most intriguing, the Orkneys are honeycombed with Neolithic ruins, evidence of the sometimes unsurprising contours and preoccupations of human society as much as five thousand years ago. On the Orkneys you literally step into the distant past when you visit Skara Brae—on the island known as the "Mainland"—an excavated village replete with an unexpectedly familiar domestic floorplan, from kitchens to bedrooms. Not far from Skara Brae is the Ring of Brodgar, a circular monu-

ment of twenty-seven monoliths set between two lochs, a kind of miniature Stonehenge. Legend has it that to circle the ring three times increases the chances of successfully conceiving a child. Heathen that he is, Rand jogged the required distance. Evidently there is something efficacious to the ritual, since the Coopers' daughter is now twelve years old and has the blond hair, rosy complexion, and fearless disposition of the Vikings who invaded the Orkneys in the 800s.

A recent article in the *New York Times* reports that Orkney's ancient ruins are now endangered by the encroaching ocean, thanks to the inexorable pace of climate change ("Rising Seas Lap at Heritage in Scotland," September 29). According to the *Times*, there are three thousand Neolithic sites on the islands, half of which are now threatened by the rising sea. Little can be done to save most of these. Teams of archaeologists, students, and government agencies are building barriers to the ocean where possible, but can do little more than document the existence of other ruins.

Perhaps the most evocative site we visited was Maeshowe, a circular stone tomb built in 3000 BC. You enter through a narrow and claustrophobic passageway. That crawlspace was painstakingly built so that, on the winter solstice, the sun shines directly into the burial chamber. One can only imagine what aspirations for the dead were in the minds of the builders.

Kirkwall, the capital of Orkney and its biggest town, is also on the Mainland. St. Magnus Cathedral, a beautiful Romanesque structure, begun in 1137 and completed three hundred years later, dominates the otherwise modest town skyline. St. Magnus seems to have met a violent end, as did many of the other medieval figures buried in the church. When first built, the cathedral was under the purview of a Norwegian bishop, but eventually ended up in the hands of the Church of Scotland, thanks to the Reformation. At various times over its long history the Orkneys have been conquered by Norwegians, Romans, Scots, and Brits, as well as the aforementioned Vikings.

Just as interesting in its way, if nowhere near as grand as the cathedral, is the "Italian Chapel" on the small island of Lamb Holm. The chapel, put together during World War II by Italian prisoners of war using two Nissen huts, is elaborately decorated, with all the artwork done by the prisoners. Nearly every inch of the interior has been turned into a faux Italian parish church, with a painting of the Blessed Virgin holding the baby Jesus dominating the wall above the small altar and tabernacle. The chapel was by necessity a modest but still impressive act of piety and longing, and has been reverently restored several times in the decades since the war.

The Italian Chapel and the Maeshowe burial chamber are separated by millennia, and yet seem complementary, if not connected in some primitive and aspirational way. They share, it seems to me, the human instinct that almost everywhere compels us to build sanctuaries that somehow capture—or, if not capture, at least consecrate—the fleeting and ungraspable nature of both life and time. These worship sites were built with the most humble of materials, and yet both have somehow survived, at least for now. One wonders if our technological civilization, so daunting in its accomplishments and yet so unconcerned about our place in the larger order of things, will leave anything as palpably human after the oceans sweep away these ancient memorials, and then our towering cities of steel and glass. ■

Paul Baumann *is* Commonweal*'s senior writer.*

St. Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, Orkney Islands

Rand Richards Cooper

Going Small

'WILDLIFE' & 'CAN YOU EVER FORGIVE ME?'

It has been a big year for the movies, and the record-breaking domestic gate receipts, which have hit $12 billion, reflect the bigness of the movies themselves. Consider 2018's top five box-office winners: *Black Panther; Avengers: Infinity War; The Incredibles 2; Jurassic World; and Deadpool 2*. More than ever, Hollywood is about big movies—big time.

So let me make a pitch for *small* movies, and their stewardship of what might be called literary values. Inwardness. Language. The intricacies of relationships. Character, in other words, and its cinematic delivery system, acting. And also place. Where the blockbuster, Marvel-comics-inspired movie conjures an opulent fantasy world via the magic of computerized imagery, the small literary movie trains its eye on the world as it is, portraying this or that specific locale as a force that shapes, colors, and limits the kind of lives lived there.

Isolation and beauty define the Montana captured in *Wildlife*, Paul Dano's sensitive adaptation of the 1990 Richard Ford novel. Set in the early 1960s in Great Falls, Montana, the film (actually shot in Livingston, Montana) opens and closes with the town seen from above, showing mountains behind and a train passing through its center—on tracks that run along Main Street, as if to remind residents that life is indeed elsewhere. It is a summer of raging wildfires, and when Jerry Brinson, a handsome but feckless family man, loses his job as an instructor at the local golf club, he falls into a self-pitying funk, then impulsively joins the brigades of men volunteering to fight the blaze, leaving his wife and young son to fend for themselves. The distant fire becomes a powerful but unobtrusive metaphor for a marriage whose smoldering resentments threaten to erupt in full fury.

Wildlife tells an archetypal American family story, with the father as modern pioneer, driven by failures to drag his family to ever more remote places; an increasingly resentful mother who wants more; and the child who watches things fall apart. Rootlessness and parental disaffection offset by a child's deep need for family stability evoke such memoirs set in the 1950s as Tobias Wolff's *This Boy's Life* and Frank Conroy's *Stop-Time*, and are no less powerful here for being familiar. As the family unravels, Joe's eyes grow ever wider with disbelief and dismay. One sly trick of *Wildlife* is to keep the worst things offscreen—leaving the camera on the boy's face, for instance, as his mother strays into unfaithfulness during a dinner at a wealthy car dealer's home.

