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Commonweal

JULY 5, 2019

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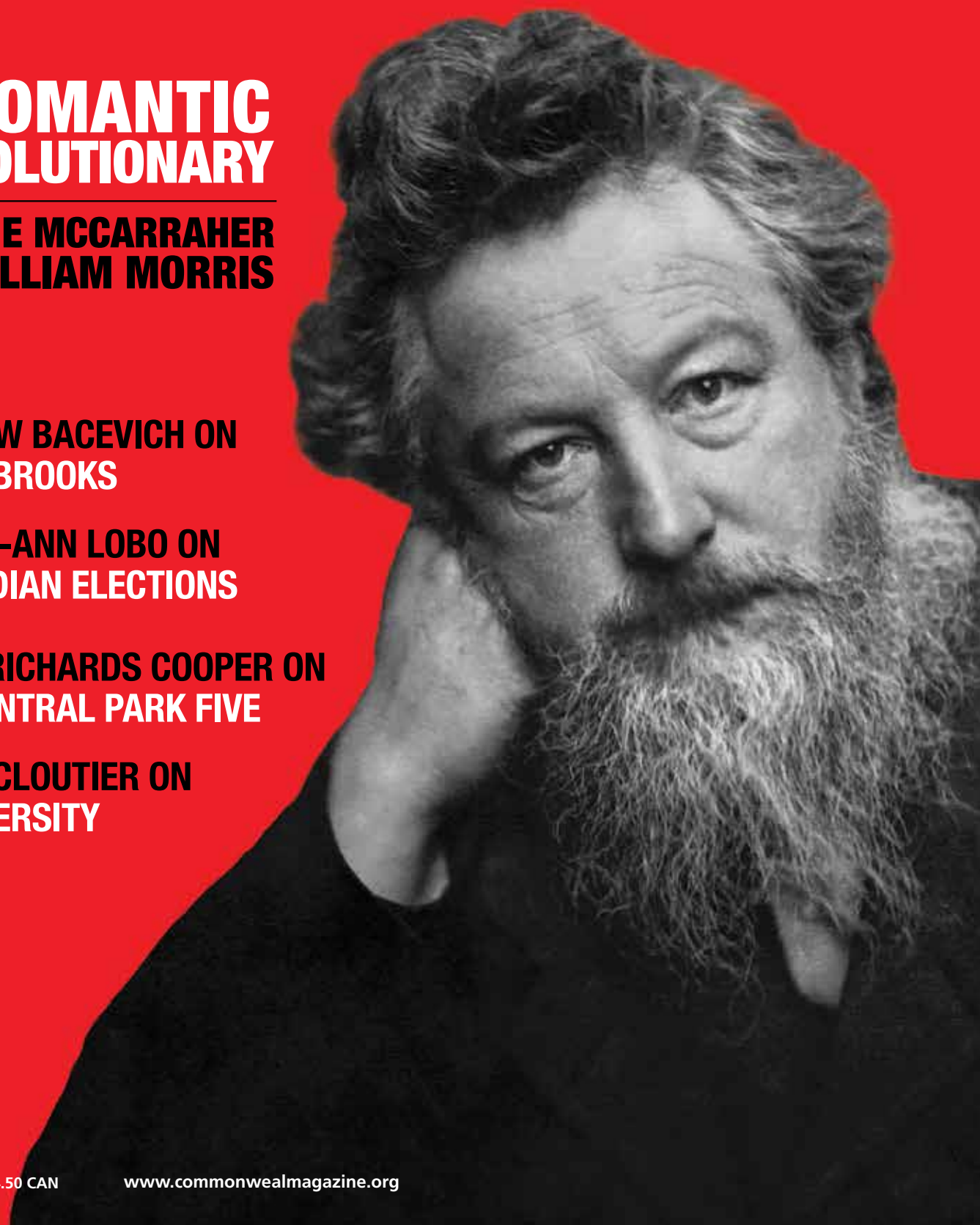

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LETTERS

Seminarians, vocations, etc.

ISOLATION IS THE PROBLEM

Pope St. John Paul II wrote *Pastores dabo vobis*, which C.Colt Anderson and Christopher M. Bellitto cite ("Scarlet Fever," April 12), largely in response to the long-standing crisis of pastoral identity. He resurrected a Counter-Reformation spiritual theology of the priesthood in which we can identify the roots of the current crisis.

I agree with Anderson and Bellitto that laity should be included in seminary classes, but they neglect one core problem: having young men live together for years in isolation facilitates psychosexual maladaptations, as studies have proved. No pre-testing or monitoring will counteract this.

It is easy to blame an ontological exceptionalism of the clergy and advocate a more humble anthropology—but cases of abuse and coverup have occurred under both.

Indeed, much exceptionalism can be found in the Reformation-influenced pastoral identity following Vatican II. It includes an antinomianism and an emphasis on the rule of the person of the pastor over the rule of canon law and tradition—which now is back in full force in the current synodal controversies facing the church.

The problems with pastoral identity run very deep. Moving the living arrangements of those in pastoral training outside of the seminary model is only a first step—but the most important step we can take is to prevent psychosexual maladaptations.

Reforming the theology of the priesthood will take nothing less than years of research by the entire brain trust of the church, working across brutal ideological divides to prepare in earnest for the next council.

CLARE MCGRATH-MERKLE, OCDS
Nottingham, Md.

LET THE VOCATIONS COME

In our Milwaukee seminary, men trained for priesthood alongside women and men for lay ministry. At the end of the program of studies, there was graduation for all and ordination for a few. The few were often not the brightest nor the most dedicated, but they were ordained while the women protested their ordination outside the cathedral. This divisive situation did not bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit for anyone.

Until the priesthood becomes both male and female, the clerical "boys' club" and its sins will remain. Children need to grow up in a church that is served (not governed) by ordained male and female leaders. Only then will we come closer to a truly safe environment.

I see no other way forward other than to recognize the vocation of men and women to ordained priestly ministry. Ordination is not a women's "right" nor is it a man's "right." It is a calling that the people of God need to lead us into a future full of hope. Let the vocations come. Discern them well. And let us be a family of God where adults and children can grow, learn, and worship safely and without fear.

JOAN MUELLER
Professor Emeritus, Systematic Theology
Creighton University

STRENGTH FOR THE JOURNEY

Danielle Chapman's "Anyway in Spring" (May 3) is a stunningly beautiful gift to your readers. My husband had just gotten out of the hospital (thankfully, not for cancer) and I told him I was going to read a reflection. He interrupted me halfway through to say, "It's really a poem." We agreed that it is both.

I thought about it again as I walked our dog on the Santa Fe desert, covered with tiny gold flowers, thanks to extra snowmelt from the Sangre de Cristo mountains. I pray we will get through this terrible period in our national life and start to work on the massive threats to our planet. Danielle Chapman has strengthened my resolve to continue.

JULIE FISHER MELTON
Santa Fe, N. Mex.

Stumbling toward War

Since the June 13 attack on a pair of oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman, tensions between the United States and Iran have escalated significantly. Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps is the likely culprit of both this and a similar attack in May on four commercial vessels in the gulf, although conclusive proof has yet to emerge. U.S. Central Command has provided what it claims is video evidence of Iran's involvement in the most recent incidents, and seems bent on using it as justification for military action. Yet even if it turns out that Iran was responsible, it is imperative that both countries aim for a diplomatic resolution to a growing crisis that could have dangerous consequences for the entire Middle East.

