

Commonweal

A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

JANUARY 26, 2018

A CHURCH WITHOUT A CLERGY?
WILLIAM SHEA & DAVID CLOUTIER

'BRIDESHEAD' REVISED
ROBERT MURRAY DAVIS

CALIFORNIA BURNING
JACK MILES



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LETTERS

Debating Ta-Nehisi Coates & Racism

As a white Catholic whose eyes were further opened to the reality of racism in the United States after recently reading Ta-Nehisi Coates's *We Were Eight Years in Power*, I was shocked and dismayed at Margaret O'Brien Steinfels's arrogant and shallow dismissal of this extremely important work. Steinfels repeatedly accuses Coates of "downplaying" reasons other than racism for Trump's election, and completely ignores the overwhelming evidence Coates offers to back up his argument. Throughout the book, Coates presents an extremely coherent and damning picture of white

supremacy as not only alive and well in America, but at the very foundation of this nation. Steinfels chooses to disregard Coates's well-researched theory, and instead chalks up his whole argument to his being an "angry" man (she twice uses this unfortunate adjective—a common one for white people to use against any black person who dares to be honest about his own experience—and juxtaposes him with a more pleasant Obama, to whom she twice refers as "not angry"). Steinfels is another white person who falls into the trap of accusing Coates of focusing too much on racism. As she has never experienced anti-black racism herself, I would have hoped that she would have been at least willing to listen to

somebody who has. As for Steinfels's disappointment in Coates's atheism, as a white Catholic she should instead feel convicted of our failure time and time again to listen to—let alone believe and stand with—our sisters and brothers of color. (For instance, no Catholics

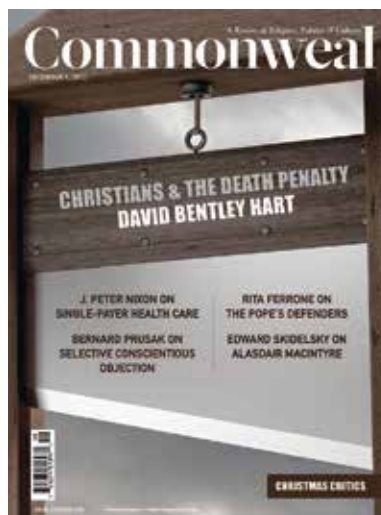
were present in the large group of clergy who showed up to oppose the neo-Nazi gathering in Charlottesville.)

At first I was only mildly offended at *Commonweal*'s irresponsibility in printing such a poorly done review. (Steinfels's inability to deal thoroughly with any of Coates's contentions leads

me to believe she merely skimmed the book.) However, after noticing that not only is *Commonweal*'s editorial board all-white (with no apparent attempt at becoming accountable to Catholics of color), but also that in this same issue these editors roundly dismissed a black Catholic's compelling letter to the editor, I am beginning to wonder whether *Commonweal* is completely committed to a policy of white denial, and white comfort, in the face of racism.

BRENNA CUSSEN ANGLADA
Cuba City, Wisc.

MARGARET O'BRIEN STEINFELS REPLIES:
Ta-Nehisi Coates's *We Were Eight Years in Power* is a collection of essays, each one preceded by second thoughts and



From the Editors

On Fire, Fury...and Decency?



As the Trump presidency enters its second year, prospects for the nation, for American democracy, and for international stability and peace grow dimmer. Trump's increasingly erratic behavior raises the most serious questions about his fitness for office, and even about his mental health. Those who could check his recklessness—the Republicans in control of both the Senate and the House—turn a blind eye to the dangers as long as Trump signs off on their plutocratic agenda. If the long arc of history does bend toward justice, the Republican Party and its supporters will face a dire reckoning. And that includes millions of Catholics and Evangelicals, who somehow judged that voting for a man demonstrably unfit for the presidency was worth the risk because he could be counted on to appoint conservative justices to the Supreme Court. That was not a prudential judgment; it was the abdication of prudence.

At the moment, the administration is beset by questions raised by journalist Michael Wolff's depiction of dysfunction in the West Wing in his book *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*. Given unhampered access during the early months of Trump's presidency, Wolff encountered a world of bitter factionalism and infighting, where staffers schemed endlessly against one another while leaking feverishly to the "lame-stream media." Much of Wolff's book relies on interviews with Steve Bannon, the former Trump campaign C.E.O. and chief strategist to the president, who was pushed out of the administration, evidently at the behest of Trump's daughter Ivanka, and her husband, Jared Kushner. Besides the picture of administrative chaos, Wolff's most damning claim is that no one in the administration, not even Trump's daughter and son-in-law, think Trump is intellectually, psychologically, or emotionally capable of fulfilling the duties of his office. According to Wolff, Trump does not read, cannot focus, cannot comprehend routine policy issues, does not listen, and is driven by a childish and disabling need for instant gratification. Equally revealing, Wolff claims that Trump did not expect to win the election and was panicked when he did. Apparently he merely hoped to leverage his increased visibility and popularity from the campaign into another profitable television platform. He had no interest in running a government or becoming the leader of the free world, no understanding of American democracy or comprehension of the Constitution.

Predictably, Trump responded to *Fire and Fury* with fire and fury of his own, claiming that he never met Wolff

and that Bannon had "lost his mind" when he was fired. Trump also had his lawyers try to stop publication of the book. As questions about his mental capabilities and health followed in the wake of Wolff's revelations, Trump assured the world that his success in business, on TV, and in winning the presidency showed that he was a "genius...and a very stable genius at that!"

Wolff has had credibility problems of his own, but clearly the enormous impact of the book is due to the fact that it confirms the picture of Trump and the White House that has long been reported elsewhere. It also provides further proof of the president's angry obsession with the James Comey and Robert Mueller investigations into his campaign's possible collusion with the Russians, Trump's obstruction of justice, and, perhaps even more damning, the Trump organization's alleged money laundering. Mueller has elicited guilty pleas from Trump's former national security adviser, Michael Flynn, and campaign staffer George Papadopoulos, and has indicted Paul Manafort, a former Trump campaign manager. There seems little doubt that, as Mueller's investigation gets closer and closer to Trump and his family, the president will take some rash action, either pardoning himself and his cronies or firing Mueller, or both. There is little indication that congressional Republicans would stand up to Trump and defend the rule of law if he threatened it. Republicans are now calling for a special counsel to investigate Mueller and for the Justice Department to reopen investigations into Hillary Clinton's emails and the Clinton Foundation. This follows Trump's outrageous demands that Attorney General Jeff Sessions and the Justice Department protect him from Mueller and prosecute his political opponents. "Where is my Roy Cohn?" Trump is reported to have complained about Sessions's unwillingness to stop the Russian investigation. The notoriously corrupt Cohn was Trump's lawyer and mentor for many years. He was also an attorney for mobsters, and the right-hand man of the red-baiting, paranoid, and eventually disgraced Senator Joseph McCarthy.

"Until this moment, senator, I think I have never really gauged your cruelty or your recklessness.... At long last, have you left no sense of decency?" was how Joseph Nye Welch, a fellow Republican, famously challenged McCarthy in 1954. In doing so, he brought to an end an earlier era of political cynicism and cowardice. When will congressional Republicans put country before party and find their inner Welch? ■

January 10, 2018

Charles R. Morris

Profits First, Workers Last

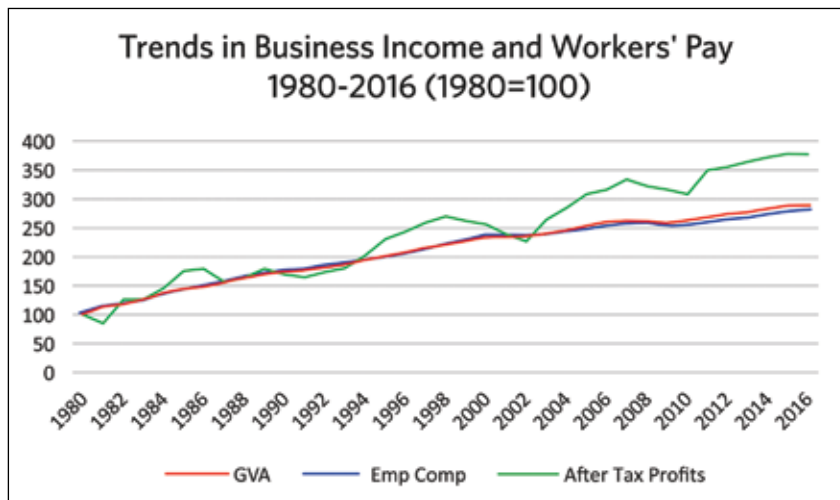
TAX CUTS FOR THE RICH DON'T LEAD TO HIGHER WAGES

Richard White's *The Republic for Which It Stands* (Oxford), a monumental account of post-Civil War America, describes how in 1890 the Republican Party managed to push through a sharp rise in America's already high tariffs. Labor and farmers had wanted to lower tariffs since they imparted a deflationary impetus to the economy. But the Republicans carried the day by, among other things, promising that the new higher prices would be passed through to workers and farmers. In the event, industrialists like Andrew Carnegie cut payrolls and invested their windfall in automating their factories. It may not be coincidental that the Republican success was followed by the long Depression that began in 1893.

Spin the newsreel to the present day, and sure enough, there are Donald Trump, Mitch McConnell, and Paul Ryan, claiming that a massive tax cut for the top 5 percent will be a bonanza for the working stiff. At one point the Council of Economic Advisers put out a pathetic defense of that claim, but that paper was removed from the CEA website. Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin vaguely promised an-

other paper, but the passage of the bill let him off the hook.

Happily, we needn't rely on disappearing papers. There is plenty of evidence on how the modern corporate sector operates. The Commerce Department keeps detailed records of broad corporate income and spending patterns. A key one is the "Gross Value Added," or the value that a business produces after subtracting the costs of all inputs, like raw materials and workers' pay. The chart above compares the change in GVA, employee compensation, and after-tax profits. Focus



just on the green line indicating after-tax profit. The blip in profits around 1984 is related to the Reagan tax cuts, mostly because real-estate developers accelerated their projects to avoid the tough new treatment of real estate. The next and bigger blip in the late 1990s is the dotcom boom. Now look at the profit performance after 2002. There is a sharp jump as Wall Street booked its fake profits in the run-up to the Great Recession, followed by a modest dip in 2009-2010, and then back to rollicking growth. If one burrows into the data, corporations started laying off workers before their sales collapsed in order to finance labor-saving equipment and machinery.

The treatment of workers in the recent decade is the worst since before the Great Depression. The chart to the left is another cut of the data, showing employee compensation as a percentage of the GVA.

Those 9 percent of unpaid wages funded lavish payouts to shareholders, eight-figure salaries to CEOs, and billion-dollar mergers. And now the Republicans and Trump want you to believe that they will use the even bigger tax reductions to improve the lives of their loyal workers. ■

Employees' Share of Gross Value Added (GVA)	Percent (%)	
1930s	64.2	
1940s	62.4	
1950s	62.9	
1960s	62.7	
1970s	63.7	
1980s	63.1	
1990s	63.1	
2000s	61.2	80 year average: 62.9
2010s (7 years)	57.2	Wage loss rate: 9.1%



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**Civil Religion:
Road to Redemption or American Heresy?**

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"Civil religion" has been described as a powerful, shared, but nondenominational belief in the United States as an exceptional nation, a "city upon a hill" that was great because it was good. But today civil religion is coming under scrutiny as some see the angry populism of the Trump era turning the cohesive force of patriotism into "blood-and-soil" nationalism.

Can a country in which the national anthem has become a dividing line still rally around civic sacraments and symbols?

Kathleen Flake University of Virginia, Richard Lyman Bushman Professor of Mormon Studies

John Carlson Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Arizona State University

Susan Wise Bauer Essayist and Author of the "History of the World" Series for W. W. Norton

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Jack Miles

California Burning

LESSONS FROM A CONSUMING FIRE

Anyone who has ever watched the annual Tournament of Roses Parade on New Year's Day, the parade that precedes the Rose Bowl, may have seen the (occasionally) snow-capped San Gabriel Mountains towering in the background. Pasadena, California, where the parade takes place, abuts Los Angeles on the northeast, in the foothills at the western end of the San Gabriel range.

East of the San Gabriels rise the taller San Bernardino Mountains, where Los Angeles County, the most populous in the United States, gives way to San Bernardino County, the country's largest in area. High in the San Bernardino Mountains are the headwaters of the Santa Ana River, whose watershed drains southwest through San Bernardino County, swelling to river-breadth as it veers south through Orange County to empty into the Pacific.

Angelenos have long called the hot winds blowing across the Santa Ann River from the inland deserts the "Santa Anas." Usually, of course, the prevailing winds are the moistening westerlies rolling in off the Pacific Ocean. But when the direction reverses, Southern California's coastal counties, already arid, can become desert-dry in a day or two, and the fire hazard can grow extreme.

Until now, the usual Santa Ana wind event has lasted only two or three days. But climate scientists have been warning us that once rare and extreme events like the Santa Ana winds are about to become both more extreme and less rare. 2017—and not in Southern California alone—was a year in which those predictions became frightening actuality. As I write at the turn of the year, the Santa Anas have been blowing on and off since December 4, and there is no guarantee that the current lull will not be followed by another flare-up. When

the fires first broke out, Southern California was already exceptionally warm and exceptionally dry. On October 24, Dodger Stadium hosted the hottest World Series game ever held: 103 degrees. November 23 broke the all-time Los Angeles Thanksgiving Day heat record: 92 degrees.

Fire has, of course, been a perennial danger in parched Southern California. But protracted drought—with shortened winters and worsened beetle infestation—has brought about the death-in-place of an estimated 29 million trees on California's mountains: fuel just waiting for the kindling spark. And when they go, those trees take with them California's most important carbon sink.

A few years ago, I attended a think-tank briefing by the retired CEO of a major utility and a retired speaker of the California state assembly. Those dead trees, they pointed out, are the result of past, not future, climate change. Until now, western firefighters have fought wildfires by rushing reinforcements from adjacent and even remote regions to the site of a conflagration. But as the frequency and intensity of fires grow, they predicted, this tactic will prove increasingly unequal to the threat, and parts of California, as a result, will become effectively uninhabitable.

My wife and I have evacuated once since the Santa Ana winds started blowing, fleeing the little-publicized Canyon 2 Fire in November, which took a dozen homes or so in eastern Anaheim. (We live in the nearby town of Santa Ana.) Having been put on evacuation alert a second time, we are accustoming ourselves to the idea that another alert, or another evacuation order, may come at any time. We have some serious plans in place against the possibility that we, too, both in our seventies, might be completely wiped out. Unlikely, I want to believe, but just how unlikely, we

must wait to learn. A year ago a blowing ember from an electrical fire set our backyard on fire. By sheer coincidence, Southern California Edison sent an inspector this very morning to check trees and power lines on our property and adjacent ones.

An iconic Los Angeles oil painting now hanging in the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C., is Ed Ruscha's *The Los Angeles County Museum on Fire* (1965-1968). The story behind that painting has nothing to do with any real fire danger to LACMA, which is in about as fire-safe a location as Los Angeles offers. The painting comes to mind, however, because of the adjective common to most eyewitness accounts of December's Thomas Fire, which threatened a huge swath of Southern California from Ventura northwest to Santa Barbara: "apocalyptic." As the Canyon 2 Fire burned west past our neighborhood and into Anaheim, I found myself imagining another iconic Ruscha: *Disneyland on Fire 2017*. Sleeping Beauty's Castle in flames: Does it not seem like the burning of Valhalla in a latter-day climate-change *Götterdämmerung*? A joke, but gallows humor for me. Fiscally, the low point in my life came in the 1975-1976 academic year when every dollar I spent put me a dollar deeper in debt. In retrospect, I think of that year as the deepest spiritual experience of my life, the year when I learned, to quote Hebrews 13:14, that "we have here no lasting city." Like so many of my fellow Californians this fire season, will I have to learn that lesson again? ■

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Lead Us Not into Temptation

SHOULD A KEY PHRASE OF THE LORD'S PRAYER BE RETRANSLATED?

Charles McNamara

Even though it has been central to Christian devotion since Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the Lord's Prayer has not remained unchanged over these past two millennia, especially as those ancient words were adapted for later believers and their novel tongues. In the history of English liturgical texts, the words of the Anglo-Saxon "Fæder ure" have metamorphosed into the "Our Father" of today's Roman Missal. Not merely a matter of translation, controversies surrounding the correct text of the prayer have been unavoidable since its words were set down in the New Testament, for the gospels provide two slightly different versions—one in Matthew, another in Luke.

