

# Commonweal

A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

JANUARY 25, 2019

**“The Pennsylvania grand-jury report on sex abuse by Catholic priests is inaccurate, unfair, and fundamentally misleading. Its shortcomings should not be masked by its vehement style, its befuddling structure, or its sheer bulk.”**

**—Peter Steinfels  
(who actually read it)**





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# Commonweal

JANUARY 25, 2019 • VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 2

## UPFRONT

Letters 4

Editorial 5 *The Cost of Civilization*

## COLUMNIST

Living into *Laudato si'* 6 *Rita Ferrone*

## SHORT TAKES

Jupiter in Eclipse 7 *Harrison Stetler*

Risking Peace 10 *David A. Hoekema*

## ARTICLE

Vehemently Misleading 13 *Peter Steinfels*

## TELEVISION

A Royal Mess 27 *Celia Wren*

## FILM

*The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* 28 *Jared Lucky*

## BOOKS

*One in Christ* 30 *Margaret O'Brien Steinfels*

Karen J. Johnson

*The Enneads* 33 *David Bentley Hart*

edited by Lloyd P. Gerson

**BOOKMARKS** 35 *Anthony Domestico*

## POETRY

Miss Sweeney 29 *Michael Miller*

## LAST WORD

St. Bernadette's Blockhouse 38 *Dean Dettloff*



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## LETTERS

### *Another scandal, another insult*

#### DIRTY MONEY

I applaud *Commonweal* for keeping a glaring spotlight on Theodore McCarrick ("The Case of Theodore McCarrick," November 9). His case, I believe, has the potential of being the most significant disclosure in the sordid, unfolding history of the Catholic Church's sexual-abuse scandal. But I am still waiting for someone to connect all the dots. As the McCarrick story was emerging this summer, I was reading *Reporter*, the Seymour Hersch memoir. Where's Sy Hersch when we need him, I thought. Where is the dogged investigative reporter who can blow the lid off the McCarrick case? To date, only one side of the story is getting attention. The McCarrick case is not just about sex. His story demonstrates the full ugliness of the scandal because it involves the intersection of sex and money in the Catholic Church.

Why did Theodore McCarrick rise so far and so fast in the church? Because he was a superb fundraiser. The public record on McCarrick's relationship with one of his key donors strongly suggests that a reporter with Hersch's investigative skills would find evidence that McCarrick's money morality was no better than his sexual morality. During McCarrick's time as leader of the Archdiocese of Newark, a leading "benefactor" of the archdiocese and two related organizations (Seton Hall University and St. Benedict's Prep) was Robert Brennan, founder of First Jersey Securities. I place the word "benefactor" in quotes because we now know Brennan was a fraud. Despite a plea for leniency from McCarrick, one of Brennan's few character witnesses, the financier eventually spent eight years in a federal prison after being convicted of securities and bankruptcy fraud. A generous view of McCarrick's role in these frauds would be that he was guilty of nothing more than accepting

tainted money. But what would a sharp investigative reporter find if the McCarrick-Brennan relationship were re-examined? How would such a reporter describe the alchemy Brennan used to transform securities of dubious worth into high fliers? Did McCarrick and other beneficiaries know how integral they were to the Brennan fraud when they accepted stock donations and then converted the gifts into cash through less-than-arm's-length sales, thereby establishing false valuations?

We now know McCarrick's fellow bishops were willing to give him a pass for his sexual behavior. What's needed is a thorough examination of the other side of the bargain: the piles of money he raised for the church. How much of that was as dirty as the games he played in his now notorious beach house?

RICHARD HAAS  
Manchester, N.J.

#### INSULT TO INJURY

In his article about Theodore McCarrick, Boniface Ramsey suggests that the ultimate punishment would be to reduce McCarrick to lay status. This is a further insult to the laity. McCarrick's sin was committed against the laity (seminarians are laity until taking orders); then the compensation to the victim was paid out of the laity's charitable contributions, and in some areas their parish churches and schools were surrendered; the cleric was sent to a place to live a life of prayer and penance at the laity's expense. This was all done without any input from the laity. By the way, the clergy had the laity pray for forgiveness when the scandal emerged. To say removing McCarrick from the clerical life is sufficient punishment is one more insult to lay Catholics who have been faithful to the church.

THOMAS O'CONNELL  
Cary, N.C.



# The Cost of Civilization

**O**liver Wendell Holmes Jr. famously wrote in a 1927 Supreme Court opinion, “Taxes are what we pay for a civilized society.” They are the means to fund public services, a way of contributing to our common life and the common good, and an instrument of economic justice—the expression of solidarity through policy. But a telling mark of our barbarous times has been a decades-long obsession with cutting taxes, exemplified most recently by the massive tax cut signed into law just over one year ago—the most significant legislative achievement of Donald Trump’s presidency.

Of course, the cuts were not just Trump’s doing. They were also the work of congressional Republicans, not least the recently departed House speaker and indefatigable champion of trickle-down economics, Paul Ryan. “Most people, half the people in this country, live paycheck to paycheck, so there’s a lot of economic anxiety,” Ryan told the *New York Times* in November 2017. His prescription for such anxiety was, as always, “tax reform,” with the promise that the resulting economic growth and a few extra dollars in every paycheck would take care of everything.

Of course, it hasn’t. The “Tax Cut and Jobs” bill has proved to be mostly a gift to corporations and the wealthiest Americans. The slashing of the corporate rate from 35 percent to 21 percent has provided major windfalls for large companies, including Walmart, which saved \$1.6 billion over the first three quarters of 2018, and Bank of America, which saved \$2.4 billion. Meanwhile, Paul Ryan had the gall to brag about the public-school secretary who was “pleasantly surprised” by the extra \$1.50 per week she received in her paycheck. The legislation also specifically created a new deduction for so-called “pass-through” entities—companies organized as LLCs, sole proprietorships, partnerships, or S corporations. That translated into an estimated \$17 billion in tax savings for millionaires. (As it happens, most of Donald Trump’s businesses are pass-through companies.) All told, according to one estimate, 83 percent of the benefits from the tax cuts would be going to the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans.

This might all be easier to accept if the tax cuts actually spurred significant wage growth and investment in new projects and hiring, but mostly they haven’t. After the tax legislation was signed, some companies did make a show

of offering bonuses and raises to their employees. But one analysis showed that among 145 publicly traded companies, just 6 percent of the money they saved from the tax cuts went to workers. More often, the savings have been plowed into stock buybacks, which do nothing to raise wages or increase employment.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin absurdly promised that “not only will this tax plan pay for itself, but it will pay down debt.” So far, just the opposite has happened. The federal budget deficit for fiscal year 2018 ballooned 17 percent to \$779 billion; it is expected to hit \$1 trillion in fiscal year 2019. If the past is any guide, Republicans will eventually rediscover “fiscal responsibility” and use the very deficits they’ve created as an excuse to cut Social Security or spending on other vital programs.

Recently, however, there have been signs that the debate over taxes, so long dominated by the GOP’s fixation on cuts, may finally be shifting. In a televised interview, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the young, unapologetically progressive congresswoman from the Bronx, floated a 70 percent marginal tax rate for the wealthiest Americans. “Once you get to the tippy-tops, on your ten-millionth dollar, sometimes you see tax rates as high as 60 percent or 70 percent,” she said on *60 Minutes*. “That doesn’t mean all \$10 million are taxed at an extremely high rate. But it means that as you climb up this ladder, you should be contributing more.” Her comments generated a wave of commentary, with a surprising number of conservatives pretending not to know what *marginal* tax rates were and left-leaning writers pointing out that the top rates she proposed are not just economically sound, but had actually been the norm in the United States during the postwar decades of shared prosperity. As Paul Krugman put it in the *New York Times*, her ideas are “fully in line with serious economic research.”

They also square with basic ideas of fairness. Higher marginal tax rates on the wealthiest Americans would help combat the rampant inequality tearing at our social fabric. If the rich paid their fair share, the government would also be better able to address urgent problems like climate change and ensuring that every American has adequate health care. Those who care about living in a decent society could do worse than to follow Ocasio-Cortez’s lead. Call it the cost of civilization. ■

Rita Ferrone

# Living into *Laudato si'*

THE PHILIPPINE BISHOPS LEAD THE WAY

If you want to see an inspiring example of engagement with *Laudato si'*—Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment—look to the Philippines. Catholics in the Philippines, more than anywhere else, have brought this encyclical to life and made it their own.

*Laudato si'* was published in June 2015. Within a month the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines released a strong statement backing the central concerns of the encyclical: ecology, stewardship, and concern for the poor. Indeed, the effort to combat climate change seemed so important to them that they invoked the Mandatum of Holy Thursday, saying: "caring about climate change and its deleterious and devastating effects on all, but especially on impoverished and struggling nations and communities...is how, today, we must wash each others' feet."

Their efforts on the ground reflect the vigor of this statement. Church groups have lobbied for clean energy; fought the spread of polluting industries, deforestation, and mining; engaged indigenous communities in planting trees; and worked for solar-energy access for off-grid communities in poor areas. The bishops have long been concerned for local biodiversity, and they continue to press for its protection. They've held educational conferences to unpack *Laudato si'*, and worked to develop a new mindset of conservation among young

people. The World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, followed by a month long "season of creation," has a place in their calendar.

When the Global Catholic Climate Movement wanted to launch the *Laudato si'* pledge in 2017, they did not come to the United States. They went to Manila. The Archbishop there, Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, invited Catholics around the world to make a personal commitment to protecting the environment: "I don't want to sound presumptuous, but I would like to say that I am speaking in the name of the church, in the name of humanity, in the name of the poor, in the name of our common home, creation, in inviting you to please sign the *Laudato si'* pledge."

For a bishops' conference in a poor country, beset by violence and political upheavals, their commitment is impressive. Whether the ecological initiatives mentioned above have been carried out by a religious community, a diocese, a parish, a "ministry of ecology," a bishop, or a charitable organization, the banner over all of them has been *Laudato si'*. They have gone all out for this.

And for good reason. The Philippines, an archipelago in the western Pacific Ocean, is the third most vulnerable place in the world to the ravages of climate change. They are on the front lines for rising sea levels and increased severity of storms. Each year

about nineteen typhoons arise in their area and eight to nine of these make landfall. Such storms can be immensely destructive: in 2013 the super-typhoon Yolanda took 6,300 lives. Imagine the effects if there are more of these storms or if they get worse.

The response of the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Conference to *Laudato si'*, by comparison, has been weak, fragmented, and unimaginative. The most recent statement on climate change posted on the USCCB website is from 2001. Another document on the site, "Church Teaching on Ecology," does not even include *Laudato si'*! It's true that the USCCB's chairmen of committees on justice wrote to Trump-administration officials in support of the Paris climate agreement. But instead of full-throated opposition to human actions that contribute to climate change, they invoked a combination of human and natural causes as contributing factors and advocated *adaptation* to climate change. The conference's website offers some links to resources for *Laudato si'*, yet for many of these links a disclaimer pops up saying the conference does not endorse their contents.

Naturally, American Catholics have not been silent on ecology. Religious communities and institutions of higher education, as well as individual dioceses, parishes, and grassroots groups, have mobilized support for the encyclical. But without a firm commitment from the conference of bishops, climate change cannot hope to become a "Catholic issue" in the United States.

You would have thought that Francis's encyclical made it a Catholic issue, as well as a human, scientific, and global one. They get it in the Philippines. They get it in Ireland, where the bishops have divested from fossil fuels. They get it in lots of places. Here? We're still waiting. ■



A few palm trees remain standing amid the destruction caused by Typhoon Haiyan in the city of Tacloban in the Philippines.



Harrison Stetler

# Jupiter in Eclipse

THE YELLOW VEST MOVEMENT FORCES MACRON TO RETREAT

Reconciling French president Emmanuel Macron's barrage of reforms in favor of corporate interests and the rich with his claim to represent the nation's vital center requires no small feat of public-relations management. An entire lexicon has emerged since his election, summoned to deflect criticism and opposition. It's best demonstrated by one of the most telling verbal tics of the Macron era, uttered by officials and commentators alike: *pédagogie*. As more and more of the French public realize Macron's devotion to serving the wealthy, majority-party leaders and friendly editorialists have diagnosed the "real" problem: a failure to explain Macron's agenda and make it palatable to the public.

If only the average citizen were able to make sense of the master plan guiding their "Jupiterian" president, the refrain goes. Sure, this or that measure might mean a smaller paycheck at the end of the month, or the need to work several part-time and precarious jobs, or a longer and more difficult commute. But those who complain just don't understand his comprehensive vision: to get the country ready for the twenty-first century.

Macron's allies are, in a way, correct: all the parts of his agenda do clearly add up to *something*. He has rushed to dismantle union power, provide income-tax reductions for the wealthiest French families, establish a flat tax on investments, and abandon a set of estate taxes on wealth. In the spring of this year, employees of the national railroad company (SNCF) saw their protected-worker status removed, paving the way for privatization; the government is now pursuing the privatization of other pieces of critical infrastructure, such as the Paris airports, to provide public capital for a start-up investment fund. All this on top of increased pension charges, cuts to welfare, and the professionalization of high-school education alongside the tightening of admissions to public universities.

The hard reality for Macron's critics, however, is that little has been standing in his way. Given a strong majority in the National Assembly (a product of low voter turnout in the last election, unity against the far right, and France's two-round voting system), only popular discontent expressed



A protester wearing a yellow vest faces off with French riot police in Paris Dec. 8 during a demonstration against the French government's reform plan.

through collective action on the streets or at the workplace might have constrained the president's actions. But for the first eighteen months of Macron's presidency, even as his approval rating plummeted, the country saw little beyond the sporadic protest or strike, certainly nothing of the magnitude needed to bring the government to a halt and force him to back down.

It is safe to assume that the government thought this relative acquiescence would continue when Édouard Philippe, Macron's prime minister, announced in September that there would be new tax increases on diesel and other gasoline products. These would fall primarily on working- and lower-middle-class citizens, reliant on their cars to get to work, living far from the fashionable urban areas of France well serviced by public transportation. There might be grumblings in response to the taxes, sure, characteristic of what Macron has diagnosed as the "refractory" nature of the French, along with a few more cries that Macron was the "president of the rich." Nothing that couldn't be fended off with the right dose of firm *pédagogie*. As Philippe maintained in early November, such a measure was necessary to "change the behavior" of gas-guzzling consumers, since "there is no magic solution to the problem of climate change."

The protests that gripped France for much of late November and early December suggest that Macron's draconian pro-business agenda has actually been running on borrowed time. Indeed, the emergence of the *Gilet Jaune* (Yellow Vests)

movement has fundamentally shifted the country's political climate, throwing the government into its first serious crisis, and also putting it in the embarrassing position of making its first significant retreat.

The Yellow Vests, named for the bright reflective vests that French motorists are required to have in their cars, blocked roundabouts and critical road junctures across the country. In Paris and other major cities, thousands of protesters have taken to the streets in marches that escalated into riots. These have been compared to the 2005 protests that saw major conflicts between police and non-white residents of Paris's isolated and impoverished *banlieues*. On three consecutive Saturdays—November 24, December 1, and December 8—large sections of central Paris were boarded up, abandoning entire avenues to day-long clashes between protestors and riot police, a trail of burnt cars and smashed bank branches left in their wake. As many as 89,000 riot police, supported by armored vehicles, were mobilized on the last of these three weekends, a remarkable show of force that resulted in more than 1,700 arrests.

Much of the roiling debate in the French press has focused on dissecting the Yellow Vest movement's political identity. The usual suspects have been pointed to, especially those taken to be the authors of the most significant displays of violence: a motley assortment of anarchist and far-right neo-fascist groups. But in the face of what was undeniably a mass protest movement, this has largely been a form of evasion, a way to ignore the deeper causes of the protests.

What really animates the Yellow Vests is a broad-based recognition of the injustice at the heart of Macron's economic program. His decision to drastically reduce the estate-tax burden on the country's largest fortunes, for example, left a hole in state revenues that many see as the real reason for the new gasoline tax. What this whole fiasco stands for is a massive redistribution of wealth, despite its "green" window-dressing and Philippe's *pédagogie* on the tough choices needed to change "consumer behavior." To be sure, this popular anger gets articulated in divergent ways. I've spoken with people who've vented fears that Macron will use the gas-tax revenues to subsidize welfare for refugees and migrants, just as I've heard people decry taxing cars but not the private jets of the billionaire class. If the Yellow Vests movement began as a tax revolt, it has now swelled into a more sweeping rejection of Macron's agenda.

Making matters more difficult for the government, the emergence of the Yellow Vests has fanned other sources of discontent, as the anger over economic injustice coincides with a renewal of student agitation across the country. Students occupied hundreds of high schools from December 3 to December 8, protesting reforms to the public-school curriculum and the public-university admissions system. The viral footage of dozens of detained students at a suburban

high school west of Paris, kneeling with their hands over their heads at the feet of riot police, symbolized the increasingly brutal government intolerance toward opposition and discontent. Likewise, several universities are again facing the prospect of protracted occupations after the government announced large increases in tuition fees for non-European citizens, which many see as a natural prelude to the end of free university education for French students.

By the end of the first week of December, the situation seemed to be sliding out of the government's control. The Yellow Vest movement, which a December 7 poll showed to be enjoying a strong level of support throughout the country, had boiled over and was beginning to draw on multiple sectors of French society. Indeed, fear seemed to overtake many in the president's inner circle. Discipline at the highest level gave way to a series of contradictory messages and announcements, during which it became unclear just who in the government was setting the agenda. On December 8, no fewer than five hundred soldiers of the elite Republican Guard were assigned to protect the presidential palace in central Paris.

To avoid the abyss, Macron finally changed course—or at least made significant concessions. In a televised speech on December 10, two days after the fourth Saturday of protests, he announced a series of measures designed to quell the revolt. Adding to the cancellation of the gasoline tax increases announced a few days earlier, Macron promised to forgo planned fee increases for low-income retirees, to exempt overtime work from taxation and social charges, and to increase the minimum wage. And yet, he repeated his determination not to go back on cuts to the estate tax and the new flat tax on investment income.

The most telling element of Macron's December 10 address is the one least related to the actual demands that have driven the Yellow Vest movement. In his speech, Macron declared his intention to reconcile France with its "profound identity," reiterating the need to "address the question of immigration." Building on the asylum and immigration law enacted this past spring, which strengthened a series of administrative hurdles to refugees and asylum seekers, Macron confirmed his government's increasing flirtation with the right-wing anxieties redefining European politics.