Whether the Trump administration has the ability or inclination to do so is a serious question. It does not seem to have a coherent long-term strategy on Iran; instead it has a policy, or at least a habit, of needless provocation. In May 2018, following years of bellicose rhetoric, the president made good on his promise to withdraw from the nuclear deal reached by the Obama administration with Iran and five other countries. The agreement had eased long-standing sanctions on Iran in exchange for reductions in uranium stockpiles and caps on nuclear development, and it had been working—both in limiting Iran's nuclear program and in de-escalating the potential for conflict in the region. This May, even as the International Atomic Energy Agency certified that Iran was still abiding by the terms of the deal, the administration implemented additional sanctions, while also penalizing countries that continued to buy Iran's oil.

The United States is now making a show of military force in the region, sending an aircraft carrier and Air Force bombers to the Persian Gulf and announcing the deployment of a thousand more troops. It has been devising plans to send as many as 120,000 troops in the event of hostilities, a conflict it appears to be itching for. Much of this seems traceable to Trump's notoriously hawkish national security advisor, John Bolton, who has openly advocated regime change in Iran—whether by using sanctions to create such abysmal conditions that Iranian citizens revolt, or through military intervention. Bolton also has a history of manipulating intelligence to justify the use of force. In response to American actions, Iran now says it will abandon the nuclear deal unless European nations help reduce the impact of sanctions. The Iranian government has already increased the production of low-enriched uranium, typically used in power plants, but it is also threatening to begin production of higher-enriched uranium that could be used to build a nuclear weapon.

While the administration continues to call for greater international pressure on Iran, many European leaders are urging restraint on the part of both countries. Having learned the lessons of the war in Iraq, they do not want to be drawn into another conflict built on lies and exaggeration. The United States should understand that, this time around, there will be no "coalition of the willing." Iran retains the support of China and Russia, two countries that, unlike Iran, do have the ability to inflict grave harm on the United States. The situation is made infinitely more dangerous by Trump's weakness as a leader. While his wariness about starting another war in the Middle East sometimes translates into a reduction of military force, as it did when he announced the withdrawal of troops from Syria in December, he also appears susceptible to the influence of the warmongering Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. It's all too easy to imagine a suggestible, insecure president going to war to draw attention from congressional investigations and polls that show him faring poorly in the 2020 election against potential Democratic rivals.

A conflict with Iran is entirely avoidable. The United States should stop issuing threats and baiting Iran's leaders and instead work with allies to find a diplomatic solution. It's also important to recall that Congress, not the president, is constitutionally charged with making decisions about when and where to go to war. This magazine has argued before that, to reassert its role in foreign policy, Congress must vote to end the eighteen-year-old Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) that granted the Bush administration war-making powers after 9/11 and was abused by the Obama administration in justifying military action in Syria and elsewhere. Pompeo has hinted the same AUMF could be used to launch a war against Iran. That would be not only illegal, but also potentially disastrous for a region already in turmoil thanks to decades of misguided U.S. policy and military action. This crisis is largely one of the Trump administration's own making. As of this writing, the president and his advisors still have the opportunity to steer away from the collision course they have set. ■

June 19, 2019

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Stepping Back

THINKING IN AN AGE OF ADRENALINE

We live in fraught times. Okay, that's a cliché. Maybe the "fraughtest times"? "An age of adrenaline"? Trade wars and shooting wars wax and wane. Monsoons inundate Midwestern farms while Congress dithers over disaster aid. Constitutional checks and balances have broken down. President Trump refuses to deal with Congress until House Democrats renounce their oversight responsibilities. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi condemns his refusal as a "cover-up."

Mindful or mindless?

You can drop the news channels. Close the newspaper. Turn off the computer and the radio. That won't stop the media reporting every word and deed of fabulists and fools. Of course, we look and listen. As Pete Buttigieg, mayor of South Bend and Democratic presidential candidate, observed in a recent interview, the president's ability "to command the attention of the media… is mesmerizing." It's "hard for anyone to look away," including himself, he admits. Why so hard? "It is the nature of grotesque things that you can't look away." Frazzled citizens need some downtime from all the threats, lies, name-calling, and grandiose claims. Admit it! It's hard to change the channel.

The media, increasingly aware that this constitutes obsessive behavior, inserts self-help advice among the tweet reports. Here are some recent tips I have encountered. First, recognize the very limited capacity of your attention span. How can it function properly, focus on anything, when it is taken up with the ins and outs of conflicting White House words and deeds, the feints and thrusts of Congress, the hits and misses of twenty-four Democratic presidential candidates, and the ducking and weaving of administration officials caught between the law and the tweets? We are, after all, fight-or-flight creatures; we can respond to one danger, but ten is too many. Center yourself. Set time limits on any discussion about the president's daily headlines. Get off Twitter. Do not roll your eyes. Change the subject.

Second, relieve your anxieties with good deeds. From a neighbor, this idea: she asks friends to observe her birthday by doing a good deed, maybe more than one. Her hope is that many, many good deeds on the same day might buoy our spirits and inch the nation toward greater tranquility. "Who knows," she writes, "this could be the beginning of a kinder and gentler world." Who knows, indeed? I offer my own birthday, July 28, for an outpouring of good deeds.

Third, take your mind off your mind and make your legs, upper arms, and back take on some of this burden. More physical exercise will not hurt. Using a straight-backed chair, sit down and stand up ten times. Do an extra hour on the stationary bike (no TV!). Walk to the store, buy a newspaper, read the headlines, and throw it in the trash. Keep walking. Do not cheat by trawling the internet on your phone.

Fourth, try knitting meditation. According to the *Wall Street Journal* (May 21, 2019), it calms the mind, promises lower blood pressure, and improves mental health. Google, the source of so much over-connectedness, has hired a company to help employees relax through mindful knitting. The firm Heartknit offers workshops that "keep phone-addicted hands and minds occupied, but calm." According to a University of Texas psychiatrist, knitting entails "evenly hovering attention," meaning "your mind can wander when you're doing something routine." Heartknit's workshop leader says that, since there is no "right or wrong way to knit," you follow your own rhythm; "it's about the journey, not the scarf." Mindful knitting may seem to many no different from mindless knitting, so you may end up with a scarf, a large blanket, or a three-armed sweater. Your attention span, however, can evenly hover, your mind wander but remain calm, and your phone-addicted hands stay otherwise occupied.

Finally, Speaker Pelosi herself has given a clue to what many of us might do. In the midst of a very difficult day with the president, sounding like Sr. Mary after a hard day with a first grader, Pelosi simply said, "I pray for him." You might try something along these lines: "Deliver us, O Lord, from the mean-spiritedness that lays on the land. Instill in us a spirit of generosity and truthfulness. May good works bring peace and justice. Amen." And if that doesn't overcome the irresistible power of the grotesque? Well, there is always exorcism. ■

Charles R. Morris

The Future of Social Security

DON'T CUT BENEFITS. RAISE TAXES.

The *New York Times* recently delivered a full-page reminder that we are coming up on crucial policy decisions about Social Security that may show the world what kind of a country the United States really is. In 1983, President Reagan signed off on a set of fundamental reforms to the Social Security system: raising payroll taxes on the wealthy, taxing the Social Security payments themselves, raising the age for eligibility, and a host of minor fixes that brought the system into rough balance over a seventy-five-year actuarial period.

As of today, the trust funds have some $2.9 trillion of cash reserves funded by payroll taxes and interest on the system's reserves. Coincidentally, 2019 is the last year that taxes will fully cover the cost of the system. From here on out, the system will have to dip into its reserves, which should last until about 2035. After that, to keep the system solvent, monthly payments would have to be cut by about a quarter.