While the English translation heard in today's churches differs only slightly from the King James Version printed four centuries ago, a significant change may be right around the corner. Pope Francis has reignited debates about the prayer's proper translation by suggesting that one line of the Our Father—"lead us not into temptation"—is poorly rendered and even theologically misleading. The *New York Times* reports:

In a new television interview, Pope Francis said the common rendering of one line in the prayer—"lead us not into temptation"—was "not a good translation" from ancient texts. "Do not let us fall into temptation," he suggested, might be better because God does not lead people into temptation; Satan does.

"A father doesn't do that," the pope said. "He helps you get up right away. What induces into temptation is Satan."

In essence, the pope said, the prayer, from the Book of Matthew, is asking God, "When Satan leads us into temptation, You please, give me a hand."

The *Times* also notes that these changes have agitated certain factions of Christians who see Francis's suggestion as an affront to tradition and orthodoxy. The textual history surrounding this prayer and its early commentators, however, might turn out to be the pope's best ally against these critics. Some of the most important early Christian authors, including Ambrose and Augustine, show an understanding of temptation in the Our Father that aligns well with Francis's proposed modification.

First, though, it's worth revisiting the Greek New Testament and Jerome's Latin Vulgate. At Matthew 6:13, the church's authoritative translator provides *et ne inducas nos in tentationem*, and at Luke 11:4 he uses the almost identical *et ne nos inducas in tentationem*. The Latin verb *inducere*



Worshippers saying the Lord's Prayer at Mass

seems straightforward here: "to lead in" or "to carry in" or even "to drag in." The Greek text is similarly clear. Both Matthew and Luke write *καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν*, and the word *εἰσενέγκῃς* is an irregular aorist form of *εἰσφέρω*, which simply means "to bring in." A 2013 *Biblica* article by Joseph A. Fitzmyer ("And Lead Us Not into Temptation") explains that the Greek here carries the meaning of "causing someone to enter an event or condition, as if it were a place."

If we rely on these gospel texts and our dictionaries alone, it seems, the pope will have a tough argument to make. These ancient languages won't easily contort themselves into "do not let us fall."

But a 1945 article by A.J.B. Higgins in the *Journal of Theological Studies* ("Lead Us Not into Temptation: Some Latin Variants") shows us that among the earliest Christian authors, the understanding and even the text of this devotional verse underwent considerable changes. In fact, these ancient writers suggest that even if one leaves the Greek and Latin texts above unmodified, something like "do not let us fall" could be an acceptable English rendering of this compact clause.

Higgins's article proceeds through several early patristic authors who offer alternative texts for the prayer or guidance on how to interpret the verb *inducere*. To begin, Higgins cites Tertullian, the earliest of the Latin Church Fathers, who in his *De oratione* provides a commentary on the Our Father and explains, "lead us not into temptation, that is to say, do not allow us to be led" (*ne nos inducas in temptationem, id est, ne nos patiaris induci*). Fitzmyer notes that some scholars even believe this "permissive paraphrase was already pre-Tertullian," although for Tertullian, the second phrase is not meant to be part of the original prayer but instead a clarification. Higgins finds that the later works of Cyprian,

however, use that second version as though it were a “part of the actual scriptural text.” In his third-century *De dominica oratione*, Cyprian gives the following as a Gospel citation: *et ne patiaris nos induci in temptationem*—or in English, “and do not allow us to be led into temptation.”

These early examples from Cyprian and Tertullian, emphasizing the sinner’s slip into ruin rather than God’s agency in pushing one into it, supply the first arguments in support of Francis’s proposal. Later authors supply more. Ambrose, Higgins reports, follows Cyprian and “regards the words *et ne patiaris induci nos in temptationem* as part of the text of the Lord’s Prayer,” and this patristic author goes so far as to reject the more compact phrase used in Jerome’s Vulgate. In *De sacramentis*, Ambrose writes “*non dicit: non inducas in temptationem*,” and Higgins explains that Ambrose “evidently reject[s] the form *non inducas* in favor of *ne patiaris induci*.”

Perhaps the most compelling example from Higgins’s survey comes from Augustine, who provides evidence of variations in the Our Father among his contemporary believers and even addresses some of the hermeneutic difficulty surrounding this line. The Bishop of Hippo, himself familiar with Jerome’s *ne nos inducas*, observes how “many people in their prayers, however, say it this way: ‘and do not allow us to be led into temptation.’ Clearly, they are just explaining how *inducas* is being used” (*multi autem precando ita dicunt, ne nos patiaris induci in temptationem; exponentes videlicet quomodo dictum sit, inducas*).

This last example is especially pertinent as we consider what one wants to accomplish with a new translation of the original Greek and Latin texts into our contemporary vernacular. Should the English strive to mimic the simplicity of *et ne nos inducas* by using “and do not lead us,” in a one-to-one correspondence between the two languages? Or should an English translation, following Augustine’s account, use a phrase like “and do not allow us to be led” or Francis’s “do not let us fall,” understanding that such a phrase better captures the intended theology of *inducas* or εἰσενέγκης?

As Christians consider these literary issues, they should bear in mind the example of their ancient exegetical predecessors, those patristic authors who defined the church and its prayers in its first centuries. If Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome couldn’t quite settle on a definitive text or single perspicuous meaning of Christianity’s central prayer, we should allow ourselves a little room for debate, too.

Charles McNamara is a core lecturer in the Classics Department at Columbia University.

Nicholas Frankovich

Pope Francis has voiced an objection to the Italian translation of the Lord’s Prayer. He made his case briefly in a recent interview on TV2000, the televi-

sion network of the Italian bishops’ conference. Like many people, Francis finds it odd to imply that God leads people into temptation. “The one who leads you into temptation is Satan,” he says. “That’s Satan’s office.”

Major news organizations have run exaggerated headlines. They are wrong to report that the pope has called for the familiar form of the ancient Christian prayer to be “updated” or reworded, although he does seem poised to do so. A new translation of the Notre Père, the Lord’s Prayer in French, went into effect in the Catholic Church on December 3, and in the interview Pope Francis expressed his approval. The French translation represents a movement away from what he says the Italian translation gets wrong. His idea of how the Lord’s Prayer should read in Italian approximates the revised French translation and even more closely the Spanish translation used in Catholic liturgy: *No nos dejes caer en la tentación* (“Do not let us fall into temptation”). In criticizing the Italian translation, Francis speaks cogently in theological terms of sin and free will but is silent on the need for translations of the Lord’s Prayer to hew as closely as possible to the biblical Greek.

The gist of his critique of the Italian translation applies to the English translation as well and betrays what in my view is a common misapprehension, which the French revision reflects and reinforces. At the heart of the controversy is the noun “temptation” (*tentazione* in Italian, *tentación* in Spanish, *tentation* in French). Its meaning has shifted over the centuries. We tend to lose sight of what it means literally, stripped of its theological associations with naughtiness, bad thoughts, and sin.

“Temptation” is cognate with “attempt.” Call it “a trying.” Better yet, “a trial”—as in “Paul suffered many trials on his way to Rome.” The mission that God called him to was marked by beatings, shipwreck, hunger, exposure to the elements. He could have backed out, but he persisted, faithful to his vocation to the end. It was hard. Note, too, that God “tempted” Abraham: that’s the verb in the King James Version where he commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22:1). The only way to make sense of the word in that context is to assume a shade of meaning that doesn’t quite match what Francis means when he says that it’s not God who “pitches me into temptation, to see how I fall. No, a father doesn’t do this.”

In the Septuagint, the Greek verb for what God does to Abraham is ἐπειράζειν. Its root is the same as that of πειρασμός, the Greek noun that occurs in the Lord’s Prayer and gets translated as “temptation” and its cognates in modern languages. God’s trial (“temptation”) of Abraham was the situation in which that man of faith would make manifest the magnitude of his fidelity to the Lord’s will. It could not have been easy for Abraham to accept and obey.

Through his gift of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus gives us permission—no, he instructs us—to ask God to spare us from such demanding assignments. In her book *The Face of Water*, Sarah Ruden suggests that “torture” is “more or less” what

Jesus' contemporaries would have understood by *πειρασμός*. The word is related to the English "peril" and to the Latin *periculum*, meaning "danger." The semantic sweep of the Indo-European root *per* or *peir* includes the concepts of experience and experiment. To try and be tried, prove and be proved, imperil and be imperiled—these define the contours of *πειρασμός*, the "temptation" that we ask God not to lead us into.

My advice to translators who share the pope's concern is to stop fiddling with the verb, "lead into," and concentrate instead on the noun, "temptation." Change it in the English translation to "trial," or perhaps "peril." Make the equivalent adjustment for translations in other languages. This would address Francis's concern to avoid theological error and at the same time reduce the distance between the original text and the understanding of it that twenty-first-century Catholics would acquire from official translations.

We tend to over-spiritualize the meaning of "Lead us not into temptation" and to jump ahead too many steps in our understanding of it. In his explanation of why he thinks the Italian translation is misleading, Francis speaks of temptation as something we "fall into," as in the Spanish translation. In the Greek of Matthew 6:13, Jesus says nothing about falling. The verb is *εἰσενέγκῃς*, a form of *εἰσφέρω*, meaning "carry into." So "lead us not into temptation" is a fair-enough translation. "Bring us not into temptation" might be better. But "Prevent us from falling"? In Christianese, what we fall into is sin. Let's not create an invitation to confuse that with temptation, which is a situation into which we're sent or thrown, if not directly by God than at least with his assent, as in the case of Job.

From temptation, we can fall into sin, though we can also stand upright and prevail, like Abraham, Daniel, and Paul. The situation is fraught with danger but also opportunity. To see it only as the prelude to sin is like describing tomorrow's game as a risk that our team will fall to its opponent and lose. In any case, the "temptation" that we ask the Father to keep at bay is a stress on us first of all in the here and now. It's a this-worldly hardship. Let's not try to be more spiritual than Jesus himself at prayer in



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Gethsemane. Pray for the virtue of the martyrs of Compiègne should a decision like the one they had to make confront you. First, pray that it doesn't confront you.

"Let this cup pass from me." In effect, what Jesus says by teaching us to pray "Lead us not into the trial" is "Your trepidation about entering into the lions' den, into the agreement to sacrifice your beloved son, or what have you—understood. On the eve of my own ordeal, I express my desire to be spared, and I address it to the Father. Do likewise." ■

Nicholas Frankovich is an editor of *National Review*.

Imagine There's No Clergy

Two Views

William M. Shea

A song in the New York seminary of my day (1955–1961) went like this:

It's Tradition, it's Tradition, it's a very, very, very old Tradition.
You can ask the Roman Rota; it won't help you one iota.
For no amount of wishin', no, no amount of wishin'
can ever change or hope to change a very old Tradition.

My confreres in the seminary thought of this as wry humor mixed with a bit of sarcasm, and sang it with gusto. Tradition was a real determinant of our life and mind, an ever present condition of our progress toward the priesthood. Among the pervasive traditions we met daily were hierarchy, celibacy, the distinction between those ordained or vowed and the laity, the seminary *horarium* (up at 5:30, lights out at 10), and a whole complex of social structures and mores in which we were educated and by which we were expected to live. We were taught that the *sola scriptura* didn't do it for Catholics; Catholics were marked by their acceptance of capital-T Tradition.

The sacred magisterium (teaching office) was a major part of that inheritance, related closely to hierarchy and awesomely close to each of us as we were trained to share in the preaching and teaching functions of the Church—i.e., of the bishops. We were to follow the magisterium of the bishops and the pope; we were to teach what they taught, for they are the authentic and infallible voice of God in the world. Scripture and Tradition were the rivers of revelation, and the hierarchy was the interpreter of both. That sacred magisterium was for practical purposes codified in the creeds, in the acts of the councils, in catechisms, and in the Latin textbooks we used for moral and doctrinal theology classes.

We were taught something of the Donatist controversy in the North African churches in the fourth through eighth centuries. Those “rigorist” bishops criticized their weaker brethren who acceded to Diocletian's command that they “hand over” their copies of the Scriptures to the imperial inquisitors. The bishops who refused called the faltering bishops “*traditores*” (traitors, those who “hand over”), declaring their sinful brethren's sacraments invalid. The Donatist

bishops did in fact believe that treachery undercut the ministry of the traitors: how could a coward who “handed over” the Scriptures celebrate valid sacraments and be trusted to teach the truth about God? Clearly he couldn't.

The response of orthodox Catholics in the “tradition” of Augustine of Hippo was that the sins of priests and bishops did not affect the validity of their sacramental ministry or the truth of their magisterial teaching. After all, God was the cause of grace and truth while the bishops and priests were merely his instruments. The popes could have their mistresses and children and ill-gotten gain, but they were still popes. The point is marvelously clear: the immorality of ministers does not undercut their apostolic ministry.

God bless those Donatist heretics, for by virtue of their error the orthodox church could ply its wares for centuries to come with a clear conscience: its ministers may be *traditores*, but their sacramental actions remain pure. The church need not be a church of saints. It was, in fact, a church of sinners. Christ makes up for all our leaders' tawdry failings by the shedding of his blood on Calvary. The sacraments work, no matter the sins of the clergy, for it is Christ himself who works through them. I am far from a Donatist, but I want to urge a course of action on the church that could easily and with some good reason be called heretical, perhaps as heretical as the Donatists themselves.

Pope Francis, in my opinion a mensch and the best thing that has happened to my Catholic Church since the election of John XXIII in 1958, recently warned us against “an immoderate desire for total change without sufficient reflection or grounding,” as well as against a hardline “attitude that would solve everything by applying general rules or deriving undue conclusions from particular theological considerations.” By way of excuse for departing from the pope's wisdom let me say that the Roman Catholic Church is in a bad way. What is to be done? I know what needs to be done. But if we did it, we'd possibly be in an even greater mess, thus proving Francis right. “The last state of the man would be worse than the first!” (Luke 11:26). I might well be killing Catholicism rather than healing it. I worry about that, but the risk must be taken, so serious is the situation. So radical is the solution that even the pope who knows the situation far better than I do is apparently unable to enact it.

Here is the short version of the argument that follows:



Saint Eligius Consecrated as a Bishop by Pere Nuyes, ca. 1527

The hierarchy of the church has so egregiously harmed its life and reputation that they have in fact abandoned their inherited apostolic status. The font of their sin is their establishment and vigorous support of a clerical monopoly in the church that must be gotten rid of if the church is to continue in its apostolicity and its evangelical mission.

There is a crisis in the ministerial leadership of the churches, including popes, bishops, and priests. The crisis (a time for decision) is far deeper and more widespread than the scandal of child abuse. A Donatist might say that the offending clergy who raped children *cannot* confect the sacraments. I would not say that. The abuse crisis itself is only one among the many rolling waves of disappointment the popes and bishops have delivered to the laity over hundreds of years and which demand the revocation of their honorific "Successors of the Apostles." A short list of examples (see Garry Wills *Papal Sins* for a fuller list) includes:

- The Reformation, a monstrous sin in the sixteenth century that tore the churches from communion with one another, was the responsibility of the clergy on both sides. They turned proposals of needed reforms into a struggle for power over souls. In splitting the

churches they violated the prayer of Jesus for the unity of the disciples (John 17). (For an account of these events read Diarmaid MacCulloch's *The Reformation: A History*).

- The antimodern crusades of the nineteenth-century popes and their refusal to contribute to the building of the "modern world." Unable to shake the vestiges of a dying medieval Christendom, the Church (bishops and popes) failed their people (the church) by pitting themselves against threatening "evils" such as democracy, freedom of the press, and a thoughtful lower clergy.
- The failure of most church leaders to counter the beast of the German war machine and its industrialized murder of Jews, gypsies, male homosexuals, and millions of Polish and Soviet citizens. A sin of omission perhaps, but surely the worst in the history of the hierarchical church.
- The vicious hounding of theologians by several twentieth-century popes, from the condemnations of the modernist priests in the early years of the century under Pope Pius X to the despicable procedures of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under orders from John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

- The sexual assault on children and young people by clergy, from priests and religious to cardinals, and the consequent hierarchical cover-up, plagues that have spread across the universal church and in some places continue unabated.
- The resistance by two popes to the impetus and possibilities of reform of church life suggested by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) insofar as they touched on clerical hegemony. Even the council itself, for all its good work, remained thoroughly clerical.
- The failure of the clerical leadership of the church to face up to the shrinking numbers of ministers and the rapid decline in the sacramental practice of Catholics in the West, much of it attributable to the debilitating clericalism of the higher and lower clergy.

We could go back to Corinth, listing one crime after another in violation of the peace and unity of the churches as St. Paul did. Few in the leadership today seem willing to draw the bottom line on these age-old problems. Occasionally some are willing to name the condition that promotes the problems. The pope knows and so do many of his own bishops. So do many theologians and commentators. Clericalism is at the bottom of this, they say. Yet while issuing warnings they do little or nothing about it.