Unwilling to fully acknowledge the injustice at the heart of his economic agenda, Macron is doubling down on the French elite's habit of deflecting, calling the people's concerns an expression of cultural anxiety. Yet as a major sociological study commissioned by *Le Monde* concluded on December 11: "the two main motivations of the *gilet jaunes* therefore appear to be greater social justice...and the demand to be heard by the government. Nationalist demands, on the contrary, such as those emphasizing identity or immigration, were very marginal, contradicting the idea of a movement infused by supporters or activists of the Rassemblement National [formerly National Front].... In short, this is indeed a revolt of the 'people.'"



By the middle of December, the largest and most intense protests seemed, for the moment, to have subsided—though not before leaving the Macron government weakened on all fronts. What will happen in the weeks ahead remains uncertain. So let's return to the original source of the crisis. And for the purpose of a thought experiment, let's grant Macron the benefit of the doubt. Let's assume that the carbon tax was indeed motivated by the earnest desire to reduce carbon-fuel emissions, bring "consumer behavior" more in line with the constraints of the environment, and, as Macron has said, "make our planet great again." If the first test of Macron's environmentalism has been a resounding failure, what went wrong?

Macron would have us believe that the advanced-industrial economies of the Western world can remain largely intact. The ecological crisis thus becomes amorphous, torn from its social context—we're all to blame. With this kind of logic it's easy to place the brunt of the much-needed changes in "consumer behavior" on the least well-off, and not on the super-rich—whose yachts off St. Barts, chalets in the Alps, and private jets account disproportionately for human waste and global fossil-fuel emissions. The crisis really is structural, marked at its core by vastly different degrees of culpability across different regions of the world and between different classes within those regions.

Few would deny that a developmental model reliant on the universalization of the personal automobile is also ecologically unsustainable, to say nothing of the deformation of urban and town life and the suburban sprawl that it entails. But with the soaring cost of living in major cities and the concentration of economic life in rural areas around big-box stores on the outskirts of towns, the automobile has become a necessity for much of working- and lower-middle-class France.

In short, the original sin of Macron's ecology is its assumption that the environmental crisis can be divorced from questions of social and economic inequality. Macronism maintains that climate change can be addressed without drastic redistributive measures and direct efforts to reduce consumption by the global millionaire and billionaire classes, and without easing the transition for workers to a sustainable way of life.

These ideas are behind the growing calls for the French equivalent of a "Green New Deal," without which a carbon tax is entirely incoherent and will be felt only as a new burden on the least well-off in French society. In fact, the government is going in the opposite direction: the dismantling of public infrastructure, as seen in this spring's SNCF reform, weakens one of the institutions that ought to be strengthened as part of a comprehensive response to the ecological crisis.

Such a plan would, however, require a major mobilization of financial resources. In his column in *Le Monde*, the economist Thomas Piketty writes:



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[I]n order for a carbon tax to succeed, it is essential that all of its revenues be invested back in the ecological transformation of the economy. But the government is doing exactly the opposite: of the four billion in increased revenues in 2018, and the additional four billion expected in 2019, we can expect only 10 percent to be re-directed towards investment, the rest de facto going to finance the cancellation of estate taxes and the flat tax on capital gains.

On a deeper level, the evidence we can all see and understand—raging wildfires and increasingly unpredictable weather patterns, historic draughts and the increasing risk of famine in many regions of the world, growing carbon-dioxide density in the earth's atmosphere and the attendant risks to human health—forces us to acknowledge fundamental *limits* to our ability to expand production and consumption. It calls on us, with special attention to those who consume the most and produce the most waste, to embrace restraint and to reassess our received notions of the good life. But Macron seems to see no need to extend such common notions as modesty and limits to the most well-off, in whose defense he's thrown French democracy into the greatest crisis it's faced in years. ■

January 1, 2019

**Harrison Stetler** studies history and political theory in Paris. His writing has appeared in the *Nation*, the *Baffler*, and other American and French publications.

David A. Hoekema

# Risking Peace

HOW RELIGIOUS LEADERS HELPED END UGANDA'S CIVIL WAR

**T**he reign of terror imposed on the people of northern Uganda by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) from 1987 to 2006 was one of the most brutal of the past century. Joseph Kony's militia abducted more than sixty thousand children to serve as child soldiers and sexual partners. Villagers who tried to stop them were mutilated or killed. The Ugandan national army, using funds and weapons provided by Western allies (including the United States), launched campaign after campaign to destroy the movement. But they accomplished very little, except to drive LRA forces deeper into hiding and to compound the suffering of the people.

That story is widely known around the world, thanks in part to Western aid agencies' reports and a widely viewed video, "Kony 2012," made by an American NGO. Far less known—scarcely mentioned in news reports—was the formation of an alliance of religious leaders in the darkest period of the conflict. Overcoming centuries of mistrust and disagreement, the Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim communities of the Acholi region joined forces to help relieve suffering caused by the violence and to bring government and rebel leaders to the negotiating table. Their work bears witness to the transforming power of interfaith collaboration and to the ability of local communities in Africa to resolve a seemingly intractable conflict.

Joseph Kony created his rebel army in the late 1980s, after government forces had crushed another Acholi uprising led by a prophetess. He claimed to be in regular communication with a number of different spirits, who conveyed commands from God and directed his military campaigns. LRA soldiers were required to follow the Ten Commandments and to observe both Muslim and Christian holy days every Friday and Sunday. Smoking and drinking were prohibited, as was unauthorized sexual contact. Weekly prayer meetings were mandatory: sometimes Kony himself would lead them, standing all day, praying and speaking with his spirits. Young boys who had been captured in village raids were indoctrinated in LRA ideology and trained to do whatever their commanders asked, no matter how cruel.



*A procession of women welcomes visitors to their village in Nebbi District, an area still recovering from the LRA conflict.*

The entire Acholi region lived in fear for two decades. Each time the Ugandan government launched another campaign, it assured international allies that success was imminent. But attacks and counterattacks continued, and the army committed the same acts of arbitrary killing and rape that it was supposedly suppressing.

When the LRA claimed at first to be an advocate for the Acholi people, some in Uganda and abroad were sympathetic. Support vanished as its raids became more and more brutal. Paul Rubangakene, director of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic diocese in Gulu, told me that in a rehabilitation camp for former LRA soldiers a commander responded to Paul's request for information about an abducted boy: "Yes, I knew him—he was a very clever boy. So I beat him to death." The boy was Paul's nephew. His parents know that he died in an LRA camp, but Paul had not shared the horrific details.

"You see, I keep a bullet-proof vest here in my office," said Paul. "But it has been many years since I felt any need to wear it while traveling to villages in the region." In the late 1990s, when he began working with residents of rural villages frequently attacked by LRA forces, the situation was very different. "At that time the government had control of the towns and trading centers," he said, "but the LRA did whatever it wanted in the countryside and in isolated villages."

On one trip to a village north of Gulu, Paul encountered an LRA ambush along the main road. Abandoning his vehicle, he fled into the bush and remained in hiding for two weeks until he could return home safely. Today a roadside monument honors fifty-nine victims of another incident at the same site, and memorial services are held there each year. These victims were fortunate simply to be shot dead and left behind, said Paul. In another raid nearby, LRA soldiers cooked the bodies of their victims and forced new abductees to eat them.

LRA violence peaked, Paul told me, from 1996 to 1998, when LRA troops were in frequent battle with government forces, and then again from 2001 to 2003, when LRA forces returning from training camps in Sudan stepped up their campaigns of looting and abduction. For two years Paul and his family were “night commuters,” fleeing nighttime raids on their village by rebel soldiers: together with thousands of others they walked several miles to Gulu each night to sleep on the grounds of the Catholic cathedral. During this period, Catholic Relief Services provided bedding, food, and other aid to all who needed it, whether they were Catholic, Protestant, or Muslim.

Few Ugandans took Kony’s claims to speak for God seriously—not one person I interviewed regarded him as a genuine religious leader—and yet many feared that he could invoke malignant spiritual forces. This did not deter a small group of religious leaders from coming together in the late 1990s to create the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI). Representing the Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim communities, they set out with three goals: to assist those suffering from LRA kidnapping and raids; to bring the situation to the attention of national and international observers; and to facilitate negotiations that would bring an end to the conflict. Their efforts helped achieve what decades of military action could not: LRA withdrawal and an end to civil war.

But first the founders of ARLPI had to win the trust of their own congregations. Members of Protestant congregations, especially the “born-again,” as Ugandans categorize Pentecostals and other Evangelicals, hesitated to collaborate with Catholics or Muslims. Muslims in turn saw the Christian majority in Uganda as unsympathetic, if not openly hostile.

Even more difficult was gaining the trust of opposing sides in the conflict. In the eyes of the Ugandan government, ARLPI proposals amounted to an admission of failure and a blanket pardon for decades of savagery. Kony’s followers, on the other hand, suspected that ARLPI’s call for negotiations was a pretext for passing information to the government. On several occasions small groups of Catholic bishops, Protestant pastors, and Muslim imams were taken deep into the bush, blindfolded, to meet LRA commanders. Rebel leaders insisted that such secrecy was necessary to avoid giving away the location of their camps, but the

negotiators wondered each time whether they would return alive. Meanwhile, their participation in these meetings fueled government suspicions that the religious leaders were really rebel sympathizers.

Slowly, ARLPI’s patient and persistent work began to bear fruit. First, small concessions were made. Trust was established. Sheik Musa Khalil, the khadhi of the Muslim community in Gulu, told me:

We sustained the community with the one important weapon of forgiveness. We preached this seriously from subcounty to subcounty, from community to community. And we preached forgiveness from both the Bible and the Qur’an. We started working with the cultural institutions and the local leaders, and members of Parliament became involved. We organized seminars that included all stakeholders, including the international community. What we have done is a lesson to the whole world in peaceful coexistence. We are trying our level best as religious leaders to show the world that we can live together, and this we would like to consolidate and continue.

A civil war that had raged for more than two decades, disrupting the lives and livelihood of the people of northern Uganda, at last came to an end as a result of negotiations that ARLPI helped put into motion. Talks were held in South Sudan, facilitated by the Sudanese government and by members of the Catholic lay community of Sant’Egidio, which had recently helped end a bloody civil war in Mozambique. Having helped bring the two parties together, ARLPI retreated into the background.

In 2006 the LRA ceased attacking villages, permitted both abductees and voluntary recruits to return to their families, and withdrew from Uganda. By 2008 the region was at last at peace. Fearing extradition to the International Criminal Court, which issued indictments in 2005, Kony and his senior advisors refused to come out of hiding to sign the agreement. Still, both sides honored its terms. LRA soldiers and camp residents returned home, apart from a small band who followed their leader into hiding in neighboring countries, where they remain today. The militia that terrorized northern Uganda now numbers no more than a hundred.

ARLPI continues to work across the region to promote post-conflict recovery, address land-ownership issues, and advocate for women’s empowerment. It is also trying to form interfaith peace committees in every village. Too many of its activities during the LRA conflict, leaders told me, were planned and initiated by pastors and imams. Lasting and effective change, they said, must begin within local communities.

The success of ARLPI efforts in Uganda reveals something important about the complex relationship between political, religious, and cultural authority in situations of crisis. Traditional religious responses to extreme suffering—providing comfort, praying for relief,





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and offering assurance of God's presence—lack credibility without accompanying practical measures. Throughout the civil war the religious leaders continued to lead public worship, comfort broken families, and offer words of hope to the war's victims. But they also undertook, at great personal risk, to bring the Ugandan military and the LRA to the negotiating table. Each side in the conflict viewed ARLPI's efforts with great suspicion, but the group pressed on all the same. And as it did so it was able to earn a degree of credibility and authority that the national government had lost through the brutality of its anti-LRA tactics.

Many in the West believe that only their expertise—and their monetary assistance—can resolve Africa's most urgent problems. The story of ARLPI shows that local resources and local wisdom can be far more effective. The guns provided to Ugandan forces by Western allies failed to defeat the LRA army, and many of them ended up in rebel hands. NGOs and international development agencies provided lifesaving relief aid to displaced-persons camps, but they did little to dispel the cloud of poverty and recurrent violence under which the residents of those camps lived. When religious leaders undertook not only to provide emergency relief but also to work toward a resolution of the conflict, a path to peace at last became visible.

It is important, too, that ARLPI's work of reconciliation and healing has drawn from several traditions without denying their differences. The theology of the Qur'an is

undeniably very different from the theology of the New Testament, but ARLPI believes the two traditions can speak with one voice on the question of how to forge a path from conflict to reconciliation. Sheik Musa Khalil emphasized how important it was that all the religious communities join together after the LRA withdrawal and support each other in proclaiming the same central message: it is time now to forgive. To the representatives of government, foreign NGO staff, and members of their own communities, the leaders of ARLPI insisted, "We must forgive ninety times, or is it one hundred times..." Are you thinking of the saying of Jesus, I asked, that we should forgive seventy times seven? "Yes! That is it! In the Qur'an it is ninety times, and in the Bible it is seventy times seven." Listening to a Muslim leader try to remember whether he was quoting from the New Testament or the Qur'an reminded me how remarkable and unlikely this experiment in interreligious peacemaking has been. ■

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# Vehemently Misleading

*The Pennsylvania Grand-Jury Report Is Not What It Seems*

Peter Steinfels

**A**ugust 15 is the Feast of the Assumption, a “holy day of obligation,” when Catholics are expected to attend Mass. This year millions of Catholics went to church sick at heart. I was among them.

The day before, the attorney general of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania had released a grand-jury report declaring that hundreds of Catholic priests had sexually abused minors. The grand jury’s conclusions were summarized in reports that landed on the front pages of the *New York Times* and other newspapers around the world, as well as lead stories on all sorts of television news programs. Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro spoke on *The Today Show* and nightly news broadcasts. No Catholics serious about their faith, indeed no one of any sensitivity, could have read about the report without feeling horror and shame. And anger. It was bad enough to read graphic accounts of anal and oral rape, sometimes combined with sacrilegious perversities; it was doubly appalling to be told that church leaders had systematically covered up these crimes and allowed abusers to go unchecked.

Within hours, the Pennsylvania grand-jury report was propelled to international status. The Vatican expressed “shame and sorrow.” Adjectives piled up from Catholic and secular sources: *abominable*, *revolting*, *reprehensible*, *nauseating*, *diabolical*. The *New York Times* editorialized on “The Catholic Church’s Unholy Stain.”

Months have passed but the report’s impact has not. At least a dozen states have announced they would follow Pennsylvania in conducting their own investigations (Illinois issued a preliminary report in December); the Justice Department has suggested that it, too, might get into the act. Pope Francis has called for bishops from around the world to address the sex-abuse scandal at the Vatican in February, where the Pennsylvania report will undoubtedly be a chief



Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro speaks during an Aug. 14 news conference to release a grand-jury report on a months-long investigation into abuse claims spanning seventy years.

exhibit—as it currently is for Catholics both on the right and the left writing farewells to the church.

In fact, the report makes not one but two distinct charges. The first one concerns predator priests, their many victims, and their unspeakable acts. That charge is, as far as can be determined, dreadfully true. Appalling as is this first charge, it is in fact the second one that has had the greatest reverberations. “All” of these victims, the report declares, “were brushed aside, in every part of the state, by church leaders who preferred to protect the abusers and their institutions above all.” Or as the introduction to the report sums it up, “Priests were raping little boys and girls, and the men of God who were responsible for them not only did nothing; they hid it all.”

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## Is that true?

On the basis of reading the report's vast bulk, on the basis of reviewing one by one the handling of hundreds of cases, on the basis of trying to match diocesan replies with the grand jury's charges, and on the basis of examining other court documents and speaking with people familiar with the grand jury's work, including the attorney general's office, my conclusion is that this second charge is in fact grossly misleading, irresponsible, inaccurate, and unjust. It is contradicted by material found in the report itself—if one actually reads it carefully. It is contradicted by testimony submitted to the grand jury but ignored—and, I believe, by evidence that the grand jury never pursued.

These conclusions are dramatically at odds with the public perception and reception of the report. Obviously they must be substantiated. To do that it is essential to examine, step by step, how this report was produced, organized, and presented; what it omits as well as includes; and finally whether a careful sampling of its contents supports its conclusions.

I realize that for many people, especially many angry and dismayed Catholics, such an inquiry flies in the face of almost overpowering headwinds. To question let alone challenge the report is unthinkable. It borders on excusing the crimes that bishops and other church leaders are accused of committing.

This resistance is understandable. The report came on the heels of revelations about ex-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick's sexual abuse of both adult seminarians and two minors. Ten days later, accusations from a former Vatican official, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, essentially enlisted the abuse scandal into the ongoing war between Pope Francis and his critics. Lurking in the background were other abuse scandals in Ireland, Chile, and Australia. And lurking at a much deeper level are years of often confusing but always mortifying reports of sexual abuse by priests, inevitably reinforcing whatever doubts and disappointments Catholics have experienced.

Then there is the hard reality that not many people have actually read the report, let alone read it critically. That includes, I wager, even many of those publicly registering their outrage or privately nursing their spiritual distress. It

includes, I can pretty safely add, the journalists on whose news accounts most of these people relied. Almost every media story of the grand-jury report that I eventually read or viewed was based on its twelve-page introduction and a dozen or so sickening examples the introduction and the report highlight, written in a language that Pennsylvania's Supreme Court later called "incendiary."

How could it be otherwise? The report was alternatively described as 884 or 1,356 pages long—more on that strange discrepancy later. As a lifelong perpetrator of journalism I know about deadlines and how dependent a reporter can

be on a summary, an introduction, or a spokesperson like the attorney general of Pennsylvania. You have time only to read a tiny fraction of such a massive document. You cannot get knowledgeable, independent comment when no one else has read the document either. You turn to soundbites from church officials or victims' advocates that echo established scripts of what a story is about.

In this case it is a script about bishops, bishops who were fully aware of the dangers that predatory priests posed to children and adolescents but who nonetheless "shuttled" or "shuffled" them from parish to parish to shield the reputation of the church and the clergy.

That script was engraved in the public mind by the *Boston Globe's* 2002 revelations and by the litigation that followed. It was the script that brought a well-deserved best-screenplay Oscar to the movie *Spotlight*. It is the script that animates the Pennsylvania grand-jury report. And it is a script so familiar as to defy any questioning.

