A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

Commonweal

FEBRUARY 24, 2017

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LETTERS

Prisons, Trump postmortem

KNOWN UNKNOWNS

James J. Sheehan's lead-in to his review of Heather Ann Thompson's book, *Blood in the Water*, caught my eye ("Our Prisons Are a Crime," January 27). He wondered which of our "unknown" sins will be easily recognized by future generations—say in the next two centuries. His first choice of such sins would be the American penal system. My first choice would be the official policy of climate-change denial by the Trump administration and the Republican Party. Just as there are now many who recognize that we still suffer from our "original sin" of slavery, including through the racial injustices of our penal system, so there are many who recognize that we are courting catastrophe in our treatment of the environment.

If the proposed slate of cabinet nominees and high-ranking administration officials is approved by the Senate, we could be catapulted into the sixth great extinction period, the last one being 66 million years ago—the one that brought down the dinosaurs. Nominees Scott Pruitt, Rex Tillerson, Rick Perry, and Ryan Zinke are all climate-change deniers. Pruitt, the nominee to dismantle the EPA, recently used a tactic deployed by most climate-change deniers: discrediting the science behind it. He wrote in an op-ed, "Scientists continue to disagree about the degree and extent of global warming and its connection to the actions of mankind." This is an absolute falsehood. Virtually all climate scientists agree that global temperatures are rapidly increasing and the cause is our production of greenhouse gases. Climate-change deniers also put into action a quote attributed to Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda minister: "A lie told often enough becomes the truth."

The deceitfulness of climate-change deniers is in some ways analogous to the history of the "flat earth" theory. It is now known that many people thought the earth to be a sphere as early as the fourth century BCE. The flat-earth myth persisted for various reasons, but fortunately did not actually change the shape of the earth—unlike disbelieving in climate change, which leads to the devastation of our common home. Unfortunately, it is very profitable to be a climate-change denier. It is not surprising that so many of Trump's wealthy cabinet nominees seem untroubled by what's happening to our planet.

We don't have to wait two hundred years to know that this denial is indeed a "mortal sin" of the twenty-first century.

MARY RUTH STEGMAN
Omaha, Neb.

NOT JUST BEING NICE

Every issue of *Commonweal* has at least three to four articles that strongly attract my attention.

But your January 6 issue, from the imposing cover featuring Donald Trump to the five contributions in "Election 2016: A Postmortem" restored my calm after considering the first two weeks of this administration—especially Trump's executive orders. I search for writers who can express my concern and outrage. Stephen Pope's contribution especially nailed one of my personal concerns with this line: "Now is the time for justice, not reconciliation."

Do we hear justice preached in our parishes at this time? Or, do our pastors avoid discussion of the injustices enacted nearly daily by this administration? So thank you, Stephen Pope, for reminding us of the Gospel stance of a Catholic disciple of Christ. Sweet talk of being "nice" to those who espouse unjust practices cannot take the place of looking to Jesus' words and actions as our daily guide. Rudeness, no. But honesty and courage, yes.

JACKIE STALEY
Green Bay, Wisc.

From the Editors

This Isn't Normal

"We are moving big and we are moving fast," Stephen K. Bannon, chief strategist to President Donald Trump, recently told the *New York Times*. "We didn't come here to do small things." For once, a member of the new administration was telling the truth. The first weeks since Trump's inauguration have been a frenzy of activity and controversy, a mix of extremism and ineptitude that has already vindicated many of the darkest suspicions about how he would govern. There can be no denying the threat his administration poses to both the common good and constitutional government. These are not normal times.

Every day brings new outrages or misdeeds. Any of the stories flitting across our screens might have been enough to dominate the news for days or weeks during previous presidencies: continuing investigations into Russian interference in the election, shameless lies by the White House staff, unhinged statements to the press, saber-rattling tweets, unvetted cabinet nominees, Trump's continued refusal to release his tax returns, and surreal exchanges with foreign heads of state. Surely one element of Trump's strategy is to exhaust his critics and divert their attention, making it difficult for ordinary citizens to focus on what really matters or even keep track of what is actually happening.

Terms like "autocrat" and "authoritarian" are being used by thoughtful observers to describe Trump, and not without reason. His executive order banning entry of people from seven predominantly Muslim countries, among other draconian measures, is only the most prominent example. Reliable information on the inner workings of the Trump White House is hard to come by, but there are credible reports that the legal advice of Homeland Security officials was ignored during the executive order's drafting, and that congressional staffers who had to sign nondisclosure agreements also were involved. When the new policies were abruptly put into effect, chaos ensued at airports around the country, drawing thousands of protesters who expressed solidarity with those stranded and afraid, and sparking criticism worldwide.

The fate of the order is now being fought out in the courts, but its motivation is clear: bigotry and fear-mongering, not empirical evidence. Rudolph Giuliani, a close Trump ally, admitted the president asked him how he could impose a "Muslim ban" legally. Tough vetting procedures established during the Obama presidency were already working; not one terrorist attack on American soil has been linked to anyone from the seven countries on the order's list. Trump is now attacking a Republican-appointed judge who suspended the ban, describing him as a "so-called judge" and decrying the ability of the courts to thwart his will. Dangerous terrorists could be pouring into the country, Trump warned, suggesting it would be the judge who has blood on his hands if the worst happened. Just weeks into his presidency, Trump is assaulting the independence of the judiciary and chafing against the separation of powers.

There are other ominous signs. Bannon has been given an unprecedented seat on the National Security Council. On Holocaust Remembrance Day, the White House put out an inept statement that neglected to mention Jewish people at all. The administration forges ahead with plans to build a wall on the Mexican border. Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions, a proponent of executive overreach as long as the president is a Republican, almost certainly will be the next attorney general. Protestors and the media, along with "cosmopolitan elites," have been targeted as the enemy.

In all this, Trump has been aided and abetted by Republicans in Congress. They have been Trump's willing partners, excusing his inflammatory rhetoric and actions in exchange for a free hand to cut taxes, dismantle the Affordable Care Act, and undermine public schools and teacher unions. It is uncertain if or when Paul Ryan and Mitch McConnell will check Trump or hold him accountable. For now, they continue to disgrace themselves. Whatever happens, congressional Republicans will be responsible for a large measure of it.

The task ahead is clear: extreme vigilance and, wherever necessary, resistance. As the Russian-American dissident Masha Gessen has warned, in situations like the one now confronting the United States, "politics as the art of the possible is in fact utterly amoral." The "corrupting touch" of autocracy will forever stain the reputations of those who are co-opted by Trumpism. Congressional Democrats must do nothing to enable this administration, and everything they can to minimize the damage that it causes. Trump is showing us exactly who he is, and the disturbing vision he has for the country. Don't get distracted. ■

February 7, 2017

Mollie Wilson O'Reilly

Out of Luck

REPEALING OBAMACARE WILL TURN HEALTH INSURANCE BACK INTO A LUXURY

As I've watched Republicans in Congress, under the leadership of President Donald Trump, prepare to dismantle the Affordable Care Act, I've been thinking a lot about luck. It's a word I find myself using when I talk about my own experiences with health insurance. Luck, after all, was for a long time the standard way to determine which Americans got care and which ones suffered.

Mine is a tale of good luck. I got kicked off my parents' health-insurance plan when I finished college, as was the custom at the time. I was working an assortment of internships and jobs—some paying, some not, none with benefits—so I went for almost a year without any coverage. Nothing bad happened. Lucky! Then I was lucky enough to land a job with benefits, and I was lucky enough to notice what turned out to be a cancerous tumor in my neck before I left that job to go back to freelancing. I was lucky that my health stayed good enough, and my employer was flexible enough, for me to keep working around my chemotherapy schedule. And I was lucky that, by the time I got clear of cancer and left that job to recuperate, I had met my future husband and could rely on his help to pay for COBRA coverage.

We got married, and then he lost his job, but we were still lucky in that we could afford to continue our coverage until he was working again. A gap in coverage could have made us uninsurable. The best luck we've had was the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which created the health-insurance exchange that allowed us to sign up for a plan to cover our growing family while I stayed home with the kids and my husband pursued a master's degree and worked part-time. The individual market Obamacare built meant we no longer had to get insurance through our jobs, which made it possible for us to make a living that didn't come with benefits attached.

Supporters of Affordable Care Act rally at Supreme Court on June 25, 2015.

When I look back now, I'm amazed that Americans ever accepted the idea that health insurance was a perk that came with steady employment, and if you didn't have the latter you'd have to make do without the former. It was an awful system—not bodies-in-the-streets awful, maybe, but awful just the same.

Obamacare is far from a perfect solution. There's still too much hassle and expense. Our family has changed plans a few times, once in a scramble to keep our kids' pediatrician and once because the co-op that insured us went under. Our choices are narrow, and our premiums and deductibles are certainly too high. These are the flaws Republicans have seized on to paint Obamacare as a failure from which Americans are desperate to be rescued. But the only plans the GOP has offered would make these very problems worse. Meanwhile, because we can buy insurance on our own, and do so without worrying about getting denied or shunted into a pricy high-risk pool due to "pre-existing conditions" like my onetime bout with cancer or my current pregnancy, we don't have to depend quite so much on luck to see us through the next crisis.

The Affordable Care Act reduced the role of luck in getting adequate health-care coverage in America. It didn't eliminate it. Bad luck can still ruin lives in a shameful variety of ways. But it was a hard-won victory, perhaps just a first step in reforming a system of doling out health insurance according to arbitrary good fortune and leaving the most vulnerable even more so. There were plenty of reasons to oppose the ACA. But to support repeal with no clear replacement plan is to support taking health care away from twenty to thirty million Americans, knowing they'll be abandoned to a system that routinely leaves people high and dry through no fault of their own.

Even if the threatened repeal sends our premiums soaring or eliminates our coverage altogether, I might yet be one of the "lucky" ones who manage to avoid catastrophe. But after a few years I've gotten used to thinking of health care as a right, not a perk. For Republicans to reverse that change is irresponsible and cruel. And when they claim they're doing it to "rescue" Obamacare's customers, they're really pushing their luck. ■

CNS PHOTO / JOSHUA ROBERTS, REUTERS

John D. Hagen Jr.

A Crisis for Crisis-Pregnancy Centers

HOW NEW LAWS ARE TARGETING PROLIFERS

Crisis pregnancy centers are the compassionate face of the prolife movement. Pope Francis has likened their work to that of the Good Samaritan, and fair-minded people generally share that point of view. Centers depend on dozens of volunteers to give support to their clients. In my experience, these volunteers do so with empathy and great warmth.

I once heard a compelling account of a counselor at a center being contacted by a single mom with three children who had become pregnant again. The woman said, "There's *no way* that I can have another baby! I can't do this alone." The counselor made some calls, and in half an hour had a volunteer to clean the woman's home, another who was willing to buy groceries for the family for a year, and another who could offer respite child care. The woman kept her baby and received ongoing community support.

Such episodes give the lie to depictions of prolifers as dour zealots, unconcerned with the welfare of mothers or of children once safely born. Many centers provide impressive programs of ongoing support for their clients. Some offer classes in parenting, job seeking, budgeting, and other life skills. Many offer ongoing support groups for mothers. Some have programs to mentor men.

The centers are locally managed by volunteer boards of directors. Their outreach is shaped by local demographics and culture. One recently established center in the Twin Cities, Sagrada Familia, is run by Latinos. Another, Abria Pregnancy Resources, serves an inner-city community ("abria" signifies "strength and beauty" in contemporary street parlance). Almost all centers use social media, but they also rely on word-of-mouth referrals through local residents, churches, and civic organizations.

Catholics always have played a leading role in the pregnancy-center movement (as have Evangelicals in recent decades). The energy with which lay Catholics established centers in the 1970s and '80s was one of the most impressive initiatives to rise out of Vatican II. It exemplified the council's call for lay witness, solidarity with those in need, and the promotion of family life as articulated in *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes*.

One striking aspect of the pregnancy-center movement is the generous involvement of medical professionals. A large percentage of centers offer free ultrasound tests, which show the heartbeat and human form of the unborn child. Many offer STD testing, and some have prenatal programs as well. Some, like the Lake Superior Life Care Center in Duluth, Minnesota, provide free clinics, with doctors, nurses, and lab technicians volunteering on a rotating basis.