First-time director Dano keeps a close focus on his three main actors: Jake Gyllenhaal as Jerry, his good looks and bursts of bravado weighed down with a hangdog moroseness; Carey Mulligan as Jeanette, all steadfast optimism until, suddenly, the effort collapses; and Ed Oxenbould as fourteen-year-old Joe, taking it all in, his expression reflecting inner vicissitudes of perplexity, hope, and dismay. Paul Dano is familiar to moviegoers through his own work as an actor, beginning with the underappreciated 2001 film, *L.I.E.*, and proceeding to such Oscar-winning films as *Little Miss Sunshine* and *Twelve Years a Slave*. His acting exudes a stolid slowness, and Richard Ford's writing possesses a similar quality, his characters' thoughts frequently circling into perseveration. But the slowness works well in *Wildlife*, which keeps the pace of an introspective and observant child for whom the events of this year in his life constitute a painful dawning. *Wildlife* lets us watch as Joe's own watchful intelligence assimilates the shock of new and unsettling adult realities; the film's heartbreak is mitigated by our sense that such closely studied vagaries of parental pain are already shaping the writer the boy will someday become.

Carey Mulligan and Jake Gyllenhaal in Wildlife

Melissa McCarthy in Can You Ever Forgive Me?

The place on offer in Marielle Heller's marvelous *Can You Ever Forgive Me?* is the Manhattan of the 1990s. With the stark wealth divide of our modern Gilded Age well underway, a struggling middle-aged writer, Lee Israel (Melissa McCarthy) finds her career stalled; her specialty, biography, isn't exactly a hot discipline, and her current project, a study of Fanny Brice, isn't finding any takers. It doesn't help—as her agent, played with snarky verve by Jane Curtin, points out—that her personality is, well, a bit of a load. Lee is pretty much impossible: she drinks too much; she can't restrain an abrasive sarcasm; and she's angry and bitter to boot. "My suggestion to you," her agent says, "is to find another way to make a living."

Well, she didn't say anything about an *honest* living. At the library one day, as Lee sits reading a book about Fanny Brice, a letter signed by Brice herself falls out. Lee slips it into her bag, and a devilish idea begins to take shape. A burgeoning market exists for the signed correspondence of writers, actors, and other celebrities—as she herself knows from having pawned a prized signed letter from Katherine Hepburn. Turning her gift for writing and literary research to illicit use, she begins to forge and sell collectible letters.

Can You Ever Forgive Me? is that rare film that's very good not just on one subject, but on several. Not least is its quirky and affecting romance (or anti-romance) of New York. With a jaunty soundtrack that includes Blossom Dearie doing "Manhattan" and Peggy Lee on "Dream Street," the film summons a seductive metropolitan nostalgia, then sets against it the abrasiveness of Lee's character and the jagged desperation of her plight, creating a tension conducive both to comedy and to pathos. Co-scripted by Nicole Holofcener, whose own films as writer-director (*Walking and Talking*, *Friends with Money)* chronicle the American artsy upper-middle-class, this is the kind of movie Woody Allen would make if he were still making movies with real vitality in them, and not just captivating music.

The film also offers an incisive study of loneliness. The intensely awkward Lee is a person we'd say today is "on the spectrum." Dealing with people is an onerous task; to escape it, she seeks refuge in the company of her cat and of literature. Her flight from the messiness and complication of others is conveyed in a brief, wan colloquy with a former partner (a cameo by Anna Deavere Smith), and several stunted encounters with a bookstore owner (Dolly Wells) who has a crush on her. Lee finally finds solace in friendship with a merry grifter named Jack Hock (Richard E. Grant), a gay British man whom she meets in a bar and eventually draws into her scheme.

Closely allied to loneliness is failure, and here too *Can You Ever Forgive Me?* offers valuable insight. Lee's scam begins in desperation borne of the urgent need to pay her rent, but bit by bit, as she commits more brazen forgeries, she feels a sense of having accomplished something—as a writer. "I'm a better Dorothy Parker than Dorothy Parker was!" she exclaims. Yes, her forgeries represent an escape from the burdens of actual creative work, and her chameleonic talents reflect her own uncertain sense of self. But the letters she fobs off on dealers are also a hard-won triumph of, for want of a better phrase, close reading. After all, how many people know a writer's style well enough to be able to channel it? If mimicry is praise, then forgery is worship.

In exploring these paradoxes, the film showcases two superb performances. As Jack Hock, Grant (a veteran actor best known for the 1987 cult film *Withnail and I*) summons a swashbuckling and irreverent *joie de vivre*. He physically resembles Christopher Walken, but with a big infusion of brio; he should win an Oscar nomination. And Melissa McCarthy adds a whole new dimension of grittiness to her usual comic persona, using a blocky and misanthropic gracelessness as a lens through which to focus Lee's underlying humanity.

Can You Ever Forgive Me? is based on a true story. The real Lee Israel forged more than four hundred letters in a yearlong spree, and was duly convicted and sentenced. When she died in 2014, the *Times* offered a pithy obituary summary of her malfeasance. "As Ms. Israel told it, her forgeries were born less of avarice than of panic, and began after a stretch of poor reviews and writer's block, mixed with alcohol and improvidence." Would that we could all prove rascally enough to elicit such a stylish valedictory. ■

David Sessions

Left to Their Devices

The Year of Our Lord 1943
Christian Humanism in an Age of Crisis
Alan Jacobs
Oxford University Press, $29.95, 280 pp.