The third source of resistance to any reconsideration is the sheer awfulness of the abuse the report documents. "Hear this," its introduction summons readers in the first sentence. You may have read about "child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church, but never on this scale." The prose is graphic in its sexual details. The third paragraph specifies masturbation, oral sex, and vaginal and anal rape, along with manipulation by alcohol and pornography. The next eleven pages describe some twenty abominable and especially grotesque cases of sexual perversity. I have heard reasonable people object that in grinding such details into our faces the report itself is manipulative. But then *this is what sexual abuse of children and teenagers is*. It's not a legal or abstract concept, not a statistic. It is the most intimate

Almost every media story of the grand-jury report that I eventually read or viewed was based on its twelve-page introduction and a dozen or so sickening examples the introduction and the report highlight, written in a language that Pennsylvania's Supreme Court later called 'incendiary.'

kind of violation—whether perpetrated by a schoolteacher, coach, physician, or, above all, a person in a special relationship of responsibility and authority, like a parent or cleric.

Over the past three decades I have read scores of abuse survivors' stories and heard directly dozens: stories of shattered trust, religious and sexual confusion, and years of life-derailing consequences. Some victims of course slough their abuse off, or at least appear to. For others, it trails them through depression, broken marriages, substance abuse, self-destructive crimes, petty or serious, even suicide. The report's insistent cataloging of physical acts scarcely captures these human complexities, but it is a start.

The sad and infuriating stories in the report, even in their sometimes excruciatingly graphic detail, were not news to those of us who were reading newspapers and watching TV in 2002. "Reports of sexual abuse by priests of children and teenagers have taken on the dimensions of a biblical plague," read a story on page one of the *New York Times's* Sunday Week in Review. It mentioned estimates of victims over several decades ranging from 15,000 to 100,000. As the senior religion reporter at the *Times* from 1988 to 1997, I wrote that story in June 1993, almost a decade before the *Boston Globe* revelations.

Recalling such stories from the 1990s to 2002, I wondered whether Catholics and others had forgotten that flood of painful 2002 revelations, to say nothing of the prime-time exposés of the early 1990s. (In 2002 the *Globe* ran 770 Catholic sex-abuse stories, compared to twenty-five the year before; the *New York Times* ran 692.) What about the 2004 and 2011 studies by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice concluding that 4,392 priests, between 4 and 5 percent of the Catholic clergy, had been responsible for more than 11,000 cases of sexual abuse between 1950 and 2002? Had no one really taken to heart those earlier disclosures?

What precisely, I asked myself, did the Pennsylvania report tell us that was new? Did it refute the crucial and widespread belief that the Dallas Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People—passed by the Catholic bishops in June 2002, implemented nationwide, and backed by regular audits since then—had changed things dramatically? Did the report speak to the question, uppermost in many parents' minds, whether children and teenagers were particularly at risk, right now, in Catholic schools and parishes, as media phrases like "the expanding Catholic sex-abuse scandals" or "a new wave of sex-abuse scandals" or sexual-abuse scandals now "engulfing the church" might reasonably suggest?

What did the report add to the intense and important debates about priestly celibacy, teachings on sexuality, ingrown clerical culture, church authority, homosexuality in the priesthood, and responsibility toward victims—to say nothing of older conflicts, going back to the Second Vatican Council and its aftermath, about contraception, women's roles in the church, sexual ethics, religious education, Vatican authority, and any number of other issues big and small?

I have written elsewhere on many of these topics, in essays

and a book that hardly cast a favorable light on the nation's Catholic bishops or their handling of the sex-abuse crisis. I am not addressing those topics here. I am not taking sides in the smoldering arguments about Pope Francis. I am not asking who knew what, when, and how about Cardinal McCarrick. I am not floating new ways to assure episcopal accountability. I am looking only at the Pennsylvania report's ringing charges about the handling of abuse: Are they true?

Yet something even more basic triggers the resistance to any questioning of the Pennsylvania report—what is popularly labeled binary thinking. To question the report's conclusions is to affirm the very opposite. If it is not true that *all* victims were "brushed aside," then it must be true that *no* victims were ever brushed aside. If it is not true that church leaders routinely acted to protect their priests and institutions, then it must be true that no church leader ever did that.

That is not my claim. I believe that the grand jury could have reached precise, accurate, informing, and hard-hitting findings about what different church leaders did and did not do, what was regularly done in some places and some decades and not in others. It could have presented ample grounds for at least three of its four rather unoriginal recommendations without engaging in broad-brush denunciations. It could have confirmed and corrected much that we think we know about the causes and prevention of the sexual abuse of young people.

Instead the report chose a tack more suited to our hyperbolic, bumper-sticker, post-truth environment with its pronouncements about immigrant rapists and murderers, witch hunts, and deep-state conspiracies. Imagine, at least for a moment, that a declamation like "Priests were raping little boys and girls, and the men of God who were responsible for them not only did nothing; they hid it all" came from one of our elected or televised demagogues. Would one really dismiss any fact-finding as uncalled for?

But it wasn't a demagogic pundit or politician who chose that language right out of a nineteenth-century anti-papist tract. It was a grand jury. And therein lies a major misunderstanding.

### *Investigating grand juries*

Grand juries are legal entities deeply rooted in common law and incorporated into the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution. Their purpose is not to determine guilt or innocence but only whether there are sufficient grounds to bring an indictment and trigger a trial. The trial is where guilt or innocence will be determined by all the adversarial procedures of examining evidence and testimony presented by both sides under strict supervision by a judge. Grand juries do not operate under those rules. They hear evidence *ex parte*—that is, with no representation from those under investigation. They operate in secret. And in practice, they

operate almost completely under the direction of a local, state, or federal prosecutor, a district attorney or attorney general, whose conclusions they almost invariably rubber-stamp.

For this reason grand juries have become controversial. Whether indictments are obtained or not may depend on the political needs of elected prosecutors, an issue raised by minority communities in regard to killings by white police. Investigating grand juries, like the one in Pennsylvania, has also proved problematic. Stanley H. Fuld, a noted jurist who was chief judge of the New York Court of Appeals, once pointed out that an *indictment* “is but the first step in a long process in which the accused may seek vindication through exercise of the right to a public trial, to a jury, to counsel, to confrontation of witnesses against him and, if convicted, to an appeal.” On the contrary, a grand-jury investigative report, “is at once an accusation and a final condemnation, and, emanating from a judicial body occupying a position of respect and importance in the community, its potential for harm is incalculable.” As a judicial document, a grand-jury report, Fuld continued, “carries the same sense of authoritative condemnation as an indictment does, without, however, according the accused the benefit of the protections accorded to one who is indicted.”

Fuld believed this potential for abuse was particularly great when an investigatory grand-jury report named names; and the Pennsylvania report of course names not only hundreds of predators, but also more than fifty bishops and diocesan administrators treated as similarly guilty. The report’s introduction makes no bones about its intention to be judge and jury, and to hand down convictions for “crimes that will go unpunished and uncompensated” otherwise: “This Report is our only recourse. We are going to name names and describe what they did—both the sex offenders and those who concealed them. We are going to shine a light on their conduct, because that is what the victims deserve.”

It is clear that most people have taken the Pennsylvania report as what Judge Fuld called an “authoritative condemnation” without realizing its limitations. It is ironic that people raising perfectly legitimate questions about the accountability of bishops should overlook questions about the accountability of investigating grand juries. The findings of such reports can only be challenged after they are made public: by those impugned, by informed critics, independent investigators, dissenting politicians, the media, and so on.

In the Pennsylvania case, of course, the bishops are paralyzed. Not only has their credibility been sullied by past failures, often by deceased predecessors, but they long ago recognized that their first priority, rightly, must be to avoid making any excuses for predatory crimes or “re-victimizing” survivors. Who else might fill this void? Liberal journalists, civil libertarians, or academics unhappy with Catholic teachings on abortion and same-sex marriage? *ProPublica*? *Frontline*? Conservative Catholics unhappy with Pope Francis? Liberal Catholics unhappy with a conservative hierarchy? Not likely.

## The report’s structure

The Pennsylvania report is divided into five parts, of very different proportions. Following Part I, that impassioned twelve-page Introduction, Part II devotes hundreds of pages to eighteen shocking, in some cases grotesque, examples of abuse, three from each of the six dioceses.

Otherwise Part II lists the bishops and other key officials of each diocese and all accused abusers over the past seven to eight decades. In almost boilerplate language, the grand jury declares that it has found evidence in each diocese of sexual abuse (“grooming and fondling of the genitals” and “penetration of the vagina, mouth, or anus”); that bishops and administrators “had knowledge of this conduct” but regularly placed abusers in ministry despite complaints, thus enabling offenders and endangering children. Dioceses were found to have consulted with lawyers and reached confidential settlements with victims prohibiting them from speaking out. Likewise, dioceses were found to have dissuaded victims from going to the police or conducting their own “deficient, biased investigations” without reporting these crimes.

Obviously, this means not just that such things occurred sometimes and in some places over more than seven decades, but that they occurred *regularly, routinely*, and as the introduction states, “everywhere.”

Part III is a nine-page overview of “The Church and child abuse, past and present.” Part IV devotes six pages to spelling out the recommendations mentioned in the introduction.

Then, in a 569-page “Appendix of Offenders,” the report profiles, diocese by diocese, all priests, deacons, or seminarians against whom the report concludes credible allegations of abuse have been found. The report calls those profiles of more than three hundred priests possibly its “most important” and “final” section. Indeed, in some PDFs of the report online, including, shockingly, the one on the website of the attorney general’s office, the document ends there, at page 884. In fact, more than 450 pages follow. These consist of photocopied responses from dioceses, former bishops, other diocesan officials, and even some accused priests protesting their innocence. Many of these documents raise important questions or present substantial criticisms. Although the report states that dioceses were invited to submit statements about their recent policies, there are no substantive grand-jury comments or replies.

This organization is effective, lopsided, and unwieldy. Effective because of the dramatic, almost inflammatory rhetoric of the introduction and then because of the chosen eighteen examples. Lopsided, because the report devotes well over eight hundred pages to its chosen examples and encyclopedic “Profiles in Abuse.” Fewer than fifty pages, including that introduction, are devoted to the grand jury’s own analysis, findings, and recommendations. Unwieldy, because hundreds of pages separate each diocese’s three “horribles” from its complete roster of offenders in the appendix and again from any of the responses. Whether scrolling

online or rustling through pages in print, it is daunting to track the claims and replies.

### *What is in the report—and what is not*

Before examining more closely what is in the report, it is important to ask what isn't. Beyond those references to more than 300 predator priests—actually 301—and more than 1,000 child victims, to dozens of witnesses and half-a-million subpoenaed church documents, there are almost no numerical markers. There is, for example, no calculation of how many ordained men served in those six dioceses since 1945, a figure that might either verify or challenge previous estimates of the prevalence of sexual abuse among the clergy. There are no efforts to discern statistical patterns in the ages of abusers, the rates of abuse over time, the actions of law enforcement, or changes in responses by church officials.

Nor are there comparisons to other institutions. One naturally wonders what a seventy-to-eighty-year scrutiny of sex abuse in public schools or juvenile penal facilities would find.

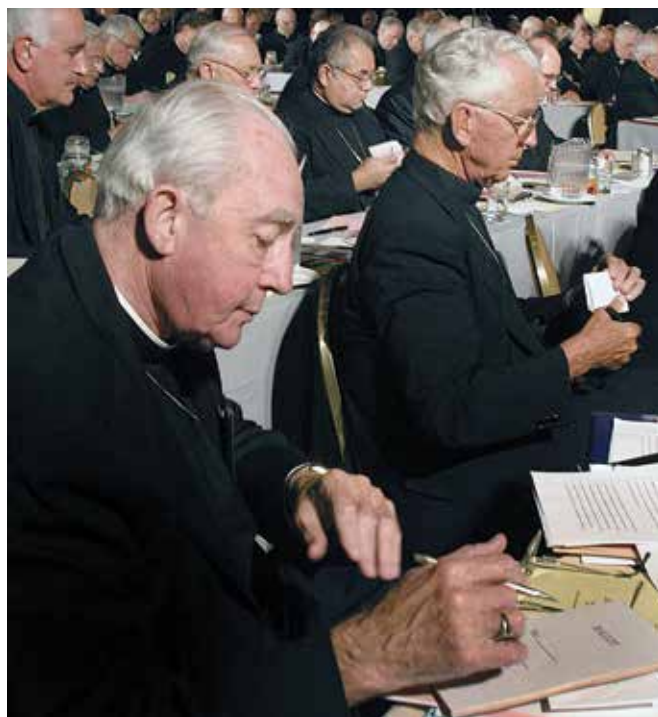
That huge timespan results in some memorable cases. Martin J. Fleming, for example, was born in 1869, the year Ulysses S. Grant became president. He was ordained in 1898, a few months after Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders captured San Juan Hill. He died in 1950, when Harry Truman was president. Fifty-six years later, in 2006, the Diocese of Venice, Florida, notified the Scranton, Pennsylvania, diocese that a woman reported having been abused by Father Fleming in 1940 when she was six. She was now in heart failure and wanted to “put all of her ducks in a row.” Whatever occurred—the report is untypically reticent—had haunted her for more than six decades, caused emotional distress, and led her to seek counseling. The bishop of Scranton and staff members promptly met with her, called the abuse an abomination, voiced sorrow over her wounded childhood, and encouraged therapy.

Even without details, one can imagine this woman's recurring pain; one can speculate that she was not the only victim; one can wonder what else was locked into secrecy or denial in a very different era. But all these unknowns from the first half of the twentieth century seem well beyond the bounds of what presents itself as a rigorous legal investigation.

Is this example exceptional? Yes, but not unique. One can say the same of some examples the report spotlights.

In fact, one could find similar examples where the investigation's span of more than seven decades—and gaps of half a century between likely abuse and the first word of it to reach church officials—raise questions about the report's concept of accountability.

But the report's chosen timespan and unexplained notion of accountability are merely symptoms of a larger issue. What is missing from the report, above all, is any sense of history. The report treats the more than seven decades from 1945



*U.S. bishops cast their votes on the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People at their 2002 meeting in Dallas.*

until yesterday as a block. That is a long time in the life of even the most basic institutions. Could you inquire into family breakdown since 1945 or patterns of sexual activity over that timespan without giving considerable attention to demography, single parenthood, feminism, contraceptives, the “Sixties,” gay rights, and changing norms regarding autonomy, privacy, and personal fulfillment? Or, for another instance, race relations? Could you accurately describe the period from World War II to yesterday without highlighting the civil-rights movement, the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, and the election of Barack Obama?

My own first encounter with sexual abuse came when I had just turned seventeen. I was working at a Boy Scout camp and discovered and managed to inform higher-ups that a camp official was abusing fourteen-year-old “trainees.” He was fired, and that was that. But of course it wasn't. A school teacher, he moved to another state where, through an extraordinary coincidence, I learned years later that he continued to molest. That experience in the summer of 1958 sensitized me to the radical and welcome changes in societal responses to sexual abuse since the hush-hush attitudes that then prevailed among parents, victims, health care professionals, and law enforcement officials as well as Boy Scout authorities. It took time to recognize that child molestation, once portrayed as a threat from lurking strangers in raincoats, could be the work of family friends, doting uncles, Scoutmasters, physicians, fathers and stepfathers, or even an admired clergyman. It took even longer for therapists, judges, and legislatures to decide what to do about it.

As for Catholicism, the Second Vatican Council, along

with major social changes, disrupted the church and the shame and silence imposed by its deferential culture. Jogged by lawsuits and publicity and the very fact of increasing instances of abuse, bishops' responses began to change, belatedly but significantly, in the late 1980s to mid-1990s. Attitudes took a definitive turn in 2002 with the bishops' adoption of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, passed in the wake of the *Boston Globe's* revelations. Even sex abuse by priests has a history. If we are to believe the findings of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, it increased in the latter 1960s, spiked in the '70s, and declined in the '80s.

The writers of the report from the attorney general's office struggle mightily to discount this reality. The report's conclusions about abuse and coverup are stated in timeless fashion. Whenever change is acknowledged, the language is beguiling.

Readers who persevere to page 297 will find a mere eight pages devoted to "The Church and sex abuse: past and present," i.e., before 2002 and after. Four pages simply expand on the opinions attributed to FBI "experts" cited in the introduction. These are said to demonstrate that euphemisms for sexual abuse found in church records (and evidently not elsewhere) are part of a "playbook" for concealment. This claim culminates in a half-page full-color chart illustrating this "circle of secrecy." The phrase "circle of secrecy" and the corresponding analysis are attributed to then-Pittsburgh Bishop Donald Wuerl, who went on to serve as cardinal archbishop of Washington. (He recently resigned.)

If curious or determined readers turn to page 1,124 of the report, they will discover that the words "circle of secrecy" are (a) not Wuerl's and (b) have nothing to do with the way that the report uses them. Scribbled on a 1993 request from an offending priest for a return to ministry, the phrase signaled that despite his apparent recovery, the priest could not have an assignment without full public disclosure of his past conduct and treatment. As it happens, the priest's request was refused. And the jotting wasn't Wuerl's. Before the report was issued, Wuerl informed the attorney general of this. His correction was ignored. The "circle of secrecy" concept and impressive chart appear to be entirely the concoction of the report's writers.

The next four pages correctly identify the 2002 *Boston Globe* exposé as critical in compelling the Catholic hierarchy to draft and implement the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. "On the whole," the report allows, "the Charter did move things in the right direction." But virtually every paragraph before and after that concession is skillfully written so as to minimize or dismiss the Charter's importance.

The grand-jury report prides itself on being a "historical record," but this passing gesture toward a history is a caricature. It registers absolutely no account of the lengthy documents submitted to the grand jury by the six dioceses.

These submissions can be captured by what Bishop Ed-

ward C. Malesic, the recently appointed bishop of Greensburg, stated for himself and his own diocese. The essential response to the grand jury's report, he wrote in italics, "can be summarized in five words: *This is not today's Church.*"

As evidence, he and each of the other dioceses documented detailed policies, some dating from the mid-1990s but constantly updated and tightened, especially since the 2002 Dallas Charter, for facilitating and investigating allegations; suspending accused priests and removing them from all ministry if accusations prove credible; prompt reporting of allegations to law enforcement; establishing and empowering lay review boards with professional expertise to guide the bishop; offering outreach and assistance to victims; screening seminarians; instituting extensive preventative measures including rigorous background checks and mandatory training for all church workers and volunteers dealing with children and adolescents; education of parents; and opening all such programs to regular auditing by independent agencies. After 2002, some dioceses combed their files or opened them to district attorneys to make sure no abusing priests were still in ministry.