If clericalism is the root of the problem, why not cut to the root? Why not a strategic plan to radically de-clericalize the church? There is none on offer, even from the pope himself. He can't meet the problem because the Church in his view and by tradition is, from the beginning and up to the present disturbed moment, dedicated to the distinction between those who minister and those who are ministered unto. While this distinction arises quite naturally in the world's religions, in a process sociologists call specialization, the Catholic Church has made something supernatural of it, made the hierarchical structure of the church part of the revelation of God in Christ.

Robert Mickens, editor of *La Croix International*, a Rome-based Catholic daily, says the pope has made clear his aversion to clericalism, which Mickens describes as a “privileged and separate caste mentality of clerics, that they are specially chosen, and they are set apart from rest of people, to rule, to teach, and to admonish.” (See also David Bentley Hart's description of the early church's “extremist” bent in the February 27, 2017 issue of *Commonweal*.)

Clericalism affects the whole church. It has been accepted and even lauded by clergy as if it is an anticipation of the Kingdom yet to come. Its hold on us rests comfortably in the symbolic imagination of Roman Catholicism and the Orthodox churches of the East, at once their charm and their curse. That structure must be radically reviewed and reformed if the faith and hope and healthy life of the church are to be revived. As a Quaker colleague once put it to me: “What American adult wants to belong to a church

in which he is treated as a child?” Clericalism infects the other Christian churches to a lesser degree and variously, but the Roman Church has simply collapsed under its weight.

According to some, there is nothing to be done about the crisis because the clergy-lay distinction is a matter of the divine will; in other words, “It's Tradition, a very, very, very old Tradition!” Or could it be that there is something that can and ought to be done that is so radical and church-embracing, so chilling, that it is beyond clerical contemplation? If indeed clericalism is the problem, then the solution is the elimination of that division between clerical and lay Catholics. I am not opposed to leadership, to authority, to structure, to ministry, even to its three-tiered Roman Catholic articulation, but I am opposed to its sacrality and its sanctification. I suppose I am now advocating anti-clericalism, an instinct almost as old as clericalism itself, a historical protest against what the priesthood has done to the church (and a lot for the church, it must be said) through nearly two millennia. Can we count on the clergy to eliminate clericalism? Or the bishops? Or the pope? Not likely! They may badmouth it on occasion, much to their credit. But undo it? Never.

Nevertheless, as I protest against clericalism, I must also protest against my own anti-clericalism for, paradoxically, I have been engaged with the Catholic priesthood for the sixty years of my adulthood. My best friends are priests and priests have been a blessing of God on my life. I am in the odd position of calling for an end of the distinction between clergy and laity when my religious life relies almost entirely on the clergy. (I include sisters and brothers as well as priests, though brothers and sisters have suffered mightily at the hands of the priesthood.)

This fracture in the Christian church began, some would argue, with Jesus himself and so is a divine ordinance, like baptism and the Eucharist. Jesus called the Twelve. He meant there to be in his church some to minister and some to be ministered unto, and that the former are to order the latter. As “Successors to the Apostles” the clergy are a sacral caste who rule, sanctify, and teach the rest of Christians, a Sanhedrin in effect presided over by the Roman High Priest. This was a mistake, made by Christian leaders rather than by Jesus himself (one hopes!), that gradually turned the Christian movement into an essentially hierarchic religion by the time of Constantine. I would argue that this development was utterly foreign to the intentions of Jesus, and was, in fact, a worldly rather than a holy phenomenon. The Christian churches became the Church in structural imitation of Roman and Jewish models of a religious society.

The answer to this ongoing crisis is this: that the clergy from low to high be desacralized entirely. This involves a change in the religious culture of all Catholics, not merely the cracking of the clergy's etiological myth about itself. There was and is no “divine plan” for how the churches are to be governed. The clergy high and low have not simply *misused* the myth; they created it, imposed it, maintained it, admittedly with the tacit agreement of the laity. “Change” is not a term that comes close

to what is required now; better words for what needs doing are conversion, repentance, transformation, reformation. The Protestants called for it in the sixteenth century and got a partial acceptance, and the Catholics missed the boat entirely, holding to Tradition and reinforcing it!

Vatican II voided tradition in some small matters (e.g., the declarations on the Jews and on ecumenism, where the tradition was especially pernicious), and made several stabs at reducing the clericalism of the Church, but the stabs were neutralized by the fact that clericalism remained the pervasive ethos of the council itself. In the matter of clericalism, the council was a physician who could not heal herself. Pope Francis, who knows what is wrong, strikes at a solution fitfully, but has no idea of how to go about it.

Let me summarize a handful of the elements of my proposal to declericalize the Catholic Church, and all its churches, and to desacralize the clergy. Steps that ought to be taken to make the ideal of a community of communities real rather than a hierarchical religion include:

Ending Clericalism. There should be no distinction between the clergy and laity, except in functions assigned to some Christians for some time. That distinction should be replaced by the Christian teaching that accords with the directive of St. Paul: "There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Such divisions were forced on the body of Christ by circumstances, by decisions made in the social history of the church by clerical officeholders, and preserved in and by clerical bureaucracies.

Ending the Ontological Sign. Clericalism is reinforced by the doctrine that the sacrament of orders causes a "sign" to be placed on the soul of the recipient marking him eternally as clergy with a special status in the church, in the Kingdom of God, and even in Hell should he go there. I would argue, however, that ministers are simply Christians who share, like all Christians, in the priesthood, the prophetic office, and the reign of Christ. Ministers should be called and accepted by the community to perform a specific service such as presiding at the Eucharistic table. The "priestly people" are the church, not the clergy.

Ending the Accouterments of Sacred Office. All of the marks of the lower and higher clergy that serve to distinguish them from the Christian people and one another are to be abandoned, except insofar as they serve the function

to which some Christians are called by the community. Thus the functions of presiding at the Eucharistic table, and preaching to and teaching the Christian people (all necessary communal functions) are not to be marked by accouterments, special dress, peculiar hats, crosiers, and rings made of precious metal. What we have come to call bishops and priests are to dress no differently than worshipping and working Christian men and women. I'm hoping that we can have shepherds who don't turn the rest of us into sheep.

Ending Christendom. Civil law is applicable to all Christians as it is to all citizens. All Christians are equally subject to the civil laws proper to their culture. The churches are not superior to the state and its culture. Church and state are simply different, each with its own ends and means. Neither

lower nor higher clergy are exempt from the laws and mores of the societies in which they minister, nor should they be "protected" when they abuse their congregants. When they commit crimes, they should be treated as criminals. If they were, in fact, the jails of many nations would be sprinkled with bishops who protected abusers of children and young adults.

A Renewed Ecclesiology. The Holy Spirit gives life to the church, yes, but to *all* the churches. End all "one true church" talk. The church catholic is all the churches, Protestant as well as Catholic, East as well as West. Drop the Vatican II declaration that

"fullness of the church subsists in the Roman Catholic Church..." The fullness of the church dwells where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name. There is nothing about the Roman Catholic Church that sets it above (or below) any other concrete community of Christians. The one true church is an assembly of equals in Christ, not a monarchy or a hierarchy established by heavenly decree.

Regional and International Synods. Leaders and representatives of the local churches should meet every five years, and ecumenical councils every ten years. This synodal form of governance was implicitly endorsed by the Council of Trent, and would have been put into effect were it not for the paranoid fear of councils that has gripped the souls of popes since the Council of Constance (1414–1418). The synods should have legislative authority for the regional and universal church, and consider issues pertinent to the believing and practicing life of the church. These synods are to include representatives of all Christian communities, not only the ones called Catholic.

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These few items are indicative of the reform needed in the Catholic Church. Others are listed in my memoir, *Judas Was a Bishop*. An ecumenical synod on church governance is needed if the underlying ecclesiological issues are to be dealt with honestly and fully, a synod that includes what are currently called lay persons who shall have speaking and voting rights. If the council is to be successful, the meaning and extent of what the higher clergy are pleased to call “the Tradition” and the “sacred magisterium” need to be reconsidered and redefined. The Church and the churches need reformed constitutions. The mantle of the “sacred” should be removed from the institutional structures of church government and bureaucracy. I don’t think the hierarchy, the clergy, and the dicasteries of the Vatican are any more sacred than the Congress or the Supreme Court. When Governor Frank Keating, as head of the U.S. bishops’ commission on sexual abuse, claimed that dealing with bishops was like dealing with the Mafia, the bishops who had begged him to lead the probe fired him. One can see why they fired him, but his analogy has not been refuted. The church needs to be freed of its formal sacrality since the actual un-holiness of its ministers and leaders can no longer be denied. This Tradition must go the way our denunciations of Protestantism and Judaism have gone—that is, into the proverbial dustbin of history.

Readers may consider my suggestions unrealizable and even fantastical. They might even consider them disrespectful. They may say that I am thoughtlessly calling for the destruction of the Roman Catholic Church. On that score I can say only that I have given these issues decades of study, thought, and prayer, and I come to my conclusion with considerable sadness. Nevertheless, I think the crises facing the Catholic Church are now so severe that one is obliged to say what one thinks the way forward might be.

William M. Shea is adjunct professor of Religious Studies at the College of the Holy Cross.

David Cloutier

There are a lot of ways to narrate divisions in the Catholic Church after Vatican II. One narrative is the power struggle between “liberals” and “conservatives”—ideological factions vie back and forth for control of institutions, engaging in palace intrigue to promote “their guys.” Others narrate a fundamental divide over the documents—the well-known debates about a hermeneutic of continuity versus a hermeneutic of rupture. And there’s always the liturgy, the old standby—bells or not, kneeling or not, translations or other translations...or no translation at all. On all these questions, I’m very happy to take a “both/and” attitude. I appreciate all the post-Vatican II popes.

I think the church benefits from wise leaders and diverse institutional approaches that can be found on either side of the ideological divide. I’ve seen good and bad liturgies rooted in both sensibilities, and I’ve learned over time to appreciate the benefits of stylistic diversity for the whole church. I think a certain pope emeritus offered a very balanced hermeneutic of “both continuity and discontinuity” for reading the documents. Instead of polarizations, I can conceive of all of these as complementarities that benefit the whole Body.

However, there *is* a way of understanding a conflict over Vatican II where I am very much on one side. This divide, because it doesn’t map well onto standard political or liturgical categories, can be overlooked. But in the long run, it may be the most important one to get right. This is a divide over whether Vatican II was supposed to “desacramentalize” or “super-sacramentalize” Catholicism. Everyone agrees that a key goal that emerged during the course of the council was needed development of the identity of the church *in* the modern world, rather than merely *against* it. As early as the 1940s, Henri de Lubac wrote a profound essay about “the disappearance of a sense of the sacred” that he ascribed not simply to the “bad old world out there,” but to a deadly treatment of Catholic tradition as a carefully curated museum. And in the 1950s, Hans Urs von Balthasar issued a clarion call for “razing the bastions” of a church that has become “barricaded against the world.”

Of course, figures like de Lubac and von Balthasar are reputed to have “gone conservative” after the council. This is a flattened view that imposes its own categories on these figures; what they resisted was a certain interpretation of the council, the “desacramentalization” approach. This approach followed what Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has recently explained as the dominant message of modernity: religions needed to accommodate a more secularized worldview to survive. They had to go along with what the philosopher Charles Taylor broadly calls the “disenchantment” of the cosmos and adopt more plausible forms that are credible to “modern man.”

Prior to the council, Roman Catholicism had resisted doing this. The Freshman Common Reading at my (very secular) college was Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger for Memory*, which includes a fascinating section on growing up in a supernaturally saturated Catholic home and parish. The memoir beautifully wrestles with the difficult sense of loss Rodriguez feels as he leaves behind that supernatural world of his childhood and takes his place in an American society that is both modern and white. What Vatican II did, on the desacramentalization reading, was explain why I, white and growing up in the 1980s, could arrive at a secular college and not have to experience that same sense of necessary loss. I could relate to Rodriguez, but I could also see how distant his experience was from mine.

I think this narrative is incorrect—it is incorrect about me, and it is incorrect about the council. And this is really



Priests participate in the ceremony to bless chrism oil at the Holy Thursday Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, April 13, 2017.

what I want to take issue with William M. Shea about. The desire to desacramentalize the church is supposed to solve many problems. But far from solving the problems he identifies, his proposals just bypass them and create others. My response is not to defend some bygone authoritarianism, but to defend the council's real aim: to make the church itself a super-sacrament of Christ for the world. What we need is more sacramentality, not less. We do that by getting the priesthood right, and not by doing away with it.

First, I need to explain more of what I mean by the "super-sacramental" view, and then I'll move on to Shea's arguments about the priesthood. To explain the "more sacramentality" view, I'll follow Shea's example and quote a song from my own era, a common one at our parish's "chapel Mass." Some readers may remember it:

Great things happen when God mixes with us
 great things happen when God mixes with us
 Great and beautiful, wonderful things
 Great things happen when God... mixes with us
 Some find life
 some find peace
 some people even find joy
 Some see things as they never could before
 and some people find that they can now begin to trust

The original lyrics—"when God mixes with man"—had obvious problems, but did tend to provide a textual echo of

Incarnational doctrine whereas "mixes with us" feels a bit more like God at an after-work get-together. Regardless, the light lyrics, the chipper melody, the hand claps—for some, this sort of thing was the height (or depth) of "desacramentalization."

Let me suggest quite a different reading. It's true that the song is hummable by a six-year-old and avoids big words. Nevertheless, its lyrics are not trivial. Indeed, they are the essence of what I'm describing as "super-sacramentalizing." To talk about great things happening when God mixes with us *at Mass* is not to downplay the enchantment, but to remind us of it vividly. More importantly, to *generalize* the enchantment is to lead us to realize that the whole of life can be like this. Let's not just sing about when God mixes with us in the Eucharist; let's talk about the whole of life. Indeed, the post-Vatican II musical repertoire is filled with song after song that follows this same strategy: take solid, Christological, sacramental theology and apply it to everything. I can't recall any Catholic song that says: *forget* the sacraments, just go do good works. The whole point is to *extend* the enchantment, not to downplay it; to remind us that the Eucharist is "source and summit" of the whole of life, not to make the Eucharist more like a casual meal. My colleague at Catholic University, Msgr. Kevin Irwin, puts this well in questioning the idea that sacraments "offer escapes from the world." Instead, Irwin writes, we should see the sacraments as "the church's unique and focused way of penetrating how God can be and is experienced in

all human life lived on this good earth.... Liturgy and life are correlatives, intrinsically interconnected and mutually enriching.”

The council’s most decisive statement of this idea is its identification of the church’s entire life as a sacramental sign for the world. As Herbert McCabe writes, mirroring Vatican II’s *Constitution on the Church*, the church’s core reality is not as a “quasi-political entity constituted by a certain hierarchic structure of jurisdiction” but rather as “the sacramental presence of Christ in the world, and from this it follows that there is authority and jurisdiction within in.” Debates between “people of God” and “hierarchical authority” remain at the level of the church as quasi-political entity, and so both miss the point of this new vision of the church. As Joseph Ratzinger points out, that vision was first and foremost to emphasize “a collective view of Christianity to replace the individual or purely institutional manner of thinking.” He follows de Lubac in saying that “the concept of sacraments as the means of a grace that I receive like a supernatural medicine in order, as it were, to ensure only my own private eternal health is *the* supreme misunderstanding of what a sacrament truly is” (italics in original). Rather, the sacramental image of the church explains what the church is: the sign and instrument of eschatological realization of the unity of God and humanity, and also the unity of humanity itself.

Of course, this appeal to a deeper vision of unity does not resolve the inevitable conflicts of institutional realities; it is ironic that, subsequent to writing these words, Ratzinger went on to exercise so much institutional power! Yet the primacy of this super-sacramental vision should not be lost amid such institutional battles. Indeed, super-sacramentality permeates papal writings across divides. Though there are real disagreements on particulars, most agree that John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* offers an unprecedentedly “high” view of the meaning of human sexuality; moreover, his beautiful account of human work in *Laborem exercens* is too often ignored as another example of sacramentalizing everyday life. Another example: Benedict XVI’s extraordinary call for an economics focused on “gift,” where every market transaction should include “quotas of gratuitousness.” The sacramentalization of everyday life also emerges powerfully at the end of Francis’s *Laudato si’*, with its account of the Eucharist as “an act of cosmic love” that “joins heaven and

earth” and “embraces and permeates all creation.” These documents frankly demolish any kind of polarity between vertical and horizontal or between liturgical life and ethics—not by de-emphasizing liturgy and worship, but by supersizing it. An appreciation for this vision won’t mean an end to practical disagreements in the church; rather, the vision invites disputants to conceive of these disagreements in richer ways.