Most centers serve the poor and the working class, helping clients contend with material poverty, get prenatal services, and escape abusive relationships. Some even help clients acquire a GED. In areas where marriage rates are abysmally low, centers help young people envision stable family formation.

I've given pro-bono legal assistance to pregnancy centers for many years. In my experience, almost all the counselors are women, mostly younger women who can readily empathize with clients. The work is often daunting and stressful. Counselors answer hotlines, welcome unscheduled visitors, and strive to help clients deal with intractable problems. One counselor says, "What turns clients away? The things that would turn you away if you were in their place. Don't overwhelm them with information. Don't push your agenda (which might be, 'Place the baby. Place the baby. PLACE THE BABY. Lose the boyfriend!'). The important thing

A client at Abria Pregnancy Resources

PEACEOFPI BLOG

HOUSES

Given gravity, it is only right
that the houses hunched along the road
seem substantive and unconcerned.
Yet their great weight distorts the air,
as the castle in the fish's bowl
makes the fish seem ill at ease,
unsuited to its situation.

The soul if it is a point,
a tiny point adrift within,
can not answer their harrumph
nor penetrate their shingled bulk
to coats hung in their mudrooms.
The passing man is himself a bowl,
and his soul a fish that hovers there.

He feels it drifting through his skull
a blinking thing with things to say,
if only it could find its tongue,
as sunrooms drawl of ottomans
and concrete steps with wrought-iron rails
say all there is to say about
coming in and going out.

In darkened dens, glowing bowls
sit silently on polished tops
while ashy flakes come drifting down.
So the soul is fed on flakes of wonder—
the passing man senses it
rises open-mouthed and then darts down
to storm around its quavering castle.

—Don Barkin

Don Barkin's poems have appeared in Poetry, *the* Virginia Quarterly Review, Poetry Northwest, Verse, *and other journals. His book,* That Dark Lake, *was published by Antrim House.*

is to express concern and let the Holy Spirit work." The counselor adds, "Good listening is crucial, despite distractions. Sometimes I go into the bathroom at the center, turn out the lights, and ask the Holy Spirit to clear my mind" so as to be attentive to clients.

Sensitive counseling is the norm in pregnancy centers, not the exception. The proof of this is that there are few complaints from the hundreds of thousands of clients. (There are roughly three thousand pregnancy centers nationwide, and the annual number of clients is certainly in the six figures.)

The general public is aware of the centers and strongly approves of their work. That approval is shown in the bipartisan funding programs provided for them in many states. Republicans and Democrats (including many who identify as prochoice) regularly support those measures. One example is the Positive Alternatives to Abortion program sponsored by the state of Minnesota. The Positive Alternatives program has operated since 2006, under Democratic and Republican governors and legislative majorities. The program makes financial grants each year through the Minnesota Department of Health. The department's website explains that grants are made on a competitive basis "to non-profit organizations promoting healthy pregnancy outcomes and assisting pregnant and parenting women in developing and maintaining family stability and self-sufficiency." Centers must demonstrate how they will use the funds for specific purposes: medical attention, nutritional services, housing assistance, adoption services, education and employment assistance, child-care assistance, and parenting education.

This is an agenda behind which a vast share of the public can unite. But pregnancy centers now face a serious and sophisticated threat, one that distorts the First Amendment, menaces religious liberty, and broadly imperils free speech rights.

For decades, pregnancy centers have been condemned by NARAL (the National Abortion Rights Action League). NARAL contends that centers manipulate, mislead, and intimidate women. A typical NARAL broadside, from a 2015 report titled *Pregnancy Centers Lie*, reads: "The American antichoice movement has built thousands of outposts across the country with the sole purpose of preventing women from accessing abortion (through lies and coercion), and they're hiding in plain sight.... A disturbing number of these antichoice CPCs receive taxpayer funding to shame and manipulate women who seek medical attention and never get it."

NARAL sends abortion-rights activists into pregnancy centers, masquerading as clients. The activists write tendentious accounts of the counseling they received. This is the equivalent of Exxon sending agents to report on Sierra Club meetings. A sweep through any grassroots movement can find unsophisticated people making unsophisticated remarks and occasional outright misstatements of fact. Some counselors certainly have flaws, and some centers genuinely need reform. But good-faith reporting strives for balance and a measure of objectivity. NARAL's reports are simply agitprop.

If centers typically did the harsh and misleading things that NARAL contends, there would be no lack of indignant clients. But clients of the centers very rarely voice complaints. Moreover, in making its accusations, NARAL almost never names specific centers or counselors. Statements supposedly made by counselors are reported without attribution, and therefore cannot be refuted.

For many years, NARAL has sought to mobilize political opposition to the centers, with limited success. Its histrionic approach lacks credibility with the general public. Most people approve of giving positive alternatives to abortion. Recently, however, NARAL and its allies have won major victories. A few years ago, the City of Baltimore passed an ordinance requiring centers to post signs notifying women that they don't provide or refer for abortions. A prolife center and the Archdiocese of Baltimore challenged the ordinance.

A federal district court ruled in favor of the archdiocese and the center, holding the ordinance unconstitutional. The city appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. Dozens of law professors filed amicus curiae briefs on both sides. In *Greater Baltimore Center for Pregnancy Concerns v. Mayor and City Council of Baltimore* (2013), the Fourth Circuit ruled 8-4 in the city's favor. The majority's reasoning advances an ominous theory. *Greater Baltimore* held that *even though a center charges nothing for its services*, its advertising can be deemed "commercial speech." "Commercial speech" (by contrast to political, religious, and artistic speech) has scant First Amendment protection. Governments can regulate it aggressively with consumer-protection laws.

"Commercial speech" usually involves economic motivation. Applying this concept to pregnancy centers defies common sense. Nevertheless, the Fourth Circuit ruled that centers offer "commercially valuable goods and services" (such as free counseling, baby clothes, and ultrasounds) and that they compete for clients' patronage in a marketplace of providers.

The four dissenting judges denounced the majority's reasoning. Judge James Harvie Wilkinson pointed out the goose/gander implications of the case: "[C]ompelled speech can serve a prolife agenda for elected officials as well as a prochoice agenda.... It is easy to imagine legislatures with different ideological leanings from those of the Baltimore City Council enacting measures that require organizations like Planned Parenthood to post a statement in their waiting rooms indicating what services *they* do not provide. Indeed, after today's decision, I would expect a flurry of such measures."

Greater Baltimore's holding was promptly expanded in California. A San Francisco ordinance bans misleading ads by pregnancy centers, whether "by statement or omission." The ordinance authorizes lawsuits to correct "omissions." A federal court upheld the ordinance, citing *Greater Baltimore*. An appeal is pending.

Why do these legal developments have dire implications for free speech? The First Amendment is in peril if suits can be brought to correct "omissions" in advertising dealing with disputed public issues. That peril is amplified when speech can be deemed "commercial" regardless of whether any product is being sold or any fee charged. The logic of these rulings could be used to attack "omissions" in ads for churches, for schools, for lectures, for renewable-energy initiatives, or for National Public Radio. (And, in consumer-protection lawsuits, losers also often must pick up the attorneys' fees of the winners.)

Case law tends to drive legislation, and onerous statutes have since been passed in California and Illinois. California's so-called Reproductive FACT Act took effect in 2016. Pregnancy centers there must post signs stating that free or low-cost abortions are available, with a telephone number to call. Several centers filed constitutional challenges, but the courts (including the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit) have refused to enjoin the law. Therefore, centers must advertise abortion or face enforcement lawsuits and fines.

In recent months, Illinois has taken a very large additional step. Its statute governs doctors, nurses, and health-care providers, including pregnancy centers that offer medical services. The law requires that patients be told of the "benefits" of abortion. It also requires a referral to an abortionist if requested. Suits have been filed to strike this statute down on First Amendment grounds.

The Illinois and California statutes are fundamentally different from other laws that regulate professional services. Abortion is qualitatively different from other medical procedures, since it involves taking human life. Compelling people to promote it, speak of its "benefits," and actively assist in its procurement violates the deepest rights of conscience. The First Amendment forbids such laws. The Supreme Court has struck down laws compelling students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. It has struck down a law compelling New Hampshire motorists to display the state motto ("Live Free or Die") on their license plates. These precedents should also bar compelling health-care workers to speak against their consciences on abortion.

The issue of pregnancy centers' free-speech rights likely will go to the Supreme Court. If the "commercial speech" theory prevails, centers will be besieged with lawsuits. The broad bipartisan consensus that has supported their work may break down. Prolife centers must strive to avert that breakdown. They must emphasize transparency and integrity in their work. NARAL's reports are gross distortions, but they should motivate centers to review their policies, improve training, and avoid misstatements of fact. Centers have the goodwill of most of the public. It's crucial to maintain that goodwill.

Friends of the First Amendment, including those who hold prochoice views, should come to the centers' defense. Irresponsible use of the "commercial speech" doctrine can be invoked to intimidate opponents and harass community organizers, service groups, and advocates of all stripes. It can be used to justify measures stifling speech of any kind. As Judge Wilkinson stated: "Today it is the center; tomorrow it is who knows what speaker and who can guess what point of view." ■

John D. Hagen Jr. *is a lawyer in Minnesota.*

Tom Quigley

Faithless Fidel

WHAT THE MEDIA GOT WRONG ABOUT CASTRO & THE CHURCH

Now that Fidel Castro is well and truly dead—his demise was rumored periodically for years on the streets of Miami—it may be useful to examine some of the intense coverage of his passing on November 25, 2016. In particular, I've been struck by the number of "alternative facts" that abounded in the coverage, as well as by the frequent misinterpretations of the past, especially as regards the Catholic Church.

Some came from decidedly right-wing sources, as when Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen reported, as soon as it was confirmed that Castro had died, that "Cuban dissidents are being rounded up as we speak." And Heritage Foundation's Ana Quintana told PBS NewsHour that "churches by the hundreds are being bulldozed," an extraordinary phenomenon noted by no journalists in Cuba. Neither story bears examination.

The *Catholic Thing*'s Robert Royal, adding to his seemingly endless list of criticisms of Pope Francis, wrote that the pope "cried at his passing" but "among those close to the situation—the Cuban bishops—it's dry eyes all around." I confess I missed the papal tears, but the Cuban bishops did issue a statement of condolence to Castro's family: "We entrust Dr. Fidel Castro to Jesus Christ, the face of the Father's mercy," they said, and aware of the new phase the country was about to experience, added: "We ask the love of Jesus that nothing disturb the coexistence among us Cubans."

Royal also informed us that "Salesians and Jesuits educated Fidel," when it was the La Salle Christian Brothers that had him for a brief time before the Jesuits at the Colegio Dolores and at Belén. Something about the La Salle Brothers apparently confuses writers; Peter Bourne's 1986 approved biography, *Fidel*, has the school "run by the French Marianist brothers."

Even better-informed writers like Austen Ivereigh managed to jumble some facts. In a March 2016 edition of the *Tablet,* he wrote of Cuba that "Just two hundred priests remained in the 1970s, down from 3,500." That two hundred is roughly correct throughout most of the years since 1961, when some 132 priests and religious were unceremoniously bundled aboard the Spanish ship *Covadonga* and sent into exile. But there were never anything close to 3,500 priests in the country, and Castro had maintained a roughly constant number of about two hundred priests, allowing a handful of foreign clergy to replace deceased or departed clerics.

In recent years that number has increased considerably, partly due to the number of Cubans entering seminary, as well as permission for a few religious congregations (e.g., the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate) to enter the country. The Vatican Information Service gives the number of priests today as 361, plus 656 religious sisters and brothers.

A poignant comment was offered by Fr. Fernando Heria, rector of the Ermita, the national shrine of Our Lady of Charity of Cobre in Miami. He was born in a small town in Pinar del Río, whose diocese had forty-eight priests and religious on Friday, September 15, 1961; on Monday, September, 18, 1961, only six priests and no religious sisters or brothers remained.

Ivereigh also conflates fact with fiction in his telling of the tale of Fr. Guillermo Sardiñas, chaplain to the July 26 movement in the Sierras, famous for his olive-green cassock. Fr. Sardiñas, he writes, "was licensed by his bishop to marry the guerrillas, baptize their babies, and bury them." All true, but then he adds that "Pope John XXIII gave special permission for him to wear olive-green fatigues." Well. No priest needs permission to wear fatigues of any color—everyone there in the hills wore fatigues—and the fact that this priest wore a cassock of military hue almost certainly involved no episcopal permission. How the author of the well-received biography of Pope Francis could imagine the pope himself being involved in the matter of a guerrilla priest's attire is beyond me.