In September 2016, literary critic Alan Jacobs published an essay in *Harper's* lamenting the diminished standing of Christian intellectuals in the American public square. Some, he claimed, now found themselves too at home in the "liberal secular world," often distancing themselves from ordinary believers and offering little to challenge mainstream views; others had self-sorted into Christian institutions, writing and speaking mostly to Christian audiences. Both tendencies, he believed, contributed to American culture's mounting incomprehension of religion.

His timing was auspicious. Just two months before that year's presidential election, we were only beginning to grasp the depths to which conservative evangelical leaders and intellectuals would descend in their alliance with Donald Trump, how rapidly and shamelessly they would abandon the values in defense of which the religious right had become a major political force. But Jacobs was already concerned at both the rise of populism based in part on "religious *ressentiment*" and the way liberals seemed utterly perplexed by it. "It would be valuable," he wrote, "to have at our disposal some figures equipped for the task of mediation—people who understand the impulses from which these troubling movements arise, who may themselves belong in some sense to the communities driving these movements but are also a part of the liberal social order."

Jacobs's latest book, *The Year of Our Lord 1943*, seems inextricable from the problem he identified two years ago. He turns to an eclectic group of Anglo-American and French writers—W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, C. S. Lewis, Jacques Maritain, and Simone Weil—as figures who were, amid the dark days of World War II and its immediate aftermath, able to mediate between Christian conviction and the big questions of their historical moment. These thinkers, too, lived through a clash between liberal democracy and authoritarian nationalism, and worried that the masses of ordinary citizens in Western societies had little basis on which to resist the lure of ideologies that promised victory through sheer domination. The challenge to the survival of liberal society raised the problem of the role of the Christian intellectual—of how Christian thinkers could speak in a way that their fellow citizens found at least comprehensible, and in some cases persuasive.


W. H. Auden

Around the year 1943, Jacobs argues, these "Christian humanists" realized that the Allies would win the war and turned their attention to the rebuilding that would follow. They saw the role that American technological might had played in turning the war's tide, and the grand plans political and scientific elites were drawing up for the postwar world. They worried that the anthropological assumptions supporting these visions uncomfortably resembled those of liberal democracy's "totalitarian" opponents that prized the scientific and technological organization of the whole over the individual. In response, they articulated a humanist counter-vision of "man" as a remedy to the "miseducation" that they believed had left ordinary citizens vulnerable to the appeal of authoritarian political ideologies. To challenge the materialist and technocratic vision of society, Jacobs writes, "They thought it was possible—and necessary—to restore Christianity to a central, if not the dominant, role in the shaping of Western societies."

This project, as Jacobs understands it, had two closely related dimensions: a form and a content. The form was "Christian humane learning": engagement with the classical and European literary tradition as a way of recovering ideas that relativized the modernist, scientistic concepts that dominated the twentieth century. Maritain found inspiration in medieval Thomism, Weil in a reconfiguration of Christian spirituality as the inheritance of the classical tradition. Lewis, himself a literary scholar, used the genre of satire as a vehicle for a theological critique of secular materialism, while Auden and Eliot, in different ways, defended poetry and humanistic education as ways of being in the world that resisted the objectifying and dominating ways modern states approached knowledge.

For the Christian humanists, the *form* of humanist learning produced a particular kind of content: individu-

als whose sensibilities and vocations were cultivated in opposition to the totalizing projects of modern political regimes. Like the Catholic "anti-totalitarian" movement of the 1930s, they associated both communism and fascism with "materialism"—that is, an understanding of human beings as biological and productive entities that could be organized and managed toward utopian ends. If such designs were primarily incarnated by the "totalitarian" Nazi and Soviet regimes, the American technocracy that developed during the war—the unaccountable authority of national-security experts, engineers, and industrialists to decide the direction of national policy—shared its faith in the power of rational organization and the manipulation of average citizens by technical experts. The answer the Christian humanists gave to the question "What is man?" was skeptical of such projects: man was a spiritual entity, an inviolable person whose individual status came before any political design. Thus Christian humanism, as Jacobs presents it, was a *personalist anti-totalitarianism*: an emphasis on the spiritual person as a bulwark against the designs of the state.

Jacobs marvels that such Christian thinkers struck the chord they did in the 1940s, and tends to take their ability to resonate with broad audiences as a testament to their genius for triangulation. But with a wider historical lens, the fact that they gave voice to Western anxieties is hardly surprising. The narrative of civilizational progress already had come to a brutal end in the trenches of the *First* World War, and the decades that followed did not inspire renewed confidence. By the early 1940s, it was common for humanists to fret about technology and dismiss the modern fetishization of reason as dangerous hubris; Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) is only the most famous example. Obsession over the meaning of "man" was everywhere: many of the ex-Marxist New York Intellectuals embraced the anti-totalitarian defense of the individual, while figures like Dwight Macdonald, a former radical and contributor to the *Partisan Review*, wrote an article entitled "The Root is Man" (1946), which worried about the totalitarian tendencies of all institutions and urged radicals to "think in human, not class terms." Christian intellectuals found an opening amid this tumult because European and American intellectuals were expressing, almost en masse, skepticism of the old secular assumptions about materialism, progress, technology, and the state.