So I’m clearly on the side of the super-sacramentalizers. This brings me to Shea’s essay. Shea exemplifies the desacramentalization view, and in this case, his target is not the Eucharistic liturgy but the sacrament of orders. Yet in a sense, to attack (and surely that is the right word for his essay) the ordained priesthood is to attack the entire sacramental system itself. Obviously, I have no interest in defending the priesthood against the abuses that Shea rightly

points out. Nor do I simply want to appeal to “tradition, tradition, tradition.” Instead, I want to analyze three aspects of his argument and suggest that an appreciation of the super-sacramental intentions of the council actually do a much *better* job than his proposals do in confronting the problems, while avoiding problems into which his argument falls.

First, Shea criticizes the ordained priesthood as leading to abuses of power. Francis targets “clericalism,” but can’t make it to the logical next step, which is to abolish the clergy/lay distinction. But will that really solve the problem? The problem of abusing power and authority doesn’t depend on fancy

dress or claims about ontological character. There are “liberal” priests who run parishes like tyrants, and there are “conservative” priests who listen, share power, and know how to lead well. Moreover, there are plenty of leadership struggles and church politics in Protestant communities without ordination—and some have to do with subjecting leaders to the fickle and often-distorted politics of the laity in their congregations.

A super-sacramental approach should prompt us to recognize the true nature of leadership. As Joseph Ratzinger points out in his wonderful book *Christian Brotherhood*, the sacrament is not called *sacerdotium* but *ordo*. He explains: “One can in no way identify the New Testament office, which is in fact New Testament service, with the phenomenon of priesthood in other religions. It is by nature something

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totally different.” Herbert McCabe reminds us that Jesus’ criticism of the “trappings” of religion is “not crudely humanist.” Rather, while it abolishes the boundary between sacred and profane, the new distinction for Christians is “the last things as realized and as yet to come.” Thus, while everything is *potentially* sacred, not everything is “sacramental revelation.” And as Michael Himes of Boston College describes it, the sacramental principle is that “what is always and everywhere the case must be noticed, accepted, and celebrated somewhere sometime. What is always and everywhere true must be brought to our attention and be embraced (or rejected) in some concrete experience at some particular time and place.” Great things happen when God mixes with us *all the time*, but we must attend *specifically* to that at some time. McCabe puts that idea in properly historical terms: the new creation is not in fact always and everywhere the case, though it *will be*, and so for the growth of the life of the whole church for the world, the sacraments make real—realize, make present—the future.

So of course I agree with Shea in decrying tyrannical clerics. But a strong view of sacramental ordination should make power-hungry clerics look even worse—they appear to be stuck in the old age, rather than the age to come. What does this mean for things like clerical dress, which Shea criticizes? It seems to me that, in this as in many other cases, wise and prudent priests do not make an idol out of this question, but recognize that distinctive dress can be fitting or less fitting, depending on the circumstances. Or what might it mean for the questions of practical power-sharing? Again, thinking about the church sacramentally should get us beyond our usual categories. It may be true that the church is not a democracy, but it’s not a military dictatorship, either. This impasse about naming “good leadership” reveals the temptation to confuse church and state that Antonio Spadaro and Marcelo Figueroa criticized in a recent article in *La Civiltà Cattolica*. Recognizing that the church is different *in kind* should invite us to richer ways of talking about appropriate institutional structures on all sides. At the recent Bishops’ Convocation of Catholic Leaders, Helen Alvare suggested that if the church was going to take male/female complementarity seriously, then we should start thinking about “what complementarity looks like in the chancery.” There’s a super-sacramental way of moving forward.

A second motivation for Shea’s proposal is the gross immorality of the clergy. While taking the Donatist controversy out for a spin, Shea piles on the well-rehearsed list of terrible behavior. “Who am I to judge?” seems far from his mind. Of course this is all terrible, but again, the link to ordination is far from clear. It’s true that, in the old days, the preconiliar notion of the sacredness of the priesthood contributed to a bad dynamic that suppressed abuse victims’ voices. But the desacramentalizing after the council hardly helped; plenty of liberal clerics and religious communities were implicated. And it hardly seems that other organizations are immune from having immoral leaders—most notably, immoral Prot-

estant leaders (the last time I checked, televangelists had none of the sacramental trappings of ordination).

More troublingly, Shea misses the crucial truth of the Donatist controversy, which is that the sacraments are ultimately actions of God and the church as a whole, and not the charisms of individuals, their personal gifts, or even their morality. Such a dependence would pose difficulties for Catholics trying to ascertain the validity of sacraments. It also suggests (rightly) that leadership is not about “cults of personality.” Authority in the system doesn’t come from oneself; it comes from Christ and the church. Surely the portrait of the flawed apostles in the New Testament is ample evidence for this.

Of course, clergy who live upstanding, even heroic lives are far better witnesses to Christ and better servants to others. But, as a super-sacramentalizer, let me say: *that’s true for all of us!* What about the immorality of the laity? In emphasizing the whole church as a sacrament, *Lumen gentium* also included the innovative universal call to holiness, putting an end to a two-level ethic of minimal compliance for laity and maximum sanctity for clergy and religious. “Holiness” in this context shouldn’t be understood simply as pious, “churchy” actions. *Lumen gentium* makes clear that the laity’s unique vocation is to embody Christ as prophet, priest, and king in the conduct of their everyday lives. So...maybe we should take an archdiocese somewhere, take all its clergy as a whole, see how they are doing with holiness, and then do the same for all the laity. Should the clergy repent of their immorality? Most certainly. But has the laity lived up to its call? Maybe we should attend to the log in our own eye as laity instead of so eagerly rushing in to condemn the sins of the clergy.

This brings me to a third aspect of Shea’s proposal: the total certainty of his ringing tones, and his constant judgments about who are the good guys and who are the bad guys. Look at the good-popes-bad-popes bit going on in the essay, or the apparent exemption from critique of “thoughtful lower clergy” (I wondered: Does he mean all the young “JPII priests”?). In his own words: “I know what needs to be done.” “There was and is no ‘divine plan’ for how the churches are to be governed.” “The mantle of the sacred should be ripped off”—presumably by him and those who agree with him.

Sometimes prophetic proposals require such stridency. Yet I fear at the heart of the desacramentalizing worldview is Western liberal individualism, exemplified in the unidentified Quaker who believes that Catholics are members of a church that treats them like children. Catholics have much to learn from Quakers about processes of discernment and about the importance of peacemaking. But they shouldn’t learn the individualism reflected in this comment. The church has not treated me “like a child”—indeed, in and through the church, I have been introduced (in person and through the Communion of Saints) to the most mature, grace-filled

ACTS

To begin again, the deepest palace must explode
unnoticed. A slow release
will always leave the one who authored you afraid.
That was legion talking from my head,
the beast. I would burn
the pages, all evidence my sentence stayed
to cheat my way inside a shadow of the rock.

POUND

Unobvious site of anchorage, Erebus was
an isthmus zoned only for sacrifice.
I envy Odysseus
that inundated shelf he slaughtered
the lambs on, if nothing else a place
to have knelt down, awaiting the shadow
instructors, an apparition anywhere
the ritual touched, their footprints
brimming with blood.

But the flensing is never finished
when the offering outlives its mystery
recipient. Tiresias starves, doubly
damned, whispering

SERVIAM

—*Steven Toussaint*

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people I know. Every Sunday, the church has put in front of me a complex piece of adult art called “the liturgy” and invited me into a deeper and deeper understanding of its inexhaustible wisdom.

And it is not adult, but child-like, to assume that a community with authority is antithetical to maturity. The implication is that to be treated like an adult is to be treated like an independent sovereign decision-maker, subject to no authority outside the self. As Ratzinger writes, “where each person wants to be a god, that is, to be so adult and

independent that he owes himself to no one but determines his destiny simply and solely for himself, then every other person becomes for him an antigod, and communication between them becomes a contradiction in itself.” Or, if you prefer, look at Jorge Bergolio’s comments on the problem of “spiritual worldliness.” He calls it “the greatest danger for the church,” defining it as “putting oneself at the center.” And he is clear: this can happen to any of us, clergy or lay. It is well known that Bergolio faced opposition from liberal Jesuits in his younger days precisely because their vision of the future treated the traditional piety of the people with disdain and contempt. A super-sacramental view invites us to a different understanding of what it means to be an adult. It is to emerge into a mission far larger than one could imagine for oneself, far larger than the idols offered by individualized fulfillments or adolescent certainty. It is to consider one’s life a participation in the sacramental transformation of the world and to pursue one’s personal vocation in light of that.

Let me be clear: I’m expressing concern about individualistic arrogance here because the alternative is to leave the critique of positions like Shea’s to ultra-conservatives commentators. These commentators have their own good-guys-bad-guys narratives. They will circulate Shea’s article as more evidence that progressive Catholics are actually anti-Catholic. This is tiresome. My point is not to suggest that there is no need for reforms. Rather, it’s to make clear that desacramentalization—far from shielding the church from ill—actually opens the way to much deeper problems, not least the erroneous autonomy that is pervasive in our culture.

Shea’s proposal should turn us back to the underlying question: What is the purpose of the church? What is the church for? If it is merely a vehicle for individual spiritual journeys and some good social reform, desacramentalization may make sense. But insofar as the church is not simply instrumental but sacramental, involving a profoundly spiritual and material eschatological mission of the realization of the new creation in the midst of the old, then desacramentalization is in fact one of the worst directions for the church to go. The visibility and particularity of ordination—and of all the sacraments—is the making real of the promise of redemption, not simply for isolated individuals after death, but for the whole world. This visibility and particularity can be a source of scandal—indeed, it can devolve into idolatry. This is even true of the Incarnation itself. Nevertheless, it is part of the larger conviction that God, though spirit, does not disparage matter or even abandon it, but seeks always to save, renew, transform, and elevate it. The practice of ordination can become an idol. The answer is not to abandon the practice, but to re-situate it within the super-sacramental understanding of the church that Vatican II so richly proclaimed. ■

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‘Brideshead’ Revisited & Revised

The Mixed Reception of Waugh’s Most Famous Novel

Robert Murray Davis

Evelyn Waugh cultivated a reputation for being cantankerous—he once listed some provocations as “cooking and theology and clothes and grammar and dogs”—so it is surprising to discover that he kept his equanimity about responses to various stages of the composition and reception of *Brideshead Revisited*, his best-known and most profitable novel and the one in which he seems to have had the greatest emotional and artistic investment.

When he sat down to begin work on *Brideshead Revisited* in February, 1944, he was aware that this would be his most ambitious novel. The scope of more than a decade, the heightened style, and the complex structure would all stretch his powers and produce what early on he called his *magnum opus*. It was, he said later, “an attempt to trace the workings of the divine purpose in a pagan world, in the lives of an English Catholic family, half-paganized themselves, in the world of 1923–1939.”

For the few *Commonweal* readers unfamiliar with the novel, a brief synopsis may be in order. *Brideshead’s* narrator and protagonist is Charles Ryder, a painter. Ryder’s involvement with the aristocratic Flyte family, English Catholics, unfolds from Ryder’s years at Oxford to the Second World War. At Oxford, he meets and befriends the charismatic but troubled Sebastian Flyte, and eventually falls in love with Sebastian’s sister Julia. Much of the novel’s action takes place at Brideshead Castle, the Flytes’ majestic estate, and a symbol of a once admirable, but now fading, religious and aristocratic order. Lord Marchmain, Sebastian and Julia’s father, is estranged from his fiercely Catholic wife, and lives abroad with his mistress. Despite a succession of setbacks, the formidable Lady Marchmain, who will not consent to a divorce, is determined to preserve the faith of her mostly wayward family.

Waugh had quite definite ideas about the development

of the complex plot. He also was aware of the audience he hoped to address, defining it in part by negation in saying that fewer than a half-dozen Americans would understand it and that, though the book was “steeped in theology,” even theologians might not recognize his intent. His ideal audience included the kind of people among whom were distributed fifty copies of a special edition—actually uncorrected and bound page proofs. Some members of that audience had been consulted while composition was in progress. More surprising was the fact that he took the advice: Monsignor Ronald Knox about what was involved in closing a chapel (keep it simple and undramatic—Waugh did); Martin Darcy, SJ, on various theological issues (no inaccuracies, but sex scenes bothered him—Waugh toned down one scene so thoroughly that the sex was almost impossible to perceive, though for the 1960 edition he restored the earlier version); A. D. Peters, his literary agent on whether to publish two-thirds of the novel and the rest the following year (Peters said no for very good reasons and Waugh abandoned the position).

By the time the special edition was distributed, while Waugh was serving with the British Army in Yugoslavia near the end of World War II, he said that he had not been this eager to hear responses to a book since his first novel, *Decline and Fall*, was published in 1928. Some of the earliest reactions came from members of his family. His wife Laura’s initial response was tepid; later, having been lectured on the art of letter writing and ordered to compare three versions of the novel, her comments were more satisfactory. His mother-in-law, Mary Herbert, thought the book a great success, though as a Catholic matriarch herself she found Lady Marchmain unconvincing. Her daughter Gabriel Dru thought that for the first time Waugh had drawn a convincing woman character.

The Herberts were, of course, Catholics. Waugh’s brother Alec was, to put it mildly, not, and though he praised the novel in a letter to his brother, to their mother he wrote that he missed the old humor and hoped that Evelyn would not write any more Catholic novels. He was moved by Lord Marchmain’s death and in the context shared “the curious Catholic point of view about living in sin—and appreciate and respect it (though I do find it hard to understand how anyone could believe it).”

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Evelyn Waugh at his home in Combe Florey, Somerset, circa 1945

Ryder was dim because “it is not his story,” though he admitted that if he were too dim to justify Julia’s reaction to him the novel had failed. Then he added, for Mitford’s eyes only: “He was as bad at painting as Osbert [Sitwell] is at writing.” As for Lady Marchmain, “No I am not on her side, but God is, who suffers fools gladly; and the book is about God.”

Mitford also sent responses by some of their friends, most of whom found something to praise even when they had reservations. “*General View*: It is the Lygon family. Too much Catholic stuff,” Mitford wrote. There were more reactions to the private edition. Just over a month before the novel was officially published on May 28, Waugh visited Oxford and at a gathering hosted by Maurice Bowra, an Oxford don and partial model for the sly Mr. Samgrass in *Brideshead*, he writes that he “heard harsh reports on *Brideshead*, [photographer, often a Waugh target] Cecil Beaton’s favorite book. [Cyril] Connolly does a funny imitation of Marchmain’s death bed. I didn’t know you had been in love with Auberon [Herbert, his brother-in-law].” After this inspired teasing, the moralistic response of a Catholic friend like Katherine Asquith—who could “hardly bear your writing about modern people” and asked Waugh to write “a book not a novel”—had not even the merit of wit. Monsignor Knox’s first response was similar—“I wish Evelyn would write about characters whom one would like to meet in real life”—but added, “once you reach the end...the whole cast—even

Since Waugh was out of touch with most of his sources of gossip, he relied on Nancy Mitford, a fellow writer and close friend, to collect and transmit comments about what she termed a “Great English Classic,” or “MO GEC.” Mitford, centrally located in Heywood Hill’s bookshop in London, was eager to provide information and as a fellow writer ideally positioned to respond to the book. She had one correction—diamond clips weren’t invented until 1930, so Julia would have worn an arrow instead, an alteration which Waugh made in corrected proof. She wondered if Waugh were on Lady Marchmain’s side and if Ryder “might have a little more glamour” because “he seemed to me a tiny bit dim.” This was the sort of response Waugh wanted, and he explained that

Beryl—falls into place and the twitch of the thread happening in the very bowels of Metroland is inconceivably effective.” On the secular side of Waugh’s acquaintance, Lady Pansy Lamb rejected the idea that everyone and all their possessions were glamorous in the 1920s.

Waugh apparently took negative responses into account when he wrote the copy for the first edition’s dust-jacket flap: “The story will be uncongenial alike to those who look back on that pagan world with unalloyed affection, and to those who see it as transitory, insignificant and, already, hopefully passed.” Waugh did not try to refute these negative responses, presumably because they came from matters of taste.

Tastes varied more than he anticipated. Lady Daphne Acton and other Catholics thought the book a masterpiece. Christopher Sykes, later Waugh's official biographer, praised the characterization of Sebastian and his Oxford friend Anthony Blanche but predicted, ironically, adverse reaction: "Feeling is running high about it. 'Roman Tract' is being hissed in intellectual circles.... Connolly is very upset.... The *New Statesman* will never forgive you for your crimes against taste: No miners, no mention of communism, no strictures on the house, and your obscure and constant references to the nobility."