Following the revolution, Sardiñas continued to wear his *verdeolivo* cassock with a medal proclaiming him a Comandante del Ejército Rebelde (a commander of the rebel army) for which assuredly no pope or bishop gave permission. He became a rather sad figure and died at the end of 1964.

A final Ivereigh imprecision: "The Belén was shuttered." Well, all private schools, including the most prestigious secondary school in Cuba, the Jesuit's Colegio Belén, were closed. But the very large and architecturally outstanding Belén was converted into the Cuban Military Technical Institute, a prize of Gen. Raúl.

Almost as bizarre as papal permission for clerical attire was the story, repeatedly picked up by many in the media, of George Will's account of a harebrained plan to assassinate Castro. Supposedly, a U.S. submarine was to surface in Havana harbor and fire star shells into the night "to convince Cuban Catholics that the Second Coming had come, causing them to rebel against Castro the antichrist." Skeptics were said to have termed the plan "elimination by illumination."

What one can confidently say about this is that no Catholic could have dreamed up such a plan. (It was said to have been cooked up by Operation Mongoose chief, Brig. Gen. Edward Lansdale.) Catholics, whether Cubans or North Americans,

Pope John Paul II greets Fidel Castro at the end of Mass in Havana on January 25, 1998.

CNS PHOTO / PAUL HANNA, REUTERS

spent little time thinking about the Second Coming or the Antichrist; the idea of Havana Catholics, however poorly catechized, drawing such conclusions beggars belief. Since U.S. fundamentalists, on the other hand, mined the Book of Revelation for all it was worth, one has to wonder why Will and the many who reprinted the story found it even remotely credible.

Two other stories got a lot of play: the banning of Christmas and the Moncada-attack trial. On December 3, the Catholic News Agency said that "in 1969 [Castro] banned the celebration of Christmas." But then, in 1998, "John Paul II successfully convinced him to remove the ban." The fact is that there was never a ban on celebrating Christmas; Christians did so in their churches and in their homes. However, the day was no longer a national holiday; the official reason given was that it interfered with the sugar harvest.

John Paul was indeed responsible for the day's restoration as an official holiday. According to Joaquín Navarro-Vals, the papal spokesman said to Castro that "the Holy Father would like to be able to publicly thank you for this gesture once he lands in Havana." That, and the diminishing importance of the harvest, evidently did the trick.

The Moncada trial, recounted in virtually all the post-mortem stories, was notable for the missing bishop. After the foolhardy and clumsily organized attack on the Moncada army barracks in July 1953, several of the guerrillas were immediately executed and those who were taken prisoner seemed likely to meet a similar fate before the local bishop intervened. The archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, Enrique Pérez Serantes, was a Galician and a friend of fellow Galician Angel Castro, Fidel's father, and it was the archbishop's intervention that, more than any other, secured a trial for the surviving attackers.

From that trial came a fifteen-year sentence, shortened to two years by Batista's amnesty, and the famous "History will absolve me" speech. (The exiled author Carlos Alberto Montaner wrote in the Miami *El Nuevo Herald* in November: "La Historia no lo absolverá.") It was during those two years of intense reading of history that the hot-headed Castro became a convinced and calculating revolutionary. The *Washington Post*'s Nick Miroff in December had a good line about Angel Castro's learning of the attack and that Raúl was involved: "I knew I had a crazy son but I didn't know that the other would follow him."

While several of the longer articles provided some detail about the Moncada raid and the trial, the essential role of Archbishop Pérez was brushed out. Well-regarded Latin Americanists like Jon Lee Anderson, Tim Padgett, and Anthony DePalma's (in his long *Times* article of November 27) all detailed the Moncada matter without mentioning Pérez. In a November article in the *Washington Post,* Miroff did mention that "through the intervention of a bishop who was a friend of his father, Mr. Castro was spared immediate execution and was instead put on trial."

Miroff also credits the intervention of the Catholic Church with the release in 2010 and 2011 of the famed seventy-five dissidents. And while De Palma speaks of the more than five hundred Batista-era officials and others who were "summarily convicted and shot to death," there is not a word about the church's strong opposition. Priests were prominent at the

wall, giving absolution to those about to die, but they had no power to stop the murders.

Many reports of the time indicated that not five hundred but several *thousand* Cubans "went to the wall"—*al paredón*—during the first years. Anne Applebaum wrote in the *Washington Post* on November 28 of "the 5,600 Cubans who died in front of Castro's firing squads, or the 1,200 murdered in 'extrajudicial assassinations.'" Apart from the urban centers, people in the countryside were also under strict curfew, such that, according to a military order issued May 25, 1963, "any *campesino* seen outside his house after 8 p.m. and before 5 a.m. will be shot without trial." During just the fortnight of July 15–30, 1963, some three hundred and fifty *campesinos* were shot. It's worth recalling that the majority of Catholic priests had been summarily expelled, so the church voice of opposition went from being weak to nearly nonexistent, as it would remain until the mid-1980s.

Time's Joe Klein had an almost-but-not-quite-believable tale of his 1975 visit to Cuba with a delegation headed by George McGovern. During the visit, which included lots of facetime with Castro, Klein said he "strayed from the official tour and went to a Catholic church in Havana looking for dissidents. I found a man who had been imprisoned and tortured both by the right-wing dictator, Fulgencio Batista, and the Castro regime." When asked what the United States should do, the man said, "End embargo! Recognize us!"

I, too, was in Cuba the year before that, also on a Potemkin Village tour, though with a much less prestigious group. (Barbara Walters was part of Klein's group.) That Klein was free to leave his group is itself noteworthy. That he could walk into a church and expect to find a dissident, willing to talk to an unknown gringo about his imprisonment and torture, and presumably in English, is simply incredible. If the meeting happened, it had to be pre-arrangeed—and even then, color me skeptical.

Klein, whose fame came largely from his "anonymous" authorship of *Primary Colors*, starts off with an error: "we met Castro at his brother Raúl's farm." But Raúl never milked cows or collected eggs. It was the farm of Fidel's older brother Ramón, who looked remarkably like him, one of Angel Castro's three children born before the old *gallego* got around to marrying their mother. Ramón, whom I also met at his farm, died just last February.

Speaking of Barbara Walters, she claimed that Fidel told her that he began wearing a beard after the U.S. embargo cut off supplies of Gillette razor blades. In fact, he had the beard in the Sierra Maestra. One wonders if someone at Gillette got a handsome raise with this product placement.

There was this curious line from *USA Today*'s Rick Jervis, reprinted in the *National Catholic Reporter* in December: "Even in his death, announced Nov. 25, Castro defied the church by requesting that his remains be cremated." Defied the church, when cremation is extremely common among Catholics today? And requesting? Fidel never requested anything; he said do it and it was done.

Jervis also noted that Cardinal Jaime Ortega "stepped down as cardinal this past summer." Ortega, of course, will be a cardinal until he dies; it's from being archbishop of Havana that he "stepped down."

Then there's the small matter of Fidel's birthdate. All the media said he died at age ninety, thus born in 1926. The almost certain fact is that he was born in 1927. It seems that his parents sought to enroll both him and Ramón in the Christian Brothers school but, technically, Fidel was a year too young to enter then—the Brothers were tough. At this same time, and at the encouragement of the senior Castro's friend Enrique Pérez Serantes, then bishop of Camaguey, the two boys were finally baptized. When the baptismal certificates were signed, Fidel's birth date was pushed back a year to make him eligible to enroll at La Salle. The source for this is Peter Bourne's *Fidel: A Biography of Fidel Castro* (Dodd Mead, 1986). The author says he heard this directly from Ramón Castro who was there and would have no reason to falsify a date.

Finally, two issues: the matter of the Church's role in the rapprochement between the United States and Cuba, and the question of Fidel Castro's belief. No need to cite the journalists who got right the story of the unprecedented role played by Pope Francis. It was simply so central a part of the story that few failed to mention it. Many were also taken by Raúl Castro's ad-lib statement at the Vatican in May 2015. While thanking the pope for helping restore ties with the United States, he said that if the pope continues what he has been doing, "I will start praying again and return to the church." He added, "and I am not joking."

It was no secret that Fidel Castro, unlike his brother, was opposed to the warming relations between the two countries. But in his last years he occasionally reflected out loud about his past connection with the Jesuits and on the matter of faith. In his final column in *Granma* (October 8, 2016), he wrote: "At this point, religions acquire a special value...I know a fair amount about Christ, given what I have read and what they taught me in schools run by the Jesuits and by the La Salle Brothers, from whom I heard many stories about Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood, and the manna that fell from heaven when food was scarce because of drought or other reasons. I will try to convey a few more ideas about this singular problem, at another time."

He never got around to that, and it's tempting to compare his reflections on religion with those of Donald Trump, so clearly uninformed and even childish. But his encounters with three popes and the influence of some of his Jesuit teachers, including Amando Llorente, SJ, whom he expelled in 1961, may possibly have left some gnawing questions about "this singular problem." ■

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Life amid Loss

What I Learned from the Sisters of La Retraite

Karen Kilby

Over the past year, a research project has taken me into quite a few homes in Britain and Ireland. The people I visit work in, or are retired from, a range of occupations, including school principal, spiritual director, dance therapist, and NGO consultant. They live in a variety of arrangements: on their own; in groups of two to four; or in housing for the elderly. All are women, and many share certain habits. France tends to figure in their conversation: a casual mention of time spent in the country; a reach for a French word in the midst of conversation.

The prominence of France is explained by the fact that all my hosts are members of the Congregation of La Retraite, a religious community whose story goes back to seventeenth-century Brittany, where Catherine de Francheville pioneered the first retreat house for women. Today the Congregation of La Retraite comprises over a hundred members living in Ireland, England, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Cameroon.

My original connection to the congregation was Barbara, a woman I came to know a dozen years ago when I inherited the part-time graduate students of a retiring colleague at the University of Nottingham. In her late forties when we met, Barbara was one of the younger members of her congregation, and she remains one of the younger members today, though she's now over sixty. This fact reflects a basic reality of the congregation: its members are aging and dying, and the group itself is shrinking. For the past ten years Barbara has been in charge of the British and Irish wing of La Retraite, and whenever our paths have crossed, she mentions funerals she's been to, the intricacies of sorting out arrangements for aging sisters, the complexities and sadness involved in closing down a retreat house. I know what a challenge it has been for her to maintain her own sense of balance while coping with the collective experience of diminishment and loss the sisters undergo as they live through their dwindling.

Our research project is the outcome of an enduring concern on Barbara's part with questions of integration: between emotion and intellect, experience and theory, the life of the mind and the life of the whole person. Barbara's doctoral thesis was driven by such questions, particularly the relationship between the psychological and the spiritual, and between the spiritual and the theological. Initially, I have to confess, these issues seemed too general to me, and too familiar. It has been common in academic circles over the past few decades to lament the gap between theology and spirituality, and to call for a renewed integration. So when Barbara was working on her PhD, I focused mainly on the mechanics of the thing rather than on the overarching theme. But the question of integration remained a feature of our conversations in the years afterward, and gradually drew me in: How, for instance, can the kind of thing I do, as a theologian inhabiting an academic context, be better integrated with the kind of reflections in which she and her sisters engage?

I began a while back to think about suffering. Systematic theologians are allowed to think about ridiculously big issues—God, creation, what it is to be human—and although suffering isn't on the standard list, I had become concerned with questions about the status it is given in Christian thought. Is suffering inextricably bound up with love, and therefore God? I mentioned this to Barbara, who immediately suggested that it was something on which to collaborate: a few of the sisters had been through experiences that she sensed they could usefully reflect on and write about, and she thought she could see a convergence. What will happen when you bring together a thinker who tends toward the abstract with people whose theological reflections are more intimately rooted in their own experience and indeed in their prayer?

I was initially a bit resistant. Writing is a solitary business for me, and one that usually follows from an equally solitary process of reading, so I wasn't sure how a collaboration would work. We discussed various possibilities. Could we write something as a dialogue between some of the sisters and myself? Alternately, might I just offer publication advice after they wrote reflections on their experiences? Or should we, with the help of a more qualified colleague, set

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up a fully fledged piece of social scientific research, where the sisters would be given carefully designed interviews? Understandably, Barbara didn't want to ask the sisters to revisit difficult, sometimes traumatic events in order to become data in an experiment, and in the end we decided to test a form of collaboration modeled not on interview and data analysis, but on conversation.