Jacques Maritain

They also found a hearing because their spiritual vision of man was about to become something like the official religion of the American state. Technocrats and propagandists in the American military, backed by the rhetoric of presidents Truman and Eisenhower, worked explicitly to instrumentalize religion for the war against the "atheist communism" of the Soviet Union. As the historian Jonathan Herzog writes of the Cold War "spiritual-industrial complex": "the engineers of spiritual mobilization set out to create a citizenry immune to the atheistic, immoral, and corporeal siren song of Communist ideology." The publisher Henry Luce used the cover of *Time* magazine to foreground anxieties about America's spiritual health; his two iconic Cold War covers promoting the heroic enemies of materialism featured C. S. Lewis (1947) and Reinhold Niebuhr (1948). Jacobs presents his Christian humanists as the "unworldly" literary foils to Niebuhr's sacralized power politics. But in Cold War America, no one saw a difference. For the American government, religion was precisely the tool with which to overcome the country's traditional skepticism of permanent military buildup. The struggle to defend a spiritual "man" and the obsessive pursuit of technological superiority were two sides of the same coin.

At the same time he celebrates the cultural influence the Christian humanists enjoyed, Jacobs also presents them as unheeded voices in the wilderness, foreseeing the coming reign of instrumentalized science and technology with "uncanny clarity" and "moral seriousness." He reads Auden's "Under Which Lyre," a poem delivered at Harvard in 1946, as a contrast between the "Apollonian" order and control of the new technocrats and the "Hermetic" dreamers and readers formed by humanist education. Jacobs glosses the poem this way: "The character of Apollonianism in our time, then, is, not to put too fine a point on it, totalitarian." Speaking at one of the epicenters of the emerging academic collaboration in the military industrial context, Auden took humorous aim at the technical fetishism of elite academic power players working to make the military technologies developed at places like Harvard and MIT a permanent feature of American society. But there is a danger in generalizing the binary Auden used as a poetic device into a more significant philosophical separation between forms of knowledge. Many postwar humanists did exactly that, paying lip service to the idea that science could be made to serve "humane" objectives, but in reality maintaining stark divides between scientific and literary views of the world, between man and machines, between administration and freedom. The French Protestant theorist Jacques Ellul, for example, who Jacobs introduces briefly in his epilogue, saw *technique* as an omnipresent logic colonizing every dimension of society and thought, one that could not be truly located or challenged.

Such vague and sweeping conceptions of technology were part of the reason that the Christian humanists' ideas could enjoy the popularity they did *alongside* the technocratic Cold

Simone Weil

War order. It was not that they "came a century too late," as Jacobs puts it, but that the very nature of their critique of technocracy made it a convenient vehicle for Cold War anti-materialism without threatening the work of those actually manipulating the levers of American technological power. If man as a spiritual "person" could only be dominated by states and technology, if these tools could never be used for good, and all collective efforts were doomed to turn totalitarian, then there was no place in the Christian-humanist worldview for truly political or scientific thinking, much less for informed political action. A philosophical or literary emphasis did not inherently *require* this kind of anti-political retreat, but in practice often facilitated it. The binary between the spiritual humanities and the deadening, instrumental sciences would become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, implicitly granting the claims of engineers and technocrats that only their expertise was relevant to running an advanced industrial society. The flipside was that many humanists ceded all possibility of understanding—much less changing—the world they lived in; they wrung their hands and concluded, as Jacobs does, that the "reign of technocracy has become so complete that none can foresee the end of it while this world lasts."

This was an all-too-popular final destination for many disenchanted European and American intellectuals who had once nourished hopes for radical transformation of society. But others resisted the current, struggling both to reject the narrow visions of postwar technocrats and to deflate their mystical vaunting of technology with a coldly realistic look at its actual functioning in the social order. They even included several of the figures Jacobs addresses, in writings and activities that he doesn't. Simone Weil modeled a political analysis of technology in her landmark *La condition ouvrière* (1935), based on two years of firsthand experience in a factory. In postwar France, Catholic writers, including "worker-priests," produced a mountain of literature on the ongoing exploitation of industrial workers, women, and immigrants. In the United States, the Catholic Worker Movement was more likely to see American militarism and colonial violence as technological threats than the Keynesian technocrats at home. Catholic intellectuals like Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier rejected the demonization of the Soviet Union, promoting dialogue with communism and common support for mobilizing against capitalism. At the first French conference on technocracy in 1948, Mounier criticized the way literary authors like John Ruskin and Georges Bernanos were used to maintain a relentless focus on the dangers of technology itself rather than the broader sweep of its evolution.

Intentionally or not, Jacobs's reading of the Christian humanists proposes retreat into literature at precisely the moment bold thinking about power and technology are most needed. Given the shameful places active political engagement has recently taken a number of Christian intellectuals, it is easy enough to empathize with his sense that a greater distance from politics, one which created space to reflect and educate, would be a better path for today's Christian thinkers. But that only leaves to others the difficult challenge—as urgent today as it was in the 1940s—of serious political thinking that takes technology as seriously as the technocrats do, and that recognizes that the question of technology is always, first of all, a question of political power. ■

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James J. Sheehan

Father, Son, Pacific Coast

The Browns of California
The Family Dynasty that Transformed a State and Shaped a Nation
Miriam Pawel
Bloomsbury Publishing, $35, 496 pp.