Non-Catholic writers like Henry Yorke and Raymond Mortimer resisted the direction of the plot. Yorke, who wrote as Henry Green, confessed "how shocked & hurt I was when the old man crossed himself on his deathbed" and thought that "you may have overdone the semicolons a bit yet even then the regret with which the whole book is saturated, is beautifully carried out in the long structure of your sentences. The whole thing seemed deeper & wider than any book you have written." Later he wrote again to say that "the theme...was not easy for me" but praised the Oxford sequence and called the prologue and epilogue "perfectly placed." The art critic Clive Bell wrote before reading the novel but reported that the critic Raymond Mortimer, "while deprecating certain tendencies," agreed that I had a great treat in store."

The writer Peter Quennell, an Oxford contemporary, deprecated some of the same tendencies, anticipating or reflecting the response of other liberal intellectuals to the novel. He wrote in the *Daily Mail* that *Brideshead* was a tract, but adding that it was "an extraordinarily readable tract. With what skill and fertility of imagination he hammers home his thesis." He found Julia unconvincing and balked at "the major sin of romantic over-writing" before concluding that the novel was "a remarkably interesting and provocative achievement."

A month after publication, Waugh was wholly satisfied with sales and partially satisfied with response in the press: "Most of the reviews have been adulatory except where they were embittered by class resentment." He seems not to have responded to any reviewers except Desmond MacCarthy, who reviewed it very favorably in the *Sunday Times* and later wrote to Waugh with further questions about his method.

Waugh thanked MacCarthy for the review but added, "I was pleased with the book when I finished it, but since then the rats and moths have been at me and I was despondent about it," adding "I am eager to learn your criticisms of my method."

MacCarthy's criticisms in his letter of June 18 were of a kind familiar in the work of later critics and, by 1960, in Waugh's own final view of the novel. Foremost were the soliloquies of Julia and her father, which, MacCarthy felt, overshadowed dramatic situations. He was also concerned

about Charles's indifference to his children; about whether or not Anthony Blanche's criticisms of Ryder's paintings were intended to be seen as accurate; and—more a concern to other readers than to him—about why Lady Marchmain was a bad mother.

Waugh admitted that Ryder's relationship to his children (assuming that Caroline was his biological descendant) was in tone "the kind of thing I used to do ten years ago" and was "artistically indefensible." Ryder's painting was with one exception—the set done of Marchmain House—uninspired. The "obscene and sterile" Anthony Blanche served as "the voice of conscience to contrast it with the voice of God speaking to Julia at the fountain."

As for the monologues of Julia at the fountain and Lord Marchmain on his deathbed, Waugh admitted that both were stunts but that he could not at the time have used any other method. Next time he might do better because "I feel sometimes I am getting the hang of writing." And Waugh conceded that his characterization of Lady Marchmain was a failure because she was more type than person, although a recognizable type.

Three other reviews in 1946 brought Waugh unwelcome attention. Edmund Wilson, who in 1944 had called Waugh possibly "the only first-rate comic genius who has appeared in English since Bernard Shaw," gave high praise to the first half of *Brideshead* but condemned the rest, and the design of the whole, as a "Catholic tract" and snobbish at that. This review, published in the *New Yorker*, contained nothing new in the judgments of Waugh's snobbery and Catholicism, but it articulated the charges more sharply and in a larger forum. Although Waugh wrote to Peters, "I am glad we have shaken off Edmund Wilson at last," he conceded that, by Wilson's lights, he was rightly outraged at Waugh's bringing God into *Brideshead* and twice more referred to him as having views similar to George Orwell's—a kind of praise, though qualified.

Like Wilson, but at greater length in a survey of Waugh's career to date for *Horizon*, the novelist Rose Macaulay regretted Waugh's turn away from the style of his early novels towards a lusher and often sentimental style and a partisan acceptance of a Roman Catholic view of Elizabethan history. Surprisingly, Waugh's only surviving comment on the article was her "advising me to return to my kennel and not venture into the world of living human beings."

A year later Waugh traveled to Hollywood to discuss with MGM the possibility of a film of *Brideshead*. Discovering that everyone at the studio regarded the book as a love story and nothing more, Waugh produced a long memo laying out the themes and the role of the characters. At times he sounded a bit sharp, but since he didn't really expect anything else from the studio, he saved his rancor until he wrote the essay "Why Hollywood is a Term of Disparagement" and the satirical novel *The Loved One*.

While in Hollywood, Waugh apparently was shown an article, "The Pieties of Evelyn Waugh," by Conor Cruise

O'Brien, writing as Donat O'Donnell. Waugh did not respond to this attack on the style and theme of *Brideshead* until six months after its original publication, perhaps because he did not see it until his trip to Hollywood. O'Donnell's article was one of several cited by MGM as reasons to be wary of trying to go ahead with the project, ultimately shelved.

Waugh's response to the article was by his standards temperate, concentrating on the charges of snobbery, justified if defined by a preference for "the company of the European upper-classes." The church he joined had none of the glamour imputed to it by O'Donnell. Furthermore, he points out, two of the three worldly characters (meaning unsympathetic) in the novel are rich or high-born.

None of these criticisms seemed to affect the popularity or sales of *Brideshead*, which became a Book-of-the-Month Club selection in 1946. But the more popular his novel became, the more serious were Waugh's reservations. Early that year he wrote his old friend Lady Mary Lygon that "my book has been a great success in the United States which is upsetting because I thought it in good taste before and now I know it can't be."

By 1950, despite minor revisions introduced into successive English editions, he had become still more dissatisfied with the novel, admitting to Nancy Mitford that "all that those nasty critics said was bang right." A week later he wrote to Graham Greene that on rereading the novel he was "appalled" by excesses in the language, though he continued to think the plot "excellent. I plan to spend the summer rewriting it."

In fact, he did not revise the novel until late 1959 for publication the following year. He changed the structure from two books to three and restored the original language of Charles's sex with his wife. He also revised the history of Charles's religious views in an attempt to make it impossible for all but the most intransigent Anglicans to deny that Charles has been received into the Roman Catholic Church. There were significant cuts to some of the lush passages because, Waugh said, "the book is infused with a kind of gluttony, for food and wine, for the splendors of the recent past, and for rhetorical and ornamental language,

which now with a fuller stomach I find distasteful." Some but by no means all of the lush places include the bridge to the novel's final book and the soliloquies of Julia and her father. In Waugh's Preface he said that he kept some of each passage because "they were essentially of the mood of writing; also because many readers liked them, though that is not a consideration of first importance."

Waugh, always conscious of historical context, offered this new edition "as a souvenir of the Second War rather than that of the 'twenties or of the 'thirties, with which it ostensibly deals." Then, turning the joke on himself, Waugh produced a travesty of *Brideshead* in the description of Major Ludovic's novel *The Death Wish* in *Unconditional Surrender* (published in the United States as *The End of the Battle*), which Waugh had begun to plan in detail some months after he had revised *Brideshead*. In the novel, Ludovic achieves some reputation as the author of avant-garde *pensées*, along the lines of Cyril Connolly's *Palinurus*, excoriated by Waugh in his diaries and later in print. Ludovic's new book, written almost automatically, progresses inexorably and unconsciously. It was the reverse of avant-garde: "It was a very gorgeous, almost gaudy tale of romance and high drama set...in the diplomatic society of the previous decade. The

plot was Shakespearean in its elaborate improbability. The dialogue could never have issued from human lips, the scenes of passion were capable of bringing a blush to readers of either sex and every age."

But in a way it is part of a movement: "half a dozen other English writers, averting themselves sickly from privations of war and apprehensions of the social consequences of the peace, were even then, severally and secretly...composing or preparing to compose books which would turn from the drab alleys of the thirties into the odorous gardens of a recent past transformed and illuminated by disordered memory and imagination."

This is Waugh's mea culpa for the excesses of his most popular and most profitable work. To paraphrase the remark made about Hemingway's hero in *To Have and Have Not*, if he had no pity on anyone else, he had no pity on himself either—nor resentment toward those who led him to change his mind about what once he hoped was his magnum opus. ■

Waugh wrote his old friend Lady Mary Lygon that "my book has been a great success in the United States which is upsetting because I thought it in good taste before and now I know it can't be."

Rand Richards Cooper

Escapist Adventure, Timely Irreverence

'THE LAST JEDI'

On December 19—opening night—I saw *The Last Jedi*, Episode VIII of the Star Wars saga. As both a cultural and commercial phenomenon the film has proved, well, pretty epic. By New Year's Day, less than two weeks into its run, it had earned more than a billion dollars at the box office worldwide, already quintupling its \$200 million budget. When I sit in a theater on opening night at this kind of blockbuster movie, there's something almost shiveringly sublime—unnerving, I mean—in the thought of so many millions of Americans doing the same thing at the same moment. Oh well. In our increasingly niched-out entertainment culture we tend to look longingly for culturally unifying events beyond the Super Bowl. So thanks, George Lucas.

There's also nothing like opening night of a new *Star Wars* movie to sort the mere film critic from the true fan. In the sold-out theater (I had bought my ticket online, two weeks in advance!), the woman next to me was dressed as Princess Leia, in white gown and the double buns of the iconic original hairdo. Darth Vader sat two rows back. I saw at least five white-plastic-clad clone soldiers. In the lobby afterward, clots of moviegoers avidly debated the film's merits and the heated question of whether it fulfills or disappoints the legacy of the earlier films.

This robust discourse has continued in a tsunami of commentary online and in social media, where fans engage in Talmudic discussions of the most abstruse and tangential points

of Star Warsiana. Disagreement over *The Last Jedi* has been fierce. An article in the *New York Times*, titled "For 'Last Jedi,' Everyone's a Critic," noted the ecstatic review by the paper's own critic, Manohla Dargis, even as it explored just how far from unanimous the fans themselves are—slugging it out over such issues as whether Luke Skywalker has become insufferably whiny in his dotage ("Luke Cavesulker," the critic David Edelstein wittily calls him in his own *New York* magazine review), whether the issue of Rey's parentage is sufficiently delineated, and whether the unceremonious dispensing with the new arch-villain Snoke reveals him as an epic red herring.

The *Times* invited fans to hash it



out on its Facebook page, and quoted their responses. There were articulate naysayers: “The script was a hot mess of lazy storytelling, absurd plot holes, recycled ideas, and lifeless characterizations,” said one. Another: “What I watched was a painful two-and-a-half hours of hyper-colloquialism, indecisiveness, and impulsivity.” But there were plenty of passionate yea-sayers as well, including one who recalled being fourteen in 1977 when the first film came out, and watching it twenty-one times (once a day) in its first three weeks. “*The Last Jedi* made me laugh,” the viewer commented. “It made me cry. It made me thrust my arms up in excitement.” Another yea-sayer wrote: “It had everything I could’ve wanted and more: A cast full of fleshed-out, kick-ass women; a relatable, tortured and believable villain; cute new aliens; a dash of that classic sci-fi cheese.”

In preparation for the new film, I watched, over the course of one equally dutiful and delightful week, all seven prior ones. I did so not in order of their release, but rather in the order of their place in the overall narrative. Remember, the first *Star Wars*, in 1977, turned out to be Episode IV, which Lucas followed with two sequels, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and *Return of the Jedi* (1983). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, he made three prequels, followed by a ten-year hiatus, before picking up two years ago—ceding creative control to other writers and directors after the sale of Lucasfilm to Disney—with Episode VII, *The Force Awakens*. *The Last Jedi* is episode VIII, with the final film of this sequel trilogy, still untitled, slated for December 2019.

Each of the three trilogies has its own particular mojo. The original three movies were cuter than I had recalled, and sillier, especially in the humor surrounding those odd-couple droids, C-3PO and R2-D2; and all three were suffused with a *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*-like jauntiness that in retrospect seems very much a hallmark of a particular moment in American cinema. The subsequent prequel trilogy is a bit of a slog, performing a lot of bio-

graphical back-and-fill to tell the story of young Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader, even as it offers a primer in the rapidly expanding use of computer-generated images, so that even the slight time gap between *The Phantom Menace* in 1999 and *Revenge of the Sith* six years later makes them two entirely different achievements technically.

As for the first two efforts in the current sequel trilogy, we should note that it’s no longer George Lucas behind them, but other, much younger writer-directors. Both J. J. Abrams (born in 1966), who directed *The Force Awakens*, and now Rian Johnson (born in 1973), who directed *The Last Jedi*, were kids during the original trilogy’s run; it’s pleasing to see the franchise being given new life by talented acolyte-directors who grew up in thrall to it and are now carrying the torch, and the Force, forward.

What results is about what you’d expect: both significant continuity and significant departure. For my part, I’ll confess that *Star Wars* without Darth Vader is a bit like *American Idol* without Simon Cowell; I miss my villain, complete with James Earl Jones’s ominous *basso profundo*. With Adam Driver as the neo-Vader, Kylo Ren, exuding tormented ambivalence and self-pity, villainy gets reconfigured even more securely within a family-dynamic and therapeutic framework. It is less purely evil. Some fans find this a salutary development, something that makes the film more contemporary, more interesting, more relevant. But—for me at any rate—relevance was never an important criterion, or even a welcome one, in an escapist adventure set long ago in a galaxy far, far away.

That said, *The Last Jedi*—which is both written and directed by Johnson, whose nimble turn in the 2012 time-travel sci-fi thriller *Looper* helped establish his cred with alternate-universe genres—certainly doesn’t fail to entertain. It brings the visual power of the series to a new level, especially in the brilliant marshaling of Fascist iconography (one scene, in

which the Empire’s General Hux addresses thousands of troops assembled in gigantic blocks of perfect lines, is straight out of Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*), and in the magnificent closing scene of battle, set in a salt desert where an underlying stratum of mineral-laden red dirt spurts blood-like crimson at every turn in the action.

The Last Jedi is also funnier, and in a new way. Sudden changes of register in the dialogue, from solemn to flippant, create a dimension of self-mockery that wasn’t there before. For instance, when a fire destroys the Jedi sacred books, Yoda comments that “page-turners they were not.” When General Hux is being given the runaround in a shaggy-dog radio transmission from the Resistance fighter pilot Poe Dameron, the stratagem is pointed out in a slangy aside by one of his officers (“I think he’s tooling with you, sir”). In the closing battle, Luke suffers a seemingly annihilating barrage of firepower from Kylo Ren’s fleet; when the red dust subsides, he’s still standing there, and calmly brushes a mote off his shoulder.

As with just about everything else in *The Last Jedi*, these comic feints have polarized fans, some of whom find such moves disconcerting and incoherent (that “hyper-colloquialism” one complained about to the *Times*), as if Rian Johnson either failed to understand, or didn’t trust, or even willfully undermined, the fundamental earnestness of *Star Wars*. I think an argument can be made that the comic gesturing draws on, and makes explicit, the underlying contrast between the Rebellion/Resistance—with its slapdash brio, its dingy and broken-down equipment, and its jaunty humor—and the gleaming, perfect, orderly, and humorless fascism of the Empire. *When the Fuehrer says, he is the master race, we Heil... Heil... right in the Fuehrer’s face!* A habit of insolent and subversive humor was a cultural and characterological weapon that democracies wielded against Fascist pomposity and solemnity—Spike Jones vs. Wagner—and *Star Wars* both grasped and utilized this from the start. ■

R. Scott Appleby

How to Survive Trump

One Nation After Trump

**A Guide for the Perplexed,
the Disillusioned, the Desperate,
and the Not-Yet Deported**

E.J. Dionne Jr., Norman J. Ornstein

& Thomas E. Mann

St. Martin's, \$25.99, 352 pp.

Publishing a hot-button political treatise that aims to assess the meaning of “current events” while transcending their moment, in order to propose sweeping reforms is an act of supreme self-confidence, if not hubris, even in ordinary times. To do so seven months into the all-bets-are-off presidency of a possibly deranged, morally bankrupt, wildly careening one-man wrecking ball risks folly. Who’s to say where this presidency is headed, or how it will end, and with what consequences for American democracy?

Against the odds, however, Dionne, Ornstein, and Mann have overcome the pitfalls of an “instant book” — save, perhaps, the inevitable taint of the overly familiar. (Readers will have long ago digested the dreary details of the first year of our political discontent, making room in the pit of the stomach for the fresh hell of a second.) Delivering practical tips for surviving “Trumpism,” the trio protect their analysis against immediate obsolescence by drawing this hopefully fleeting moment on a larger historical canvas.