This is why, alongside my usual activities of solitary reading and wrestling with ideas, I have found myself visiting sisters' homes across Britain and Ireland, being fed tea and healthy homemade meals, and discussing particular instances of suffering: disabling chronic pain, alienation within families, a slow death from motor-neuron disease. I've been asking the sisters how they think about the suffering they've encountered in their own lives and in the lives of those they've taught, directed, and accompanied—and I've been testing with them my own thoughts. My goal is not to write about either the sisters or their views, but to collaborate with them in reflecting on suffering and its relationship to love.

While getting to know the sisters is not the main object of the project, it has been a fascinating and rewarding consequence of it. Without fail, the sisters make me feel comfortable, put me at ease. Consistently, they are good listeners, interested in me and in the wider world—even those far into their eighties. We have grown rather close. You cannot, it seems, deliberately set out to talk to people about the suffering they've endured or witnessed without quickly moving to a certain level of intimacy. In fact, I've noticed a deepening of conversations with other friends and acquaintances: people hear what I am working on and tell me their thoughts about the death of a brother, the disability of a mother, the impact of an illness on their sense of vocation. Normally, I suppose, there are good reasons people don't do this: most of the time we avoid introducing experiences of suffering and loss into everyday conversation because we don't want to seem to complain, and because we hesitate to inflict an emotional burden on our listeners. And also, no doubt, because we are so shaped by our culture's orientation toward happiness and success.

With the sisters, something that occasionally comes directly into the conversations, and is more often present in the background, is an element of suffering related to the congregation's own diminishment. On the day I began our conversations, twelve months ago, everyone was reeling from the death of a sister a few days earlier. Theresa had been ailing, so her death was not a complete surprise. But she represented a vitality, a set of gifts and talents, now forever lost to the congregation. And it could not be presumed, as it might have been in the past, that the loss would be balanced by younger women joining.

That the sisters live separately—in small groups or alone—is a choice they've made in response to this diminishment. They are committed to allowing those still of a working age as much freedom as possible to continue their ministry, their "apostolic work," and they've determined that this means living in a variety of arrangements. One might think of it as a decision by the older sisters not to be a "burden" to the dwindling numbers of younger ones, or as a decision by the group as a whole to remain outward-looking, concerned for something beyond its own life, as long as possible.

It's hard to put my finger on what exactly I find impressive about this group's way of facing the possibility of its own end. In part I suppose it resides in the things I *don't* hear these women say. There is no searching for who to blame, no complaining about, say, the young people who don't join religious life, no anxious backward look to determine where something went wrong. I also don't hear—or even sense—anyone questioning the value of the lives they've led, of the congregation itself. The congregation is diminishing—it's a fact. The sisters are smaller, older, frailer, and fewer. This is something they are facing, and the task is to live through it.

In many of the accounts of suffering and loss I've heard, there has been a story of an intensification of relationships—

THE "STRENGTHLESS ARMS" OF THE BAGGAGE HANDLERS

Although you have never seen them yourself,
there are places you still suppose to exist.
San Diego, for example,
where the man in the next cubicle
flew his family over Christmas week...
Beautiful weather, a wonderful zoo!
You imagine a sun-splashed elephant
in its glaring enclosure—San Diego.

Not for the Louvre you flew to Paris,
but the baggage handlers who came at dawn
on a grimy tram to stack big bags
in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower
yet would not lift their eyes to it.
Now if you wondered what difference
anything makes, you could go home
and live as a man who has been to France.

Another place you suppose to exist
entered your mind one afternoon
asleep underneath the Sunday papers.
In the Travel Section, in gaudy orange,
was an ancient desert habitation
and a man on his camel. Like you on your couch,
he too will go, when his god wills it so,
to a place even stranger than San Diego.

—Don Barkin

the strengthening of bonds, and sometimes also the deepening of rifts. Relationships become more visible, more clearly felt. Is this also true in the collective experience of diminishment and loss the community is undergoing? To my eye, at any rate, the fascinating and complex web of relationships among the sisters is made movingly visible in the way they are living through their dwindling.

Sisters occasionally talk in terms of "generations"—groups who entered at roughly the same time, went through a similar style of formation, and absorbed together the emphases of a particular period. There is a certain kind of bond among those of the same cohort, but also a rich range of links across the cohorts: two sisters divided by ten or fifteen years might nevertheless have lived together or collaborated in some project over a significant period, and take visible pleasure in each other's company; one sister may appear in the life story of those of a different generation as providing decisive support at a key moment, or as having modeled a way of living religious life that continues to shape their reflection.

I find it hard to settle on an analogy for this delicate web of relationships among the sisters. At the start of the project, a group came together so that I could be introduced and discuss what we planned to do. As I watched them greet each other and chat over tea, I wondered whether this was like the occasional get-together of an extended family—the pleasure in seeing one another again after a time apart, the shared history evoked in anecdotes of colorful and long-gone characters. Yet the sisters were more careful and polite with one another than most families. And they had more in common, in their commitments, in their outlook, and in a shared vocabulary about the things that matter most, than any family I've ever encountered. A rich range of friendships exists among them, but neither are they simply a group of friends. They are a little like the longtime colleagues one might find in a stable department of a small liberal arts college—except that they work, or have worked, at very different things and in different places, and may well not see each other for months at a time.

The sisters would probably say that what matters is not just their relationships with each other, but also their ties to those outside the congregation. Even though the nature of their ministry hasn't been the subject of our discussions, I've been struck by certain things I've picked up along the way. Though their occupations, and their professional and educational backgrounds, vary quite a lot, certain words and themes recur in the conversation of all: listening, presence, accompanying, freedom. To someone used to living in a world focused on publication, prestige, and influence, the consistent centrality of "listening" and "presence" in the sisters' view of what matters most in their work is striking. So is their understanding of success. At the beginning of the project, I told them I didn't quite know how it would work—we were feeling our way forward, and I couldn't predict the outcome. They were entirely at ease with that, and didn't press for anything more concrete. Their academic counterparts would have required a fully articulated method, a set of dates by which well-defined "outputs" were to be produced, and a plan for how to maximize the impact of those outputs.

Some of what I have learned from the La Retraite sisters is peculiar to them, to their particular "charism," and some will be shared by other congregations. Certainly the experience of diminishment is widely shared. A recent report on women religious in the United States found that there are currently more sisters over ninety than under sixty. Of course religious life will not disappear altogether from the church, and even now, new religious congregations are coming into being. But we are, nevertheless, experiencing a very significant period of loss, of the dying off of communities that were each unique in themselves and distinct in their contributions. Something I have come to appreciate from conversations with one or two of the sisters, including Barbara, is that few things are more important in life than accompanying those who are dying. Ought we as a church, as a society, be paying more attention to these communities before they go, so that we really know them for what they are and have been, and understand what it is that we are losing?

It's hard to put my finger on what exactly I find impressive about this group's way of facing the possibility of its own end. In part it resides in the things I *don't* hear these women say. There is no searching for who to blame, no complaining about the young people who don't join religious life, no anxious backward look to determine where something went wrong. I also don't hear anyone questioning the value of the lives they've led, of the congregation itself.

Whatever the future of La Retraite may be, the chance to spend reflective time with them, in their period of diminishment, has been a real gift for my work and for me personally. I had not had much to do with women's religious orders before this project; I didn't go to a Catholic school, and met only one nun (and not a very pleasant one) in the Connecticut parish in which I was raised. Not too surprisingly, perhaps, I never even toyed with the idea of a religious vocation. But now I can see the attraction and the beauty of the life, and of the people who choose and are formed by it. It is a beauty that shines out particularly clearly, to my mind, in the calm way this particular group faces the possibility of its own end. ■

Humanity's Conscience?

Two New Books on the Church & the Holocaust

John Connelly

What standards should we use to judge figures of the distant past—those of their time, or of our own? No historical figure evokes this question more acutely than Pope Pius XII. In the 1940s, leading newspapers celebrated him as a "lonely voice" against Nazism, a courageous opponent of those bent on persecuting the Jews. At his death in 1958, Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir cabled condolences to the Vatican: "When fearful martyrdom came to our people in the decade of Nazi terror, the voice of the pope was raised for the victims."

Yet three years after that encomium, a play by the German Rolf Hochhuth accused the pope of failing to speak out forcefully against the Nazis. Historians confirmed that while Pius condemned aggression and violence, he never censured the Nazi regime or spoke out against the killing of Jews—even though the Vatican received information about it in 1942. In 1989, Conor Cruise O'Brien wrote that if the pope had issued an encyclical against racism and anti-Semitism, he might have averted the Holocaust. A few years later, the historian John Cornwell completed this line of criticism by anointing Pius "Hitler's pope," a man who by his silence had enabled the greatest crimes known to humankind.

The pope's defenders fought back, insisting that Pius had muffled criticism in order not to endanger the Vatican's behind-the-scenes efforts on behalf of the victims. Rabbi David Dalin wrote that the pope's "diplomacy and the Vatican's rescue operations saved hundreds of thousands of Jews and other innocent victims from Nazism." Now in ***Church of Spies: The Pope's Secret War Against Hitler*** **(Basic Books, $29.99, 384 pp.)**, Mark Riebling, a respected expert on national security, takes this approach to a new level. In his view the pope was not simply a top diplomat, but a spymaster who oversaw intricate intelligence networks that passed information to select parties in hopes of helping to destroy Hitler. Pius was silent, *Church of Spies* insists, because his operations were secret.

John Connelly, *a frequent contributor, is completing a book on the history of Eastern Europe, 1784 to the present.*

Those operations placed him in contact, direct and indirect, with anti-Hitler conspirators. The Munich lawyer and later postwar politician Josef Müller facilitated contacts from Rome to the German state and military, including high-ranking Hitler opponents in the SS and in military counter-espionage, like Admiral Wilhelm Franz Canaris. Hitler led a charmed existence, however, and escaped one assassination attempt after another. In March 1943 Colonel Henning von Tresckow placed a bomb in a plane carrying Hitler to his quarters in East Prussia, but the detonator froze; Pius as well as generals in Berlin waited hopefully, only to learn the plane did not crash. The greatest disappointment came on July 20, 1944, when the thick leg of an oak table shielded Hitler from the blast of a bomb placed beneath it by Claus Count von Stauffenberg, leader of a group of high military officers attempting to take over the government and sue the Allies for peace. (Josef Müller had worked closely with the Stauffenberg conspirators, but was incarcerated at the time of the assassination attempt, and thus survived retribution in the mass roundup and executions that followed.)

Riebling takes readers into each plot, and makes them all vivid. We hear the doors of the sleek old limousines snapping shut, see the green and black uniformed officials across banquet halls and around the curving staircases of hotels in Berlin and Rome. Through the plans' arcane details one can feel the anxieties of people who for years racked their brains, under the shadow of the guillotine, for ways of destroying Hitler. More than other authors, Riebling dwells upon the religious commitments of Hitler's foes. Stauffenberg, we learn, was a Catholic troubled by the regime's anti-Jewish policies, and his circle intersected with that of the Kreisau conspirators around Helmut von Molkte, whom Riebling calls "latter-day apostles of a new Babylon." They received spiritual guidance from the Jesuit Augustin Rösch, of whom Moltke's widow Freja later said: "we really felt quite reborn because of him." After ridding Germany of Hitler and ending the war, they hoped to fashion faith communities—*Christenschaften*—in which Germans could recuperate from the deification of the state. Instead, most were arrested and executed, including a second Jesuit, Alfred Delp, who left us his haunting prison diaries.

In my view Riebling underplays the challenges of accurately recapturing his heroes' stories. He writes, for instance, that Pius made the "choice to help kill Adolf Hitler" in late October 1939, but the source he cites refers to the necessity of "removing" Hitler, which by no means necessarily means killing him. Because Vatican archives on the period are closed, Riebling is forced to extrapolate from sources produced after the war—often several degrees from the individuals in question, and with the diminished accuracy of memory. Also problematic is the way Riebling uses Pius's peripheral role in the plots against Hitler to account for his "silence" on the Holocaust. Citing Nazi retribution for the July 1942 pastoral letter of Dutch bishops against deportations of Jews, Riebling claims the pope feared that public condemnation would do more harm than good. Yet in his own meticulous study ***The Pope's Dilemma: Pius XII Faces Atrocities and Genocide in the Second World War*** **(University of Toronto, $37.95, 424 pp.)**, historian Jacques Kornberg notes that German authorities had already decided to deport forty thousand Jews from the Netherlands in June, and that the first trains had left before the bishops spoke out.