For most of human history, kinship was both the source and substance of political power. Except in a few out-of-the-way places like North Korea and Saudi Arabia, dynastic rule has now faded away, but it is nonetheless striking how important family connections remain in American public life. The Caseys of Pennsylvania (Robert, governor; Robert Jr., senator), the Cuomos of New York (Mario and Andrew, governors), the Daleys of Chicago (Richard J. and Richard M., mayors) are just a few of the names on the long list of America's prominent political families. It may be misleading to describe these families as "dynasties" since most do not last more than two generations. Moreover, almost all of them remain closely tied to a particular city or region; only a few (the Kennedys and Bushes are the obvious examples) manage to succeed at the national level. Both these limitations are apparent in the remarkable careers of the Browns (Edmund J., known as Pat, and Edmund J. Jr., known as Jerry), the subjects of Miriam Pawel's deeply researched and engagingly written book. The Browns' political prominence, begun when Pat won his first election in 1943, will almost certainly end in 2019, when Jerry completes his fourth term as governor. Both father and son failed dismally when they tried to project their influence beyond the borders of their state. As the title of Pawel's book tells us, the story of the Brown family is, above all, a California story.

For the Browns, California meant San Francisco, where Pat (in 1905) and Jerry (in 1938) were born and reared. Although "the city" prided itself on its cosmopolitanism (some even called it "the Paris of America"), pre–World War II San Francisco was an insular, provincial town. It was run by people who had known each other from childhood (my parents, members of Pat Brown's generation, met in the first grade), went to the same schools (Lowell for Protestants and Jews, St. Ignatius or Sacred Heart for Catholics), belonged to the same clubs (Bohemian, Olympic, Family), and spent their summers on "the river" (Russian) or at "the lake" (Tahoe).

This small world, held together by a dense web of friendships and favors, was made-to-order for a man like Pat Brown. Smart, affable, and energetic, Pat had a natural politician's ready laugh and long memory. By the time he was in high school (although a Catholic, he went to Lowell), his political aspirations were already apparent: he was elected president of no fewer than eleven student groups, having run for office, as he recalled, whether he was a member of the organization or not.

After establishing a modestly successful legal practice, Pat Brown patiently began to build a political base, calling on old friends, carefully cultivating useful allies, and joining every club he could. In his second try, he was elected district attorney in 1943, went on to be the state's attorney general seven years later, and then became governor in 1958. After a successful first term, he soundly defeated Richard Nixon in 1962, the occasion for what many believed (and not a few hoped) would be Nixon's final press conference; the former vice-president told the assembled reporters they "would not have Nixon to kick around anymore." Pat's popularity ebbed during his second term; in 1966, he was defeated by Ronald Reagan, the rising star in the conservative firmament.

Pat Brown's political career ended in part because he had a run of bad luck, but mostly because the world of California politics was changing in ways he never truly understood. In an era of television, big money, and photogenic celebrities, the skills he had honed as an ambitious young lawyer in San Francisco were no longer enough. Pat, who went on to make a small fortune practicing law in Los Angeles, never quite recovered from his electoral defeat. From 1967 until his death in 1996, he had to satisfy his political appetites vicariously by observing, with a characteristically paternal mixture of affection, admiration, and perplexity, the changing fortunes of his third child and only son.

Jerry Brown needed special permission to attend his father's inauguration as governor in January 1959. A seminarian at the Novitiate of the Sacred Heart, he was subject to the discipline that the Jesuits imposed on everyone who set out on the long and arduous path to the priesthood. Looking somber and somewhat out of place in his cassock, he had only a few hours with his family before returning to the novitiate's strict routine. Jerry left the seminary a year later and would eventually drift away from the church. But for him (and, in a quite different key, for his father), Catholic values and rituals remained an important part of his identity, the starting point and an abiding presence in what would be a lifelong quest for a spiritual home. The Browns' story is, among other things, a Catholic story.

Jerry was unlike his father in many ways: less amiable, more introspective, and less disciplined, he was not a natural politician. But the two shared both the capacity to inspire loyalty among those who knew them best as well as some core beliefs about the importance of public service, the evils of racial discrimination, and government's obligation to protect society's most vulnerable members. Above all, father and son shared an insatiable appetite for elected office. After a few fitful attempts to practice law, Jerry devoted more and more of his time and energy to campaigning, first for the Los Angeles College Board, then California Secretary of State, and

Father and son

finally, in 1974, for governor. After he was reelected by a substantial margin, Jerry's popularity began to slip, in part because he could not resist the siren call of national politics, mounting a series of fruitless efforts to win the Democratic nomination for the presidency. In 1982, after deciding not to run for a third term as governor, he was defeated in a bitterly fought senatorial race. A year later, his somewhat quixotic attempt to restart a presidential campaign collapsed. Although he was just forty-five years old, it looked as though Jerry Brown's political career was over.

Like his father, Jerry was the victim of some bad luck (for example, an infestation of the Mediterranean fruit fly and his very unpopular decision to delay combating it with a toxic chemical), as well as changes in the political climate. But here the resemblance ended: after a few years in the political wilderness, Jerry came back, slowly working his way up the electoral ladder until 2010 when he was, once again, elected governor; he was reelected with a nineteen-point margin four years later. Once the youngest governor in California's history, he now became the oldest, a feat that is not likely to be matched any time soon.

Although written with the Brown family's cooperation, Pawel's book is not an authorized biography; she does not hesitate to point out, rather gently to be sure, her subjects' faults and foibles, such as Pat's highly profitable but unsavory connections to an Indonesian oil firm and Jerry's stubborn refusal to abandon his doomed presidential ambitions. Overall, however, she provides a sympathetic and affectionate group portrait of the Browns, based on their own letters and diaries and on the testimony of more than seventy relatives and friends. Along the way, Pawel tells us a great deal about the issues that continue to confront the golden state—immigration, racial inequality, crime, water supply, environmental degradation—but her main subject is the complex interplay of public life and personal relationships within the Brown family. Considering their differences in character, temperament, and experience, and the incandescent intensity of their individual ambitions, the Browns managed to treat one another with an impressive amount of love and loyalty. Pawel argues that this was largely due to the influence of two remarkable women, Ida Schuckman Brown, Pat's mother, and Bernice Layne Brown, his wife. The third remarkable woman in the Brown saga is Jerry's wife, Anne Gust Brown, whom he married in 2005, just as the second act of his political career was getting under way. Unlike Ida and Bernice, she has been directly and actively involved in policy-making and deserves a good deal of credit for the accomplishments of her husband's last two terms as governor.