That is a big deal. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) points out that a third of Americans on the verge of retirement have no savings at all, while another third have total savings that are less than their annual income. Once upon a time, companies furnished loyal employees with pension plans. No longer. Now the more enlightened companies make available a sum of money that their employees may match, putting the onus of financial planning on the employees. And only a third of American employers do even that much: 44 million workers have no fallback at all—except, that is, for Social Security. Congressional Republicans say they want to reform the system, but not in order to strengthen it. They want to *cut* Social Security benefits, presumably to protect the $1.5 trillion tax cut they passed in 2017.

One would think that America is a poor country, with its shambolic infrastructure and its third-rate schools. But perhaps it's just a mean-spirited country, or perhaps just the Republicans are. Occasionally, if I'm with other business people and the conversation turns to politics, I'll ask whether they think people pay higher taxes here than in other countries—counting all taxes, not just federal. Where, I ask, do they think we rank? Invariably, they guess we're among the most highly taxed countries. They're wrong. The OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) is the official bookkeeper of such things. Of the thirty-four countries it ranks, the United States usually comes in fourth or fifth from the bottom, near much smaller countries such as South Korea and Mexico.

President Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act on August 14, 1935.

The United States is a paradise for the rich because they get to keep a great deal of their money. Consider: over the past forty years or so the top 10 percent of earners have increased their share of income from about 7 percent to about 18 percent. But that doesn't quite convey the extent of the problem. If you break down those figures, you'll understand what being rich *really* means. Start with the top 10 percent of earners, and take the bottom half of that—between the ninetieth percentile and ninety-fifth percentile. That segment covers a range of incomes between $124,000 and $180,500. If your family is in that range, your parents may still have to borrow to pay for your college tuition. The next band is the 4 percent between the ninety-fifth percentile and the ninety-ninth, spanning incomes between $180,500 and $443,000. The top 1 percent is anything over $443,000. But you could create another band that starts at $2,000,000, and another that starts at $200 million.

How is the bottom half doing? A series in the *New York Times* examined the numbers since 1980. For the past forty years, the lower 50 percent of income earners improved their lot by an average of $5 a year. Think about that. And then think about how, during the same period, earners in the top tier have *tripled* their incomes. And then think again about how the Republicans are looking for new ways to cut away the fat in Social Security.

God bless Elizabeth Warren. She and some of the new Democratic members of Congress are not ducking the challenge. Warren wants to create a surtax on income over $250,000 so that we can put an end to Social Security cuts forever. That might or might not be enough, but there does at least seem to be a new momentum for finding a lasting solution to the problem. ■

George Dennis O'Brien

North Star

REMEMBERING NICHOLAS CLIFFORD (1930–2019)

In May 2016, *Commonweal* published an essay by Nicholas Clifford about Simon Leys, a scholar of Chinese art, history, and politics who had died in 2014. Nick, himself an accomplished scholar of Chinese history, described Leys as a "North Star to intellectuals of all kinds, combining qualities rarely found in a single writer: tact, good taste… generosity…and a sometimes astringent honesty." I think this is a pretty good description of Nick Clifford himself. The title of the essay on Leys was "Uncommon Decency," and this too describes Nick.

Today decency appears uncommon at the highest levels of government and, at times, even in the halls of the academy. Go back to an earlier time of indecency—May 1970. The United States was deeply engaged in a war conceived in myth and pursued in lies. On May 4 at Kent State University, a student protest against the war resulted in the killing of four students by National Guard troops. The next day, Middlebury College suspended classes as part of a national student strike to protest the shootings. In the early hours of Thursday, May 7, an abandoned building on the Middlebury campus was set on fire. Later that morning there was a mass meeting of students and faculty at Mead Chapel. It was proposed that the college cancel classes for the remainder of the year in light of the grave political crisis. Shortly before noon, Nick Clifford rose to speak for the faculty council. With clarity and conviction, he argued that canceling classes for the year would suggest that the college was a *political* actor. That was not the college's mandate. In a time of lies, nothing could be more important than a continual conversation toward truth. Nick's remarks expressed with "stringent honesty" his own deep commitment to the ideals of academic life. Middlebury finished the academic year.

Another date: September 14, 1991: the college's president unexpectedly resigns. Two days later another mass meeting in Mead Chapel, where it was announced that provost John McCardell had been named acting president and Nicholas Clifford would be the new provost, a position he held for eight years. Part of Nick's uncommon decency was that he did not crave position. But when he was needed, he would serve, whether this meant serving on the boards of Porter Hospital, *Commonweal*, Connecticut College, and Middlebury, or, later, running the film series at EastView retirement community.

Nick's decency also expressed itself as modesty. He grew up in very privileged circumstances and was a man of great refinement, but he was not interested in self-display. He was in a position to dominate almost any argument but he never asserted superiority. The scope of his expertise about China, world history, world literature, and music was awe-inspiring but it also remarkably inconspicuous.

Another date: October 6, 2010. Celebrating his eightieth birthday with a small gathering of family and friends, Nick was called on to make some remarks. He decided to talk about his wife Deborah, who had died unexpectedly two years earlier. Deborah was herself an accomplished historian, whose field of expertise was as far removed from China as one could imagine. She concentrated on local history and resurrected the lives of significant nineteenth-century women like her distant relative, Aunt Julia—Julia Ward Howe—who wrote the words to "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Nick and Deborah wrote a book together in Deborah's field, an account of the great Vermont flood of 1927. I'm sure it is the only history of Vermont that mentions Mao Zedong. In his birthday remarks Nick said that his marriage to Deborah had been "a long occasion of grace."

The last real conversation I had with Nick was about our mutual concern for reform in the Catholic Church. As you might expect, Nick's criticism was directed at failures by the official church to acknowledge history, including both the recent cover-ups of abuse and the total historical amnesia often displayed by church officials. He used to say that if the Vatican ever changed some ruling, the new decree would begin, "As the church has always taught..." Our whole conversation was accompanied by music pouring out of the radio *mezzo forte*. Nick listened to classical repertoire by the hour—particularly opera. He never missed a Met telecast or a live opera at the Town Hall Theater. On the day of our conversation, he was tuned in to some German radio station that specialized in opera. While we talked Lucia was probably going mad or Figaro practicing his usual tricks in full voice. Why a person as careful and rational as Nick was so caught up in the wildest and most flamboyant of musical genres may seem an impenetrable mystery, but I think it provides a clue to his character and his faith. Nick was an historian, and, as Marx famously wrote, history repeats itself, first as tragedy and then as farce. Between tragedy and farce is a tale of despair. But in opera unbearable tragic action and farcical nonsense are transfigured by music. The desperate plot is resolved in the final chord. I think this is what Nick found in his Christian faith. Christianity casts a clear eye on human folly, sin, and suffering, but the liturgy transfigures them, offering a final chord of hope and love and grace. ■

George Dennis O'Brien *is a frequent contributor to* Commonweal. *This tribute is adapted from the eulogy delivered at Nicholas Clifford's funeral Mass on June 11.*

David Cloutier

The Web of Life

WHY WE SHOULD CARE ABOUT THE LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY

When I teach Pope Francis's *Laudato si'* to seminarians, I point out that he gives considerable attention to three crucial crises in his first chapter: climate change, fresh water, and the loss of biodiversity. Each of these crises are of a scope and scale that differs from the harm humans have done to *portions* of the earth throughout history; they involve real threats to "our common home" as a whole. I explain that these sorts of threats are a big reason why the pope decided to devote an entire encyclical to the environment, and not simply speak about it in the context of other social teachings, as previous popes had.

But I confess I am more animated by the first two crises. I get worked up cataloging the evidence of atmospheric catastrophe and acquainting my students with the decline in the Ogallala aquifer, on which the entire Plains agricultural system depends. It's not hard to convince them that the spike in greenhouse gases and the dwindling supply of fresh water qualify as unprecedented crises. Then, nodding to the third crisis, I add, "Have you heard about the sixth great extinction? Tons of species are disappearing because of human activity." And we move on.