The long view allows these proudly progressive public intellectuals to trace the historical roots of the Trump phenomenon to the collapse of traditional norms of American politics and public discourse over the past three decades, and to the simultaneous erosion of a shared sense of national purpose. The broad timeline also allows our reformers to envision a future in which these

norms, and the democratic institutions they once bolstered, are restored at greater strength.

The first half of the book is almost as difficult to read as the daily newspaper. For it is an unrelenting catalogue of Trump’s offenses against public decorum and common decency during the 2016 campaign, and his assault on competent governance, professional ethics, and American leadership abroad during the initial months of his presidency. How could this person be elected president? Dionne and company insist, rightly, that any hope of reversing the downward spiral unleashed by Trump and “his” supine Republican Congress turns on answering this question.

A chapter that could have been titled “Choose Your Poison” explores whether Trump voters were motivated by his un-

subtle race-baiting and fear-mongering, or by enduring economic malaise in the Rust Belt. The sad answer is “both.” While it is impossible to disentangle the upsurge of open bigotry and xenophobia from the loss of manufacturing jobs and the alienation of the American worker, “nativism and racial feeling, including outright racism...were indeed a decisive part of Trump’s appeal.” The authors point to various data, including the exit polls of voters who listed immigration as their most important issue and voted overwhelmingly for Trump, 64 percent to 33 percent. (But it is also true that voters who said that trade with other countries took away American jobs voted for Trump by a comparable margin.)

Old-fashioned populist resentment of “clueless” elites also spiked. The authors



quote a white working-class Trump supporter: “I’d love to see one-tenth of the outrage about the state of our lives out here that you have for Muslims from another country. You have no idea what our lives are like.”

Here, as elsewhere, the historical perspective is illuminating. It was the 1960s, when postwar prosperity was at its zenith, which saw the great gains in civil rights, a far more generous immigration policy, and an initially popular “war on poverty.” The authors, citing the economist Benjamin Friedman, note that a rising standard of living makes a society more open, tolerant, and democratic; by the same token, a sustained period of hard times uncorks a meanness in the land.

The authors’ method—distilling and contextualizing reams of public commentary, scholarly studies, and polling data—also produces a succinct, focused account of “the most unlikely achievement of [Trump’s] campaign”: the fact that he won the largest margin among white Evangelicals of any Republican presidential candidate since exit polling began. Catholics have nothing to crow about—white Catholics voted by almost exactly the same margin for Trump as all other whites—but the shift in the moral standards of white Evangelicals, Dionne and company marvel, was “genuinely breathtaking.”

In 2011, when asked if a politician who committed an immoral act could fulfill his or her public duties, only 30 percent of white Evangelicals said yes; in 2016, 72 percent said yes. White Evangelicals, the authors point out, went from being far less inclined than the country as a whole to separate a politician’s personal life from his or her professional life, to being more insistent than almost any other group on doing so. “It is hard to escape the conclusion that whatever else was going on, white Evangelicals changed their views on what had once been a matter of deep conviction to justify supporting a presidential candidate they knew to be, by their own moral reckoning, personally immoral,” they write. “It was one of the most dramatic examples of how Trump

debased so many aspects of American public life.”

Less convincing, in this case, is the historical explanation for this sea change. Surely there was more to it than the culmination of a long-festered reaction to the passage of civil-rights law under Lyndon Johnson, and the 1983 Supreme Court decision to uphold the Internal Revenue Service’s revocation of the tax-exempt status of Bob Jones University for discriminating against nonwhites. In any case, Dionne, Ornstein, and Mann echo the lament of Rob Schenck, a conservative Evangelical pastor who worried that the enormous Evangelical turnout for Trump “could be the undoing of American evangelicalism. We could just become a political operation in the guise of a church.”

The second part of *One Nation After Trump* outlines a series of proposals to revive the dying art of political compromise and evidence-based policymaking, and to reinvigorate civil society and local community groups for civic participation and social change. Significant space is given to the urgent need to mitigate the practice and effects of gerrymandering and to defeat Republican Party efforts to undermine deliberative democracy. Ensuring the enforcement of voting rights is also a major objective, to be gained by a series of mostly common-sense measures (e.g., guaranteeing online voter registration in every state; expanding hours, days, sites, and improved technologies for Election Day voting).

A few passages in these concluding chapters are idealistic and aspirational to a fault, and some of the proposals and expectations are thinly sketched and improbable in the near term (e.g., instituting one eighteen-year term for Supreme Court justices, rather than a lifetime appointment; the ascent of more long-term “builders” and fewer short-term “traders” in the corporate world). But most of the recommendations are measured, sensible, and conceivably more plausible in the mid to long term. Taken together the reform agenda set forth in these pages could

suffice in achieving the authors’ stated, modest intent—namely, to spark a conversation among progressives about how best to translate the lessons learned from Trump’s election into an action plan for moving the electorate toward a moderate center dedicated to pursuing the common good.

The treatise is a manifesto and thus inescapably partisan. Although Democrats shoulder a portion of the blame for the mess America finds itself in, and come in for stinging criticism for misreading key elements of the electorate and blithely ignoring large swaths of “flyover country,” the authors leave no doubt where the lion’s share of the responsibility lies. The Republican Party leadership’s relentless, cynical, narrowly self-interested, and hypocritical (I’m summarizing, believe me) manipulation of millions of Americans into a self-defeating distrust of government and, more egregiously, of their fellow citizens has led the GOP into a dead end. It threatens to become no more than a “white man’s populist party.”

This may be wishful thinking, along the lines of the authors’ speculation that disgruntled Republicans might move away from Trump’s rightward GOP and become “neomoderates” (another historical allusion, recalling the formation of the neoconservative movement that was a reaction to the excesses of a tired liberalism). Such a political realignment would unfold only if the progressives include in a new centrist coalition a healthy public space for traditional conservative social values and economic policy.

This historically informed, forward-looking assessment of our current situation, “rushed into publication” out of an understandable sense of urgency, merits careful consideration. Let us hope that the authors’ vision of “a new patriotism,” grounded in a spirit of inclusion and inspired by a love of American democracy, remains within reach. ■

R. Scott Appleby is the Marilyn Keough Dean of Notre Dame’s Keough School of Global Affairs and professor of history at the University of Notre Dame.

Regina Munch

Shelter from the Storm

What You Did Not Tell

A Russian Past and the Journey Home

Mark Mazower

Other Press, \$25.95, 400 pp.

In his 1998 book *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, historian Mark Mazower marveled that the twentieth century ended as well as it did. After catastrophic experiments with fascism and communism, Europe had emerged as a stable collective of democracies that was about to unite, for the most part, in a common currency. Counter to those who saw this triumph as the inevitable spreading of our superior political economy—democratic capitalism—Mazower cautioned that the peaceful denouement of the century was “just one possible outcome of our predecessors’ struggles and uncertainties.” It is easy to forget that, perhaps with just a twist here or a tweak there, things could have turned out much worse.

Mazower, who teaches at Columbia University, has written of these horrors from a scholarly remove. But his most recent book, *What You Did Not Tell: A Russian Past and the Journey Home*, makes them personal. Growing up in London’s Highgate neighborhood, Mazower had heard stories of his grandparents’ flight from the 1917 Russian Civil War and observed his family making a modest middle-class life in Britain. Summoning his talents as a historian, Mazower dives into Russian, Belgian, American, and British population archives, complicated oral histories, and most vitally, letters, diaries, and photographs gathered from his family. The result is a meticulous, sensitive, and fascinating account of his family’s remarkable story, one that provides a window into the hopes and fears of those who suffered some of the worst calamities of the twentieth century.

Mazower introduces us to his paternal grandfather Max, a radical involved with the Bundists, an anti-tsarist Jewish socialist movement. Hiding their subversive network of revolutionaries under middle-class manners, Max and other Bundists set up an illegal print shop to produce their tracts. In Łódź, Max organized demonstrations against the government, notably the 1905 protests after government forces fired on a group of children. After an arrest and escape from exile in Siberia, Max found himself the target of the ascendant Bolshevik party, and many of his fellow Bundists, as well as one of his brothers, were killed. Max fled Russia in 1919, eventually settling in London.

Other family members had no less remarkable stories. Max’s wife Frouma lost much of her community of revolutionaries to Bolshevik purges. Frouma’s daughter Ira experienced a deeply traumatic flight from the Soviet Union, and all her life compensated for her early poverty with extravagance and superficiality. Max’s son André disavowed his father’s leftist past, converting to Catholicism, supporting Franco’s fascism, and working himself into T. S. Eliot’s social circle. André’s mother Sofia had been an anti-Bolshevik revolutionary, and was likely hunted by her Bolshevik brother Nicolai Krylenko, who rose to become the People’s Commissar for Justice of the USSR. Sofia lived among other revolutionaries in Paris, such as Leon Trotsky and Pyotr Kropotkin. The philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin remarked on meeting Sofia, and credited her friend with encouraging his interest in Marxism.

The overwhelming sense that Mazower conveys is the tendency of history to be like a “slalom course, a battle of wits with whatever lies round the next corner.” Rather than a predictable, reasoned path, people find themselves engaged in a “wager on fate,” and there

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Mark Mazower

may be no explaining why some wagers pay off and others do not. This is its own kind of trauma, and the members of the Mazower family find their own ways to cope with this uncertainty and the defeat of their ideals.

“What invisible psychic struggles, what efforts of renunciation” had Max and Frouma endured to give Mazower’s father, referred to as “Dad,” a safe home? In Russia, Max had pretended to middle-class respectability as a cover for his illegal printing; in London, he embraced it as his survival strategy. He exchanged subversion for domesticity, making a comfortable home for his family rather than embracing the uncertainty and solitude of revolutionary life. He and his neighbors, many of them former revolutionaries, bonded over British politics and support of the Labour Party. They took walks; they cultivated a backyard garden. And into this quietly pleasant life the author’s father was born.

The first of the Mazowers not to have lived through persecution, flight, and resettlement, Mazower’s father was

born, lived, and died all in the same London neighborhood. The traumas of the twentieth century that his family had endured, and in their own way overcome, gave Dad his own foundation for a contented life: an “enduring bond” with his neighborhood, and with the people, places, and memories that made up the “web” that he was born into. Mazower muses that the violence of the twentieth century affected Dad through its effects on his family, but also because “he knew what good fortune was whenever he looked at his family tree.”

In *Dark Continent*, Mazower observed that the social, economic, and existential damage of the twentieth century made Europeans weary of heroic politics. Revolution seemed uncontrollable, meta-solutions too risky. Politics became “something to be endured” rather than one’s *raison d’être*. Instead, “intimacy and domesticity became more important than ever as stabilizing factors in people’s lives.” Critics then and

now attack liberal democracy for being bourgeois and complacent, but it was far more tolerable than the oppression, hatred, and mass murder that had come from utopian ideologies. Mazower has seen this retreat from politics unfold in his own family, and doesn’t seem quite sure what to think. Concluding his family’s history, he acknowledges that it is not the beloved story of a lone revolutionary defying the odds to win a victory. He has in mind people like his uncle André and André’s mother Sofia, who give everything they have to a cause, but are “unmoored by the storms of history” and, at least in his characterization, bitter and alone.

In some way, the Mazowers did prevail over the horrors of the last century, precisely because they found their mooring amidst the storm. And so the historian wonders: “What would it be to tell the story of a life that illustrated the unfolding of a different, much older theme: the pursuit of contentment and well-being? Of life lived across generations as a story not so much about suffering and the isolation and loneliness of an authentic individuality as about resilience and tenacity and the virtues of silence and pragmatism and taking pleasure in small things?”

It’s an appealing thought, especially in the hyper-politicized times we live in. Still, one has to wonder: Where would we be without the revolutionaries, the ascetics, the people who accept no half-measures? Surely for them, “contentment” is lethal; the storms of history are where victory is won. When horror threatens, can domesticity stand up to the slalom course of history?

Mazower quips that history’s losers might matter more than its heroes. “No victories last forever,” he insists. “It is what you do with defeat that counts.” The romantic revolutionary might fester in resentment and misery after defeat. But Max, Frouma, and countless others have picked up, kept going, and taken solace in each other. If that’s not a life well lived, I’m not sure what is. ■

Regina Munch is *Commonweal*’s editorial assistant.

Denis Donoghue

An Ambiguous Character

On Empson

Michael Wood

Princeton University Press, \$22.95, 224 pp.

I spent one evening in William Empson's company, in a manner of speaking. I was Professor of Modern English and American Literature at University College, Dublin. One of my colleagues, Norman White, suggested that I might like to invite Empson to read his poems. I might indeed, on condition that Dr. White would do the work entailed: write the letter of invitation, fix the date, fee, the travel, would Mrs. Empson be coming?, the hotel, the meal before the reading, taxis, and so forth. Agreed.

Nothing of the meal stays in my memory, but when Empson and I were taking the short walk from the Montrose Hotel to the campus, he surprised me by these words. Empson: "Do you know much about Andrew Marvell?" I: "Only what everybody knows, I suppose." Empson: "Do you know much about his housekeeper?" I: "Not a thing." Empson: "Pity. I think she's the clue to the whole thing." Since I didn't know what the whole thing was, the clue to it reduced me to silence.

This persisted till we reached the lecture hall, where a remarkably large audience of students was awaiting the poet. We worked our way down the many steps to the podium, where I introduced him with my usual formula: "Please welcome our distinguished guest, poet and critic William Empson." Then I sat down a yard or so from him and thought my duty well enough fulfilled. Not yet. Empson looked at me and asked: "Have you seen my dentures?" I: "No, I'm afraid not, Professor Empson." Empson:

"Perhaps I left them in the restaurant?" I had nothing to say. Empson: "Oh well, perhaps in London." At this point the top door on the right-hand side of the lecture hall opened and Mrs. Empson entered, accompanied by Gareth de Brun, a familiar literary man well known for being one of the few Dubliners who sported a pigtail. They made their way down the steps to the only two vacant seats in the front row. Empson waited till they were settled before he began.

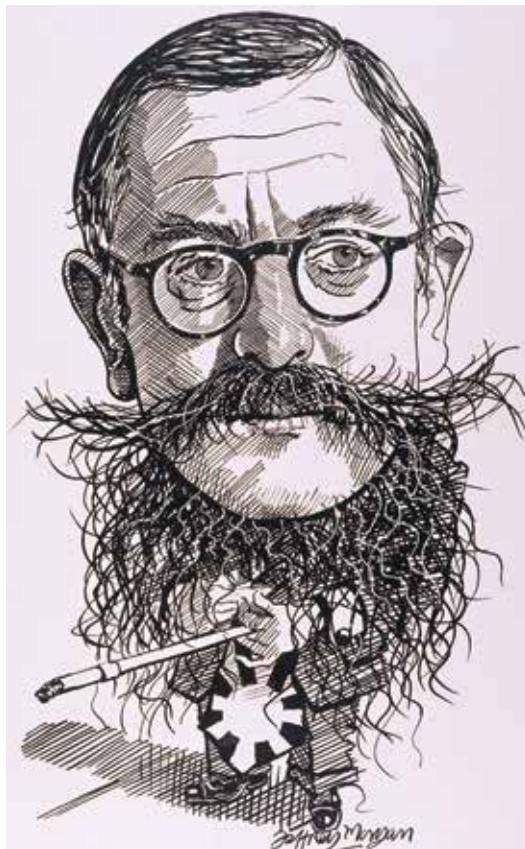
Introducing each poem, he indicated in a sentence or two the circumstances in which he wrote it: where, when, and in what mood. After the second poem, as I remember, Mrs. Empson called out: "William, you're very boring." He let that pass. But after the next poem she called out more formally: "William,

you are very boring." Empson stopped, looked at the audience, and said: "My wife tells me I am very boring." He then finished the poem, whereupon Mrs. Empson and Gareth de Brun got up and left. Empson continued without further interruption in his "grandee English accent," as Michael Wood describes it. I recall only one further moment, when a student called out "Give us 'Aubade,' Professor." Empson complied. "It seemed the best thing to be up and go."

When he had read for more than an hour, I called the evening to a halt and thanked him. The applause sounded as if it would never stop. I handed Empson over to Norman White and went home.

Michael Wood's book is as all such books should be, an introduction, continuously helpful, never boring, addressed to readers who may have met one or two of Empson's poems in the standard anthologies but have not gone forward to become learned in his work. Such readers probably know Empson as a critic, author of *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951), *Milton's God* (1961), and several collections of his essays and reviews. Those readers may also have come across Empson in his controversial style, disputing with weightier scholars—notably Helen Gardner and Rosemond Tuve—who knew more of the matter in hand than he did. Professor Wood is decently informative on everything that needs to be clarified, especially on *Seven Types of Ambiguity* where the whole thing—if I may repeat that opaque phrase—starts. He is excellent, too, on the complex words in Empson's vocabulary: "ambiguity," "pastoral," "irony"—far-darting words that need a deft touch.