Pope Pius XII

But if we grant that these were in fact the pope's calculations, were those calculations wrong? We lack sufficient evidence to say. Besides the 1943 Rosenstrasse protests of "Aryan" wives for their Jewish husbands, no public protest halted the deportation of Jews in areas controlled by German authorities. We also know that the Vatican did have some success using diplomatic channels to halt deportations of Jews from Nazi puppet states like Slovakia and Hungary, or from Germany's ally, Romania. We do not know whether a papal appeal to other Catholics, in particular Central Europe's bishops, informing them of the genocide against Jews, and of its incompatibility with Catholic teaching, might have caused more Catholics to act to save Jews. We have every reason to assume the German state would have portrayed any such appeal as a declaration of war, and would have moved to seize church properties, thus costing lives of many Jews and non-Jews. Far less vicious rulers than Hitler have not hesitated to confiscate monasteries, churches, and convents.

At the time, persuasive arguments for papal caution were not lacking. As John Pollard has pointed out in his study of the papacy, Pius believed to the end that he might act as an intermediary to bring about peace, and that if the Holy See was to maintain diplomatic relations with both sides, it had to remain impartial. According to Josef Müller, the German conspirators urged the pope not to condemn the Nazis because doing so would have made German Catholics "even more suspected than they were and would have greatly restricted their freedom of action in their work of resistance." This claim was recorded by U.S. Ambassador Harold Tittmann after dinner with Müller in Rome in June 1945, long before the Hochhuth controversy and a perceived need to shield the pope from criticism.

Pius sympathized with efforts to assist Jews, but viewed the decision of whether to do so as a prudential one best left to individuals. In March 1943 the archbishop of Berlin, Konrad von Preysing, wrote that deportations of Jews were recommencing from his diocese and their likely fate was death. "Would it not be possible," he asked, "for your Holiness to try once again to intervene for these many un-

fortunate innocents?" On April 30 the pope replied that he would not speak out, but encouraged pastors "on the spot" to judge whether "the danger of reprisals...counsel restraint...in order to avoid greater evils." It was consoling, he continued, to learn "that Catholics, notably in Berlin, had manifested great Christian charity toward the sufferings of non-Aryans." He expressed special "paternal gratitude and profound sympathy" for Msgr. Bernard Lichtenberg, provost at St. Hedwig's Cathedral in Berlin, languishing in prison for criticizing Nazi racism from the pulpit.

It's possible that the retribution against Dutch converts in 1942 had made Pius hesitate to speak as openly as Lichtenberg (soon to die while being transported to Dachau). Yet one can't help noting the pope's continued use of anodyne idioms of diplomacy, designed not to offend Nazi Germany, even in *private* communications. He wrote Preysing that "Our paternal love and solicitude are greater today toward non-Aryan or semi-Aryan Catholics, children of the church like the others, when their outward existence is collapsing and they are going through moral distress." In *Years of Extermination*, historian Saul Friedländer notes that "'moral distress' and the collapse of 'outward existence' were not exactly the right terms" for the fate of the Jews under Hitler. And indeed, the pope's inability to summon outrage in intimate communication suggests precisely the kind of self-censorship that occurs under totalitarian regimes. It's clear that the pope was aware of a problem: his note to Preysing was meant to justify what *appeared to be* scanty public criticism. But again, given the inaccessible nature of closed Vatican archives, we have no definitive insight into what Pius was thinking.

Jacques Kornberg's way around this problem in *The Pope's Dilemma* is to assess Pius's behavior within patterns established by earlier popes operating among contending and sometimes warring European states. In World War I, Benedict XV condemned aggression but pointedly not aggressors, a careful stance adopted not only in order to facilitate peace, but also because Catholics fought on both sides and the Vatican feared that partiality would divide the church and hamper its efforts to mediate the salvation of all humans. The trend continued under Pius XI, who knew of the injustices of French occupation of the German Ruhr, and of Italian aggression in North Africa, but did not condemn them. Where Nazism was concerned, he worried that open censure might cause Hitler to take the church out of Germany as Henry VIII had taken it out of England.

But now comes the hard part for Kornberg's argument. If one acknowledges such a well-established concern for the church's unity, what is the basis for a harsh judgment of the papacy? A letter Kornberg himself published in the *New York Review of Books* in October 1989 makes precisely this point, calling it "preposterous to suggest that Pius XII would have tested the faith of German Catholics by launching a campaign against anti-Semitism." Kornberg was responding to Conor Cruise O'Brien's idea that a papal critique might have averted the Holocaust. "O'Brien's might-have-been," Kornberg continued in 1989,

> disregards the papacy's practical concern with maintaining religious institutions, based on its view of the church as the necessary channel for grace and salvation. Clearly this took priority over promoting Christian love, self-sacrifice, and martyrdom. The role cast for the papacy as humanity's courageous moral conscience in a time of crisis is a recent phenomenon, perhaps in part a reaction to twentieth-century horrors. If a pope ever took up this challenge, he would rank as even more of an innovator than Gorbachev.

And yet in his current book Kornberg does more than regret that the pope was not a visionary; he accuses him of "moral failure," even of acquiescence to murder. He writes that the pope "could have promoted a more benign view of Judaism, at a time of extreme Jewish distress," but that "he chose not to do so." Yet Kornberg has no more internal evidence of Pius's choices than Riebling does. Kornberg wishes the pope had gone beyond simple lament and called for "action" against Hitler. But what kind of action could have stopped Hitler? Violence? That's hardly something a modern pope can call for. And so Kornberg seems as much a victim of wishful thinking as O'Brien. Indeed, the example he cites—Gorbachev, who until the very moment he was ousted in the summer of 1991 believed that through some brilliant innovation or reform, Leninism could be squared with democracy—reminds us that even astute reformers cannot suddenly jump out of the shadow of their assumptions. And Pius was neither an innovator nor a reformer, but, as Paul O'Shea calls him in *A Cross Too Heavy*, an "intelligent and highly educated conservative Tridentine Catholic."

Kornberg's lament over the papacy's "moral failure" is only part of his compelling, lucid, and highly learned argument. Probing the mental barriers that limited the popes—the "historical context" that shaped their choices—*The Pope's Dilemma* delineates a tradition, going back to Augustine, in which Catholicism stressed human weakness and the absolute need for salvation mediated by the church. Avoiding extremes like Jansenism, the church learned to "compromise with human nature as it was," Kornberg writes, and it tolerated nationalist readings of Christianity, by which "clergy everywhere made God a steadfast ally of their own nation at war." The state was respected for guaranteeing space within which the church could operate, disdaining politics while abhorring the room that "pluralism" left for theological error. For his part, unimpressed by the virtues of democracy, Pius XII hoped to restore a medieval Christian commonwealth, with a "unity of faith, custom, and morals." The popes of the interwar years had arrayed a Catholic militancy against forces of secularization; the church, Pius XI told French pilgrims in 1938, had the "right and duty to claim total control over the individual." The evangelization went hand in hand with a cult inflating the pope's self-image to extraordinary dimensions. "Who of you can

suffer," Pius asked a Polish delegation in 1939, "without me suffering with him?"

In Kornberg's view, this self-assigned infallibility conduced to the cynicism of a "divine institution" that constantly created alibis for being less than divine. This returns us to the papacy's concern for appearance, for *seeming* to have spoken out when in fact it had not. In a private meeting of October 1941 with Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, the future John XXIII, Pius had worried how his "inaction" on Nazi mistreatment of the Jews would be perceived abroad. Kornberg thinks such concerns for appearance were an end in themselves. For example, in April 1943 papal undersecretary of state Domenico Tardini recommended papal intervention with Slovakia to stop deportations. But he wanted the note leaked in order to deflect responsibility from the church in case the effort failed. Kornberg writes that Tardini "assumed this empty gesture would win high praise."

My sense is that operations in the Vatican were messier. Tardini wanted the church to put on a good face, true; but what institution is not concerned about its appearance? At the same time, it seems clear that Tardini—a respected figure—sincerely wanted to help, and may have judged that arguments about losing face would help win over skeptics in the hierarchy. In the event, thanks to the efforts of Nuncio Burzio and the remarkable Sr. Margit Slachta in Bratislava, a letter was produced, and helped halt planned deportations.

By way of accounting for the changing view of Pius over the decades, Kornberg credits a radical shift in the church after World War II—toward respect for the autonomy of the individual's conscience, toward faith in the spiritual gifts residing with individual believers, and toward a recognition that the church, in Karl Rahner's words, was both sinful and holy, from top to bottom. It was a shift both exemplified and ratified by Vatican II, but anticipation of it long predates the council, and even World War II itself. On April 1, 1933, State Secretary Pacelli met with his boss, Pius XI, to discuss news from Germany, where the newly installed government had launched a boycott of Jewish businesses. Pacelli made a note: "The day may come when we will have to be able to say that something was done about this matter." At the time, the church still taught (non-magisterially) that Jews were fated to suffer for rejecting Christ; indeed, just a few years prior, Pius XI had closed down a society within the church that advocated improved relations with Jews. Still, it seems, Pacelli anticipated these assumptions one day being overshadowed by larger truths. In a time just beyond the horizon, people would ask the church: Where were you?

Such prescient moral intuition helps explain why Pius XII became a figure of such compelling and even crucial historical significance, and why what he said and did—and did not say and do—sparks such ambivalence today, and remains so polarizing. Who can generate more passion—whether among those damning or defending him—than Pacelli?

In 1942 the editors of the *New York Times* read the twenty-six-page papal Christmas message with tremendous care and concluded as follows:

> When a leader bound impartially to nations on both sides condemns as heresy the new form of national state which subordinates everything to itself; when he declares that whoever wants peace must protect against "arbitrary attacks" the "juridical safety of individuals"; when he assails violent occupation of territory, the exile and persecution of human beings for no other reason than race or political opinion; when he says that people must fight for a just and decent peace, a "total peace"—the impartial judgment is like a verdict in a high court of justice.

Yet many in our day insist that the pope's Christmas message was insufficient.

The important truth is that criticisms of Pius XII go far beyond concern over one man's failings or one institution's hypocrisies. The list of governments, organizations, and leaders who have either traduced sworn obligations or failed in high callings is endless, from democracy and liberal nationalism to all brands of socialism, from leaders of charities to banks to great armies. Somehow, however, the papacy stands apart. Saul Friedländer writes that the popes exposed themselves to uniquely probing assessments because their claim was one of "moral witnessing" and not merely protecting "institutional interests."

These words are important for gauging Kornberg's own standards. "As a universal moral authority," he asserts in his book's conclusion, "an immense gap existed between [Pius XII's] claims and reality." That gap is particularly glaring and dismaying because "Catholic traditions had always revered the memory of its martyrs." Kornberg seems to imply that Pius should have given up his life. If so, of what other institution, religious or secular, would an outsider conceivably write such a thing?

Kornberg might argue that he is only granting the truth of what some inside the church had already said. He mentions the diaries of the unfortunately little known German Catholic anti-Nazi Theodor Haecker, who wrote in 1940 that the Vatican had forgotten that Peter was not only bishop of Rome, but also a martyr. And he might also have cited Konrad Adenauer, who regretted after the war that bishops had not been put in concentration camps as a result of their Christian witness.

Still, there is something remarkable about the conclusion Kornberg reaches. What *The Pope's Dilemma* tells us, despite all the disdain its author has gathered for the Vatican over decades of meticulous study, is that it's good when Catholics go to their deaths *in witness to their faith*. Kornberg is suggesting that if this witness was worth dying for, it was worth living for. This in itself is a kind of faith, shared by authors ranging from Dalin and Riebling to Kornberg, Cornwell, O'Brien, and many others. It is a faith that popes and bishops and countless prelates over many centuries have failed to shake. ■

Richard Alleva

Missions Accomplished

'THE FOUNDER' & 'HIDDEN FIGURES'

All salesmen get in your face sooner or later, and Michael Keaton as Ray Kroc gets in yours right in the very first shot of *The Founder*, the propulsively entertaining biopic about the evolution of McDonald's from a single, modest family-owned restaurant into a worldwide force that feeds (if that's the right word) the entire planet. In that first extreme close-up shot, Keaton—his eyes ablaze beneath devilishly arched eyebrows—flatters and pressures and cajoles the off-camera potential buyer of whatever it is he's trying to sell. Soon his Bugs Bunny smile takes on a life of its own, a frightening life because it's not animated by any delight in a unique product but by sheer all-purpose salesmanship. Kroc's a demon of persuasion, but all this Mephisto is trying to sell is…a milkshake maker. The spiel ends. We cut to a silent medium shot. Salesman and customer face each other. And the buyer isn't buying. A shrug, a mumble, he's gone. And poor Kroc packs up and wearily hits the road.