The value of biodiversity—and the urgency of preserving it—can be hard to convey. Why? Too often we think of the environment only in terms of how it affects us, and the impact of habitat loss and species extinction on human beings simply isn't as clear as the impact of climate change and desertification. I know I can get my students' attention if I say, "We won't be able to grow 25 percent of our crops," or "coastal cities will be underwater." By comparison, most talk of endangered species or extinction (except our own) can seem either sentimental or abstract.

But the recent United Nations report on the unprecedented scale of the threats to biodiversity should awaken us to the true gravity of the problem. It should also remind us that Catholic theological convictions about the environment extend beyond the question of what's harmful to human beings to a deeper question: whether we truly believe what we say about God as the creator and destination of all things.

How does the report (whose release received less attention than the birth of a royal baby the same day) name the problem? The headline stat for the loss of biodiversity is frequently the danger of species extinctions: the report announces up to a million possible extinctions. Rapid declines in amphibians are particularly striking; in the span of just a few years, whole species have gone from thriving to disappearing. Thin skins make amphibians unusually sensitive to changes in environmental chemistry; their natural habitats of shallow streams, ponds, and wetlands are unusually threatened by human development; and they are now subject to a lethal skin bacteria, formerly confined to Africa, that has spread worldwide. On top of all that, their eggs can only survive in fish-free waters, which are becoming harder for them to find as humans introduce fish species for aquaculture and sport. Estimates suggest about a third of known amphibian species are threatened.

The great gray owl—one of a million endangered species

Extinctions, however, are merely one symptom of a deeper problem: the shrinking and fraying of local ecosystems on which all life depend. As one UN panel member puts it, "The essential, interconnected web of life on Earth is getting smaller and increasingly frayed." This is the key idea: loss of biodiversity is a matter of taking an intricate system and making it both less intricate and less tightly woven, and thus more subject to all sorts of disruptions. The ecosystems in today's world are the product of remarkably complex patterns of coevolution, in which diverse life forms, from bacteria to large mammals, share symbiotic relationships that enable the continuation of life. When ecosystems are healthy, they are rich in genetic and species diversity, enabling what ecologists call resilience, an ability to absorb shocks, adapt, and maintain functional stability. Nature can and does adapt to

changing conditions. But when ecosystems are frayed, and subjected to rapid change over decades and centuries rather than millennia, strikingly small disruptions can produce cascading effects with catastrophic consequences.

Yes, ecosystems have always changed and species have always gone extinct—but not at anything like the rate of current changes. It is this "rapidification" that Francis frequently criticizes as a key symptom of "tyrannic anthropocentrism." Take the example of coral reefs, probably the most endangered ecosystem on the planet. These living wonders support up to 25 percent of all marine life. Submerged in saltwater and useless for human exploitation, they look safe from the threats faced by other, resource-yielding habitats like rainforests. Yet they are highly sensitive to water conditions, especially ocean acidification. (As oceans absorb more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, they become more acidic.) Corals lack the mobility that even tree species have. They are profoundly affected by large-scale runoffs from poor land use. And worst of all, they are simply destroyed as byproducts of illegal but common practices like blast fishing and cyanide fishing—truly barbaric acts that feed a constant demand for live fish in restaurants and aquariums. The combination of indirect and direct threats to corals has led experts to predict their extinction by 2100, if not sooner.

For Catholics, the UN report makes clear the degree to which we are willing to disregard what Benedict XVI called "the grammar of creation," which is "prior to us" and more comprehensive than our puny designs. A commitment to maintaining biodiversity rests on a bedrock conviction of the integrity of the grammar of the *whole* of creation, created by and destined for God. We simply can't address this problem sufficiently if we remain anthropocentric in our environmentalism. True, the UN report works hard to suggest that biodiversity is "humankind's most important, life-supporting safety net," mentioning key "ecosystem services" like that provided by pollinators, whose extinction endangers our food supplies. But in fact, we just don't know what will happen. What is already clear is that we are messing with a fragile system in ways that demonstrate our ignorance. We can't say what will happen to marine life if corals decline to almost nothing, or what will happen to Central American ecosystems if many amphibians disappear. But as Pope Francis reminds us, we already know that "thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us." To disrupt the natural world at this rate is not to "till and keep" it. Right now, we have way too much tilling and not enough keeping.

What to do? The UN report offers a ranking of the five biggest "direct drivers" of the loss of biodiversity, with "changes in land and sea use" topping the list. Such ranking is always risky—since everything is connected, causes like climate change and invasive species are also serious—but at least it helps us respond practically to what might otherwise be an overwhelming challenge. The destruction or significant fragmentation of habitats is a well-known problem but, again, we forget the scale and speed involved: for example, we've lost over 50 percent of tropical rainforests, the habitat richest in species. Some suggest that as many as four thousand species become extinct every year because of the loss of unique ecological niches in rainforests. Of course, rainforest destruction leads back to the enormous expansion of human consumption, and the UN report notes that urbanized areas have more than doubled since 1992, while the annual extraction of all natural resources has increased nearly 100 percent.

The voracious appetite for cheap commodities from afar is no longer limited to Americans and Europeans. Global patterns of resource use have changed a great deal in the past few decades, partly because of the large increase in global population, but also because more of the world has adopted Western measures of affluence and habits of consumption. To use a personal example: when I was two years old, my hometown of Chicago claimed the tallest building in the world. In 1990, when I graduated from high school, the world hadn't changed much: our Sears Tower was still the tallest building in the world. Today? It's currently ranked 17. And all the taller buildings except one are not in Europe or the United States. Of course, building skyscrapers is not the most resource-intensive of human endeavors, but it does indicate where there has been enormous growth in wealth. Certainly, American and European consumers should stop consuming so much, but we also need what both Popes Benedict and Francis have recommended: some kind of enforceable international agreement that limits exploitation, particularly of the most sensitive habitats. Such an agreement will have to compensate (poor) countries for *preserving* their natural resources as much as they are now compensated for *exploiting* those resources. After all, the destruction of habitats frequently occurs because populations and nations are poor. If we want to save the rainforest or the coral reefs, we'll have to pay to save them.

And we should. The next time I teach social ethics, biodiversity will get more attention. Like our disregard for the balance of the atmosphere and the character of water as the essential element of life, the disregard of biodiversity is a crucial mark of the gravity of our environmental sins—and a reminder that these sins are not reducible to the harm they do to human beings. It is likely that I will never see a rainforest or a coral reef in person. But I do believe that they are God's wonders, made to give God praise. And their destruction proves that we are in the grip of what Francis calls a "practical relativism," in which we reject God's grammar, seeing it as "irrelevant unless it serves [our] own immediate interests." ■

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Nicole-Ann Lobo

Modi's 'Mother India'

NATIONALISM IN THE WORLD'S LARGEST DEMOCRACY

National elections in India, the world's largest democracy, are a long and grueling process. This year's were held in seven regional phases over the course of six weeks, involving more than two thousand registered parties. They culminated May 22 with the landslide reelection of Narendra Modi as prime minister. Many foresaw his victory; few anticipated its sheer magnitude, underscored by significant parliamentary gains by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political wing of the Hindu nationalist organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Challengers had hoped that India's lackluster economy might weaken Modi's support, and many believed that the BJP would lose some of the 282 seats (out of 545) it held—instead, it gained twenty-one more. If anything, the surge of Hindu nationalism that brought Modi to power in 2014 seems only to have intensified.