There is no reason, of course, why a grand jury has to take such diocesan testimony at face value. Perhaps the impressive policies for handling and reporting allegations or assisting victims exist only on paper rather than in practice. Perhaps the impressive numbers of clergy, educators, youth workers, and employees vetted and trained, parents and students informed, dollars spent, and audits conducted are false, flimflam trumped up for public-relations purposes. Perhaps these impressive safeguards, many of which are less than two decades old, operate effectively in some dioceses, but not in others. These are serious possibilities that a serious grand-jury investigation might have looked into. There is not the slightest indication, not the slightest, that the grand jury even sought to give serious attention to the kind of extensive, detailed testimony that the dioceses submitted regarding their current policies and programs.

The lack of historical consciousness blinds the grand-jury report to two other factors essential to understanding church officials' responses to accusations of abuse. One was the recourse to therapeutic treatment. The other was the frequent gap between the time of abuse and the time of accusation. For both factors, the year 2002 was critical.

### ***Recourse to treatment***

By the mid-1980s Catholic leaders began to emerge, all too unevenly, from their state of clerical denial and psychological cluelessness regarding sexual abuse. It was increasingly recognized that abuse of minors was not simply a sin requiring repentance, perhaps a retreat, and "a firm purpose of amendment"; such misconduct signaled a serious psychological pathology. Bishops began sending accused clergy for evaluation and treatment to a handful of treatment centers,



mostly church-related and often originally founded to treat clerics suffering from alcoholism. At a time when official church procedures made removing individuals entirely from the priesthood an uncertain and prolonged affair, this “therapeutic option” seemed more promising. Unlike laicization it also seemed to maintain leverage over treated priests to comply with ongoing monitoring, restrictions, and aftercare.

Serious questions about these centers and their effectiveness remain open. The litigation seeking compensation for victims, which has overwhelmingly informed and framed media coverage of the clergy sex-abuse scandal, has targeted bishops. The treatment centers have largely escaped public attention, except when victims’ lawyers argued that these centers were either telling the bishop, who was after all paying for their services, whatever he wanted to hear or giving him cover even when he ignored their recommendations. In fact, it was a controversial director of St. Luke Institute in Maryland who first raised the alarm that clergy abuse was not a problem of a few bad apples but a systemic one. Many individuals staffing those centers had good professional qualifications. Recidivism, they believed, was exceptional.

As a reporter, I visited St. Luke in 1992. I was impressed with the staff’s professionalism, the rigor of their methods (at least as described to me), and their argument that it was better for endangered youth and the church to treat priests over whom the church retained considerable leverage than to “cut them loose” on society by laicizing them. I went away wondering if these dedicated professionals were overestimating their skills. But I also went away understanding why quite conscientious bishops, not just obtuse ones worried only about public image and protecting their clergy, would turn to the centers as the best option.

In some cases, this confidence proved misplaced. Some centers were definitely subpar. The Servants of the Paraclete’s center in Jemez Springs, New Mexico, appears to have been a particular disaster, releasing “guests” still under treatment to do parish work around the Southwest—and creating many more victims. One notorious case was James Porter, sent there in 1967 from Fall River, Massachusetts; Porter continued to molest minors both as a priest and ex-priest until he was tracked down and arrested in 1993 after a sensational *Primetime Live* broadcast hosted by Diane Sawyer. The center closed its doors in the face of lawsuits in the 1990s and was no longer around when a flood of later accusations and lawsuits emerged.

There is much still unknown about these psychiatric programs. In 1992, therapists at St. Luke were well aware of cases like Porter’s from two decades before and insisted that knowledge and treatment were now “lightyears ahead.” Grave differences among centers appear to have persisted, however. The report begs this whole question by referring to “evaluation” and “diagnosis” and “treatment” in scare quotes, clearly implying that these were disingenuous maneuvers by bishops to cover up their irresponsibility.

In any case, the Dallas Charter’s zero-tolerance policy put

an end to this “therapeutic option.” After 2002, no priest ever found credibly accused of abusing a minor, no matter how far in the past and regardless of whether the offender was now considered successfully treated, could remain in ministry.

### *The discrepancy of dates*

There is an unforgettable scene at the end of *Spotlight* when the *Boston Globe* has gone to press with the first of its articles exposing abuse in the Boston archdiocese. All the phones in the newsroom start ringing with calls from victims finally empowered to report their own experiences from years or decades before. This frequent gap of many years between sexual abuse and victims’ coming forward is a widely recognized reality. It is crucial to understanding the psychological toll of abuse and the drive to extend statutes of limitations. It is also crucial to tracking the response of church officials.

When initial credible allegations against predatory priests were made after the Dallas Charter in 2002, the priests were automatically removed from ministry as quickly as possible. Many of the newly accused were in fact already retired, inactive, or deceased. In Pennsylvania, as across the nation, a sizeable percentage of initial accusations were post-2002. (Some in Pennsylvania seem to have been triggered by the Penn State University scandal in 2011.) Determining the dates when word of abuse first came to church officials is not always easy from the grand-jury report’s profiles, which often dwell on the sexual acts of the molester and sometimes the devastating effect on the victims. The profiles do not follow any uniform template: when abuses were committed, when reported, and how they were handled. There are no decade-by-decade summaries of how many priests were credibly accused, retained in active or restricted ministry, sent into treatment, removed from active ministry, and/or laicized.

Certainly the trauma and stigma that kept these victims silent demand self-scrutiny by both the church and the larger culture. But anyone investigating the decisions that church officials made should be aware that, by my estimate, the allegations against at least one-third of the 301 offenders profiled came to light only after 2002, i.e., when the decision to remove them from active ministry was established policy.

### *Examining the contents*

This brings us to the substance of the report itself. Does it substantiate its sweeping and damning condemnations of the bishops and other church leaders?

Let us simply look at one diocese. I have chosen Erie for a number of reasons. In response to the grand-jury investigation, Bishop Lawrence Persico, who has led the diocese since

2012, commissioned an independent study of its handling of sex abuse by a team from K&L Gates, a Pittsburgh-based international-law firm. The team of investigators and lawyers was headed by a former federal prosecutor and given access to all diocesan files and personnel. The team interviewed 113 people and examined more than 100,000 documents, a deeper dive into the diocese's record than the grand jury's. In addition, the Erie diocese was led from 1990 to 2012 by Bishop Donald W. Trautman. Many bishops from the time period covered by the report are either deceased or now leading other dioceses. Bishop Trautman is neither. As Erie's bishop during twenty-two crucial years for the sex-abuse scandal yet no longer constrained by the pastoral priorities of active bishops, he was well placed to speak candidly in his own extended response. Thus there are three points of reference—the report's summaries of abuse and church actions; Erie's independent Gates study; and Bishop Trautman's response. All three are united in expressing sorrow and contrition for, in Trautman's words, the "horrible and sinful acts" of abusers and their "terrible impact" on victims.

There are forty-one Erie offenders profiled in the report, including the three notable examples described at length. One of the three masturbated at least a dozen thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds under the pretext of performing "cancer checks" on their penises. A second priest, known to have a violent personality, was accused of extended relationships with both an underaged female and male along with instances of brutal assaults. The third priest admitted to anal and oral sex with boys seven to twelve years old.

In all three cases, the abuse came to light in the mid-1980s, under Bishop Michael J. Murphy, Bishop Trautman's predecessor. The abuse itself went back a decade or more earlier. Murphy sent accused priests for evaluation and, if necessary, treatment, mainly to St. Luke and Southdown, a well-respected center in Canada. Trautman sometimes did so as well although his practice seems to have been not to return any to parish ministry, not even with the center's recommended restrictions. Having inherited the three outstanding examples from Murphy, Trautman "grandfathered" them, abiding by their agreements with his predecessor to submit to psychiatrically prescribed monitoring and aftercare—unless, Trautman added, some further allegations arose from their pre-treatment pasts. Which in each case happened.

The first priest was already limited to ministries having no proximity to children when Trautman took office in 1990. The second priest had been assigned to a parish by Murphy after treatment, and Trautman let him remain there until he retired in 2000. In 2002, allegations were made about that priest's conduct in the 1960s and '70s. Within weeks, Trautman suspended him from the priesthood and eventually had him defrocked. Immediately after taking office, Trautman met with the third priest, now apparently "clean" after four years in therapy for sexual and substance abuse. Bishop Murphy had assigned him to a parish in 1987 and Trautman left him there until 1992 when, fol-

lowing the advice of the priest-personnel board, Trautman reassigned him, again barring him from being alone with children. A year later, having received a fresh allegation of the priest's abuse in the early 1970s, Trautman restricted him to nursing homes and certain units of a VA hospital. In 2002, when allegations arose of other abuse in the late 1960s, Trautman withdrew him from ministry altogether and moved to have him laicized.

Briefly, that is the story of the three with Trautman's input. The grand-jury report reads very differently. It stresses not concerns for victims and potential victims but legal precautions, secrecy, and public pressures as the motivation for all diocesan actions. People known to have abused, it says, were reassigned "multiple times" and remained "cloaked in the authority of the priesthood." The emphatic language of Trautman's eventual appeals to Rome for laicization is cited as belated admissions of awful conduct that had been previously known but hidden. In the case of Trautman's initial meeting with the apparently "clean" priest in aftercare after undergoing treatment, the report quotes Trautman's impression that the priest was "a person of candor and sincerity" whom he had complimented on "the progress he has made."

What to make of such differences? Obviously there is an asymmetry in prominence. The report's account appears on page 4 and again at great length on pages 69–142. Trautman's appears on page 982. (In the Office of the Attorney General's online version, Trautman's account does not of course appear at all.) For Trautman, the report is "artful," and "misleading" in quoting selectively while ignoring the overall pattern found in both his own testimony and the independent study submitted by the diocese to the grand jury. In particular, he points to numerous omissions.

The report, for instance, states—accurately—that Trautman reassigned the first of the three examples "multiple times." The report omits that these reassignments were to a chaplaincy at a nursing home, a senior-living facility, and briefly a hospital and several jails for adults. The priest was forbidden to function as a priest outside these chaplaincies and eventually to wear any priestly garb. Faced with resistance, Trautman successfully moved to have him defrocked.

Omitted, too, is the fact, according to Trautman, that "none of these priests is known to have reoffended." Whatever the wisdom, in retrospect, of maintaining these priests even in restricted and monitored ministries, that fact seems pertinent and deserving of mention.

The report also omits that Trautman, in twenty-two years as bishop, personally met or attempted to meet every victim and provided pastoral counseling and funds for therapy.

It omits his decision in 2002 to have all diocesan files reviewed by the Erie County district attorney, who concluded that "no offenders remained in a position where they would present a danger."

It also omits his establishment in 2003 of the Diocesan Office for the Protection of Children and Youth with full-time workers, as well as the diocese's prompt notification

of law enforcement in Pennsylvania or elsewhere whenever new allegations emerged.

Although acknowledging that some of his decisions “might be subject to critique,” there is no evidence, Trautman wrote to the grand jury, that he “moved priests from parish to parish to ‘cover up’ abuse” and “no pattern or practice of putting the Church’s image or a priest’s reputation above the protection of children.”

“All of the above facts can be derived from diocesan records and information that was available to the grand jury,” Trautman wrote. “None are in the report. Is that fair? Is that a balanced attempt to report full facts?”

### *Another view*

The contrasting stories told by the report and Bishop Trautman can also be checked against the Gates study commissioned by the diocese. The Gates study does not mince words: “Within the Erie Diocese,” it acknowledges, “horrific abuse occurred—and was concealed—from as early as the 1940s through the 1980s. Less systematic but equally reprehensible acts occurred in later years when criminals within the Church took advantage of the trust previously given to all clergy.”

The Gates study proceeds to give an example representing the “historical failures” of the church. In 1994, allegations surfaced that then-Fr. Michael Barletta had abused students in the 1970s and ’80s, long before Trautman’s tenure. But Trautman contacted a priest who had lived in a rectory with Barletta. This fellow priest described witnessing the accused with a naked teenager in the 1970s and reporting this to then-Bishop Alfred Watson. “Mind your own business,” Watson had told him; “go back to the rectory, and be a good priest.” According to the diocesan study, “Watson then proceeded to transfer Barletta to a different school, where Barletta then abused additional teenagers.” This was a classic case of the “shuttling” or “shuffling” of an abuser from one parish to another, adding new abuse to the damage already done.

“Before 1982,” the Gates study concludes, “abuse allegations were not properly handled.... Bishop Watson’s tenure from 1969 to 1982 is marred by numerous abuse cases, along with a complete disregard for protecting children from accused priests.”

That changed, “although inadequately by today’s standards,” the Gates study found, with Bishop Murphy’s arrival in 1982. Murphy assigned accused priests to ministries “where children were not present, such as the military, a nursing home, or a convent.” As already noted, he also availed himself of medical professionals.

The Gates study is not uncritical of Bishop Trautman, stating that he “improved the practices” but “could have been better in certain areas.” One was the monitoring of priests working or living under restrictions, a criticism Trautman contests but one expressed by some diocesan priests. Another



*Donald W. Trautman, the former bishop of Erie, Pennsylvania*

was in “informing the public of priest disciplinary issues”—an important point to be taken up later.

Nonetheless, in many specifics, the Gates study is highly supportive of practices begun and expanded under Trautman. Under him, the study says, “The Erie Diocese promulgated its first child protection policy over 30 years ago, well before the Church required such a policy and well before the devastating newsmaking events at the Boston Archdiocese, Penn State, USA Gymnastics, and other high-profile institutions.”

“It would be unfair to provide the public with only half of the story,” the Gates study declares.

### *Summing up Erie*

Is that what the report does? Or worse? Did church leaders in the Erie diocese ignore complaints or accusations? Did they reassign priests without regard to the danger to minors? Were victims “brushed aside,” deterred or pressured from going to the police and not offered help? Was all this done to “protect the abusers and their institutions”? Or to put it more graphically, as the report does not hesitate to do, is it true that the while “priests were raping little boys and girls,” the “men of God” in the Erie diocese “did nothing” except hide it?

A careful review of the report’s own evidence from Erie, corrected here and there by the Gates study and Trautman’s testimony, shows that the answers to those questions are, overwhelmingly, “no.”

As well as can be determined by the report's profiles, in approximately one-third of the offenders, the diocese received the first accusations of past abuse between 2002 and 2017. Four of the accused clerics were long dead; a number had retired or left the priesthood of their own accord long ago. Under the zero-tolerance provision of the Dallas Charter, those remaining in ministry were promptly barred from all priestly roles and public identification and, when needed, defrocked.

In this one-third of cases that were simply unknown, church leaders can hardly be said to have "brushed aside" victims, done nothing, hid, and reassigned predators. When the abuse did become known, the available evidence indicates that victims were sympathetically contacted and offered counseling and assistance, and the crimes reported to the DA.

What was the pattern in the other two-thirds? The bulk of abuse occurred between 1965 and 1985, fitting the pattern uncovered by the John Jay research, but almost all of it came to light after 1982, during the tenures of Bishops Murphy and Trautman. In four instances when abuse became known to their predecessors, one could say, as the Gates study does, that it was addressed with "complete disregard for the protection of children." But the report's profiles provide no basis for the charge that over three decades and the vast number of cases, Murphy, Trautman, and Persico "brushed aside" victims, reassigned accused priests without concern for dangers to children, or deterred victims from going to the law. There is no evidence that either Murphy or Trautman sent priests to treatment centers as a ruse simply to hide rather than remove the danger. When new allegations underlined the extent of past abuse, Trautman in particular acted with dispatch to remove these priests from ministry. He reached out personally to victims and did not discourage them from going to the police or prosecutors.

Having reached those conclusions from poring over the available evidence, I belatedly discovered that Pennsylvania's Office of the Attorney General, in a little noticed legal document, had basically conceded as much last August. (See sidebar.)

Gaps in the report's profiles of Erie offenders make some cases difficult to track, including three instances where priests moved from the diocese to Hawaii, Texas, and, briefly, New York. But even allowing for misjudgments and uncertainties, what the Erie profiles show overall not only rebuts the report's charges but, in fact, stands in sharp contrast to the standard narrative of the sex-abuse scandal, i.e., that bishops responded to accusations of abuse by knowingly shuffling dangerous priests from parish to parish.

Pause, necessary pause. To say that is not to deny or diminish the inexcusable suffering inflicted on victims, at the time or in the long years that followed. It is not to say that such shuffling never occurred under earlier bishops. It is only to say that the grand jury's own evidence does not substantiate the prevailing script about how predators got away with committing and recommitting their crimes. In-

stead, the report's evidence shows that—to repeat—for over three decades and in the vast bulk of cases, Erie's bishops did *not* respond to accusations of abuse by knowingly shuffling dangerous priests from parish to parish.

### *The definition of "hiding"*

A review of Erie's response to the sex-abuse crisis also highlights one of the most contentious issues in the Catholic sex-abuse scandal: publicizing names of presumed but never-convicted predators. This is part of a larger concern, central to the grand-jury report, that bishops and other church officials not only "did nothing" while "priests were raping little boys and girls" but also "hid it all."

The report's word-for-word findings against every diocese construe "hiding" as (1) discouraging victims from going to the police; (2) pressuring law enforcement from investigating; or (3) not reporting crimes against children but rather conducting "their own deficient, biased investigating." The last charge is more than slightly ironic, since perhaps 90 percent or more of offenders the report lists were identified not by the police but by those "deficient" diocesan investigations.

In fact, the report contains scant evidence of Erie church officials dissuading people from taking sex-abuse charges to the police, although one can assume that Catholic deference to clerical authority and the culture's general sexual taboos once made dissuasion hardly necessary. In 2002, the Dallas Charter mandated reporting all allegations to public authorities, cooperating in investigations, and advising victims of their rights. The profiles indicate that Erie had been regularly reporting allegations of abuse by that date, even if the report and diocesan officials sometimes joust over what records of reporting exist.