I found myself assenting to Wood on every page, except on page 11, where he refers to what Empson saw as "the invasion of English and American universities by hordes of Christian critics." I



don't recall the hordes or the invasion. The Christian critics in those years were few: T. S. Eliot, W. K. Wimsatt, Walter Ong, and the one that Empson professed himself glad not to have read, Hugh Kenner. That critic read Empson (*Gnomon*, 1958, pp. 249–262) so spiritedly that I wish I could have heard a conversation, which never happened, between Kenner and Wood on the poems.

In *On Empson* Wood reads about ten poems, some well known, others not. His method is explication, paraphrase. When I was young, we were warned against this method; it was alleged to be fatally misleading. But Wood knows that, without it, it would be impossible to enter Empson's poems. He is also splendid in quoting relevancies from other sources—as from J. L. Austin's *Philosophical Papers*: "We may cheerfully subscribe to, or have the grace to be torn between, simply disparate ideals." I would want to ask Austin how much weight I should put on "cheerfully" and "subscribe."

The poems that Professor Wood chooses are hard enough but not the hardest. As it happened, I had been reading a long, arduous commentary on Empson's "The Teasers" by Mark Thompson in the May/June issue of the *PN Review*. This poem was once held to be accessible. Empson included it in readings (but not in the one I attended), recorded it, let it be anthologized, put it in *The Gathering Storm* (1940) but later told Christopher Ricks that "it doesn't make sense, you can't find out what it's about." Even after Thompson's commentary, I feel blank about it. Wood lets it alone, concentrating on "To an Old Lady," "Villanelle," "This Last Pain," "Autumn on Nan-Yueh," "Note on Local Flora," and several other poems he likes. His readings seem to me always honorable, highly intelligent, the sort I would like to hear in one of his lectures at Princeton. ■

Denis Donoghue holds the Henry James Chair in English and American Letters at New York University. His most recent book is *Irish Essays* (2011).

LETTERS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

meta-analyses that offer a look into a rich and complicated mind. Coates's own family story, *Between the World and Me*, is also complicated. The fact that he should enter into conversation about race in America with no less than the first black President of the United States, another man with a complicated family story, is intriguing. That encounter and Coates's reaction to Trump's election, "The First White President" (reprinted as an Epilogue in *Eight Years*) drew me to write "Nope to Hope" (a column, not a review).

Good that Anglada's reading of *Eight Years in Power* "further opened" her eyes to racism in America. Regrettable that this valuable experience leads her to conclude that my different reading is an "arrogant and shallow dismissal" — one due to my white racist insensitivity, and probably *Commonweal's* as well.

Readers who have previously encountered Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, W.E.B. Dubois, Martin Luther King Jr., James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Malcolm X, William Julius Wilson, Maya Angelou, and a host of other African-American poets, playwrights, and public intellectuals, and those who grew up during the civil rights era in cities with large black populations and rampant racism, may very well appreciate Coates's insights without finding them quite so original and well-researched as Anglada does.

In fact, my column used adjectives like "instructive," "reflective," and "right" to describe his positions and warned against ignoring "his anguish at the threat of reinvigorated racism." But I also criticized some of his views as "short-sighted" and "wrong," in particular his "default view of racism as all-explanatory"—this Anglada finds intolerable. Only my stereotypical view of Coates as angry, it seems, could account for my skepticism of the "overwhelming evidence Coates offers to back up his argument." (You cannot read Coates's earlier *Between the World and Me* without recognizing "anger" as its emotional propellant.

That he felt compelled to ask President Obama if he was angry, was revealing and poignant. Obama said he was not).

Sorry to disappoint, and possibly further infuriate, Anglada; but the evidence that racism was the main cause of Trump's victory is not "overwhelming." The election data has been sliced, diced, and examined like sheep entrails; no such overriding explanation has emerged. Was racism a factor in Trump's victory? Yes. Is racism the critical factor explaining, for one instance, why 206 counties that voted twice for Obama voted for Trump in 2016? Not obviously. (Anglada writes from a Catholic Worker farm in one of those counties. Perhaps she could spend some time chatting with her neighbors about this data.)

Anglada hails Ta-Nehisi Coates's "damning picture" of white supremacy "at the very foundation of this nation." Is this news? My grade and high school exposed me and many Catholics to the catalytic role of slavery in the colonial and post-revolutionary American economy, to the three-fifths clause in the Constitution, and to the abolitionist crusade against slavery.

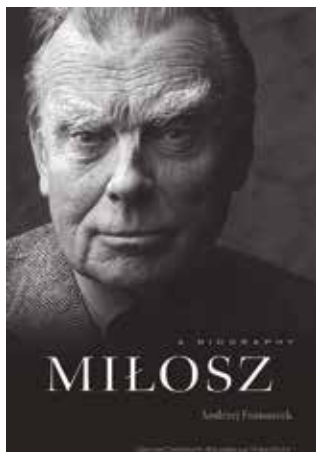
Yet if white supremacy is at the nation's "very foundation," the question for Coates and for all of us is, what else is there? Is the acknowledgment of multiple motives at work in American history—religious convictions, Enlightenment principles, frontier egalitarianism, regional and class interests, instinctive compassion, and so on—merely a distraction from white racism? Or is such an awareness of multiple, mixed, and contending factors the best basis we have for restitution, resolution, and hope? Does examining conflicting impulses among 2016 voters (regional, class, gender, ethnicity, education, and Hillary-hatred) dilute our moral outrage? That seems a counsel of despair: if racism is so persistent and pervasive, so unyielding to decades of reforms and efforts, then there can be no remedy. I do not accept that logic, and I doubt that Coates does.

BOOKMARKS

Anthony Domestico

Literary biographies tend to come in two flavors. First, there's the big, fat, encyclopedic type—the kind that gets called “magisterial,” the kind that wins awards. Think of A. David Moody's three-volume Ezra Pound biography, or J. Michael Lennon's recent 960-page doorstopper, *Norman Mailer: A Double Life*. Then there's another type: shorter, stranger, more distinctive in style and argumentation. This kind offers not an exhaustive combing through of a life's minutiae (“and then, on December 3, Joyce had three pints and two shots of whiskey, followed by some fish and chips...”) but a particular angle of vision, a critic's sense of how the life and work fit together, or how and when they don't. Think of Elizabeth Hardwick's *Herman Melville* or Muriel Spark's *Mary Shelley: A Biography*—both slender works of brilliance in which we see a fit of sensibility between biographer and subject. Two recent books, Andrzej Franaszek's *Milosz: A Biography* and John Irwin's *The Poetry of Weldon Kees: Vanishing as Presence*, exemplify these two styles.

The first biography of the Nobel Prize-winning poet in English, *Milosz: A Biography* was ten years in the research and writing, another six in the translating. Czeslaw Milosz led a historically interesting—which is to say, a deeply tragic—life. Born in Lithuania in 1911, Milosz and his family fled the German army during World War I, living for short periods of time in Estonia and Belarus before settling in Wilno, where Milosz also attended university. There, he became involved, first excitedly and then uncomfortably, with left-wing literary movements. He witnessed anti-Jewish violence—“not far removed from a pogrom” Franaszek tells us—and bravely spoke out against it.



When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Milosz left Warsaw, where he had worked for Radio Poland, only to sneak back into the Nazi-occupied city in 1940. There he published underground poetry, witnessed the Warsaw Uprising, and moved from safe house to safe house, narrowly escaping capture on several occasions. After the war, he became a cultural attaché at the Polish Embassy in Washington, D.C., then ran afoul of the Communist Party and had his passport revoked. He publicly defected, living in exile—first in France, then in America—for most of the remaining fifty-three years of his life. He returned to Poland only after he had won the Nobel Prize and the Iron Curtain had fallen. (His poetry served as an inspiration for the Solidarity Movement.) As I said, it's a historically interesting life.

Once you start talking about Milosz's life, it's difficult to stop. There are just too many interesting events and telling details, and Franaszek offers them in abundance. Once during World War II, at risk of being discovered with a falsified passport, Milosz swallowed his documents. For years, he had a free-wheeling correspondence with Thomas Merton. (In general, Franaszek is good

on Milosz's complicated but essential relationship to Catholicism. He's less good on Milosz's many affairs, some of which took place quite late in his life. Franaszek informs us, by way of extenuation, that in 1981 the poet's testosterone level was 755, “whereas men over fifty could usually expect an average of 300.” Good to know.)

We also get details about the bit players in Milosz's life: a classmate, Stanislaw Kownacki, was obsessed with “constructing shortwave radios and staying in touch with other enthusiasts worldwide”; a relative named Eugeniusz was so absentminded that he was a few days into a hunting trip before remembering that he had locked his wife in the pantry.

The problem with telling Milosz's life isn't finding good details. It's knowing when to cut them. On this score, Franaszek isn't ruthless enough. Here's a paragraph about a hundred pages in:

A neighbour at the hotel, Boleslaw Bochwic, who was preparing for his doctoral exam in chemistry, was fascinated by Milosz and introduced him to a large circle of interesting Poles living in Paris. Through his good offices, the poet met the talented young musician Zygmunt Mycielski, who later composed music for Milosz's poems, and also the famous and feted composer, Karol Szymanowski. He resumed his acquaintance with Roman Maciejewski, who provided Milosz with access to a host of major Polish figures from the musical and artistic world.

The swirl of names is all but impossible to keep track of, especially since Bochwic and Mycielski don't appear again. (Mycielski, Szymanowski, and Maciejewski do in very, very minor ways.) Remember Kownacki, the shortwave radio enthusiast? He doesn't reenter the narrative for three hundred pages. And

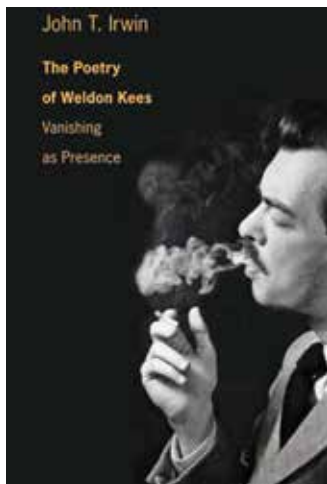
Eugeniusz, the scatterbrained relative? He's never heard from again. Good biography, like good literature, lives by its details, but the details have to be integrated to some larger purpose. They have to *mean* something. Too often, Franaszek's details don't.

Milosz's life was interesting, but it's worth reading about at great length because that life was transmuted into art. So how does Franaszek measure the life against the work? Primarily through quotation. Indeed, you could compile a decent *Selected Writings of Milosz* just from the quotations that Franaszek offers here. Most chapters begin with two or three long epigraphs from Milosz's work. So do individual sections within these chapters. As befits an epigraph, these quotations aren't contextualized; they just sit there, providing an implicit frame for the section to come. This can be a good strategy when you have lines of thematic clarity like this: "Endurance comes only from enduring. / With a flick of the wrist I fashioned an invisible rope, / And climbed it and it held me."

Most pages contain a long block quotation, frequently more than one, and Franaszek rarely slows down to interpret how and what these chunks of text mean. Such generous selections habituate us to Milosz's music and imagery, but we don't get a sense of what Franaszek makes of them—where he believes they succeed and where he believes they fail. Their subtle meanings, their felicities and imperfections, all are simply assumed. Franaszek quotes liberally but analyzes stingily.

The book's introduction has an epigraph from Milosz's *The Witness of Poetry*: "What surrounds us, here and now, is not guaranteed. It could just as well not exist—and so man constructs poetry out of the remnants found in ruins." Franaszek has thoroughly excavated the ruins of Milosz's life. But what he has constructed out of the remnants does not illuminate the life; it merely records.

Irwin's *The Poetry of Weldon Kees* is as light as Franaszek's book is dense, less a product of research than a labor of love. (To be fair,



there's a lot less research to be done: Kees died at forty-one after leading a relatively quiet life.) Kees was a great and versatile poet—Irwin calls him "the most interesting poet of his generation"—but his achievements in verse often have been overshadowed by his mysterious death. In July 1955, he told some friends that he was considering suicide and others that he was lighting out for Mexico. On July 19, Kees's abandoned car was discovered near the Golden Gate Bridge. His body, however, wasn't found, and where there isn't a body there will be legends. Perhaps, some speculated, Kees was alive and writing under a pseudonym; Kees-truthers claimed to have spotted him in Mexico.

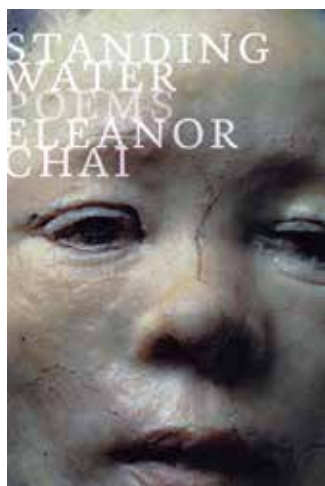
Irwin is less interested in what happened to Kees (his suicide isn't really in doubt) than in how his poetry prepared the ground for such a vanishing act, and how that vanishing act might affect our reading of his poetry. Irwin makes a daring interpretive move: What if we consider Kees's suicide as itself a kind of poetic act, a decision that needs to be read for its aesthetic justification and consequences?

So, like a literary detective, Irwin investigates the scene. Police found two books near Kees's bedside, Dostoevsky's *The Devils* and Unamuno's *The Tragic Sense of Life*, both of which consider the philosophical and theological implications of suicide. What happens, Irwin asks, if we read these books as Kees's suicide note? Irwin, after close-reading

selections from both texts, offers this tentative conclusion: "Kees...placed the question of suicide between two poles: on the one hand, Unamuno's attempt to recover for modern man the reality of a personal God, what he calls the 'God-man,' and on the other, Kirilov's attempt to begin the creation of a future man-god."

Irwin then continues his bizarre and thrilling "intertextual interpretation" of Kees's death. First, he leaps to *Nonverbal Communication*, a book Kees cowrote with the psychiatrist Jurgen Ruesch, then to a 1953 story from the *San Francisco Chronicle*, then to a 1951 letter in which Kees mentions F. Scott Fitzgerald, and finally to the concluding paragraph of Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*. Why end there? Because, Irwin tells us, in that novel's final paragraphs, as the protagonist Dick Driver "mov[es] through a succession of ever smaller towns, he seems to vanish into the landscape until both narrator and reader lose sight of him...a situation in which we would be left to wonder whether Dick is still alive—and how would we know?" Fitzgerald's melancholic ending, then, both rhymes with Kees's own (like Dick, Kees's particular way of vanishing leaves him stranded between life and death, present despite his absence) and completely departs from it (Kees doesn't fade away but jumps out of the picture).

It's all very weird and absolutely engrossing. Where Franaszek includes incidental details in order to give us a complete portrait of Milosz's life, Irwin uses them as a chance to interpret, to imagine, to speculate. In another chapter, for instance, Irwin begins by remarking upon the "fearful symmetry" between the deaths of Kees and Hart Crane, the American poet who in 1933 drowned himself in the Gulf of Mexico. In a late poem called "Robinson," Kees first mentions a "mirror from Mexico, stuck to the wall," which hauntingly "Reflects nothing at all," and then begins his final stanza like this: "Outside, white buildings yellow in the sun. / Outside, the birds circle continuously." Irwin notes that *White Buildings* was Crane's first book of poems, then



that the birds circling echo the end of Melville's *Moby-Dick*, then that one of Crane's best poems is called "At Melville's Tomb"—a poem that anticipates Crane's own death, beginning with an image of "the dice of drowned men's bones" pummeled by the waves.

This isn't source-hunting for source-hunting's sake. It's all in service of Irwin's broader claim: that for Kees, as for Crane, a mysterious vanishing became its own form of presence. Or, as Irwin more baldly puts it, "such a mystery"—that is to say, such a death—"could kick-start a writer's reputation."

Eleanor Chai's excellent debut collection of poetry, *Standing Water*, also investigates the relationship between absence and presence. The book's narrative, refracted across twenty-five poems and through the lenses of mythology, photography, and sculpture, is one of primal loss. After Chai's birth, her mother suffered from postpartum depression and was institutionalized—a fact revealed to Chai only years later, after she has been raised first by her grandparents and then her father, who coldly tells her, "With the boys, she was strange for a few months / ...she got better. With you, she stayed *strange*."


The loss is especially painful for Chai's elder brother, who is old enough to be conscious of the rupture even if he doesn't fully understand it. What he does know, and what Chai herself comes to know, is that rupture doesn't

result in obliteration: it's not "as if all trace of her could be erased, / as if the void could be etched over." The mother remains a "*throbbing blankness*, [a] *human palimpsest*." Even for Chai, who didn't know her mother and who doesn't reunite with her until just before she dies, the lost mother becomes "the pull of the moon, the slide of the tow. / She holds me in the water with the arms of a ghost."