That year, the BJP became the first party since 1984 to win a parliamentary majority without forming a coalition with other parties. This year, it built significantly on its advantage, easily turning back its main challenger, the Indian National Congress (INC) and its standard-bearer, Rahul Gandhi. Severely weakened in 2014, the INC this time ran on a message of inclusivity to counter the Hindu nationalist rhetoric of the BNP, while criticizing Modi's economic policies (primarily demonetization, the controversial ban on high-value currency) and his ties to the nation's capitalist elite. It didn't work: the INC mustered an even poorer performance than expected (it gained just eight seats, amassing a total of fifty-two). But then, its vulnerabilities should have been plain enough. Gandhi is the grandson of Indira Gandhi and the son of Rajiv Gandhi, both of whom left legacies of corruption as prime ministers, and both of whom were assassinated. He has long been dogged by the perception that he is far too inexperienced, and even before the election was mocked with the nickname "Pappu," a Hindi term used to describe a young, naive boy. The INC—the oldest and most established of India's parties—has itself become closely associated with corruption, most recently involving sporting-event and telecom scandals. It is also tied to a slew of murder investigations followed by trials yielding no convictions. INC member Shashi Tharoor, who poetically dubbed this year's election "a battle for the soul of India," is currently charged with driving his wife to suicide. The party's appeals to inclusivity clearly rang hollow to an electorate long disillusioned by the INC's failure to deliver on promises, something that should have already been made clear by its 2014 blowout. This year's loss now marks the longest period in Indian politics in which the INC has not been in power. And, adding insult to injury, Gandhi lost his seat in his state, Uttar Pradesh.

Narendra Modi

Modi's 2019 campaign focused both on economic reform and on determining the identitarian essence of what makes India India. To the former point, Modi inspired hope with a message of economic rejuvenation, promising in the face of Western-focused globalization that India would bow to no one, and pushing for a strong, centralized economy that would lift up all citizens. Yet unemployment is the highest it has been in forty-five years, and the agrarian sector in particular has suffered, with farmers in rural India (who make up about two-thirds of the nation's population) in severe debt, some committing suicide out of sheer desperation. Meanwhile, Modi refuses to address criticisms of his tenure: he's the only prime minister to have never held a press conference within his own country.

To the latter point, Modi continued to draw on the concept of Hindutva, which might be defined as "Hindu-ness," or the equating of Indian culture with Hindu values. He

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THE "REGINA CAELI"

Alleluia—
minimalist, elegant,
as though a second

Gabriel addresses
the Queen of Heaven, to say:
Alleluia—

(almost by-the-way)
The created space-time dust
(just matter-of-fact),

matter of glory
now, full Grace, flesh did happen
God. Rejoice, be glad,

Alleluia—
He is risen as he said,
Alleluia

—Judy Little

Judy Little is Professor Emeritus at Southern Illinois University. Her publications include Comedy and the Woman Writer *(University of Nebraska Press, 1983) and* The Experimental Self *(Southern Illinois University Press, 1996). Her poetry has appeared in* Vallum, Beloit Poetry Journal, Prairie Schooner, America, *and the* Anglican Theological Review.

obscured the underlying causes of the nation's social insecurities (primarily related to differences in caste and creed) by emphasizing a message of cohesive ethno-religious identity. In this way, Modi's rhetoric can sound like that of another well-known national leader—he often includes the refrain "India first" in speeches. Modi prides himself on being tough on terrorism and strong on national security while criticizing his opponents for their corruption and creation of family dynasties. But while some are quick to draw comparisons between Modi and Donald Trump—and such comparisons would not be baseless—Hindu nationalism in India is actually a far more complex issue, rooted in conceptions of the nation's post-colonial identity and the need to reassert its position in the aftermath of globalization. "*Bharat Mata Ki Jai*," Modi frequently ends his speeches: "Hail Mother India."

This feminization of India's identity harks to the post-Independence days: Mother India is, simply put, the national personification of India as a mother goddess. The symbol became popular during the Indian independence movement; pride in Mother India was renewed following Nehruvian socialism, out of nostalgia for a traditional Indian "essence" that predated colonialism. The personification of India as a goddess further suggests that for Hindus, defending the nation is both a political and religious obligation, particularly noteworthy today in calls to resist cultural homogenization and to counter the threat of Islamic terrorism. Modi is deft in using this image to appeal to voters' psyches, and tensions between India and Pakistan along the Kashmiri border only gave him more to work with during this election.

And the championing of femininity may have had a direct effect both on turnout and on candidates. This election marked the first that the number of female voters roughly equalled that of male voters, while more women than ever ran for seats, and won. Yet linking national prosperity with religious identity necessarily excludes religious minorities. Just under 80 percent of India's population is Hindu, while 15 percent is Muslim; Christians make up less than 3 percent of the population, and Zoroastrians (Parsis), Jains, and Sikhs account for even smaller percentages. Persecution of religious minorities has increased under BJP rule; in the first two months of 2019, there were seventy-seven reported cases of persecution against Christians, ranging from social outcasting to physical violence and torture. In some cases, the government is seen as complicit. Some suggest the Modi government is actively involved in suppressing accounts of persecution. In 2017, for example, the *Hindustan Times* launched a Hate Tracker feature intended to be a "crowd-sourced database of hate crimes in India since September 2015," but after a meeting between Modi and the paper's chief, the tracker was pulled. Two days later, the editor and driving force behind the initiative, Bobby Ghosh, resigned.

Many believe the concentration of power that Modi now holds to be unprecedented in modern Indian history; not even Indira Gandhi enjoyed such a parliamentary majority. What must also be noted are the BJP's ties to wealth and capital: the upper castes overwhelmingly support it, while financially, it received twice the amount of campaign contributions of the six other main parties combined. Meanwhile, the lower castes—already constitutionally disenfranchised, their interests generally ignored by the political elite—remain powerless, while the organized left suffered its worst electoral defeat to date. When Modi speaks of lifting up all Indians, everyone knows just who he has in mind. For those dismayed by what seems like an intensifying nationalism wed to wealth and the privileged castes, the next five years do not look promising. ■

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Emma McDonald

Listening to the Laity

CONSCIENCE & REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY

In the musical *Li'l Abner*, a ragtag crew of townspeople develop a potent potion called "Yokumberry Tonic" that has the power to enhance the mind and body. The concoction is discovered and exploited by reproductive scientists from the "big city," who hope to use it to improve society by enhancing human capabilities. In his memorable song "Oh Happy Day," Dr. Rasmussen Finsdale dreams of the promise this tonic holds, envisioning a future of social conformity controlled by reproductive technicians in laboratories: "Oh, happy day, when miracles take place / And scientists control the human race, When we assume authority of human chromosomes / And assembly-line women / Conveyor-belt men / Settle down in push-button homes."

Since its 1956 debut on Broadway, advances in reproductive technology have made Dr. Finsdale's dream of "man-made man" a reality: *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) allows fertility specialists to produce and implant embryos; preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) enables doctors to select particular embryos to avoid passing on genetic abnormalities during IVF; and advancements in gene-editing technology like CRISPR-Cas 9 suggest that our ability to influence the genetic makeup of future generations will soon balloon. This is only the beginning: soon enough, we will be able to engineer not only conception, but also gestation. Early forays into artificial-womb technology have introduced the possibility of gestation outside the human body.