What about "hiding" abuse or abusing clergy by settlements including confidentiality agreements? That issue has been debated for decades. Some lawyers have declared that such agreements should be rejected in principle. Other well-known victims' lawyers have disagreed. Litigation can be prolonged or chancy. Whatever facilitates a settlement, they maintain, should be the priority for their clients. And of course in some cases it may well be the victims who want to remain unnamed.

Again, the Dallas Charter mandated in 2002 that dioceses were not to seek settlements requiring confidentiality unless the victim requested it. The grand-jury profiles show eight Erie settlements over the years. The dates are not clear, nor is anything specified about the church requiring confidentiality agreements. The priests being sued, in any case, were no longer in ministry.

Yet the question of "hiding" goes beyond that, too. There is no question that sexual abuse has been unconscionably hidden, first of all by molesters themselves who lured altar boys or other victims to a rectory bedroom or a country camper and then frightened them into secrecy, and second

by other priests or church officials who shrugged off accusations and pressed victims or families to drop them, or third, and most notoriously, by bishops who fully recognized the threat such a priest posed and yet bounced him to a distant parish just to keep word from getting around.

Were bishops who put accused priests on “health leave” for what was considered reputable professional evaluation or treatment engaged in similarly meretricious conduct? For the report, “health leave” is always a euphemistic coverup. What about bishops who removed priests entirely from the clergy, informed legal authorities of accusations, but did not go further in publicly announcing and explaining these actions?

The Dallas Charter declared that dioceses should “be open and transparent in communicating with the public about sexual abuse of minors by clergy within the confines of respect for the privacy and the reputation of the individuals involved. This is especially so with regard to informing parish and other communities directly affected.” The phrasing suggests a balancing act.

After the Dallas Charter mandated removing all credibly accused priests from any form of priestly ministry or identification, victims’ advocates began urging—and some bishops began implementing—a further step: the naming of all credibly accused priests from the past, regardless of whether they were barred from ministry, defrocked, or even deceased. The rationale was to empower past victims to come forward and seek recognition, help, and recompense. The focus shifted from preventing future abuse to redressing past abuse.

This is an area in which Erie’s policy under Bishop Persico differs from that under Bishop Trautman. Currently the Erie diocese prominently displays a long list of individuals “credibly accused of actions that, in the diocese’s judgment, disqualify that person from working with children.” It includes priests and lay teachers, employees, and volunteers. It lists the living and the long dead, including Bishop Watson—for failing “to act to stop abuse which was credibly reported to him.”

Bishop Trautman followed a different course. Neither in removing priests from ministry nor in any later list like the one the diocese now provides did he publicize the names of abusers. In the written response submitted to the grand jury, Trautman affirms that “rightly or wrongly, it was his judgment that publicity would harm, not help victims, and that the relatives of accused priests should not face the public ridicule and scorn that would follow publication of the dismissal or suspension of an accused priest. This was often consistent with requests of the victims, many of whom informed the Bishop that they did not want the names of the offending priest publicized for fear that they would be connected with the name and it could injure both their recovery and the life they had built.” Trautman also pointed out, “No federal, state or canonical law required that the names be made public.”

## A SIGNIFICANT CONCESSION

Seldom has an eye-opening document concerning the church and sex abuse gone as unnoticed as the joint stipulation signed August 2, 2018, between Bishop Donald Trautman and Attorney General Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania’s Office of the Attorney General. Trautman was one of a number of accused individuals who demanded last spring that, in the absence of any opportunity to defend their reputations before the grand jury, those sections of the report naming them should be redacted. In Trautman’s case this would have meant redaction of much of the report regarding Erie. To avoid that, Trautman withdrew his demand. In return, the attorney general’s office agreed that virtually all of the sweeping charges in the report were “not directed at Bishop Trautman.” These included the statements that “all [victims] were brushed aside”; that “the main thing” was to avoid “scandal”; that “priests were raping little boys and girls and the men of God ... did nothing”; that diocesan officials knowingly “enabled offenders and endangered the welfare of children”; and that they blocked law enforcement from investigating “crimes against children.”

The few news reports of this joint stipulation stressed Trautman’s withdrawal of his petition for redaction and not Shapiro’s rather remarkable withdrawal of core elements of the report’s charges. One wonders what the impact would have been had other Pennsylvania bishops made similar demands. On December 3, 2018, citing the rights to due process and protection of one’s reputation in Pennsylvania’s constitution, the state’s supreme court ruled that the demanded redactions should remain permanent.

In his press conference of August 14, 2018, Attorney General Shapiro managed to even the score with Bishop Trautman by detailing the crimes of Erie molesters and making several demonstrably false statements about how Trautman had handled them.

—Peter Steinfelds



## *The problem with publicizing*

Trautman's policy, which Erie's independent Gates study judged "less transparent" than Bishop Persico's, makes a certain sense. But so does the demand for fully publicizing the names of those credibly accused. In fact, it is increasingly becoming the default position of dioceses (and religious orders) across the country, especially as investigations like Pennsylvania's seem likely to release names in any case.

Doing so, of course, poses problems. Nowadays the consensus is that, given the trauma and shame connected with such experiences, most people alleging being molested in their youth are telling the truth. The burden of proof, *pace* pronouncements to the contrary, has been reversed. Anyone forcefully accused is now presumed guilty, or at least very probably guilty, until proven innocent. Among the offenders listed in the report, a good number have had little chance to defend themselves, certainly not in court, and no chance at all when accusations emerged only after their deaths.

Consider the case of Fr. Richard D. Lynch. He died in 2000. Four years later, a man phoned the diocese complaining about feminism in the church and mentioning a "sexual involvement years ago" by his high-school headmaster, Fr. Lynch. The caller said that in 1978, when the caller was a senior in high school, he was cleaning a locker room when Fr. Lynch touched him in a private area and slammed him against a wall. At a 2004 meeting with Bishop Trautman and another Erie administrator, the man claimed he had subsequently needed back surgery. Notes from that meeting state that the man has "psychological issues," is easily agitated, but "usually calms down as you talk with him." He was advised of his legal right to report sexual misconduct to the district attorney.

Ten years later, in 2014, the accuser reemerged. A series of letters showed him embroiled in a quarrel about his parents' burial plot at a Catholic cemetery. Then writing to Bishop Persico in 2016 from Albion State prison, the man complained about his treatment by two deacons assigned to prison ministry—and again alleged sexual abuse by Fr. Lynch. Acknowledging that he had been previously inconsistent in alleging sexual abuse as well as physical abuse from Lynch, he attributed this to shame. In a 45-minute meeting with a deacon at prison he mostly complained about how poorly the church was run. Later he asked for "a check for \$20,000 to just close the books on this era," adding, "I'm trying to keep it quiet so that this case never becomes public." Bishop Persico reported all these allegations to the district attorney's and child safety offices and wrote the man that the diocese was interested in healing rather than keeping things quiet. It might be tempting to treat this accuser as a disgruntled crank. In fact, neither Bishop Trautman in 2004 nor Bishop Persico after 2014 nor any other church personnel appear to have done so; after all, victims of sex abuse often end up very troubled. But no other allegations against Fr. Lynch were ever recorded.

That has not kept him from being included among the grand jury's "offenders." And the Erie diocese publicly lists Lynch among a group "currently under investigation, and each is presumed innocent unless proven otherwise."

Is Fr. Lynch, now dead for eighteen years, really "currently under investigation" but "presumed innocent unless proven otherwise"? When will that investigation be completed? In what sense can he be "presumed innocent" when included on a widely publicized list of priests and other church personnel "credibly accused" of abusing or being threats to children? To say nothing of being listed as an "offender" by a state grand jury?

Not long ago the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the U.S. Supreme Court caught the whole nation up in a debate over the presumption of innocence until proven guilty. Fierce debates even surround the legitimacy and operation of federal and state sex-offender registries—and those apply to individuals legally tried and convicted, not just designated as "credibly accused" by a diocese or other entity. Yet virtually no one has raised questions about a grand jury, an attorney general, or a diocese authoritatively pronouncing so many priests and bishops guilty of awful crimes, many without any hearing or opportunity for defending themselves.

This is not the place to resolve this dilemma. There are plausible arguments on all sides. What the Pennsylvania report does, however, is to erect publicizing of the names of all credibly accused or suspected abusers, present or past, alive or dead, having had an opportunity to respond to accusations or not, as an indisputable standard. Anything less the report condemns as essentially criminal "hiding." If this is to be the case, it should not be unilaterally declared by a grand jury but established by statute and applied to all organizations rather than the Catholic Church alone.

## *Is Erie an exception?*

If a careful perusal of the report's own profiles from the Erie diocese refutes the broad-brush charges against church officials that have gained worldwide notice, so what? Couldn't these charges be true of other dioceses and their leaders?

Each diocese has its own history, some better, some worse, as my sampling of hundreds of profiles of offenders reveals. These profiles were no doubt challenging to write from uneven diocesan files; as noted, they do not follow any standard template but vary from diocese to diocese, probably depending on what staff member of the attorney general's office wrote them. The gaps in these summaries may leave no doubt about the insidious seductions and brutal violations of molesters but often reveal little about the motives of church officials. Bureaucratic reflex? Willful denial? Deliberate coverup? Commendable vigilance?

Like Erie, every diocese has its especially shameful cases, usually dating from earlier decades. Monsignor Thomas J. Kinzling, the chancellor and vicar general of the Greensburg

diocese between 1984 and 1988, submitted written testimony to the grand jury describing the responses of Bishop William G. Connare (1960–87) as dismissive and deceptive. (It should be added that Kinzling also makes strong criticisms of the report, and that Connare is no longer alive to defend himself.)

Allentown's profiles, like Erie's, indicate a high percentage of offenders (fifteen out of thirty-six) not accused until 2002 or much later, when there was no longer any question of reassigning or retaining them in active ministry—if they were not already dead, retired, or laicized. Unlike Erie, however, Allentown relied on evaluation and treatment by the Servants of the Paraclete's facilities in New Mexico, later to be harshly criticized. In at least nine cases, mostly in the 1980s, although it cannot be said that diocesan leaders “did nothing,” they were sadly deaf or blind to dangers posed to children, in some cases shockingly so.

In 1993, Scranton, under Bishop Joseph C. Timlin, became one of the first dioceses nationwide to institute a systematic policy for handling allegations and referring charges to a diocesan board of lay people professionally qualified in areas like psychiatry, social work, and law enforcement. These measures followed the 1991 arrest of a priest whose history constituted a classic example of how extensive accusations of abuse from parents and a pastor were handled in 1968. The priest offered an unconvincing denial, was sent off for a spiritual retreat, then returned to ministry. The grand jury's profiles of Scranton's offenders are atypically terse, but many indicate prompt removal of accused priests from ministry and commendable announcements in parish bulletins seeking other victims. Those actions contrast with Bishop Timlin's occasionally jarring expressions of solicitude for abusing priests. Especially troubling was his irresponsible 1998 decision to invite into the diocese a small organization of ultraconservative priests who proved sexually and financially dissolute—made worse by his subsequent defense of them.

Despite incomplete or inaccurate reports from Pittsburgh that prompted Cardinal Donald Wuerl to resign from his later position as archbishop of Washington, the response from Pittsburgh offers a clear, pointed rebuttal to many assertions in the report, for any reader willing to go to page 1,113. In Pittsburgh, too, nearly 40 percent of the credible allegations—mostly of much earlier abuse—were made after the 2002 zero-tolerance rule of automatic removal from ministry.

In short, whatever the merits of Erie's responses, I found no grounds for considering it a total outlier.

So the question remains: If distinctions can be made from diocese to diocese or from one bishop's tenure to another's, why not make them? Why should such an extensive, elaborate report tar all leaders of all dioceses over all those seven decades with the same brush? Why can't a report devoting 800 pages to detailing sex acts devote more than a dozen or so to a fine-grained analysis and precisely tailored findings? Why the virtually identical sweeping and damning charges across the board?

## *The real objective*

The most plausible answer, I believe, lies in one of the report's four unoriginal and unremarkable recommendations. In Pennsylvania, the criminal statute of limitations for the sexual abuse of minors has been repeatedly extended; the first of the grand jury's recommendations is to remove it altogether. Pennsylvania's law mandating reporting of abuse has also been repeatedly broadened and tightened; the grand jury recommends it be clarified to include reporting any past abuser as long as there is a reason to believe he will abuse again. The grand jury also recommends that no settlements of lawsuits include confidentiality agreements that would justify either party in not cooperating with a criminal investigation. Legal experts may spot technical problems in these recommendations, but they seem in line with current church practices.

The radioactive recommendation is one that has been implemented in four states (California, Minnesota, Hawaii, and Delaware) and proposed in many more. The grand jury calls for a “civil window” of two years during which victims can sue dioceses for abuse not just if accusers are under thirty, as Pennsylvania law now provides, but no matter their age. Pennsylvania's bishops have previously opposed similar legislation on the grounds that it would expose dioceses, parishes, and charities to huge losses, even bankruptcies, for misdeeds committed by others many decades ago. Who would be penalized for these crimes? Not the actual predators and negligent or culpable church officials, in most cases dead or without assets, but Catholics who had nothing to do with those deeds. Time would erode memories, evidence, and the availability of witnesses. Verdicts or settlements would be arbitrary. The Pennsylvania bishops' conference, like its counterparts in many other states, has argued the unfairness of lifting the statute of limitations for such suits against the church and other nonprofits while barring them, under the doctrine of “state sovereignty,” against public schools, juvenile-detention centers, or other state agencies, where far more abuse occurs.

All this is debatable. In fact, a growing number of dioceses, including those in Pennsylvania, are establishing programs to compensate survivors voluntarily through arbitration rather than litigation, something that should have been done locally or nationally as early as the 1990s and certainly in 2002. But the critical point regarding the Pennsylvania report is that it has been designed to be a weapon in the debate. Its impassioned, graphic style; its characterization of church leadership as no better, perhaps even worse, than the abusers; its refusal to make distinctions between dioceses or between periods of time like pre- and post-Dallas Charter: all are aimed at mobilizing public opinion behind legislation suspending the statute of limitations for civil suits and discrediting church opposition.

Whether that objective is a good or bad thing is open to debate. But the tool that the attorney general's office

has constructed to achieve it is an inaccurate, unfair, and fundamentally misleading instrument. Its shortcomings should not be masked by its vehement style, its befuddling structure, or its sheer bulk.

### *What now?*

As of this writing, a dozen or more states and the federal government are signaling intentions to follow Pennsylvania's lead in investigating clergy sex abuse in the Catholic church. Just before leaving office, the attorney general of Illinois specifically cited the Pennsylvania model (and duplicated some of its faults) in a preliminary headline-grabbing report. It is possible that these investigations could be productive and salutary. But only if they make distinctions between dioceses, leaders, and time frames. Only if they do not fudge what was true before and after Dallas. Only if they recognize changes over time in the larger society's understanding and openness about sexual abuse. Only if they provide perspective by comparisons with other institutions. Only if they engage honestly with diverse or contrary viewpoints, including those of church officials. Only if they are written in a way that expresses necessary, justifiable repulsion toward crimes against children and young people without burying all efforts at analysis in a mudslide of outrage.

Only, in short, if they do better than Pennsylvania.

That is for the future. For the present, the important thing is to restore some fact-based reality to the instant mythology that the Pennsylvania report has created.

What does the report document? It documents decades of stomach-churning violations of the physical, psychological, and spiritual integrity of children and young people. It documents that many of these atrocities could have been prevented by promptly removing the credibly suspected perpetrators from all priestly roles and ministry. It documents that some, although far from all, of those failures were due to an overriding concern for protecting the reputation of the church and the clergy and a reckless disregard for the safety and well-being of children. It also documents that a good portion of these crimes, perhaps a third or more, only came to the knowledge of church authorities in 2002 or after, when the Dallas Charter mandated automatic removal from ministry. It documents, well before 2002, many conscientious attempts to determine the truth of accusations and prevent any further abuse, often successful though sometimes poorly executed or tragically misinformed. It documents significant differences between dioceses and bishops and time periods in the response to allegation of abuse. It documents major changes in vigilance and response in some dioceses during the 1990s and, as far as the evidence shows, dramatic changes after 2002.

What does the report *not* document? It does not docu-

ment the sensational charges contained in its introduction—namely, that over seven decades Catholic authorities, in virtual lockstep, supposedly brushed aside all victims and did absolutely nothing in the face of terrible crimes against boys and girls—except to conceal them. This ugly, indiscriminate, and inflammatory charge, unsubstantiated by the report's own evidence, to say nothing of the evidence the report ignores, is truly unworthy of a judicial body responsible for impartial justice.

Why the media were so amenable to uncritically echoing this story without investigation, and why Catholics in particular were so eager to seize on it to settle their internal differences, are important topics for further discussion.

It is true that disturbing instances of apparent failures by church officials continue to come to light—and will no doubt continue to do so, especially as the line between past cases and current ones is regularly blurred, and as cases from all around the world are increasingly blended with a few American ones into a single narrative. Church leaders must remove persistent doubts that these failures are being thoroughly investigated, with consequences for those found responsible.

Doing that will not be easy. The prevalent story about Catholic clergy sex abuse as deeply entrenched, largely unabated, and uniquely Catholic is now so embedded in the media as to make it resistant to evidence to the contrary, which, at least for the United States, is ample and well-documented.

In the case of Pennsylvania, whether one looks at the handling of old allegations or the prevention of new ones, the conclusion that a careful, unbiased reading of the Pennsylvania report compels is this: the Dallas Charter has worked. Not worked perfectly, not without need for regular improvements and constant watchfulness. But worked. Justified alarm and demands for accountability at instances of either deliberate noncompliance or bureaucratic incompetence should not be wrenched into an ill-founded pretense that, fundamentally, nothing has changed.

This conclusion does not acquit the Catholic hierarchy of all sins, past or present. Personally I have a substantial list. Nor is it impossible that some other states may vary from Pennsylvania. But just as the grand-jury report correctly though not consistently points to “institutional failure,” something beyond the virtues and vices of individual leaders, the Dallas Charter has apparently proved to be an *institutional* success. It set out, and has regularly fine-tuned, procedures, practices, and standards that can be overseen by middling caretaker leaders as well as outstanding, proactive ones.