Perhaps the most important source of Jerry Brown's extraordinary success is his apparently inexhaustible capacity for self-invention. Like the California that he governed, he has been driven by a constantly changing vision of the future. This vision, it should be said, was not always clear and accurate, but in a career stretching across half a century, he has been more often right than wrong. For decades he has warned about the dangers of climate change and environmental catastrophe, and is now one of the most eloquent critics of the institutionalization of ignorance that characterizes so much of contemporary American politics. Jerry's success depends on more than his commitment to prepare for a tomorrow that will not be like today. He has also been, as many of his fellow Californians have not, inspired by his awareness of the past's enduring power, an awareness nourished by the spiritual values that he learned from the Jesuits, by his own broad and eclectic reading, and by his engagement with his ancestors, whose experiences have begun to play an increasingly important part in his public statements and private reflections.

Pawel begins and ends her book where the Browns' own story began and apparently will end, in the rugged foothills of Colusa County where Jerry Brown's great-grandparents first settled in the middle of the nineteenth century and to which he plans to return when he leaves office in January 2019. "It is nice," the governor recently remarked, "to walk in the very footprints of your grandmother, and your great-grandfather." The Browns always looked where they were going (often it was to the next election), but they never forgot where they came from. ■

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Kaya Oakes

The Soul of San Francisco

Silicon City

San Francisco in the Long Shadow of the Valley

Cary McClelland

Norton, $26.95, 272 pp.

We talk about what's closing. We talk about who's leaving. We talk about our childhood and adolescence being erased. We talk about rent. We talk about the impossibility of owning a home, about commutes and homelessness and crime. We talk about beer gardens, kombucha on tap, high-rises appearing overnight, legal weed delivered right to your door, Uber drivers clogging bus lanes, fifteen-dollar cocktails, yoga and wine meetups, Central American nannies, clothing stores that sell neutral-colored shirts costing $300 each. In the Bay Area, we talk about gentrification every single day. Apple's headquarters, an hour south in Cupertino, are located at One Infinite Loop. That might also be the name of every conversation happening in the Bay Area. One infinite loop of worries about what tech is doing to us.

Lawyer and filmmaker Cary McClelland's *Silicon City* is a collection of interviews with Bay Area residents, conducted as California goes through yet another boom cycle. In the vein of Studs Terkel's *Working*, the book gathers short interviews into themed chapters, each with an introduction by McClelland. If *Silicon City* has an overarching theme, it's that the accelerated growth of California's economy in the current tech boom is changing the state in ways we still can't figure out. California's economy is currently the fifth largest in the world, surpassing that of the U.K. We also have some of America's highest housing costs and rates of social stratification, America's worst poverty rate, and nearly 150,000 homeless people.

San Francisco, in many ways, embodies this inequality. The glittering headquarters of tech giants Twitter and Salesforce are just blocks from the Tenderloin neighborhood, where urine, feces, and discarded injection needles litter the streets. Blocks away from that, the city's historically Latinx-populated Mission District now has some of San Francisco's highest rents; a little further on, Hunter's Point, last holdout of the city's rapidly dwindling black community, is under siege from developers.

In his introduction, McClelland acknowledges that this is simply how gentrification works. "[T]he richer the cities get," he writes, "the more unequal they get. Specifically, the more young, male, and white they get." Yet he also knows that tech has roots in the radical thinking that has shaped California, and his book includes interviews with a wide range of tech workers, CEOs, and visionaries. Those with a long view understand that the Bay Area may have changed past the point of no return. As Regis McKenna—a marketer who worked with many of tech's giants in their early years—tells McClelland, the whole point of tech is to push "the edge." Yet this very tendency inevitably leads *over* the edge: to a point beyond which social change cannot be undone. As McKenna observes, the problem with this kind of irreversible social change "is that you can only see it in the rearview mirror."

As the interviewees in McClelland's book point out, gentrification hasn't quite managed to erase the Bay Area's radical history. Berkeley student Lisa Chu says the campus tradition of protest has spread in the Bay Area's consciousness, like something in the water. "It makes you aware," she says. "Inspired." The Bay Area's radicalism is both political and cultural; its much-vaunted (and endangered) diversity is reflected in creative work by those artists still clinging to an existence here, rooted in waves of DIY and avant-garde art charged with cutting-edge politics.

Much of that radical art and political thinking has been forced out of San Francisco. Artists began decamping to Oakland during the last tech boom, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, moving into abandoned warehouses. Those artists were primarily white, while Oakland is historically black, and a version of the displacement crisis that occurred in San Francisco is now playing out in Oakland, where rents have spiked and home prices soared. As Oakland rapper and educator Do D.A.T. tells McClelland, Oakland is "the heartbeat" of the Bay Area, while San Francisco "is a city built to funnel all the resources." What San Francisco seems to be doing now is funneling people of color out of the Bay Area altogether, with many of Oakland's black residents forced to move an hour or more from the city.