Decades ago, *in vitro* fertilization technology was met with considerable apprehension. Dr. Finsdale's cartoonish optimism and eugenicist tendencies caricature the worst possibilities for this technology. Comparisons to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* abounded; double-helix-discoverer James Watson famously predicted "all hell will break loose" if there were a successful embryo transplant. Half a century later, we can safely say that Watson's dire warnings of political and moral chaos were incorrect. When Louise Brown, the first "test-tube baby," was born in 1978, she seemed like a miracle, one in a million. Now, forty years later, she is just one among millions: over 1 million babies have been born through IVF in the United States since 1985 (when the U.S. Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology started keeping track), and it is estimated that there have been more than 8 million babies born through IVF globally in the past forty years. Last year Michelle Obama captured national attention when she revealed that Malia and Sasha were conceived via IVF. While rates of infertility (which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines as the inability to get pregnant after one year of trying) haven't changed much, the utilization of technologies like *in vitro* fertilization has surged, and with it, many infertile couples have been able to have children.

A monitor shows the microinjection of sperm into an egg cell at an in vitro *fertilization clinic.*

CNS PHOTO / EPA

Despite the rapid development and increasing use of reproductive technologies, the Catholic Church's moral teaching on the subject has developed very little in the past forty years. Louise Brown is not the only one celebrating a recent birthday: the instruction *Dignitas personae* ("On Certain Bioethical Questions") was released just over ten years ago. This relatively short instruction from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) reiterated the church's case against assisted reproductive technologies (including IVF) in the lengthier 1987 instruction *Donum vitae* ("On Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation"), but with a few key updates that respond to technological developments from the previous decades. Both documents lay out the church's logic for finding IVF and artificial insemination morally illicit. The CDF's reasoning follows from the same principle that grounds the church's argument against contraception in *Humanae vitae*. According to the CDF, the marital act contains two aspects, the procreative and the unitive, which correspond to the procreative and unitive ends of marriage. These aspects are inseparable, not only within a marriage, but as Pope Paul VI famously decided, within each instance of the conjugal act. Birth control is illicit because it frustrates the end of procreation; IVF is illicit because it effects procreation without the physcial union of the spouses. The fact that many IVF procedures include the abuse or destruction of embryos provides further reason for the CDF to oppose it—but even if care were taken to avoid elimination of excess embryos, the inseparability principle remains as grounds for objection.

It is common knowledge that most American Catholics find the church's teaching on contraception less than compelling, so it may come as no surprise that only 13 percent of

LOOKING UP AT EL CAPITAN

As I watch quirky clouds capture
Yosemite's sky-piercing peak,
iPhones catch climbers high-hanging,
reaching up for an amenable rock.

Rogue showers wring out colors
in swatches of old Noah's rainbow,
blues deepen like windows of Chartres
sprinkling glory on upstretched faces.

—Charlotte F. Otten

A retired professor of English, Charlotte F. Otten has devoted her life to the study of poetry in both literature and nature. Her poems have appeared in many journals, as have her articles on literature.

Catholics characterized IVF as "morally wrong" in a 2013 Pew survey. (This is virtually the same proportion as the general population: just 12 percent of Americans consider IVF to be morally wrong.) By contrast, 53 percent of Catholics in the same survey believe abortion to be morally wrong. While the irrelevance of church teaching on contraception might help explain some of this discrepancy, the difference in opinion among Catholics regarding IVF and abortion is striking given that the typical rationale for opposing abortion—the destruction of embryos—is frequently a part of IVF procedures. Typically, embryos that appear healthiest are selected for implantation to maximize the chances of a successful implantation and pregnancy, and the excess embryos are discarded, destroyed, donated for research, or frozen for potential later use. Sometimes, selective reduction is used to eliminate a fetus or fetuses during the first trimester of pregnancy to minimize the risk associated with being pregnant with multiple fetuses. Given that there are obvious threats to embryos in many cases of IVF, it is all the more surprising that prolife Catholics do not oppose it more vocally. In fact, in a 2005 piece for *Commonweal* ("Catholics & IVF," August 12, 2005) Paul Lauritzen wondered whether IVF would be the "next big battleground" for prolife advocates. So far, this has not proved true: for example, a quick search on the popular prolife website *LifeSiteNews* turns up only 554 results for "*in vitro* fertilization," compared to more than 38,000 results for "abortion."

Why has IVF slipped under the prolife radar? It may be because many American Catholics are not familiar enough with the process of IVF, or aware of its widespread use. Let me suggest a secondary reason: the identity of the prolife movement centers around a valuing of human life—especially (and sometimes exclusively) in its most vulnerable nascent stage. People opting for abortions are accused of devaluing life, of prioritizing convenience or bodily autonomy at the expense of a commitment to human dignity. The few Catholics who do vocally oppose contraception bemoan the lack of openness to life that they perceive in the use of artificial contraception. In both cases, an intention to avoid or stop pregnancy is equated with being "anti-life." It is harder to make this case with individuals and couples utilizing IVF: Can you really accuse someone trying to get pregnant of being against life?

The reductionist rhetoric of the American prolife movement, which casts reproductive choices as either for life or against it, is ill-equipped to evaluate a procedure like IVF. Clearly, whatever moral guidance American Catholics are receiving is not resonating: 46 percent of American Catholics believe that IVF is not even a "moral issue." Even if we set aside the inseparability principle, IVF and the technological innovations used in conjunction with it present a host of moral quandaries that have the potential to both promote and undermine life. On the one hand, IVF is literally life-giving, allowing individuals and couples to conceive when they might not be able to otherwise. On the other hand, IVF produces many embryos at once, all potential children, which are at risk of being commodified or otherwise treated instrumentally.

The process of IVF presents a variety of morally complex decisions for potential parents. With the help of fertility specialists, individuals and couples must decide how many embryos to create, what kind of testing will be done, and what to do with any excess embryos. Recent advancements in preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) have only added to the moral burden of IVF. PGD has made it possible to select embryos that don't carry certain genetic diseases over embryos that do, and to select embryos that carry lower genetic risk of developing certain cancers. We might imagine a variety of moral responses to this technology: some might oppose all variations of embryo selection on the grounds that it violates human dignity; others might draw the line differently, seeing the avoidance of genetic disease as morally acceptable while opposing selection based on risk of disease. Caution must be raised here about the potential for this technology—when used to avoid implantation of embryos with particular disabilities—to promote a culture that suggests that disability makes life not worth living.

IVF requires potential parents to decide the moral status of an embryo, an issue on which many prefer to remain agnostic. For example, when dealing with excess embryos that they do not want to implant, many using IVF equivocate, not wanting to destroy the embryos they have imagined as their future children, but not wanting to implant them either. In response to this predicament, many opt to delay decision via cryopreservation; the National Embryo Donation Center estimates that there are currently 700,000 to 1 million excess embryos frozen in the United States.

Even before embryos are created, individuals and couples must decide whether to use their own gametes (if that's an option) or those of a donor. For same-sex couples, a donor is inevitably involved. Bringing a third person (and sometimes a fourth, if there are donors for both gametes) into one's reproductive efforts adds additional questions to the process: Is it morally acceptable to involve a donor in the process? What characteristics should one consider when choosing a donor? What about involving a surrogate? Soon, the artificial womb may be an alternative to surrogacy, which will bring new ethical considerations.

The church's teaching does offer moral guidance on many of these questions: in its reflection on the danger of treating children as products and its reminder of our human limitations, *Donum vitae* identifies some of the vital considerations in reproductive ethics. But any nuance found in *Donum vitae* is overwhelmed by the magisterium's condemnation of IVF, which frustrates its attempts to provide relevant moral guidance to lay Catholics. And indeed, the fact that more than half of American Catholics see IVF as either not a moral issue or as morally acceptable suggests that this teaching is falling on deaf ears. Perhaps this is because, as Catholic moral theologian Margaret Farley has suggested, the teaching of the church on reproductive issues fails to respond to the lived experience of the laity. What would a pastoral response to Catholic individuals and couples using IVF look like?