The Dallas Charter is decidedly not a recipe that can simply be transferred to any society or culture or legal and governmental situation around the globe. But American bishops should go to the Vatican's February summit meeting on sexual abuse confident that the measures they've already adopted have made an important difference. ■

Celia Wren

# A Royal Mess

'THE ROMANOFFS'

**Y**ou have to admire the premise of *The Romanoffs*, the ham-fisted new Amazon series by *Mad Men* creator Matthew Weiner. Each of the episodes involves a contemporary person, or people, claiming to be descended from Russia's last royal family, who were murdered by the Bolsheviks in 1918. This conceit combines great narrative flexibility with the potential to tap into evergreen human concerns: fear of death, anxiety about the path of history, concern with legacy and remembrance, and the feeling each of us has that, in some way, we stand out from the crowd. Unfortunately, the writing in most episodes of *The Romanoffs* is so maladroit, and the characters are so unpersuasive, that the series is painful to watch.

And then there's the awkward timing: *The Romanoffs* is appearing at a time when democracy is experiencing setbacks around the world, and some political leaders are cultivating nostalgia for autocracies of the past. Jair Bolsonaro, the new president of Brazil, has openly pined for the years of his own country's dictatorship. These real-world developments cast a harsh light on the Amazon show's slight but perceptible romanticization of the Tsarist legacy. Admittedly, this romanticization is in keeping with the century-old public fascination with the Romanovs' fate and afterlife. Hence the success of *Anastasia*, which was based on the legend that one of the Tsar's children survived the massacre.

That apocryphal story gets a nod in the Amazon series's credit sequence—surely one of the worst in the history of television. After a gratuitously literal opening that depicts the family's murder, with blood trickling past photos on the floor, the credit sequence shows a young woman fleeing through a forest, before exiting a subway into a mod-

ern city. The blue cloak and hood the woman wears in the forest give her the appearance of a fairy-tale figure.

That fairy-tale touch is emblematic of a series that often seems cluelessly detached from how real people behave. For instance, in the wholly unconvincing first episode, "The Violet Hour," a hard-working, hijab-wearing French nursing student (Inès Melab) throws her career to the winds when she impulsively goes to bed with an American slacker (Aaron Eckhart); the improbable pair end up living blissfully in a palatial Paris apartment. In "Panorama," set in Mexico City, a journalist (Juan Pablo Castañeda) puts a scoop on hold to hang out with an American woman (Radha Mitchell) he has just met; he ultimately finds himself in mystical communion with Mexico's past.

If the plotting is often preposterous, so too is the dialogue. In the belabored episode "Expectation," a middle-aged limousine liberal (Amanda Peet) and her smug conservative daughter (Emily Rudd) have an argument that summarizes their philosophies in an absurdly blunt manner. The mother says, "You're a throwback!...You gave

everything up to be some, I'll just say it, rich housewife!... I don't know how I raised someone who thought it was better to be comfortable than to be her own person!" And so on. Like many of the characters in this series, these two women register as artificial constructs, and the conversation underscores the contrivance.

The blithe disregard for truth is all the more striking given the near anthropological level of detail that distinguished *Mad Men*. It's as though, weary of the fact-gathering *Mad Men* required, Weiner decided to throw all authorial discipline to the winds and just make stuff up, while indulging in expensive photo shoots (shots of Paris streets, Cossack dance routines on a cruise ship, a Mexico City square prowled by Frida Kahlo).

To be fair, the penultimate episode of *The Romanoffs*, "End of the Line," about an American couple's adoption saga, is painstakingly observed and sometimes stirring. But the standout episode in the series is "House of Special Purpose," an unsettling, atmospheric, compellingly unpredictable ghost story set during the filming of a television miniseries about the Romanovs. During the shoot, the grisly fate of Tsar Nicholas and his family manifests itself in eerie phenomena that affect a famous actress named Olivia (Christina Hendricks) and her domineering director (Isabelle Huppert), among others.

That episode, written by Weiner and Mary Sweeney, is successful in part because it portrays the loneliness, discomfort, and interpersonal awkwardness that plague Olivia while she's on location. You get the sense that "House of Special Purpose" draws on the creators' deep familiarity with the TV-making process. This episode may boast sensational horror-tale trappings, but it's based on hard-won knowledge. And, unlike much of the series, it rings true. ■



Aaron Eckhart and Marthe Keller in "The Violet Hour"



*Jared Lucky*

# The Place Up Ahead

**'THE BALLAD OF BUSTER SCRUGGS'**

Watching a white-hatted cowboy shoot off a man's fingers one by one, you might guess that the Coen brothers' latest is a gory romp à la Tarantino. Fortunately, you'd be mistaken. *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*, a collection of stand-alone vignettes produced by Netflix, is not a celebration of stylized violence. Nor is it a revisionist film, pedantically exposing the grimy "real West." Rather, the anthology is a thoughtful but imperfect effort to return to the roots of the Western genre—albeit with an offbeat, parodic sensibility.

Buster himself appears only in the first of six wide-ranging tableaux, all of which feature breathtaking long shots that recall classics like George Steven's *Shane* (1953) and John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956). Nowhere is the engagement with genre conventions more clear, or more biting, than in the opening sketch. Scruggs eerily strums his guitar on horseback in Monument Valley, the iconic desertscape that Ford made legendary in *Stagecoach* (1939). Portrayed by longtime Coen-collaborator Tim Blake Nelson, Scruggs looks for all the world like Hank Williams's evil twin. He is a singing, shooting, card-sharping cowboy outlaw, obsessed with his own self-aggrandizing nicknames, galloping through a Wild West so stylized it could be a video game. "Don't let my white duds and pleasant demeanor fool ya," Scruggs drawls to a bartender. "I too have been known to violate the statutes of man, and not a few of the laws of the Almighty."

Scruggs's spree of shocking violence culminates in a shootout with his anti-type, a black-clad troubadour gunslinger played by folk singer Willie Watson. After the fatal draw, Buster removes his own white Stetson to admire two bullet holes in it: one clean, one brain-spattered. He's been shot straight through



Tim Blake Nelson as Buster Scruggs

the head. Scruggs's winged, harp-toting soul wafts up to heaven, crooning a duet with the man who murdered him.

Scruggs is grotesque in the literary sense: comic but repulsive. His apotheosis takes aim at the cheap grace that prevails in many Westerns. The unregenerate Buster has no business ascending to a "place up ahead where men ain't low down, and the poker's played fair." The unsettling absurdity of this first short calls attention to our protean expectations for the cowboy: hard-drinking roughrider, blue-collar everyman, romantic poet, and (most ridiculous of all) Christian knight. In life, death, and afterlife, Scruggs mischievously demolishes the "white hat" Western.

Some will no doubt find Buster's gore and the segment's sheer unreality off-putting. But tellingly, his ballad is sung first, not last. The next five segments also tell stories in classic Western modes, but carry the series beyond mere parody. A printed book of "campfire tales" frames the anthology.

At each transition, pages are turned by a wizened, anonymous hand—a fitting emblem of the curious alloy of history, folklore, and mass-entertainment that has always made up the Western.

In "Near Aldogones," James Franco plays a New Mexico bank robber in a droll tale of justice served. There is a gallows involved, and some Coen-esque gallows humor. Many of the story's elements are drawn from the life of the infamous Texan saloon owner and frontier judge, Roy Bean. Tragedy overwhelms an unlikely romance in "The Gal who Got Rattled," an Oregon Trail epic that aims at historical realism. Craggy sierras encase Liam Neeson and Harry Melling in "Meal Ticket," a Grimmian fable about Old West show business.

An anthology comprising such diverse material requires more binding than a fake book. Folk music ties the vignettes together and sets the pace for Carter Burwell's magnificent score. A prospector's hoarse tune crests into an orchestral idyll in the Jack London—



inspired sketch “All Gold Valley.” In “Meal Ticket,” Liam Neeson’s drunken rendition of “Weelye Weelye Wailya” gives an ominous glimpse of his character’s brutality. Coen fans will find a familiar trope in Neeson’s character: the benefactor who turns out to be a monster, played to perfection by John Goodman in both *Barton Fink* and *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

The true theme, musically speaking, is “Streets of Laredo,” plucked by a doleful Spanish guitar as the book opens in the first shot. The dirge is ingeniously resurrected in the last sketch when Brendan Gleeson sings “The Unfortunate Rake,” the old Irish ballad that evolved into the cowboy lament. Folk songs, like folk tales, are morbid. They fit well in this anthology, a scorched-earth campaign against happy endings. Even “All Gold Canyon,” in which the protagonist manages to survive, exudes a funereal eeriness. As the prospector hits his gold vein, the shot widens to reveal—just for an instant—the grave-shaped hole he has inadvertently dug himself.

Moments like these gradually lead one to realize that *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* is not, after all, about the cheapness of life. It’s about the mystery of death. The flip supernaturalism of the first vignette slowly transforms into a profound reckoning with the afterlife, epitomized by the last chapter. “The Mortal Remains” is the only sketch that dispenses with expansive landscapes; the shots are tightly confined within a midnight stagecoach. With a folkloric existentialism that evokes *The Seventh Seal*, a pair of Mephistophelean bounty hunters gradually unnerve the other three passengers. A corpse is strapped to the roof, bound for Fort Morgan. But the motley travelers finally start to sense that they too are “negotiating their passage.”

For all its thematic power, *Buster Scruggs* still suffers from some formal limitations. At times, anthology yields to miscellany. The shorts were pulled from a scrap bin of storyboards written up over twenty-five years, and the series as a whole never quite attains the im-

mersive grandeur of a *True Grit*. Perhaps more significantly, for all its diversity, the anthology falls short of a true panorama of the West. Indians serve always as plot device, never as characters. Comanche raiders merely provide a *deus ex machina* in “Near Aldogones” and a *diabolus ex machina* in “The Gal Who Got Rattled.” Rich historic figures like black cowboys and Mexican *rancheros* are neglected entirely. (The closest treatment of the Spanish West comes from a few bad hombres in the first sketch; in the credits, they are listed as “Cantina Scum.”)

There is some artistry in the Coens’ deliberate choice to avoid a pinched, hidebound realism. Dime novels and silent films coexisted with the waning days of the Old West. For all the literary distortions that revisionists love to hate, the image has at some level become the reality. Animating every part of this film is that most famous of John Ford mantras, spoken by Jimmy Stuart in *The*

*Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* (1956): “When the legend becomes a fact, print the legend.” But even by this standard, there are serious blind spots. Western legend brims with the kinds of characters who get no airtime in *Buster Scruggs*. There is plenty of Coen-worthy material in the life of the half-white, half-Indian Quanah Parker, for example, the last war chief of the Comanches. Or perhaps Bill Pickett, the larger-than-life black steer wrestler who performed with Wild Bill in his later years.

Still, there is no denying that *Buster Scruggs* breathes new life into a time-worn genre with the oldest of all themes: death. These six weird vignettes are a fresh and fitting contribution to a tradition that constantly resurrects itself. You can kill Buster Scruggs, but he’ll keep on singing. ■

**Jared Lucky** is a PhD student in history at Yale University. He is originally from El Paso, Texas.

## MISS SWEENEY

A ruddy face, a wealth of curly  
Gray hair, her eyes a turquoise ocean  
Advancing into me—“Learn what adaptable  
Means,” she said, and I recognized  
Miss Sweeney, principal,  
Instructing me in a dream.  
Forgotten through my calendar of years  
She appeared, brandishing  
Her word of the month:  
Adaptable, written in bold green  
Letters on posters in the halls.  
Dear Miss Sweeney, you were telling me  
To adapt to fear, to blindness, death,  
The trinity looming over my old age.  
I woke from my dream,  
Adaptable, to begin the day.

—Michael Miller

*Michael Miller’s recent book is Asking the Names, published by Ashland Poetry Press. His poems have appeared widely in such places as the Yale Review, the Kenyon Review, Raritan, and the Sewanee Review.*

*Margaret O'Brien Steinfels*

# Minorities within Minorities

## One in Christ

Chicago Catholics and the Quest for Interracial Justice

Karen J. Johnson

Oxford University Press, \$34.95, 320 pp.

Headlines might make you believe that no one (at least no white person) in Chicago ever noticed that the city had a race problem. Not so—as Karen Johnson’s history, *One in Christ*, amply documents. In the fifty years following World War I and the murderous 1919 race riot, a small number of Chicago Catholics, black and white, took notice. Segregated, crowded, dilapidated, and overpriced housing for blacks was an obvious but difficult place to start. Jobs, education, and the demands of urban life were challenges for rural southern black migrants in particular. These Catholic activists, who are the primary focus of *One in Christ*, were always a “minority,” to use Johnson’s word. They were Catholics in a Protestant culture, activists in a local church suffused with racial prejudice, and the blacks among them suffered discrimination in both church and society. Her recurring image of minorities within a minority underscores the complexity of Chicago’s racial dynamic and the challenge in tackling it.

Johnson begins with Arthur Falls, born in 1901 to a middle-class, African-American, Catholic family in Chicago. By his death in 2000, Falls had had a long and active life as a physician and vigorous advocate of “interracialism,” the proposition that blacks and whites should work together to improve the lives of blacks confined to Bronzeville, the city’s South Side ghetto. When Falls



Holy Angels Catholic Church in Bronzeville, 1973

was born, Chicago was home to a small number of African Americans (six hundred of them Catholic)—so small, in fact, as to be unremarked. Over Falls’s lifetime their numbers grew dramatically. In 1910, blacks were 2 percent of the city’s population; by 1960, the percentage had increased to 25 percent. The interracialists’ fellow Catholics noticed and often resented that demographic transformation.

The small coterie of Catholic activ-

ists followed in the book were mostly white; sometimes Falls worked with them, sometimes not. Johnson suggests that this tension gave Falls a moral claim on their attention and sometimes on that of church leaders. She sums it up in asking: Did white activists work for better conditions *along with* or *for* blacks? Though not the liveliest writer, Johnson, like a documentary filmmaker, captures with cameo appearances and quick shots a number of these activists

and their decades-long effort as a tiny minority to rally their fellow Catholics against racial injustice.

Within the Catholic minority were African Americans like the Falls family who had direct experience of segregation—in the church no less than elsewhere. Their Catholic beliefs spurred their efforts to break the color barrier: to worship in “white” parishes, to send their children to Catholic schools and their sick to Catholic hospitals. Falls appealed to white Catholics who shared his religious beliefs, and then to fellow blacks in groups like the Urban League who shared his goals but not his religion. These alliances had their own biases, as Johnson discusses, especially the middle-class condescension of established blacks toward the manners and mores of immigrants from the rural south. With his involvement in many communities and groups, Falls pressed the borders of reform in *several* directions, sometimes discomfiting both church leaders and close collaborators.

As Johnson points out, Catholics, whether black or white, were also a minority, unwelcome in Protestant America. In the early decades of the twentieth century the U.S. Catholic Church absorbed millions of Irish, German, Polish, Italian, Czech, and other European immigrants. To meet their needs in Chicago, Archbishop George Mundelein created national parishes, taking advantage of natural communities of language and culture. The Falls family and other African Americans were consigned, over their objections, to a black “national parish.” In creating Catholic enclaves (richly described and analyzed in John McGreevy’s *Parish Boundaries*), Mundelein in effect reinforced white-only neighborhoods and schools. In time, the parish itself became a structural barrier to the interracialism that Catholic activists sought to define and implement.

Activists faced other hurdles. In the pre-Vatican II church, bishops were effectively the singular authority in decisions about parishes, the clergy, and

the role of the laity. Even when without biases themselves, the archbishops of Chicago, at least until the arrival of Albert Meyer in 1958, had a strictly pastoral view of blacks: yes, saving souls and conversion were promoted, and yes, blacks should have a parish or two, and yes, those parishes should have schools for black Catholic children. Where charity was needed, it should be given. But episcopal priorities did not extend to reprimanding parishes that barred blacks, or high schools that refused black students, or hospitals that would not accept black doctors, like Falls, or his black patients. However much priests understood the needs of black parishioners and neighbors, they were controlled and restrained by their archbishops. Lay men and women working in the name of the church for racial justice operated under the same restraints—or joined a secular organization.

Activists, white and black, were another minority within the church itself. In committees, conferences, and conversations throughout the 1920s and ’30s, they worked toward a more equitable treatment of blacks while maintaining episcopal support. Energy and ingenuity fed conversations, debates, and disagreements that went into years of strategizing. Should they focus on works of charity or justice, pursue conversions or collaboration, emphasize personal relations or political organizing? Johnson follows these shifts, cataloging the rise of an alphabet soup of organizations, coalescing ultimately in the Catholic Interracial Council, founded in 1945. As ecumenism emerged after World War II, activists often cooperated with Jewish and Protestant organizations in their interracial projects.

Individual efforts also came into play. Falls convinced Dorothy Day to open a Catholic Worker House in 1935; its leaders included future *Commonweal* editors John Cogley and James O’Gara. In 1942 Friendship House established an outpost in Bronzeville itself. Direct contact with the neighborhood and neighbors encouraged friendships and



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outreach that took the form of charity and social work. In 1930, Bernard Sheil, a Chicago auxiliary bishop, founded the CYO, an athletic and social resource that brought together black and white adolescents and young adults. (Another recent history, *Crossing Parish Boundaries: Race, Sport, and Catholic Youth in Chicago, 1914–1954* by Timothy B. Neary features a cover photo of the 1950 CYO swim team. Was I surprised to see that the team included men and women, black and white? You betcha I was astonished: 1950!)

These signs of progress were real, though efforts were sometimes constrained by doubts about how far the laity could go in doing the work of the church, with or without the help of a priest. Johnson cites the appointment of Reynold Hillenbrand, rector of Mundelein Seminary (1936–1944), as a key to broadening interracialist influence by linking liturgy and theology with social justice and lay responsibility. Johnson calculates that Hillenbrand influenced some five hundred of the priests who passed through the seminary. Religious orders—Jesuits, Benedictines, Dominicans, and Franciscans—enlarged this reach in the city’s high schools and colleges so that in the years before and after World War II, there was a cadre of students and young adults who had passed through Summer Schools of Catholic Action; belonged to Catholic Action Groups; were members of the CYO, CISCA, YCS, or YCW; or had spent time at the Catholic Worker or Friendship House.

These women and men became heroes and mentors to a post-World War II generation of Catholics, many of them first-generation college students at Loyola, DePaul, Rosary, and Mundelein College—including my friends and classmates. Johnson’s roster of activists includes priests Daniel Cantwell, Jack Egan, and Rollins Lambert, and lay people Edward Marciniak, Peggy Roach, Matt Ahmann, John McDermott, Ellen Tarry, Pat and Patty Crowley, and many others. John-

son judges this a high point of Catholic social action, Chicago-style: “If there was any place where lay-led interracial justice might have taken root, where lay people might have fostered sweeping racial change, it was Chicago.” It is at once heartening and sobering to have my living memories registered in the data bank of history: letters, memoirs, unpublished autobiographies, newspaper accounts, diaries, and recorded interviews (cited in the extensive endnotes).