He won't be poor much longer. Mystified by an unusually large order for those milkshake makers, Ray drives to San Bernardino, California, to interview the buyers, the McDonald brothers, Dick (superbly played by Nick Offerman, all glowering integrity) and Mac (equally well done by John Carroll Lynch, all good-humored but vulnerable expansiveness), who have had success with a restaurant that serves high-quality burgers with great speed in disposable cartons. It's all quite novel in 1954. In a wonderful montage, we see how the brothers used assembly-line techniques choreographed with a precision that Balanchine might envy. The result was satisfied customers, a well-paid and loyal staff, and relatively rich owners: capitalism with a human face. Ray Kroc wants in, but then he utters the fateful word: "franchise."

The Founder is, inevitably, a sad tale of usurpation, unethical business behavior, and gargantuan ambition. The McDonald brothers practiced such small-scale, well-honed craftsmanship that medieval cobblers might have recognized them as spiritual heirs. But to be small-scaled is to be doomed, as Ray Kroc soon proves. He is a champion of all things large and modern: homogenization, standardization, incorporation, globalization. Kroc, his energies now focused on a product he believes in, creates a national chain employing the brothers' "speedy system" but lowering the quality of the food. And when Mac and Dick baulk, Kroc undercuts them by buying the land beneath each franchise instead of merely leasing space. Thus, he makes money as a landlord and limits the control of the brothers over the chain. Eventually, Kroc buys the McDonalds out, leaving them with more than a million dollars each but without the 1 percent of profits he'd promised over a handshake.

Is Kroc so ruthless that we cease to care about him? Well, is Shakespeare's Richard III so murderous that we cease to watch him? We care for Juliet and Falstaff, but fascination is what we feel for Richard III. Of another lethal Shakespeare character, Coriolanus, critic Marvin Mudrick wrote, "He's like a great dancer or athlete, exciting to think about, paralyzing to meet, terrific to watch in action, but you wouldn't want to have to live with him." In his own way, Kroc has that sort of kinetic magnetism, and director John Lee Hancock and writer Robert D. Siegel keep us from hating him by showing that his bruised, middle-aged spirit (he was fifty-two when he met the McDonalds) craved a success much different from what the brothers wanted. They loved to see the contentment on their customers' faces, but Kroc needed the faceless signs of success provided by profit margins and the knowledge that his product was virtually everywhere. Watching Keaton's Ray Kroc, you might not like him, but you "get" him. He is what American business—with our cooperation—has become.

Michael Keaton in The Founder

THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY

Janelle Monáe, Taraji P. Henson, Octavia Spencer in Hidden Figures

Exiting a theater screening *Hidden Figures*, I walked in a knot of people who were aglow with enthusiasm. They were feeling good about the film's heroines, African-American women who had done splendid computational work that helped launch the early space flights at Cape Canaveral. (In fact, they were called "human computers.") Their scientific contributions were all the more heroic for being made under the double pressures of racial prejudice and male chauvinism. Three fine actresses—Taraji Henson as mathematician Katherine Johnson; Octavia Spencer as Dorothy Vaughan, a computer supervisor; and Janelle Monae as aspiring engineer Mary Jackson—all sound every note of pathos, comedy, and nobility that the script makes available to them.

But I couldn't share the glow. In fact, I felt sentimentally pummeled by this fast-moving, slickly made, and nuance-free film. The problem is not that it doesn't get every fact right (*The Founder* probably cuts factual corners, too). The problem is the sheer audience-pandering crudeness. I could cite many examples of this, but let the following suffice:

When Katherine, the only black person working within a group of white males, goes to get herself a cup of coffee, all heads rise and swivel toward her in robotically uniform, bigoted alarm. I'm sure there was bigotry (a separate coffee pot labeled "colored" soon appears), but why such simple-minded choreography? Real office bigotry works by sidelong glances and muttered insults. And, by the way, what were all these guys *doing* at their desks? We never see anyone in the room except Katherine make a single contribution to the program.

Several white male characters outside that robotic group—grumpy but fair Task Director Al Harrison (played by Kevin Costner), charming John Glenn, and a nice Polish Jewish engineer—are no doubt intended to balance the cartoonish bigotry of the other men. But why are there *three* white female supervisors with identically malefic facial expressions who eye our heroines as if they couldn't wait to tell the KKK about them? I'm not saying that scriptwriters Allison Schroeder and Theodore Melfi should have included a quota of decent white characters, but why such concentration of racist loathing in three interchangeable white women? There's something strange going on here.

Katherine is constantly forced to use a segregated women's bathroom far from her workspace. Why, even after she has won her boss's respect, does she make no complaint until he bawls her out for being away on a bathroom break? Is it just so that she can make a big crowd-pleasing speech bawling him out in return? Having to fault such a nobly intentioned film is no fun. But noble intentions don't excuse flattening the humanity of a fascinating true story. *Hidden Figures* is a cornball tribute to some great women. They deserved something better. ■

20TH CENTURY FOX

DONLAD TRUMP JR. (LEFT) AND ERIC TRUMP

Sam Adler-Bell

Not Like Us

Capital without Borders
Wealth Managers and the One Percent
Brooke Harrington
Harvard University Press, $29.95, 400 pp.

Americans have insufficient antipathy toward the extraordinarily rich. I hope this isn't a controversial view. We like them too much. Despite a short-lived blossoming of post-recession anger toward the "one percent," and the efforts of anti-plutocratic politicians like Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, Americans persist in seeing extreme wealth as a virtue—a sign of integrity, intelligence, merit. Those who have it garner respect and deference, even reverence. Being wealthy signifies that you have done something good, achieved something praiseworthy. More than any previous presidential candidate, Donald Trump made his net worth a centerpiece of his campaign, the proof he was worthy of the office. His opponent, in turn, sought to portray him as not quite as wealthy as he claimed: a boastful con man, not a real billionaire. We know how well that worked.

The notion that being a billionaire itself might be disqualifying—a hindrance rather than an advantage when leading the country—never seemed to cross anyone's mind. But it should have. The conventional wisdom that millionaires and billionaires are "out of touch" contains within it a capacious truth. Very rich people tend to be less empathetic, less altruistic, and more selfish than people of lesser means. Psychological studies confirm this. Their wealth instrumentalizes their relationships to others, even those they love. It isolates them from the vast majority of non-rich people and alienates them from our concerns, our lived experience, our suffering. To put it plainly, extraordinarily wealthy people are not "like us," and I see no good moral or political reason why we should pretend that they are.

On the contrary, the instinct to forgive and (worse) identify with the very wealthy has extremely bad political effects. It gives us presidents like Donald Trump—and, let's be frank, candidates like Hillary Clinton. It eases the passage of upward redistribution, normalizes the logic of austerity, and undermines the basis for mass working-class politics. The cruel irony is that it is precisely the working class's superior capacity to empathize with others and to see ourselves in them—a tendency toward mutual care and concern born of necessity—that makes us so vulnerable to the war the rich have been waging (and winning) against us for ages. The rich, meanwhile, harbor no such illusions. They don't think we are like them. They hardly think of us at all. While we live our lives—and vote—as if we're all, already, fundamentally the same, the rich do everything in their power to ensure that we remain fundamentally different. The wolves are wearing wolves' clothing, but we're still treating them like sheep.

The opaque means by which the wealthy preserve their luxury at our expense is the subject of Brooke Harrington's new book *Capital without Borders: Wealth Managers and the One Percent*. The book addresses a challenging sociological question: Who are the agents engaged in the maintenance of wealth stratification and what are their methods? Harrington's study points the finger at a little-understood class of professionals known euphemistically as "wealth managers." Their role in exacerbating the ever-growing chasm of wealth inequality, Harrington believes, has been woefully underappreciated.

Her account of the social, cultural, and financial intricacies of this profession—about two-thirds of the book—is no small feat. Owing to the secrecy and discretion demanded by "ultra-high net worth" individuals, wealth managers are not predisposed to divulging the details of their work. Especially not to curious outsiders with digital recorders. Nor is there a significant material archive to draw from. Wealth management, by design, leaves little in the way of a paper trail.

In overcoming these obstacles, Harrington displays an admirable degree of sociological grit. In 2007, she enrolled in a certification program in Trust and Estate Planning (TEP) herself. Two years later, she graduated with honors. Her immersion afforded her a semi-insider's perspective. She gained access to proprietary training materials and was welcomed into a professional society of wealth managers. Most importantly, she used her certification to gain the trust of her interview participants, whose candid (albeit anonymous) responses are the basis for the book.

Harrington serves as a sort of Virgil for the reader. Only our Virgil has spent two years—in Switzerland!—training in the implementation of the sordid degradations on display. I myself experienced a mild vertigo, a mixture of titillation and disgust, at the book's glimpses of unfathomable luxury and the ornate means undertaken to preserve it. This proximity to power and intimacy with its inner workings is one of the draws of the profession. Harrington's respondents tell stories of globe-trotting daytrips on private jets and late-night drinks with heads of industry and heads of state. Wealth managers become their clients' most intimate confidants, entrusted with a family's darkest secrets. As Eleanor, an American practitioner, put it, "It's like being a voyeur…the client has to undress in front of you."

What do wealth managers do exactly? In short, they engage in a form of preemptive warfare against the forces of wealth depletion—whether that means tax authorities, creditors, courts, regulators, or even spendthrift relatives. Practitioners erect a globe-straddling architecture to house their client's wealth that is simultaneously dynamic, impenetrable, and opaque. And thanks to the financialization of our economy, especially since the 1980s, wealth is unprecedentedly fungible

and mobile. "Keeping assets circulating among structures and across jurisdictions," Harrington writes, "allows them to move through the regulatory apparatus of nation-states in a nearly frictionless manner."

The building blocks of these asset-holding structures are trusts, foundations, and corporations. Perhaps the most notorious of these is the trust—as in "trust fund"—a fiduciary arrangement in which a portion of private wealth is sequestered from an estate, allowing the beneficiary (often an heir) to enjoy the benefits of ownership without incurring its duties and liabilities. The mortar, however, is the "offshore financial center" (OFC). The textbook on which the TEP certification is based opens with twenty-eight pages dedicated to OFCs. States like the Cayman Islands, Cook Islands, British Virgin Islands, Jersey (not that Jersey), and Mauritius have organized their legal systems to accommodate the priorities of the global elite and their fiduciaries. These locales, writes Harrington, are "zones of freedom from regulation and accountability," characterized by little to no taxes and hands-off (but politically stable) governance.

Wealth managers use "regulatory arbitrage" to "liberate" their clients from the rule of law. That is their job. To unencumber the wealthy from the legal and civic obligations that apply to the rest of us: the obligation to pay our taxes, to pay our debts, to pay our civil liabilities. As Nicolas Shaxson, an expert on offshore finance has observed, the project of global wealth management is to offer "escape routes" for wealthy elites to avoid "the duties that come with living in and obtaining benefits from society." Taken together, these strategies shift the fiscal burdens of society downward, "imposing a surcharge on those who are unable to afford" them. In the United States, that surcharge could be as much as 15 percent in additional taxes to cover a "$35 billion underpayment by the wealthiest Americans."

In the final third of *Capital without Borders*, Harrington helps dispel two of the most pernicious myths underlying America's overly tolerant attitude toward the extremely rich: first, that they deserve to be so, and second, that the rest of us might one day be extremely rich too. The first falls when we understand that the vast majority of these high-net-worth individuals—including our president and his children—have benefited from dynastic wealth. As legal scholar Lawrence Friedman has said, "An upper class is a class that inherits. A lower class is a class that inherits nothing." In the next three decades, it's estimated that between $10 and $41 trillion in private wealth will be inherited in the United States. Practically all of it will descend to a tiny fraction of the population. Eighty percent of us will inherit nothing at all.