The final document of last year's Synod on Young People suggests a way forward. This document acknowledges the rapid developments in biomedical technologies and the ethical and anthropological questions emerging from these innovations. It proposes three commitments that could help the church recapture the attention of American Catholics: the importance of conscience, the meaning of accompaniment, and the role of social engagement.

The synod emphasizes attentiveness to one's own conscience as a fundamental means of moral discernment. In the sanctuary of our own conscience, we encounter Christ intimately and learn to listen to God's word, which in turn guides our moral choices. The document identifies the need for proper conscience formation, emphasizing that the development of the conscience is not limited to the clergy, but rather requires the assistance of a diversity of mentors, especially women. A renewed effort to facilitate conscience formation among Catholics and to connect Catholics making reproductive choices with experienced mentors and resources for reflection would aid the church in responding to new technological developments in biomedicine.

The reflection that one undertakes in the sanctuary of conscience is mirrored in the communal reflection in the sanctuary of the church. Thus, the process of conscience formation is not just about individual reflection; it requires the church to serve in an accompanying role, another theme that emerges from the synod document. The document mentions in particular the importance of accompanying those who have a vocation to marriage, which frequently includes having children. Given the pervasiveness of involuntary childlessness and infertility, the church's liturgical life should make an effort to reflect the experiences of its people. The Archdiocese of Baltimore recently began a "Holy Innocents" ministry to support families who have experienced miscarriage. Similar initiatives could provide support for those struggling to conceive, especially in liturgical contexts that tend to honor parenthood without acknowledging the involuntarily childless. The church also has a responsibility to accompany children conceived via reproductive technologies. Given the ubiquity of these technologies today, how many young Catholics hear from the church that the manner in which they were conceived is morally illicit?

The synod's final document recognizes that young people are particularly socially engaged. While some American Catholics engage in robust advocacy on the issue of abortion, there are wider social implications to consider regarding reproductive technologies. These moral considerations are not limited to individuals, couples, and families; they also have an impact on the common good. Not only are there widespread disparities in access to fertility treatments (including reproductive technologies like IVF), both within the United States and globally; there are also issues of disability and gender discrimination that emerge in the use of reproductive technologies. In China, for example, abortion of female fetuses became such a problem that the government outlawed the use of ultrasounds to determine fetal sex. A thriving underground ultrasound business has sprouted in response. On the global level, "reproductive tourism" remains an urgent issue, particularly cross-border surrogacy. Frequently, impoverished women from countries including Thailand, Ukraine, and Nepal are sought out as gestational surrogates for wealthier Western couples or individuals at a rate cheaper than the cost of surrogacy in the United States (where it is legal only in some states). These social ills are opportunities for the church to exercise its prophetic witness and to engage young people as they cultivate their consciences.

In order to respond to the challenges faced by the laity, the church first has to listen to the experiences of lay Catholics. In the synod document, the "Synodal Church" is defined as a "Church of listening," what Pope Francis called "the apostolate of the ear." As the church works to renew its response to the laity, and particularly to young people, listening and accompanying should take priority over moral prescriptions. As Pope Francis concludes, "May the Lord bless our steps, so that we can listen to young people, be their neighbors, and bear witness before them to Jesus, the joy of our lives." ■

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'Turn the Page'

The Romantic Socialism of William Morris

Eugene McCarraher

It was the summer of 1889, and William Morris was reclining in the shade of an elm tree somewhere in Oxfordshire. As he recalled the moment in an essay published in the *Commonweal*, the journal of the Socialist League (and later the inspiration for this magazine's name), the bucolic scene opened on an earthly paradise invaded and despoiled by avarice. The fields and hedges were "redolent of bean-flowers and clover and sweet hay and elder-blossom." The river was "sapphire blue," its banks adorned by "pearly white-flowered water-weeds" along with "meadowsweet and dewberry, comfrey and bedstraw." Blackbirds and starlings glided over a "labyrinth of grasses" set back from the river. Medieval towers dotted the countryside, an architecture made by craftsmen "bent on pleasing you and making all things delightful to your senses." The ambience was languid and sensuous—not the hectoring, inflammatory tone one would expect from a revolutionary socialist.

But a serpent had slipped into Eden, and the idyllic prose turned combative as Morris spiraled into radical dudgeon. The day before, he had come upon some older men and women, "ungraceful and unbeautiful" haymakers toiling and sweating in the midday sun. As one of them explained, the younger people refused the low wages paid by the farmer who owned the field. Only one young man, desperate for money, had acceded to the skinflint's terms; but after leaving and looking unsuccessfully for factory work, he had returned "begging for his slavery." "What will happen," Morris asked, "with all this country beauty?" What an appalling waste, he thought, of land exploited by absentee profiteers "for the sake of villa-dwellers' purses." But the greater outrage was the injustice and indignity inflicted on godlike beings:

> When people had created in their minds a god of the universe... they were driven to represent him as one of that same race to which the thirsty haymakers belong; as though supreme intelligence and the greatest measure of gracefulness and beauty and majesty were at their highest in the race of those ungainly animals.

Now, the moneybags had reduced this race of divinities to "a population of slaves and slave-owners."

This tale of subjugation to Mammon was a "shabby, sordid story," but Morris saw a happy ending if the workers could mobilize and topple their masters. "Turn the page, I say," and the story concluded with a vision of beloved community in labor and repose:

> Suppose the haymakers were friends working for friends on land which was theirs...with leisure and hope ahead of them instead of hopeless toil and anxiety—need their useful labor for themselves and their neighbors cripple and disfigure them and knock them out of the shape of men fit to represent the Gods and Heroes?

"Under an Elm-Tree" (1889) is a vintage Morris essay: the vivid rapture at the natural world, the reverence for craftsmanship, the passion for things medieval, all blended in an elegant and vigorous homily against the iniquity of capitalism and in favor of the loveliness, as well as the justice, of a socialist and eventually communist future. In our callously mercenary neoliberal era—coming after the disappointment of revolutionary hope in what the historian Eric Hobsbawm once called "the short twentieth century"—such a vision is dismissed as a utopian reverie or a dangerous historical delusion.

But "socialism" is once again popular, especially among younger voters in the North Atlantic world—fearful of their own enslavement to debt and low-wage, precarious employment, and increasingly impatient with the neoliberal insistence that "there is no alternative" to capitalism. Yet if the left's rejuvenation is electrifying, there is hardly a unified program. The Labour Party that Morris's work did so much to inspire is still trying to recover from its pact with the devil that Tony Blair signed and sealed in the 1990s. Here in the United States, epitomized in the Green New Deal that takes aim at inequality, racism, and ecocide, a social-democratic insurgency is challenging the establishment of the Democratic Party, those woke but intellectu-

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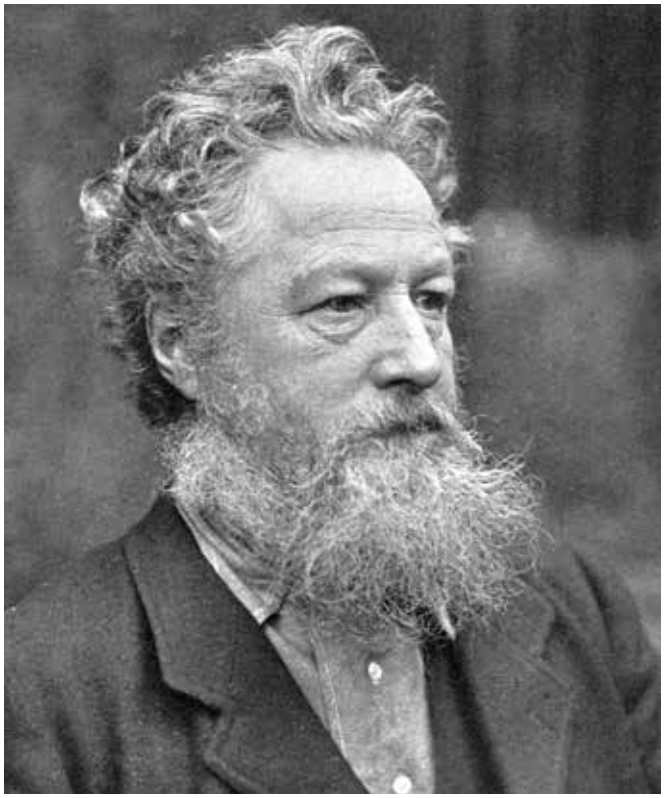
ally bankrupt minions of the techno-financial plutocracy. Though vilified as "socialists" both by Republicans and by their own insipid party leaders, the Green New Dealers aren't nearly as radical as Peter Frase and his comrades at *Jacobin*, who contend that the spread of automation augurs a society beyond wage labor—"the realm of freedom," as Karl Marx dubbed it in *Capital*.