Johnson singles out Pius XII’s 1943 encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ as the theological and spiritual inspiration for the interracialists’ work, in particular for empowering lay initiative. At the same time, she stresses episcopal authority as the stop-and-go light for interracialist efforts. No doubt activists welcomed papal theology while chafing under mixed episcopal signals. But perhaps Johnson, writing as an Evangelical, has overestimated elements alien to her own tradition. Interracialists did not have to appeal to *Mystici corporis Christi* to justify practical work on behalf of decent housing, education, welfare, and dignity, especially in the New Deal days, when the corporal and spiritual works of mercy were in every Catholic schoolchild’s *Baltimore Catechism*. And Catholics may possess a greater capacity for dealing with bishops’ directives than Johnson realizes.

Though *One in Christ* emphasizes the importance of Catholicism in the struggle for racial justice, the book also probes the role of the church in fostering racist attitudes and maintaining (both willfully and unwittingly) structures of racial segregation. Regardless of theology and authority, barriers to integration persisted in the city’s parishes and neighborhoods. In the pre-Vatican II Church, episcopal wavering, church governance, parish practices, and limited roles for clergy and laity were significant obstacles. So were the waves of newcomers, both European and African American. Yet the “interracialist” project held firm into the 1960s, working for open-housing ordinances and against blockbusting and contract house buying.

But then came another religious and political understanding: nonviolent protests and marches. In 1966, Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference joined with Chicago activists in the Chicago Freedom Movement. Many Catholics, including priests, sisters, and laity, joined in. But others, priests as well as Archbishop John Cody, questioned the wisdom of Freedom Marches in neighborhoods that refused to share their neighborhood with black families. Cody and others saw the marches as provocations to violence that would likely increase racial prejudice. Indeed, one of the objectives of the Freedom Marches was to show the level of racism among Northern whites. In that, they succeeded.

Johnson ends her account with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and Freedom Summer in 1966. The Catholic Interracial Council came under pressure from Cardinal Cody and he withdrew his support in 1967. Committed Catholic activists, Ahmann, Marciniak, McDermott, Egan, and Roach among them, moved on to other civic, corporate, and religious groups working on integration and civil rights. Their potential heirs—some of them my classmates and friends—took up other crusades: voting-rights projects in the South, the Peace Corps, anti-Vietnam protests, and women’s rights. The Black Power movement came forward to cut the Gordian knot of *with* or *for*, a shift marked by the sale of Friendship House’s Bronzeville building on the south side to the Black Panthers.

Whatever the strategies Arthur Falls and other Catholic activists pursued or rejected, the turns of a Rubik’s cube of religion, race, class, and demography were aligned against a stable and lasting solution to the city’s racial divisions. But as Johnson thoroughly demonstrates, it was not for want of trying. ■

**Margaret O’Brien Steinfels**, a former editor of *Commonweal*, writes frequently in these pages and once blogged at now-deceased dotCommonweal.



David Bentley Hart

# Mind over Matter

## The Enneads

Plotinus

Edited by Lloyd P. Gerson

Cambridge University Press, \$150, 938 pp.

What little we know about the life of Plotinus (ca. 204–270 CE) comes from the short memoir with which his disciple and literary executor Porphyry (ca. 234–305 CE) prefaced *The Enneads*—the complete edition of Plotinus’s writings that Porphyry collected and arranged. Because Plotinus was reluctant to speak of his early life, and because Porphyry came to know him when he was already fairly advanced in years, the picture we have is of a man already fully formed in personality and settled in his convictions. According to Porphyry, Plotinus attached small importance to his own biography. Just as he objected to having his likeness drawn or sculpted, because he was ashamed at finding himself caught in the shadowy meshes of a material body, so he also objected to dwelling on the trivial details of his individual existence as a mortal man.

We know that he came originally from Deltaic Lycopolis, in a thoroughly Hellenized Egypt, but not whether he was of Coptic or Greek descent, or what class he came from. Apart from one mildly embarrassing episode with a wet nurse when he was eight, his story begins for us around 232 CE, when at the age of twenty-seven he decided to move to Alexandria to study philosophy. There, after an initial period of searching about among the various schools, he attached himself to Ammonius Saccas, the “Socrates of Neoplatonism.” After eleven years in the city, he conceived a desire to study with the “gymnosophists” and philosophers of India and Persia, and so joined the Persian expedition of Emperor Gordian III. But when that military venture

ended in disaster, Plotinus was forced to make a perilous retreat to Antioch, apparently more or less on his own. He moved to Rome, where he spent the rest of his life teaching. When his final illness set in, he retired to Campania to die. His last words were supposedly something like, “Try to elevate the god within us to the divine in the universe.” Then, as his soul departed his body, a snake passed under his bed and out through a hole in the wall.

Apart from this bare outline, Porphyry provides only a few brief, if illuminating, anecdotes. For instance, Plotinus once explained his decision to remain aloof from certain festal liturgies by mysteriously remarking that the divine beings should come to him, not he to them. On another occasion, when the orator Diophanes had publicly argued that a philosopher’s disciple, for the sake of his own advancement, was obliged to submit to his master’s sexual importunities, Plotinus was too agitated to deliver a refutation himself, but had to depute one of his followers for the task. And there are a few more colorful tales, of the sort modern readers might foolishly be prone to doubt. An aspiring philosopher from Alexandria named Olympius, for example, became consumed by envy and attempted to attack Plotinus with magic. But the spells doubled back upon the sorcerer, and Olympius was forced to acknowledge the invincible strength of Plotinus’s soul. Porphyry also relates that, on at least four occasions during the years of their friendship, Plotinus achieved mystical union with the highest divine reality. Perhaps the most delightful tale of all concerns a priest of Isis who, at the temple of the goddess in Rome, invoked an apparition of Plotinus’s tutelary divinity, only to discover that Plotinus was attended by no mere celestial daemon (as most good souls are) but rather by an actual god. In the

end, though, these are only so many tantalizing glimpses. Would that we knew a little more. Then again, perhaps Plotinus was right—perhaps too great a concentration on the ephemeral episodes of his life would only distract us from his ideas.

Those ideas, after all, were profoundly influential. Viewed in long retrospect—looking back from the vantage of late modern philosophy, through the golden epochs of the great Christian and Islamic medieval schools, to the world of late antique Hellenistic, Jewish, and Christian thought—we find no pagan thinker more consequential for the development of later traditional “Western” metaphysics and epistemology. Plato and Aristotle, of course, laid the foundations; but it was principally through the vehicle of what we now call “Neoplatonism” that the ancient systems were conveyed to the post-pagan world, and it was principally through Plotinus that Neoplatonism first acquired the full grandeur and scope of a recognizable and internally consistent tradition in its own right. His thought constituted a crucial crystallization and creative revision of those spiritual and intellectual currents of late antiquity that would prove most durable and influential in subsequent centuries.

Though Plotinus’s importance has never been entirely forgotten by scholars, and though he enjoyed a period of particularly reverent recovery during the Renaissance, he has rarely received the degree of close attention from modern philosophers that he merits. Moreover, for roughly a century it has been his undeserved fate to serve as a rhetorical foil—caricatured, misrepresented, slandered—for Christian theologians (chiefly Protestant) who have wanted to differentiate between what they fancifully imagine to be the God of the Bible and what they no less fancifully imagine to be the God of the philosophers. This is a pity. There was no more brilliant and dynamically original thinker in the last few centuries of pagan intellectual culture, or the first few centuries of the Christian era.

So it is rather odd that until now there has been no scholarly edition of *The Enneads* in English. There have been two previous complete translations, but neither was a fully critical edition with the sort of basic scholarly apparatus needed by serious students of Plotinus's thought. Stephen McKenna's translation (completed in 1930, revised by B. S. Page in 1956) has long been prized for its literary felicity and honest attempt at accuracy. But it was not made from the best textual exemplars, it suffers from certain idiosyncrasies of translation, and in places it betrays the translator's sometimes questionable understanding of the Plotinian system. The seven-volume Loeb edition (1966–1988), prepared by the philosophically astute classicist A. H. Armstrong, is an admirable achievement, but its critical apparatus does not do enough to situate the texts or their ideas in the intellectual world of Plotinus's time.

On the whole, this new critical edition—under the supervision of the always impressive Lloyd Gerson—remedies most of the shortcomings of its predecessors. For one thing, it uses the best available version of the original texts. For another, the translations have obviously been undertaken with great care, and with diligent editorial oversight, in order not only to harmonize their terminology and style but also to render Plotinus's distinctive speculative vocabulary into a plausible set of English equivalents. Plotinus's language, it should be noted, is anything but smooth and perspicuous. The treatises were apparently written hastily, and were never properly revised—in large part because of Plotinus's poor eyesight, atrocious handwriting, and general carelessness with regard to syntax. Plotinus's Greek encompasses a number of oddities of expression (and even of spelling), and he was not always consistent in terminology. No translator, therefore, can hope to be absolutely certain that he or she has captured the exact connotation of every word or the exact meaning of every sentence. But this edition of *The Enneads* comes as

close to establishing an authoritative Plotinian idiom in English as we could reasonably hope. If it lacks the grace of the McKenna version, it is at least as accurate as the Armstrong at just about every point, and more so in many instances. It also provides a comprehensive glossary, explaining precisely which terms or phrases in English correspond to which in Greek. For any reader with enough Greek to have strong opinions on such things, the glossary makes it possible to recognize where his or her choices might have deviated from those of the translators. In short, this edition is now, without question, the definitive version of these texts in English. It is not likely to be challenged, let alone surpassed, at any point in the foreseeable future.

This volume might also provide an occasion for a renewed appreciation among Anglophone readers of Plotinus's importance—not only for the history of Western thought, but for contemporary philosophy. At least, as I was rereading the treatises that make up *The Enneads* in this new edition, I could not help noticing how severely logical a thinker Plotinus was. Of course, if one thinks of philosophical reasoning as a process of reducing synthetic propositions to analytic simples (the pathology of the currently dominant Anglophone tradition) then one might fail to notice how ingeniously each of Plotinus's guiding claims follows from its essential premises. Many contemporary scholars are familiar with the basic scheme of Plotinus's thought—the descending ontological hierarchy of the One, Nous, and Psyche, for instance. Some may even be aware of his distinctive treatment of divine simplicity and infinity, or his insistence on the goodness of Being and his definition of evil as pure privation, and so on. But they are likely to think of all these things as a kind of extravagant speculative fantasia, dreamed up by an ingenious artist of the abstract. In point of fact, Plotinus appreciated as perhaps no earlier Western philosopher had ever done that there is a primordial alliance between mind and world, and

was able to derive a coherent philosophical picture from this truth.

Plotinus gave exquisitely refined expression to the ancient intuition that the material order is not the basis of the mental, but rather the reverse. This is not only an eminently rational intuition; it is perhaps the only truly rational picture of reality as a whole. Mind does not emerge from mindless matter, as modern philosophical fashion would have it. The suggestion that it does is both a logical impossibility and a phenomenological absurdity. Plotinus and his contemporaries understood that all the things that most essentially characterize the act of rational consciousness—its irreducible unity of apprehension, its teleological structure, the logical syntax of reasoning, and on and on—are intrinsically incompatible with, and could not logically emerge from, a material reality devoid of mind. At the same time, they could not fail to notice that there is a constant correlation between that act of rational consciousness and the intelligibility of being, a correlation that is all but unimaginable if the structure and ground of all reality were not already rational. Happily, in Plotinus's time no one had yet ventured the essentially magical theory of perception as representation. Plotinus was absolutely correct, therefore, to attempt to understand the structure of the whole of reality by looking inward to the structure of the mind; and he was just as correct to suppose that the reciprocity between the mind and objective reality must indicate a reality simpler and more capacious than either: a primordial intelligence, Nous, and an original unity, the One, generating, sustaining, and encompassing all things. And no thinker of late antiquity pursued these matters with greater persistence, rigor, and originality than he did. For Anglophone readers inclined to try to follow the course of his reasoning to its end, this new edition provides the ideal resource. ■

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# Bookmarks

Anthony Domestico

What the hell did I just read? That's what I thought after tearing through Fleur Jaeggy's *These Possible Lives* (New Direction, \$12.95, 64 pp.). Though I suppose you'd have to say it's a work of literary biography, it often reads more like poetry, or flash fiction, or fable. Polonius's lines from *Hamlet* come to mind: "The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited." Jaeggy's book is poetical-biographical, fictional-critical, essayistic-historical—a book unlimited.

It's also a work of almost impossible compression. In around fifty pages, beautifully translated from the Italian by Minna Zallman Proctor, Jaeggy offers three mini-biographies of three very different writers: Thomas De Quincey, most famous as an opium-eater but most interesting as a writer of and about visionary experience; John Keats, the Romantic poet whose gift, Jaeggy rightly notes, lay in his imaginative and ethical restlessness, in his "not knowing how to reconcile himself" either to the world or to his sole self; and Marcel Schwob, a nineteenth-century French symbolist largely unknown in the English-reading world. (Jaeggy herself has translated his *Imaginary Lives* into Italian.)

Those looking for an exhaustive treatment of these writers will have to look elsewhere. You won't hear much about Keats's class position or the early deaths of his parents. De Quincey's relationship to Wordsworth—complicated, shall we say—gets short shrift, as does pretty much everything about Schwob, whose section runs a grand total of nine pages. Jaeggy is uninterested in the particular kind of detail that most literary biog-

raphies trade in: meals eaten, lectures attended and given, friendships made and dispensed with, reviews received and obsessed over. This isn't biography-as-accumulation, emerging from years of research in the archives. Here, instead, is a typical passage from the Keats section:

He saw Brown, Dilke, Bailey, Hazlitt. Things were lukewarm with Shelley. Haydon showed him the Elgin Marbles from the Parthenon. Keats didn't have the money to travel the world but made a long walking tour of Scotland. He wore a sack on his back filled with old clothes and new socks, pens, paper, ink, Cary's translation of the *Divine Comedy*, and a draft of *Isabella*.

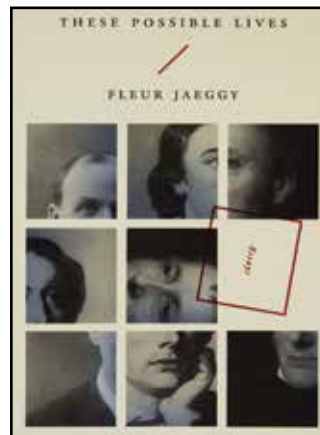
In a typical work of biography—say, Walter Jackson Bates's superb 1979 *John Keats*—such happenings would receive dozens of pages. Consulting the index for Percy Shelley in Bates's book on Keats, I read, among other entries: "advises K to defer publishing," "assonance in," and "on vegetable diet." For Jaeggy, it's "Things were lukewarm with Shelley," and then we've moved on. Keats's visit with Haydon to the British Museum inspired "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" and proved a fructifying influence for "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Jaeggy follows up with neither poem.

Rather than biography-as-accumulation, this is biography-as-condensation, with details compressed and burnished until they burn with a hard gemlike flame. Jaeggy reads the lives of De Quincey, Keats, and Schwob the way

we read poems—imaginatively and associatively—and so she writes their lives the way poets write poems.

The carefully selected, limpidly presented particulars of *These Possible Lives* hum with significance. After De Quincey's sister Elizabeth dies, for instance, "The desolate *dandy* stared at her transparent eyelids. He noted the Bible and other small objects in the dim room, and then heard a cracking sound, hollow and desolate—everything had become so remote. A requiem shone between the girl's stiffening hands, the light was mocking and complicit. The boy set about writing." Jaeggy's style is stringent and exacting, the descriptions precise and unsentimental. Later, as Schwob lies dying in 1905, "His face colored slightly, turning into a mask of gold. His eyes stayed open imperiously. No one could close his eyelids. The room smoked of grief." That last sentence—the final sentence in the entire book—is perfect: the unexpectedness of the verb "smoked," the absolute control of rhythm that clinches this moment of finality.

Jaeggy sees biographical detail—De Quincey's first experiences with opium, Keats's relationship with Fanny Brawne, Schwob's childhood illness—not as sturdy building blocks that the biographer lays end-to-end until a life has been constructed. Instead, she sees biographical details as stars and the life she limns as a kind of constellation, patterns and associations she traces (i.e., invents) in order to find beauty and meaning.





The best way to review a book this stylish is mainly just to quote from it, and so I'll leave Jaeggy with this passage. It comes midway through the De Quincey section. In the dizzying preceding paragraph, De Quincey has mourned the death of Wordsworth's daughter, Kate, and has increased his already high consumption of laudanum. Late one night, he began to feel "a singular sensation shooting from his knee down his calf. It lasted for five hours and when it was over, despair abdicated. He was overcome with laughter. The memory of Kate disappeared and her little red morocco shoes were deposited alongside other secular relics." Then, we get this passage, remarkable both for its obliquity (What does this list of eccentric personages and their eccentric actions have to do with De Quincey?) and for its suggestiveness (their obsessions with dreams and violence and gloominess and the Lake District in fact have everything to do with De Quincey):

Henry Fuseli ate a diet of raw meat in order to obtain splendid dreams; Lamb spoke of "Lilliputian rabbits" when eating frog fricassee; and his sister Mary, wielding a knife, chased a little girl who was helping her in the kitchen and then stabbed her own mother through the heart; Hazlitt was perceptive about musculature and boxers; Wordsworth used a buttery knife to cut the pages of a first-edition Burke. Coleridge, his head shrouded in a fog, read poetry badly and moaned gloomily. The dreams of Jean Paul, the crow that loved the storm, reverberated across the Lake District. This was TDQ's Western Passage.

**T**he challenge Jaeggy sets herself in writing *These Possible Lives*—to write about three lives in under sixty pages—is hard. The challenge the journalist and critic Michelle Dean has set herself in writing *Sharp: The Women Who Made an Art of Having an Opinion* (Grove Atlantic, \$17,400 pp.) is even harder. Dean tries to weave into a single book not three lives but ten: Dorothy Parker, Rebecca West, Hannah Arendt, Mary McCarthy, Susan Sontag, Pauline Kael, Joan Didion, Nora Ephron, Renata Adler, and Janet Malcolm.