The second myth is dispelled when we realize that, for much the same reason, the prospects that the non-rich will accumulate great or even significant wealth in their lifetimes are miniscule. This is Thomas Piketty's central insight, made famous by his blockbuster book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. When the rate of return on capital (r) exceeds the rate of economic growth (g)—as has been the case for most of human history—wealth originating in the past inevitably grows faster than wealth stemming from work. The wealth you create from your labor (unless you're Taylor Swift or LeBron James) simply cannot compete with wealth derived from inheritance. We're screwed from the start.

The relatively low inequality we associate with the middle twentieth century is an exception to this rule, born of a brief period in which g exceeded r—which was as much the result of wartime devastation and post-war recovery as redistribution (though higher taxes and regulation didn't hurt). We have since returned to the norm. In the latter half of the twentieth century, growth in the United States and Europe stagnated while the rate of return on capital surged. States—captured by the super-rich and eager to attract mobile capital from the global market—have done less and less to counteract its effects. As a result, intergenerational transfers of wealth have acquired a "self-perpetuating momentum" that increases inequality generation after generation.

Wealth managers, Harrington suggests, have enabled and exacerbated these conditions. By all but obviating inheritance taxes—as one practitioner said, "the estate tax is a voluntary tax in our country; you only pay it if you don't plan"—avoiding the pitfalls of liability and risk, and sheltering dynastic wealth from taxes on capital gains, wealth managers have set in motion a "perpetual money-making machine." They ensure that the benefits of accumulated wealth accrue to a single bloodline and sabotage the state's means of generating upward mobility. Wealth managers are foot soldiers in the preservation of class hierarchy.

The severity of this situation, the sheer Dickensian absurdity of it, is perhaps our best hope that what Harrington calls the "moral valence attached to wealth" might shift back in a more healthy direction—away from the blinkered admiration that helped bring us President Trump and toward a more clear-eyed suspicion of the rich and their enablers. It was not so long ago, in perhaps analogous times, that an American president said, "The transmission from generation to generation of vast fortunes by will, inheritance, or gift is not consistent with the ideals and sentiments of the American people." It would be an unmitigated good for the vast majority of us if we once again concluded, as FDR did, that such "great accumulations of wealth" perpetuate an "undesirable concentration of control in relatively few individuals over the enjoyment and welfare of many, many others."

At the very least, we might start by resenting the extremely rich for what they are doing to us. After all, we expect the wolf to eat the lamb. But we don't expect the lamb to praise him while he does it. ■

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Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Big Stick, Short Memory

The Mirror Test
America at War in Iraq and Afghanistan
J. Kael Weston
Knopf, $28.96, 585 pp.

The Will to Lead
America's Indispensable Role in the Global Fight for Freedom
Anders Fogh Rasmussen
Broadside Books, $27.99, 247 pp.

Vladimir Putin and Basher Al Assad, our best of enemies, said they were looking forward to working with Donald Trump. What must they think after his first weeks in the oval office? He has picked fights with President Enrique Peña Nieto of Mexico, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, and Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull of Australia, three of America's closest allies. Do Putin and Assad expect kinder, gentler treatment?

Trump's campaign promises to rebuild the U.S. military, repudiate the Iran nuclear agreement, require NATO members to pay their share, give China what-for on currency and trade (ditto Mexico on immigration and trade), and embrace Putin portend major changes in U.S. foreign policy. So far, he has delivered belligerence to allies and a chaotic rollout of rules banning citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries, including U.S. green-card holders. If the negotiator-in-chief thinks blowing up long-standing relationships and established procedures will reorder the globe to his specifications, he's in for a surprise.

First, the Trump administration is not inheriting—nor can it create—a tabula rasa; renegotiating current policies and commitments takes time and patience. Second, alliances are embedded in long histories. Some of our alliances have vigilant domestic advocates, and some are plainly tied to U.S. national interest. Third, foreign policy is a balancing act. Allies and enemies alike have economic and political weapons to counter Trump's threats. They could withdraw from common ventures, terminate intelligence sharing, limit reciprocal privileges as well as impose tariffs. It is wholly predictable that the new president will face roadblocks that the real estate candidate did not expect in promising to build a wall, end NAFTA, and disrupt NATO.

Two new books on U.S. foreign policy could not foresee Trump in charge, yet they present sobering prospects to the dealmaker-in-chief.

J. Kael Weston's *The Mirror Test* lays out almost every foreign-policy challenge the United States has faced since 9/11 in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Middle East—not just militarily but politically, culturally, and economically. We are good at invasions but, as Weston points out, follow-up efforts have entangled us in moral and political chaos. A Foreign Service officer, he was on hand at the UN when Colin Powell made the spurious case for invading Iraq. Then, from 2003 to 2010, Weston was an eyewitness to the outcome. He served as a State Department political advisor on the front lines with the Marines in Iraq and with the army in Afghanistan. His esteem for the military increased as his respect for political leaders diminished. He holds Powell, Cheney, Bush, and, yes, Obama responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands—including, by his count, 6,970 Americans.

CNS PHOTO / ALAA AL-MARJANI, REUTERS

Displaced women at camp in Iraq

As a civilian responsible for civil-society projects in military zones, Weston saw the mangled bodies of Marines, the body parts of his translators, and the assassination of Iraqi friends and allies. The carnage infuriated him, above all because he was responsible for some of those deaths. Iraqi officials who signed onto his rebuilding projects were killed for cooperating. He persuaded Marine officers in Falluja to distribute ballots for the 2005 Anbar provincial elections; thirty-one Marines died in a helicopter crash delivering those ballots to Sunnis who never intended to participate in the election.

The Mirror Test is suffused with anger, sadness, regret. Weston's wandering account ends in the reverie of a pilgrimage back home to the bedsides of the wounded and the graves of the dead. Full of good intentions, Weston charges himself with complicity in the reckless decisions of political leaders. Insight and remorse come too late for the dead and the wounded, but he offers hard-learned lessons for those willing to study them.

In contrast, Anders Fogh Rasmussen's *The Will to Lead* is a paean to American hegemony and a plea for more of it. He skips the baleful consequences of U.S. Middle East policy, harking back to the golden years of Cold War containment. He extols the aggressive leadership of Truman, Kennedy, and Reagan, and the willingness of two Bush presidents to fight three wars. Rasmussen implores the United States to abandon Obama's policy of "leading from behind" and return to serving, as he unabashedly puts it, as "the world's policeman."

Rasmussen, a former Danish prime minister (2001-09) and secretary-general of NATO (2009-13), raises his hand in favor of America's "big stick," albeit with a soupçon of diplomacy. He selectively invokes the ways the

United States shaped global relations and preserved world peace during the long decades of the Cold War (omitting mention of Korea and Vietnam). In recent wars (in the first Gulf war, then in Afghanistan and then in Iraq again), the United States has shown resolve, but sadly failed to follow through and secure the peace. The UN refusal to sanction the U.S. attack on Saddam Hussein's Iraq notwithstanding, Rasmussen insists that the invasion was legal. Even Hillary Clinton and Trump, backed off their early support for the invasion, with the latter falsely claiming he never supported it at all. But not Rasmussen, who is also deeply disappointed with Obama's failure to secure Libya after the fall of Gaddafi and to put an end to Assad's rule in Syria.

It is tempting to read the word "will" in the title of *The Will to Lead* as "willful," a blind faith in U.S. military power. And yet, Rasmussen's worries are real. Once prime minister of a small Scandinavian county and head of NATO during the early days of Ukraine's crisis with Russia, he understands the military vulnerability of Europe. His plea for the United States to play policeman reflects a keen sense of the EU's dependence on NATO. He can hardly be optimistic about Trump's apparent eagerness to make deals with Putin. Yet Rasmussen's enthusiasm for what could be called American overreach is in stark contrast to Weston's report and to Obama's leading from behind. Some might think a humble rethinking of foreign and military policy is in order. Not Rasmussen. And Trump?

If the new president were to read these books, he would find each, in sharply different ways, a challenge to his crusading promise to make America great again. These authors make clear the United States faces difficult choices amid severe constraints: there is no tabula rasa. There will be pushback, and there will be unforeseen consequences. ■

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels, *a former editor of* Commonweal, *writes frequently in these pages and blogs at dotCommonweal.*

Daniel Callahan

End Games

The Consolations of Mortality

Making Sense of Death

Andrew Stark

Yale University Press, $30, 275 pp.

I received this book for review in early June and skimmed it quickly to catch its flavor. Yet before I could read it more carefully, my body began to fall apart. As I marked my eighty-sixth birthday, I came down with two separate life-threatening illnesses that gave me more than ample hospital time to spend making sense of death and pondering the consolations of mortality. My predicament made such a book uncomfortably salient. Don't ask for whom the bell tolls—it tolls for me.

Andrew Stark is a management and political-science professor at the University of Toronto, and he has a straightforward agenda; he wants to persuade us that mortality and death make "the best deal imaginable" for us humans. He offers four possible "consolations"—arguments, really—for accepting mortality: (1) that death doesn't warrant our fear, since "as long as a person is alive, his death has not happened. And then once his death occurs, he is no longer around to suffer it"; (2) that "since a well ordered life offers everything that immortality could, death deprives us of nothing"; (3) that "immortality itself would actually be an awful fate," sentencing us to an eternity of "excruciating boredom"; and (4) that our fear of mortality is superfluous, since "within life—this vale of tears—we already face everything that we dread about death."

Objections to Stark's sanguine take on death might begin with the obvious: we have no knowledge whatever about what it is to be dead. Those who are dead, after all—a reticent group—refuse to tell us. Lacking any evidence whatever, we therefore have nothing to go on beyond our imagination, nurtured by traditions and speculations over the centuries. Stark himself has an exceptionally rich, often playful, imagination, one that draws on highly engaging ideas, speculations, epigrams, and thought experiments with which to build his argument. The statesman Solon, he reminds us, supposedly advised King Croesus to "Call no man happy until

Jean François Millet, Death and the Woodcutter, *1859*

he is dead." Yet, Stark notes, "after remaining happy for a long stretch of his life, Croesus entered a bad endgame.... [and] spent his final days in humiliating captivity." So, is a long happy life with a bad end better than a poor life with a good end? "Neither," Stark answers. "The dichotomy between culmination and cumulation is…an illusion." He tries to explain that illusion by imagining a football game between the Detroit Lions and the St. Louis Rams, with the Rams coming back to win in the last quarter. "Finality," he concludes, "still matches quantity; there's no conflict." Get that? I am not sure I do.

Here is another sample of Stark's nimble mind at work. The late British philosopher Bernard Williams observed that immortality might be interminably boring, a ceaseless recycling of our tired old memories, thoughts, and aspirations. Alternatively, Stark notes, our attachments, memories, values, tastes might change, fashioning us in our immortality into "a new person"; but in that case, he argues, "immortality would simply entail a different kind of death: a repeated cutting off of our previous selves and lives" that might trigger "an ever-increasingly mournful nostalgia for the past"—or, even worse, "a kind of perpetual dementia."

I will say this in Stark's favor—his book and its elegantly gnarled arguments, while too clever by half in places, surely beat daytime hospital TV for interest and amusement. I do not have space here (or desire) to quibble with him over dozens of dubious arguments. Instead, I want to note one perspective he omits almost altogether, and two important sources he does not draw on.

The important fact he skirts is that when we die, we take leave of those closest to us and many friends beyond that. Death leaves a terrible gap in our life with others. If you are my age, you learn to adapt to that reality and more or less accept it; we are all going away. Yet if it is the death of a beloved wife and longtime daily companion, or child who died in an accident, or a friend who commits suicide, that is not so easy. And that is not even to mention those desperate migrants who drown in their search for freedom, or those killed by genocide. Who exactly is the calmly rational thinker Stark envisions as the bearer of such intricate reflections on mortality as are offered up in these pages? The real hero of his book, Epicurus, is one of those historical heroes who had it all: power and prestige; a calm and sober temperament; a good life and a peaceful (if briefly painful) death. He is for that reason not the ideal model for the rest of us; we should all be so lucky!