This push-and-pull forms the question at the heart of McClelland's book: Can the soul of San Francisco—and by extension, the rest of the Bay Area—be saved? The most moving interview in the book is with an Uber driver who emigrated from the Democratic Repub-

lic of Congo, where he studied computer science. Like many skilled immigrants, Leon Fakiri found that his degree didn't much matter in America. Becoming one of the first Uber drivers in the Bay Area, he has watched that company explode, as he ferries around people who represent the best and worst of the new San Francisco. About the gig economy, he comments that "I've seen this story already," and predicts that "a society that doesn't value human beings will end, just fail." No matter how inured we are to Twitter jokes about end-stage capitalism, stories like Fakiri's are a punch in the gut.

But whose gut? Callie Millner, a city native and *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist who covers the tech industry, says what many of us born and raised in the Bay Area have said over and over again: that our lives are now shaped around waiting for the coming bust. In a bust, the money stops being so "crazy," Millner tells McClelland, and "you can actually buy a house, have a kid, do these things that normal adult people do." But for many others, a bust is a calamity. Retiring governor Jerry Brown and others have sounded a warning: the bust is coming, and California, high on the fumes of its own success, is not prepared. If that means anything, it's likely to be more homelessness, more poverty, and more displacement. The Bay Area will likely be ground zero.

Much of McClelland's book feels like any number of conversations you might have had at Bay Area parties over the past couple of decades. So if you've lived here a while, perhaps *Silicon City* is not for you. It might be useful for newer arrivals who don't know the area's history, or for those of us tired of trying to explain things to out-of-town friends. McClelland's bio on the back flap of the book says he lived in San Francisco and even built a home there. Perhaps revealingly, he no longer lives in the Bay Area. He wrote this book from the city where he now lives: Brooklyn. ■

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Time Is on Our Side

Cassandra Nelson

Casinos have been on my mind a lot lately, although I'm not a gambler. What I keep thinking about is the way that they're designed to make patrons lose track of time. The absence of clocks and windows is purposeful. If all is going well—at least from the house's point of view—guests can place bets from 4:00 in the afternoon until 4:00 in the morning and hardly notice the hours pass. The goal, of course, is to maximize profits. The longer you're in there, the more chances they have to take your money.

More and more, I wonder if we're all starting to exist in a version of casino-time, where one hour bleeds into the next with little discernible difference. Light pollution is growing in both scale and brightness every year, giving the nighttime an artificial glow. Inside our houses, we bask in a different kind of artificial light, with smartphones and tablets constantly by our sides. Backlit screens, a twenty-four-hour news cycle, and features like AutoPlay and infinite scrolling make it easy to lose sense of time. In fact, technology and social media companies deliberately employ casino-like tactics in order to make websites and applications as addictive as possible. It's not an accident that you can intend to look up one headline, or one video on YouTube, and before you know it, discover that you've consumed a dozen more. Meanwhile, the payoff of what we encounter online—whether it's the dopamine hit of a well received Instagram post, or horror at the latest bad news—tends to be fleeting. So we keep scrolling down, or hitting refresh, like someone sitting glassy-eyed before a slot machine.

The net effect of such trends can be to trap us in a kind of endless, lonely, and anxious present. And a diminished sense of time, I worry, could lead to a diminished sense of hope. The two things—time and hope—are intimately connected in Julie Otsuka's novel *When the Emperor Was Divine*, about a Japanese-American family taken from their home in Berkeley, California, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The husband is sent to a federal prison, and his wife and two children to an internment camp in the Utah desert. Almost immediately upon reaching the camp, the mother—who, along with the other family members, is unnamed—begins to let go, first of time, and then of any agency or ability to conceive of a better future. She stops winding her watch and loses track of the days. Time begins to seem distorted, stretched out and blurry. "Who was winning the war? Who was losing? The mother no longer wanted to know," Otsuka writes. "She no longer read the paper or listened to the bulletins on the radio. 'Tell me when it's over,' she said."

In all honesty, I sometimes feel the same temptation to despair, especially after reading the news for too long. It isn't easy to exist in an endless, anxious present.

Thankfully, believers have a lifeline in the form of the liturgical calendar, which recently started up again on December 2. Never before had I been so thankful for the start of a new liturgical year that I found myself wanting to *pregame* for Advent; but from mid-November on, it was all I could do to keep from counting down the days. Advent is a season of hopeful expectation, covering the four weeks leading up to Christmas. Its name derives from the Latin words for "to come," and what is on its way, this and every year, is Christ and the promise of salvation. Both feel sorely needed at the moment.

Advent is followed by the Christmas season, which celebrates Jesus' birthday and God's entrance into the world. After Christmas there's a short break and then comes Lent, a time of fasting and penance. (A meaningful Lent, in my experience, has less to do with punishment or self-mortification than it does with readying oneself for the joy of Easter. If you think about the difference between eating a delicious meal on an empty stomach and eating it when you're only kind of hungry, it's a little bit like that.) The forty days of Lent lead up to the Triduum—which chronicles the passion of Christ and his descent to Hell—and then to the triumph of Easter and the glory of Jesus' Resurrection. After fifty days of Eastertide comes Pentecost, which marks the Holy Spirit's entrance into the world.

And then there's another break, a much longer one, a second stretch of what is called Ordinary Time. The word "ordinary" in this context doesn't mean boring, exactly, although it's likely not a coincidence that Ordinary Time accounts for more than half of the liturgical year, and that at least 50 percent of our day-to-day lives, if we're lucky, passes in a somewhat unremarkable fashion. "Ordinary" here mainly means part of a series. Each week of Ordinary Time is marked by an ordinal number: first week after Pentecost, second week after Pentecost, etc. After six months of Ordinary Time, the whole cycle starts again. Advent and Christmas return to refresh a world that has grown weary, and more than ready to hear the Good News again.