Why these particular figures? Because, Dean argues, they all "came up in a world that was not eager to hear women's opinions about anything"; because they all, through the sharpness of their minds and the sharpness of their writing, made people listen to their opinions; because they all, against great odds, made their living and reputations by getting people to listen to their opinions. And why write this book at this particular moment? Because "there is something valuable about knowing this history if you are a young woman of a certain kind of ambition"—like Dean herself—and "there is something valuable in knowing that pervasive sexism notwithstanding there are ways to cut through it."

Many of Dean's writers were what Roxane Gay calls "bad feminists": they displayed a fundamental ambivalence toward certain feminist ideals and toward the feminist movement more generally. Take Joan Didion. As Dean writes, Didion "thought that in their books the feminists had constructed a kind of self-delusion... 'persecuted even by her gynecologist,' 'raped on every date.'" Yikes. Yet *Sharp* is itself a work of feminist criticism, sketching how a group of female writers came to live out, and make new, the traditionally gendered role of "man of letters." In the process, Dean shows how these writers went from being *criticized* as sharp—mean, cold, destructive—to being, in this book and in our current literary moment, *praised* as sharp: intelligent, hip, cool.

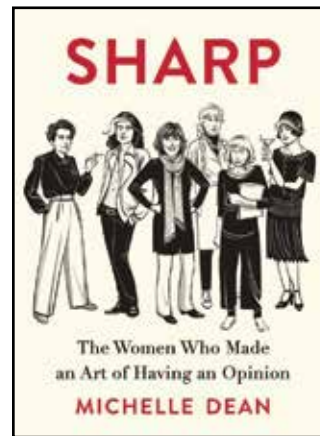
I will confess, I really wanted to like *Sharp*. I enjoy Dean's criticism in the *New Republic*, and she's chosen to write about many critics from my own personal pantheon: Adler, Kael, Malcolm, West. And I'm happy to say that, by and large, *Sharp* succeeds in its aims. Many of these short chapters—in particular those on Parker, West, Son-

tag, and Kael—are exemplary capsule biographies, displaying an awareness of writerly strengths (Malcolm's self-reflexivity and Kael's stylistic brio) and writerly weaknesses (Sontag's fiction and Didion's tendency to flatten out the complexities of the feminist movement).

Ideas mattered to these writers, and Dean makes them matter to the reader, too. It's easy to see how and why ideas mattered to Arendt, a figure so serious and of such obvious cultural significance that, in one of the book's many small gems, Janet Malcolm remembers being "flatteringly mistaken...for someone who might have been invited to Hannah Arendt's parties in the fifties." But Dean delights most in more surprising moves—for instance, showing how seriously Kael took the notion of fun ("fun was the one thing Kael was consistently devoted to. She made it a credo"), or how McCarthy's uncertainty wasn't, as her critics claimed, "a sign of unseriousness" but a sign of an irony that could think through—and past—political consensus. Fun and irony have often been treated as feminine things, which is another way of saying that they haven't been taken seriously. Dean's writers, and Dean her-

self, admirably right this wrong.

I described the chapters in *Sharp* as capsule biographies and, unlike Jaeggy, Dean provides us with most of the context we expect. In the chapter on Dorothy Parker, for instance, we get her background (her "family name was Rothschild—not *those* ones, as Parker reminded interviewers all her life"), her early success at *Vanity Fair* and the *New Yorker*, and her later and lacerating self-doubt: as Dean writes, "The knife had traveled inward, and instead of urging her to do increasingly better work, it shredded her will to do it at all." There's even a wonderful bit about Parker's arrest at a march for Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927: "She pleaded guilty to 'loitering





and sauntering' and paid the five-dollar fine. When asked by the press if she felt guilty, she said, 'Well, I did saunter.' (Here and throughout, Dean appears to have mastered all the material on all of her writers, with every Parker quip and every Ephron barb at her fingertips.)

Yet to say that these are exemplary capsule biographies is also to admit that they're just that—capsule biographies. Many feel rushed. I wanted to spend more time with Rebecca West, for instance, whose masterpiece *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is rushed through. Dean has a smart passage about the gap between West's writing and life: "There was something about who West was in prose that promised people something they then felt distressed not to see materialize in person." But soon we're off to Zora Neale Hurston (the least satisfying and least integrated chapter in the book), and then to Hannah Arendt, and then to Mary McCarthy. I admire Dean's desire to be synoptic, but the wide-angled vision leaves some of these sharp writers looking a bit fuzzy.

Jaeggy's prose verges on the poetic. Dean's does not. That's not necessarily a criticism. The kind of book Dean is writing, explicatory and analytical, requires lucidity above all else. And there are moments of critical sharpness throughout: Adler "was, mostly, smarter than those who surrounded her, and...she liked to show it off in print"; Kael's personality comes not through the authorial "I," which appears rarely in her reviews, but "in the vigor with which she analyzes something, turning it over, looking for clues." There are also, though, moments where the prose sounds, well, prosaic. Adler "bears down on the subject with bull terrier determination"; she "can be a bit like a dog with a bone when she senses logical fallacy."

Again, I suspect such instances of stylistic flatness are simply the result of having to dispatch with so many writers in so little space. Though *Sharp* is a very good book, a less expansive cast of characters would have made it better without compromising the historical argument. For Dean's purposes, five

writers would have worked as well as ten. There's a reason that the best group biographies—Paul Elie's *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*, for example, or Eileen Simpson's *Poets in Their Youth*—are very careful about how many subjects they choose to focus on.

**D**avid Plante's recently reissued *Difficult Women* (NYRB Classics, \$16.95, 208 pp.) might not make the list of best group biographies ever. But it would be on my list of the most wicked and pleasurable. First published in 1983, Plante's delightfully bitchy book features three of his friends, none of whom are flattered, all of whom are, in some way or another, betrayed by Plante's depiction: Jean Rhys, a significant novelist and, in Plante's hands, a self-dramatizing, self-embarrassing drunk; Sonia Orwell, George's widow and a literary socialite; and the feminist Germaine Greer.

Greer was the only one of the three still alive at the time of publication in 1983. Her response? "When *Difficult Women* was all but finished, Plante... begged me to read it, so that he could change anything I didn't like. I refused point-blank. I despised him for being so ready to change his work, and also because—though he made a great parade of sensitivity—he had no idea how deeply I would resent being made to utter namby-pamby Plante-speak like a dummy on his knee."

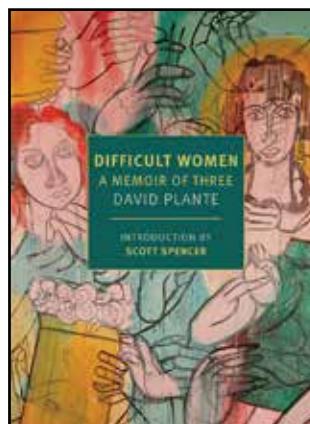
Toward all three women, Plante displays almost equal measures of sycophancy and malice. He's eager for their attention and the material they provide: Rhys falls off the toilet and drunkenly rants against fate, herself, and Plante; Orwell sees dinner parties primarily as a chance to pettily display her own social superiority. Greer, physically and intellectually commanding, comes off best out of the three. Yet here is how she's introduced:

When we arrived we found a baby, about a year and a half old, at a table under the fig tree, playing with finger paints. The baby was slopping green paint onto a shiny piece of wet paper, her hands covered to the wrists; some of the paint was on her face. She was preoccupied and didn't see us until Germaine, standing over her, shouted, "That's not the way to use fucking finger paints," and the baby stared up at her with a look of shocked awe that there was a wrong and a right way to use finger paints.

Plante is sharp in the way that Dean's writers were often criticized as being sharp—nastily catty, delighting in cruelty. At least Plante is just as mean to himself as he is to his subjects. When he goes to visit Rhys, Plante plumps himself up to cut himself down, baldly displaying his own delight in having access to literary power: "I asked at reception for Mrs. Hamer. It always gave me pleasure to use her married

name, not the name she was known by." *Difficult Women* frequently skewers Rhys and Orwell and Greer, but it just as frequently skewers Plante himself. Yes, Rhys is a mess, and yes, Orwell is a bully, and yes, Greer is a bit pompous. But Plante is, in many ways, the worst of them all. At the very least, he's the most self-consciously duplicitous: "I would get home from an evening of being victimized, angry and depressed, and swear I'd never see Sonia again. The next morning, however, I'd ring her to say what a lovely dinner party she'd given, and how I longed to see her again soon."

If you like literary dishing, then this is the purest catnip on the market. And if you, like me, loathe dinner parties, then the Orwell chapter cuts through all the pretense with chilly delight: "As she laughed, I laughed, my laughter as hard and dry as hers. She said, 'I hate dinner parties,' and laughed. I laughed." That's Plante's book at its cold-hearted core: hard, dry, and sharp. ■



# St. Bernadette's Blockhouse

Dean Dettloff

In the early 1960s, Bishop Michel-Louis Vial of Nevers, France, held an open competition to design a church in honor of St. Bernadette Soubirous, famous for her visions of Mary at Lourdes a century earlier. Among the submissions was a plan for a strange, hulking assemblage of gray stone and cement, modeled after bunkers from the Second World War. Designed by a pair of France's most inventive architectural thinkers, Claude Parent and Paul Virilio, the church features two massive, curved shells that rise to a fracture at their apexes. Shaped like a periscope, the fracture allows natural light to penetrate down into the center of a sanctuary made of sloped planes. The interior is modeled after an anatomical heart, leading congregants to circulate through ventricles to Confession and Communion.

Alienating as it might appear, the church is warmly lit inside, with broad, rounded walls that recall the cave where Mary appeared to Bernadette. Outside, simple grass surrounds the behemoth, suggesting the fortifications flanked by natural landscapes in the north of occupied France, where Virilio, born in 1932, had his childhood punctuated by air raids.

It was a jarring way to honor a saint who saw Mary in a grotto, where millions now travel each year in hopes of healing. Bishop Vial admitted as much to Virilio, as the latter recalled in an interview years later: "'The other project being considered,' [the bishop] told me, 'is a small chapel with little angels, but there is so much hatred for your project, this pile of concrete, that I am going to choose it.'" Construction of the Church of St. Bernadette in Banlay, or more colloquially the "bunker church" or "blockhouse," finished in 1966.

Two years later, when Paris erupted, Virilio joined students and radicals squatting at the Théâtre de l'Odéon. He was an odd presence among the other *soixante-huitards* ('68ers), having converted to Catholicism through his association with worker-priests when he was eighteen. (His father was an Italian Communist, his mother a Catholic Breton.) Yet he made a forceful impression, delivering impromptu lectures in the occupied theater on the use of space, leading students to nominate him as a professor at the École Spéciale d'Architecture.

From this improvised academic position, Virilio became one of the most incisive critics of the militarization of society. While the bunker church functioned as a critique of a spectral war characterized by the threat of mutually assured destruction, he would go on to investigate the looming dangers for a weaponized world after the digital revolution.

As one of France's foremost public intellectuals, Virilio explored themes like the accelerated pace of society, the way weapons technologies creep into civilian life, and our shrinking sphere of privacy. But Virilio's most ominous warning was about what he called the "information bomb," which would be for the information sciences what the nuclear bomb was for the physical sci-



ences. All technologies, he argued, contain unforeseen accidents waiting to happen. In an increasingly globalized, computerized, and interconnected society, Virilio explored the consequences of accidents that occur everywhere simultaneously, unmoored from spatial or temporal limitations. He suggested that the 2008 financial crisis, which spread like a virus around the world, was a portent of things to come.

Virilio died last year on September 10, the day before the United States and its allies commemorated an event that expanded the reach of surveillance states, only hastening a world of constant overexposure. We are surrounded by orbiting satellites, a network of devices and data, all with their own catastrophic potential. Virilio knew that there could be no new bunker church, an artifact of an era when we at least knew what we were sheltering from. But he never succumbed to despair, managing to hope against hope, clinging to the possibility that we could still find other grottos in our world, other places where Mary might appear to peasant girls dismissed by local authorities.

Reflecting on the cave in Lourdes, Virilio explained, "Men would also take prostitutes there at night. That's where the Virgin Mary was about to appear, which perfectly fits my faith, moreover. She appears where danger grows, preceded by the prostitutes and the good thieves. It's all there."

Whatever accidents await us, Virilio sensed them coming. It seems unlikely that we are capable of taking the radical steps necessary to stop them. But perhaps we can take comfort imagining Virilio in that great cloud of witnesses, interceding on our behalf, praying that Mary might still appear where danger grows. ■

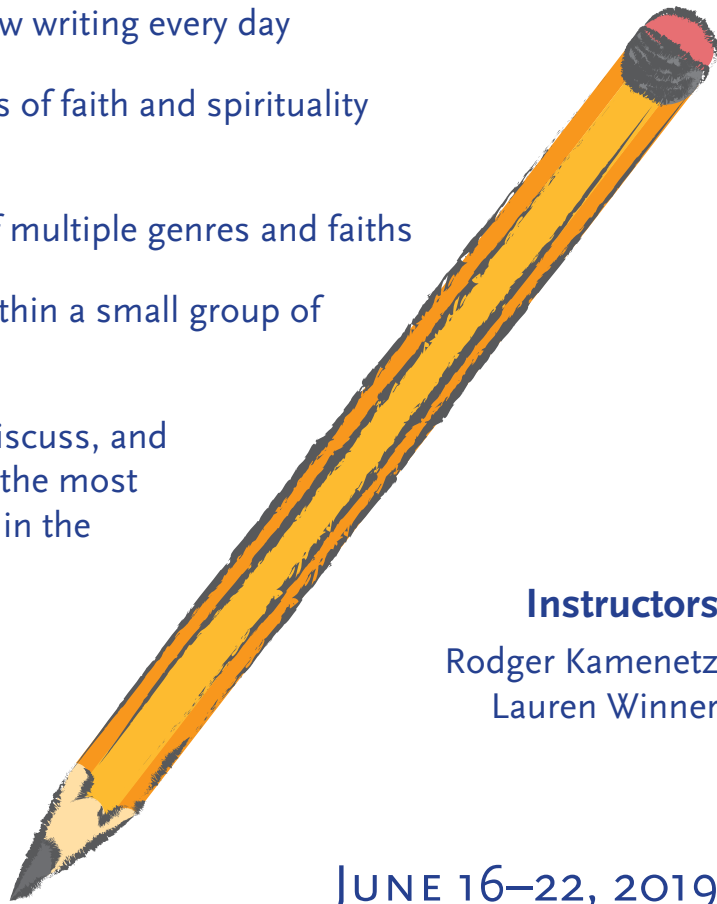
Dean Dettloff is a writer and PhD candidate at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto.

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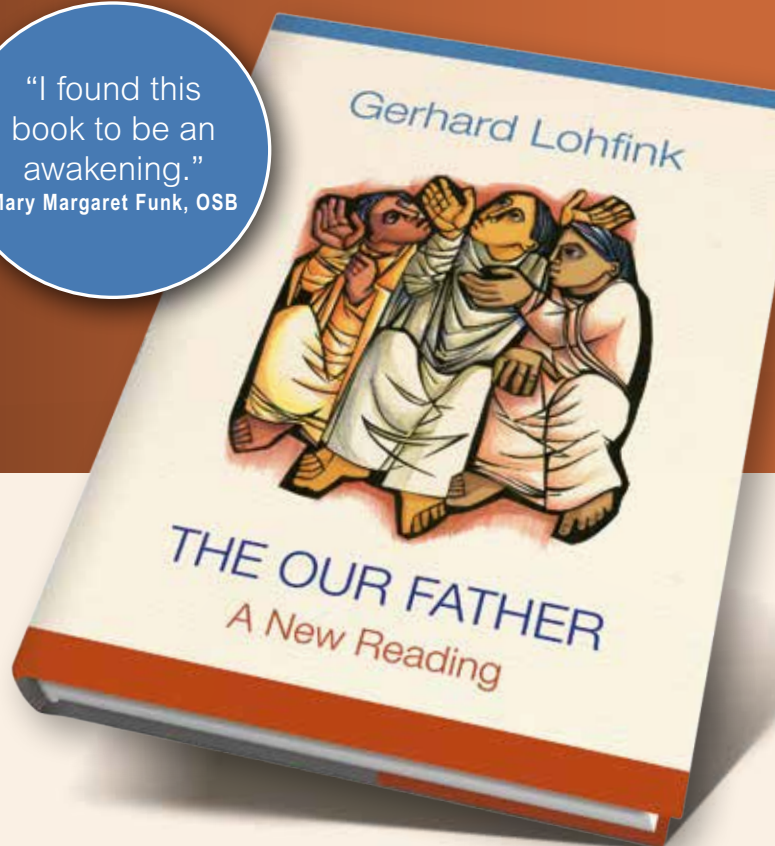
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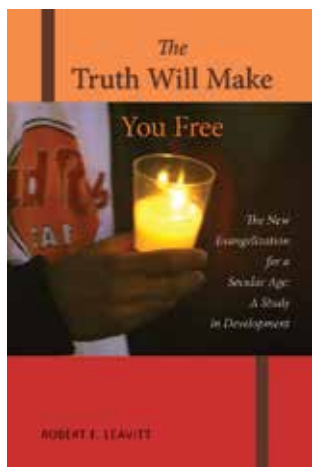


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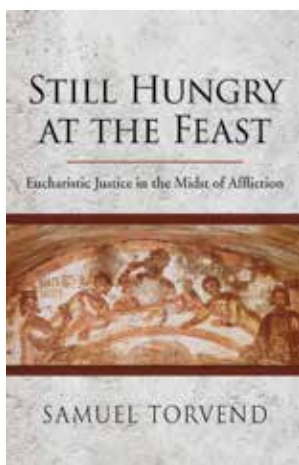
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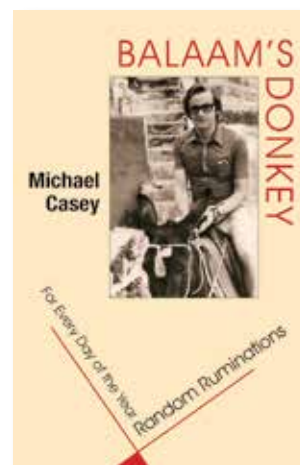
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