A religious perspective on mortality and death would have enriched this book, by taking account of something to which Stark gives scant attention: that for many people, mortal life is an evil to be escaped, not embraced. People who have seen their children murdered before their eyes cannot be easily reconciled to an Epicurean coolness. The

Christian idea of heaven is utopian but coherent: Jesus was crucified, died, and then rose from the dead three days later to lead his followers to heaven. One may not believe that story, but it reflects a powerful drive to find an alternative to mere extinction, and particularly after a miserable life.

The other perspective worth noting is a significant wave of research that pushes against Stark's static view of mortality. As long ago as 1795, Condorcet wondered aloud whether "it be absurd to imagine that this perfection of the human species might be capable of indefinite progress," specifically a dramatic increase in our life span. Today, one scientist has laid out a plan to allow us all to live to be 2500. He is considered a bit far out, but a number of Silicon Valley entrepreneurs—not known as sentimentalists—are betting millions of dollars that aging can be cleaned up of its burdens and life extended well beyond 100.

Andrew Stark ends his lively and adventurous book with these elusive sentences: "Two features of mortal existence—that our selves move together relentlessly into the future while the events of our lives ceaselessly disappear into the past—are finally what bars life's losses from ever resembling death's. And while that fact does not console me about death, it does console me about life." There a Delphic flavor in those words, and I find that in or out of a hospital, I want more than the thin consolation they offer. It may take another hospital stay to pin down just what I do want. But what if that stay was painful and miserable, would it be worth it? Or am I better off in my present muddled state? I should be careful; I could get the wrong answer. ■

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Anthony Domestico

The World in Its Glory

Collected Poems

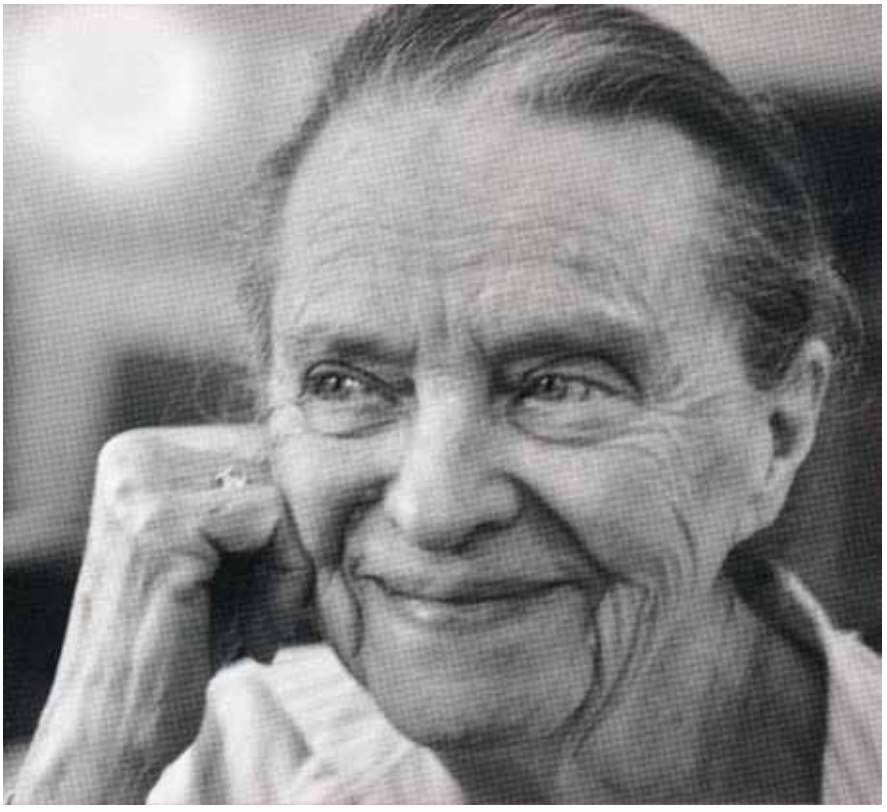
Marie Ponsot
Knopf, $35, 496 pp.

Marie Ponsot has had a remarkable, and remarkably long, career. Her debut collection, *True Minds*, was published way back in 1956—a distant time when Allen Ginsberg, Robert Lowell, and Elizabeth Bishop strode the earth. The first poem in that book, and the first poem in her new *Collected Poems*, is "Take My Disproportionate Desire." It speaks in a voice that is confident and complicated, rich but not overwrought. Above all else, it speaks in a voice that is attentive—attentive to itself and to the world it speaks of and through:

Enough of expressionist flowers lions and wheat,
Let us consider our separate needs
Here in this beautiful city of delicate surfaces
That a touch makes bleed.

Ponsot has said that poetic "forms create an almost bodily pleasure in the poet." She lives and works within poetic forms, but she also tweaks and torques them. In its use of rhyme and regular stanza structure, for instance, "Take My Disproportionate Desire" shows the joy of form even while it urges us to turn in new directions, away from the familiar tropes of "flowers lions and wheat."

Another early poem, "Espousal," also embraces and enlivens formal regularity. Fourteen lines long, this sonnet organizes itself not into three quatrains and a concluding rhymed couplet, as the traditional Shakespearean sonnet would, nor into the Petrarchan sonnet's octave and sestet, but into four tercets and a concluding unrhymed couplet. The



Marie Ponsot

PHOTO: TOM BIRMINGHAM

shorter stanzas give the poem great velocity—appropriate enough for a poem that is about the anarchic force of love.

The speaker opens with a declaration—"Glad that we love and good at it, we riot in it"—and goes on to command the world around her to answer to this riotousness: "Hurry, we shout to the tree-soft hills." The world responds to her command, matching the riot of love with its own vigorous activity: the hills "Lapse back; the free rivers trapped at the dam strive / Beautifully to follow the big swathe of our course. // The shot sun leaps; he whirls; he plummets to fall / Cut out of heaven by our bow-hot knives." Paradoxically, it's through the restraint of the sonnet form (albeit a strange and off-kilter sonnet form) that Ponsot expresses love's radical and enlivening power. In "Espousal," it is form and love, order and energy, that are espoused to one another.

The much later "Summer Sestina" performs a similar marriage of the formed and the extravagant. The poem, which is dedicated to *Commonweal*'s poetry editor, Rosemary Deen, employs the fixed form of the sestina: six stanzas of six lines each, all using the same six end-words in different sequence, followed by an *envoi*, a three-line concluding stanza that includes the poem's six end-words. Here is the poem's concluding stanza:

> By her teaching there we are changed,
> colored,
> Made ready for evening, reconciled to
> earth,
> Gardened to richness by her spendthrift
> light.

That last line celebrates the delights offered by poetic form—how structural extravagance (say, the inventiveness called forth by the sestina's complex structural demands) might cultivate all kinds of "richness." Form, pattern, order: Ponsot suggests that all of these color and change us precisely by making us ready for evening (death) and reconciling us to earth (our physical embodiment)—a readying and reconciling that makes the world richer, fuller, deeper.

W. H. Auden once said that his first thought on encountering a new poem was, "Here is a verbal contraption. How does it work?" Ponsot clearly rewards such attention to the poem as a verbal contraption, a patterned sequence of rhymes and rhythms. But if a poem marks itself off from prose in part by its intricate formal engineering, it also defines itself by a surplus of energy and desire. Poetry is life-affirming in a deep, even theological sense. A true poem has life, and it has it more abundantly than other kinds of language.

And so it is with Ponsot's poetry. The first poem in *Collected Poems*, "Take My Disproportionate Desire," ends with a strong declaration: "I need that passion, miracle, / Incautious faith. To only you I offer it." Passion, miracle, and faith: *True Minds* and the collections that followed—including 1981's *Admit Impediment*, 1998's *The Bird Catcher*, 2002's *Springing*, and 2009's *Easy*—contain all these things in abundance. There is passion for, and faith in, music and painting, flowers and philosophy, God and the "city seeing loving I cry / Is holy."

Ponsot is one of our great religious poets. By this I mean not only that she writes great poems with religious themes or imagery (though she does), but also that, like Gerard Manley Hopkins, her poems attend to the sacredness of experience—to the glory that can be found in the mind's musings, in the body's pleasure, as well as its suffering. In "Why Vow," Ponsot describes how Hopkins "holds / that his self is unlost," a theological first principle that his work asserts again and again, despite the darkness of the world: "Obedient: he said he would. / He did as he said. He did / as he was told. He could / good as gold, hold good." Ponsot also holds the world to be good, to be glorious, and her poems help us attend to the miracle of consciousness and the startling nature of sensory experience: "instantly everyone's cup is clean, bright, full / of a supreme wine, / its ripe light still." Want to know what it's like to see—and to see truly—the migration of birds from New York in September? Read "In Abeyance," where Ponsot describes the "hours of disembodiment, selves tossed out to vision," as she sees hawks "ebb from us, emigrant, / their perspective on or in / the now of air, transfiguring." Interested in what differentiates childhood vision from adult vision? Read "For Denis at Ten," which ends, "He goes there, whistling. / Nothing reminds him of something. / He sees what is there to see." Like the hawk, Ponsot transfigures the world; like the child, she sees the world as it is.

The poet Christian Wiman has said, "I don't really believe in *Collected Poems*. They're almost always bad. The bad so far outweighs the good, I mean, that you're left with a negative impression of even truly great poets like Frost or Stevens." Well, Ponsot's book offers an astonishingly high proportion of good to bad—a sure sign, I think, of her greatness. She has been publishing poetry for fifty years, with the past twenty being her most productive: the poems written during that period take up more than half the pages of the *Collected Poems*. Now ninety-five, Ponsot continues to publish regularly. Her most recent poems, many of which first appeared in *Commonweal* (where she was once poetry editor), still dazzle with their learnedness ("Against Fierce Secrets" grows out of Yeats's "Among School Children," for instance) and with their sharpness of phrasing. "I like to drink my language in / straight up, no ice no twist no spin." That's about as good an opening to a poem as you can get. ■

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PHOTO BY AZLAN DUPREE

Who Saved Whom?

Wayne Sheridan

One day several years ago I was sitting on a bench in front of Heine Bros. coffee shop on Frankfort Avenue in Louisville, Kentucky. This portion of Frankfort Avenue parallels a railroad track. A young woman walked up the street, a little unsteadily it seemed to me. I immediately noticed her eyes, which had a half-vacant, faraway look. I had seen that look far too often before in the seriously depressed.

A train whistle sounded. Immediately the young woman ran across the street toward the tracks. Instinctively, I got up and followed her. There was another whistle. She walked over and stood between the two tracks. Another whistle: the freight train was getting closer. I walked toward the woman and talked to her softly, trying to persuade her to move away from the tracks. Finally, she did.

It was a brief respite. The whistle sounded again, and, suddenly, she ran back onto the tracks. I quickly decided to run straight at her. I suppose I thought—if I was thinking at all—that I could grab her and carry her off on the other side, or at least push her out of the way. And I suppose I thought my own momentum would be enough for me to avoid the oncoming engine.

When I had almost reached the tracks and could see the engine approaching from the corner of my eye, the woman suddenly jumped from the track right into my arms. We fell down just a few seconds before the train passed. After we disentangled ourselves, she began to pummel me with her fists, saying, again and again, "Why did you? Why did you?"

Then she turned away and ran back down Frankfort Avenue in the direction from which she had come. A small crowd had gathered. I asked someone to call 911 and tell them what had happened. I told them I would follow her at a distance. About five minutes later a police car drove slowly up Frankfort Avenue. I waved the officers down and pointed to the woman, who had turned onto a side street. I watched until she was safely in the police car, then said a short prayer and walked home.

A few months later, as I was sitting in the same coffee shop on Frankfort Avenue, the same young woman walked in, came up to me and said, "I just want to thank you." We exchanged first names and I gave her my phone number and told her, "If you ever need to talk, call me." It was a few months after this second encounter that I shared the whole experience with a close friend, who, it turned out, knew the woman professionally. My friend told me the woman was a medical doctor and a social activist. My friend also told me that the woman had since moved to Cleveland, where she was working in a clinic serving indigent people.

When from time to time I reflect on all this, I often wonder who saved whom: Did the woman jump into my arms to save herself, or to save me? Over time, I've come to believe her training and instincts as a physician would not let me risk my death in order to save her. Her impulse to save another's life won out over her impulse to take her own, her sense of duty overriding her despair. ■

Wayne Sheridan *is a freelance journalist, poet, and communications consultant to nonprofits. He lives with his wife, Sandra Dutton, on a farm in the Hudson Valley, north of New York City.*

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