Chai experiences guilt, illogical but deeply felt, endlessly rehearsing her "fault / in the dark matter of the Firstborn whose first // six years were erased when his mother and her infant girl vanished." By "dark matter," Chai primarily means something like "tragic story." But she also suggests the cosmological sense of dark matter: that stuff, nearly 30 percent of the universe's mass, that can't be seen but can be measured by its gravitational effects, the throbbing blankness that invisibly shapes and distorts everything there is, including us. Chai dreams of calling forth her mother from her absence: "I thought I could do it: body you forth / create/ make a formal being shapely enough // to restore you to some life." But such attempts fail. She can only measure the damage loss has left.

In "Abandon of the Eyes," Chai describes how lost objects, "her missing / pearl choker, her night / clothes," point back to a lost person: "I imagine them where / she is, in a ruthless version of St. Augustine's / storehouse for memory, a *spreading / limitless* room for the hoarded / —a camp at a border holding hostage / all I have forgotten." For Augustine, interiority is so complex that it might be called limitless; it's the site where we find God and ourselves. For Chai, loss is so complex that it might be called limitless; it's the site where we make our identity, or find it already made.

In enjambed lines that flow into one another, Chai smudges any clear distinction between past and present. To see a photograph of her mother is to "drop / a homing device back in time to spy // into the landscape of my infancy." To think of the myth of Persephone is to hear her own painful story: "There







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was no nymph to save us, no Cyane to try." To see a sculpture by Rodin is to think of its deceased model: "I am long dead, but I survive." Time is a palimpsest, haunted by that which came before and still abides.

Susan Miller's first book of poems, *Communion of Saints*, also sees time as a palimpsest, though the past for her is less a haunting than a sustaining presence. It's a deeply Catholic sense of time—a fact signaled by the book's title, of course, but also by its four numbered sections: three—"Faith," "Hope," and "Love"—are named after the theological virtues; the final, "Pax et bonum," after the motto of St. Francis of Assisi. Throughout, Miller channels Catholic artists from the past, including Hopkins and his musicality ("he is lifted then too, / all sinew and soul thrilled in the high reaches / of Christ's clutches, to whom all things / are light, and lifted, and lifting"), O'Connor and her pecu-



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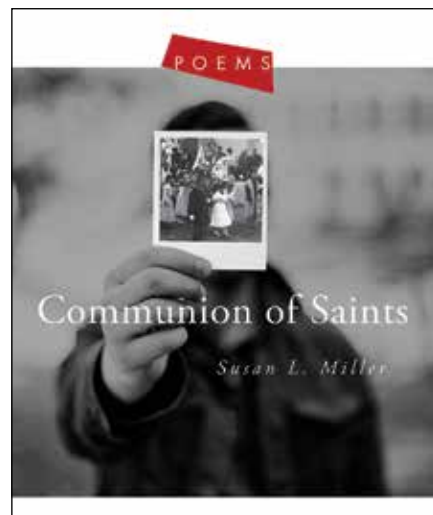
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liarity ("She's good / with birds, Miss Flannery, as proved // when as a girl she taught her favorite / chicken to walk backward as a stunt").

Chai's poetry layers identity and time. In any given poem, she can be both herself and her mother; now can also be then: "Do we die with your *are* and still / *am* and *is*?" Such layering is even more explicit in Miller's poems, as her titles indicate: "Portrait of Jess as St. Lucy," "Self-Portrait as St. Christopher." The ordinary and the sacred, the past and present, sometimes come together from a sensory perception, as when the speaker's friend flickeringly mirrors the martyred St. Lucy: "I know it's just a trick / of smoke, our dinner leftovers on a plate, but / for a minute I could swear she's offering up her eyes." At other times, the resemblance is more theological, as when the speaker, like St. John of the Cross, experiences a dark night of the soul, "the air howling in [her] ears, and then // darkness," which yields to the reassuring presence of "that hand / that wraps itself around the human heart and presses gently / two times every second."

Miller has great technical facility (no surprise, given that she studied with Marie Ponsot), and she's comfortable working in many different forms. She also has a slight tendency toward the just-so ending, the affirmation of a religious comfort that isn't cheap—her poems don't turn away from poverty or bodily suffering—but does sometimes seem too tidy. "A Vision" ends with "every man / and woman, every child, clean and naked, / brighter than the glow of a thousand candles," another with "Sister Carol, married to God...singing alleluia," another with the speaker "say[ing] / pax et bonum to every monk and nun I pass." Give me instead the wonderfully messy, pleasingly overloaded conclusion to "Portrait of Jess as St. Augustine," in which a tattoo "needle vibrates. Its buzz like / a thousand thousand bees, turning in the side / of a blasted dripping overripe lopsided stolen pear."

Catholicism is messy, as the best poems here acknowledge. In "Gerard



Manley Hopkins Looks at a Cloud," we get both the "gnarled root torn from its bed / and tossed onto the dung-pile" and "the drifting crowd / of clouds like steam opening the sky," the exhilarating search for the right "words for the cirrus, / the cumulus, the nimbostratus" as well as the deadening sense that "There is no human friend. There is none." It's a faith of absence and presence, one that acknowledges the seeming limitlessness of loss but also asserts that all shall be well: "Would you // call it a miracle if you knew / that wherever you went, / someone provided for you?" ■

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‘Be Such as God Made You’

Amanda C. Knight

As a PhD student in early Christian theology, I describe, analyze, and evaluate ancient texts. I have also been, I think, a relatively thoughtful Christian for most of my life, so the texts I study inevitably intersect with my own experiences and beliefs. Remarkably, this intersection has often proved most edifying on the subject of body image—an issue I have long wrestled with and about which the contemporary church has largely remained silent.

I am twenty-eight-years old. For as long as I can remember I have had severe anxiety about my appearance. But I didn’t entirely understand the extent to which that anxiety affected me until I

met the man who is now my husband. The first time he kissed me, I trembled and I cried. But it was not from any abundance of romantic feeling. It was because he was so close to my face—close enough, I imagined, to see every flaw.

I also wept the first time I let him touch my bare, clean face, knowing that beneath his gentle fingers lay scars and scabs that were left from a recent round of my obsessive skin-picking. It was a habit I had fallen into as a teenager, one that started as an attempt to deal with acne but quickly evolved into a form of self-punishment. My sense of worth was bound up in how I felt about my appearance. And if I felt ugly, I had a sense that my ugliness

ought to be further displayed. So I created more blemishes. I was also convinced that I was too short, my breasts were too small, and my figure too girlish and skinny.

I know I am not alone in my struggle. Research shows that the majority of women, including adolescents and even young girls, feel dissatisfied with their bodies. But the heart of the problem is not merely dissatisfaction with bodies but their objectification. Art critic and writer John Berger perceptively observed that the experience of “being looked at” leads women to see themselves as “an object of vision: a sight.” Psychologist Rachel Calogero argues “that the sexually objectifying experiences encountered by girls and women in their day-to-day environments lead them to internalize this objectifying gaze and to turn it on themselves.” In other words, women and girls begin to view their own bodies as objects distinct from themselves—objects that, importantly, must be sexually attractive to be valuable. Women receive these objectifying messages not only through social interaction but through the nearly inescapable exposure to media. Such was certainly my own experience: the images of flawless actresses in advertisements and television shows, the photo-shopped models on billboards and magazine covers, and the frequent comments from those around me regarding my appearance or that of other women pressed home the message of my own deficiency.

Because the female body that the culture upholds as ideal consists of generally unattainable and even incompatible physical characteristics, the majority of women will always fall short. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that self-objectification is associated with depression, sexual dysfunction, and eating disorders.

I’ve never heard this issue addressed from the pulpit. Certainly some churches affirm women in their “inner beauty” (though others tell women that “sometimes the barn needs a fresh coat of paint”), but mostly these concerns with body image go unnoticed or unmentioned.

Surprisingly, a few leaders of the ancient church noticed the problem. In their world, too, the bodies of women were judged according to harsh standards. And, while some patristic authors were far from kind to women (Tertullian, for example, called women “the devil’s gateway”), others—still imperfect and still men of their time—responded boldly against the objectification of women’s bodies.

Take Clement of Alexandria (150–215). Clement understood Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount (“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?”) to describe the innate value of the human body. He observed women buying inordinately expensive clothing just “for looking at.” To him, these purchases indicated that these women actually valued the clothes more than their own bodies. Female bodies, rather than being useful like men’s, were looked at as adornments. Clement responded by affirming the value and inherent loveliness of women’s bodies, because they too had been created by God. “Is it not monstrous, that while horses, birds, and the rest of the animals, spring and bound from the grass and meadows, rejoicing in ornament that is their own, in mane, and natural color, and varied plumage; woman, as if inferior to brute

creation, should think herself so unlovely as to need foreign, and bought, and painted beauty?” he proclaimed.

For the same reason, Cyprian of Carthage (200–258) understood that women’s bodies are inherently valuable. Cyprian, in a work on the dress of virgins, counseled them thus: “Therefore hear me, O virgins, as a parent.... Be such as God the Creator made you; be such as the hand of your father ordained you. Let your countenance remain in you incorrupt, your neck unadorned, your figure simple.”

John Chrysostom (349–407), archbishop of Constantinople and the most distinguished preacher of the early church, frequently warned against the expense of outward adornment out of his passionate concern for the poor, yet also showed pastoral concern about the anxiety he perceived in women regarding their appearance. Indeed, John spoke about this anxiety as a kind of enslavement. Moreover, John appeared to have an inchoate idea that this enslaving anxiety was a communal problem, the responsibility for which was shared by men. For example, in a homily condemning the “the tyranny of wealth,” John added the following comments: “Is gold good? Yes, it is good for almsgiving for the relief of the poor; it is good, not for unprofitable use, to be hoarded up or buried in the earth, to be worn on the hands or the feet or the head. It was discovered for this end, that with it we should loose the captives, not form it into a chain for the image of God. Use thy gold for this, to loose him that is bound, not to chain her that is free.” Remarkably, John addressed the entire congregation in these exhortations, and seemingly men in particular by his use of “we” and “her.” It is “we” who form the chains for “her.” In this way, John implied that women’s anxiety about their appearance is a problem to be solved by the entire community.

Every generation must engage the interpretation of Scripture and tradition afresh in light of its particular circumstances, for God’s truth is living, active, and ever new. I am not suggesting that the church simply adopt the particular beliefs expressed by Clement, Cyprian, or John Chrysostom. I am suggesting that the church take up the boldness and the depth of theological reflection exemplified by these fathers, for the depth of the response of the church today must be proportionate to the magnitude of the underlying issue.

Soon after my husband and I began dating, I decided to stop wearing makeup. Sticking to that decision was often painful, but the recognition that my anxiety was impeding trust in my relationships showed me that I had to find a way to change my thinking regarding my appearance. I needed to grow accustomed to seeing my bare face, my unadorned body, and replace my constant fault-finding with the firm affirmation that what God has created is good.

The church should have aided me. It should have recognized and denounced the lies that our culture relentlessly presses on us. Nevertheless, I thank God for my discovery that the ancient church did address my struggle. In the presence of the fathers of the church I learned to reconnect beauty with truth and goodness, with love, and with wholeness—all things that belong to God, the same God to whom St. Augustine famously cried out, “Late have I loved Thee, Beauty, so old, and yet so new.” ■

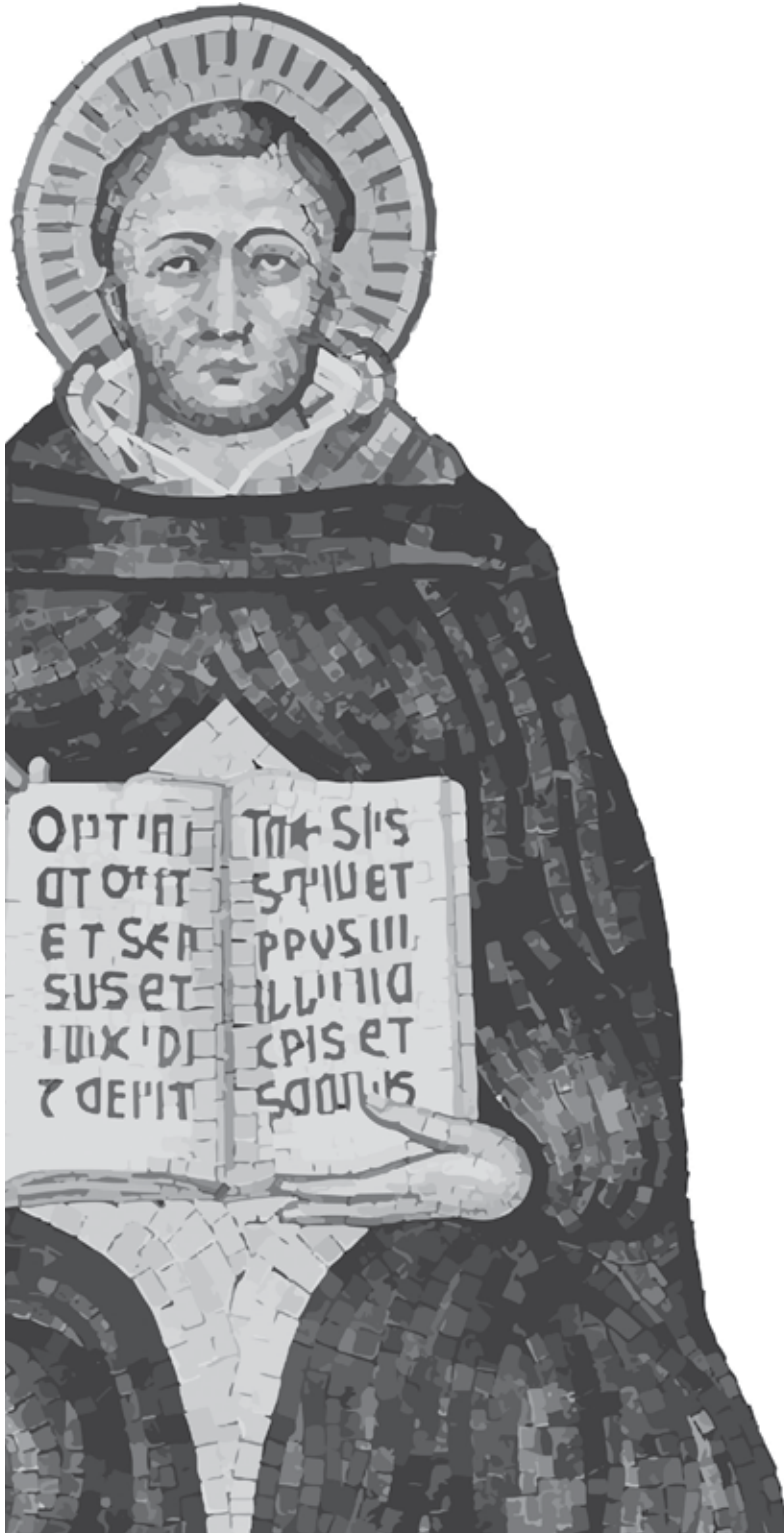
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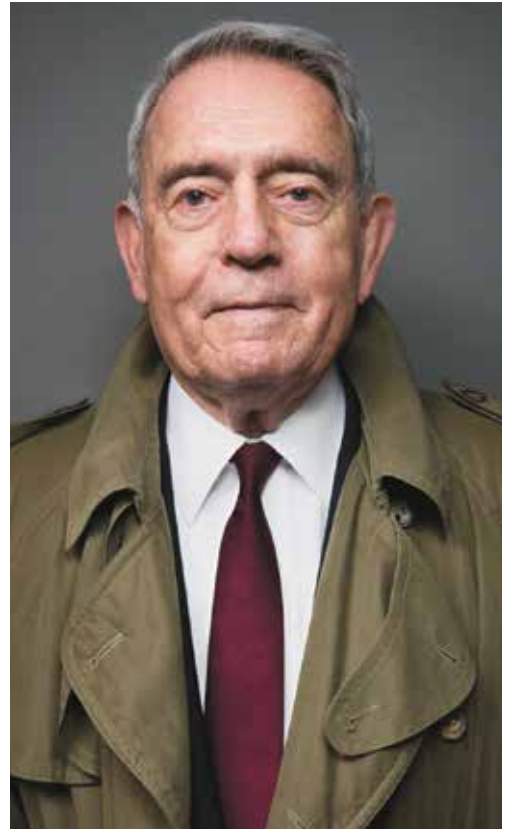
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