The liturgical calendar can do much to counter casino-time. It returns us to the physical world, for one thing. Pay attention to the priest's vestments, to the colors of the decorations in church. They've recently shifted from the green of Ordinary Time to Advent's violet. Depending on when you're reading this, you might still have the chance to see rose, a color used only twice a year (including Gaudete Sunday, the third Sunday in Advent). Such details remind us that however chaotic the world can seem today, there is still order and meaning. And liturgy by its very nature—descending as it does from the Greek words for "public" and "work"—helps pull us out of loneliness and into community. There's something

Advent Vespers in Taos, New Mexico, December 1941

wonderfully comforting about the realization that the words one says as part of a Mass or church service are always echoed by other believers around the globe.

The church calendar can lend additional richness to our lives, thanks to the way that it sacralizes all aspects of the human condition. So often today we are surrounded by narratives of endless growth and ceaseless triumph. The way we talk about shareholder profits, university endowments, average SAT scores, and the desired life expectancies of Silicon Valley CEOs suggests that what goes up should really keep going up, indefinitely. If it doesn't, something must be wrong. Meanwhile, advertisements and social media can make it seem like everyone else is living a perfect life, effortlessly. The upshot of these narratives is that many people lack a way to talk about—and thus to conceptualize, since it's hard to think straight without words—human weakness, defeat, or death without framing them as pathological.

The liturgical calendar, by contrast, acknowledges that life can't all be hallelujahs here below. It carves out space for mourning as well as rejoicing, for fasts as well as feasts. It reminds us of Solomon's words in the Book of Ecclesiastes, "To every thing there is a season." In doing so, the church calendar provides a model to strengthen us and dignify our experiences in times of both joy and sorrow. When I was recovering from the effects of trauma, I took a lot of solace in comparing my sorrows to the solemnity of Lent and the grief of the Triduum. It meant that I wasn't alone, and I wasn't in uncharted territory. I was on a path that many others, including God in human form, had walked before me. It also meant that suffering and death—for some periods in our lives can feel like a kind of death—is never the end of the story, because Christ conquered death on Easter morning. If you walk away from the slot machine, and out into the dawning light, you can be reminded of this truth every day.

The varied nature of the liturgical calendar means that we will inevitably feel the significance of particular seasons more acutely in some years than in others. I lived through what felt like a full year of Lent following trauma, and a year ago, Advent—with its emphasis on hope and looking forward—helped keep me sane during a time of job uncertainty. If your personal circumstances align with the church calendar in a given year, that is one kind of blessing. If they don't—so that a cheerful season helps lift your spirits or a penitential season tempers them—then that is another kind of blessing. Either way, the rhythm of the church year can carry us along from one season to the next in our lives, and help us find the melody again when we've gotten lost in the noise.

Its cyclical nature, too, is a comfort. Not only *This too shall pass,* but also *This too will come again.* For anyone who feels mired in the quicksand of the virtual now, the chance to use the liturgical calendar as a lifeline is now within reach.

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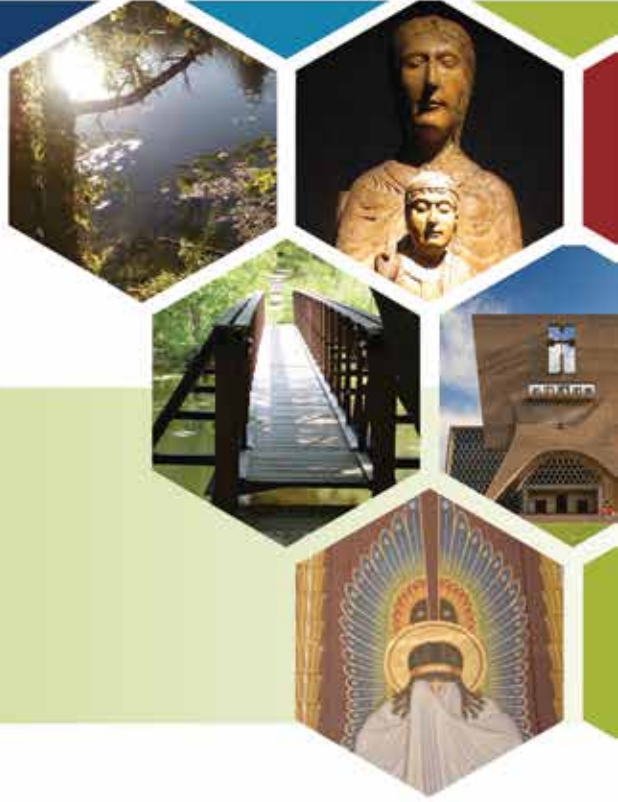
SUMMER 2019

Writing Programs at the Collegeville Institute



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with Enuma Okoro

A workshop that explore issues of identity and belonging through creative nonfiction

Wednesday, June 5 – Tuesday, June 11

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with Renita Weems

A workshop for women who want to hone their skill in writing short personal essays

Monday, June 17 – Sunday, June 23

In the Thick of It: Explorations of Advanced Topics in Prose Writing

with Lauren Winner

For advanced spiritual writers in the middle of prose projects

Friday, July 12 – Sunday, July 21

Writing Beyond the Academy

A week with professor and writer Michael N. McGregor

For academics who wish to reach a broad audience

Wednesday, July 24 – Tuesday, July 30

Apart, and Yet a Part

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