What could a laureate of craftsmen and haymakers say to a cybernetic world? Isn't Morris an exquisitely irrelevant heirloom of Victorian radicalism? His writing and handicraft spurred the Arts and Crafts movement at the turn of the twentieth century; but what began as resistance to mass production soon morphed into a market in high-end ornaments. Still, far from being period pieces, Morris's ideas on art, work, technology, and politics are more important than ever for those eager to create a post-capitalist world. He would remind proponents of a "Green New Deal" that even the most far-reaching reforms cannot be equated with socialism, and he would warn enthusiasts for automation—following, so they think, the dialectical trajectory of capitalist technological development—that they might be depriving human beings of the pleasures of creation, just as the moneybags do. Morris was a revolutionary Romantic, and his utopianism arguably made him a more incisive critic of capitalism than Marx.



William Morris in 1889

Born on March 24, 1834 to William and Emma Morris of Walthamstow, Essex, the bard of Romantic communism grew up in an impeccably bourgeois household. His father was a successful broker and speculator who owned shares in a lucrative copper mine. The wealth enabled his parents to devote the family to what Morris later scorned as "rich establishment puritanism": the stodgy and venal sanctimony practiced by middle-class Evangelicals, in which Sabbath observance, abstention from alcohol, philanthropy, and kindness to the help were considered the pith and marrow of the Christian life. For relief, he read John Keats and Sir Walter Scott, whose Romantic insistence that beauty was a portal onto truth afforded Morris an imaginative refuge from his family's philistinism.

Although his father died suddenly in 1847, the copper mine's dividends allowed his mother to send young William to Marlborough College, an especially awful specimen of England's public-boarding-school culture. Morris endured his education stoically; bored both by his snobbish classmates and by the musty classical curriculum, he was only mediocre as a scholar, preferring to swoon over the Middle Ages and spin "endless stories of knights and chivalry." Morris fell in love with the churches and prehistoric mounds in the countryside around Marlborough, and his letters home conveyed his affection for the alluring landscape; "what a delectable affair a water meadow is to go through," he once wrote to his mother.

In the winter of 1853 Morris entered Exeter College, Oxford, arriving there at the crest of the Romantic critique of industrial capitalism. In part a reaction to the crisis of Christian faith in the wake of the Enlightenment, Romanticism registered, in the historian Bernard Reardon's words, "the inexpungable feeling that the finite is not self-explanatory and self-justifying...[that] there is always an infinite 'beyond.'" For many artists and intellectuals Romanticism offered a surrogate for the sacramental imagination of Christianity, from William Blake's "Heaven in a Wild Flower" to William Wordsworth's "sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused." But it could also enkindle challenges to the brutal emergence of capitalist modernity. Unlike the "progressive" dialecticians of Marxism, Romantics looked to the past for resources to oppose the pecuniary and instrumentalist values of bourgeois life. In Britain, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Cobbett, Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, and others were Romantic prophets of "Tory radicalism," a conservative opposition to the corrosive effects of capitalism on tradition, custom, and hierarchy.

Raised, like Morris, in a wealthy Evangelical family, Ruskin experienced an "unconversion" from orthodox Christianity, but a firm (albeit heterodox) faith always leavened his art history and social criticism. While he was certainly a "conservative" who recoiled from the progressive pieties of liberalism and socialism, Ruskin also mounted one of the most compelling moral and religious critiques of capitalism. Though Ruskin was known and respected primarily as an art critic and historian, *Unto This Last* (1862)—his impas-

sioned and controversial treatise on economics and one of the greatest moral documents of the nineteenth century—was revered by innumerable workers, trade-union leaders, and Labour Party members. And he exerted a broad influence on intellectuals across the political spectrum, from G. K. Chesterton to G.D.H. Cole, R. H. Tawney, and Mahatma Gandhi. Throughout the five volumes of *Modern Painters* (1843–60), the three volumes of *The Stones of Venice* (1851–53), but especially in *Unto This Last*, Ruskin insisted that both the theory and practice of capitalism represented nothing less than a sacrilege against humanity. Topping Carlyle's dismissal of economics as "the dismal science," Ruskin likened it to "alchemy, astrology, witchcraft, and other such popular creeds." The phony discipline's account of *homo economicus*—the self-interested, maximizing utilizer—was not just unedifying but, at bottom, untrue. A human being is the *imago Dei*, "the witness and glory of God," as he wrote in the second volume of *Modern Painters*. Ruskin's sacramental view of the human person underlay his sardonic observation, in *Unto This Last*, that he knew "no previous instance in history of a nation's establishing a systematic disobedience to the first principles of its professed religion."

To Ruskin, the capitalist assault on the divine image and likeness was most evident in industrial work and technology. Looking back to the Middle Ages in "The Nature of Gothic," a renowned chapter in *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin surmised that "the principal admirableness of the Gothic school of architecture" was that it hallowed "the labor of inferior minds": the great cathedrals were built not by geniuses but rather by ordinary, now-unknown artisans, who with humble and imperfect talents created monuments of enduring beauty. Driven by the imperatives of productivity and profit, capitalists enforced an industrial division of labor that subdivided tasks, imposed absolute precision of motion, and thus deskilled the mass of everyday workers. Mechanization made people into machines: "you must either make a tool of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot make both." In order to maximize accumulation, one must not honor workers but rather "unhumanize" them—in other words, one must defile the *imago Dei*. Thus, for Ruskin, the fundamental evil of capitalism was not inequality but rather desecration, a profaning manifest in the factory discipline that extinguished all delight in labor: "It is not that men are ill fed, but that they have no pleasure in the work by which they make their bread." Still, Ruskin virulently opposed socialism—"simply chaos," he once mused—and called instead for a renewed paternalism.

This was the Tory Romanticism that Morris encountered as a student at Oxford, and he expressed his opposition to bourgeois society in its loftily aestheticized accent. He fell in with other students enthralled by the Oxford Movement—another genuine, albeit reactionary, bastion against the mercenary spirit of the age—and they formed a "Brotherhood" devoted to poetry and art as antidotes to commerce and industry. "Full of enthusiasm for things holy and beautiful and true," as his friend Edward Burne-Jones later described them, the Brotherhood adopted the "High Church" Anglicanism associated with the Reverend Edmund Pusey, and affirmed a medieval aesthetic as the antidote for industrial ugliness. (Inspired by the "Gothic Revival" in architecture, Morris joined several of the brethren who toured medieval churches in France and Belgium.) They also grew fond of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, and other "pre-Raphaelite" painters, who rejected the classicism that in their view had enervated much of the art of the past three centuries. United by what Morris later termed "a hatred of modern civilization" and stirred by a "desire to produce beautiful things," they contemplated forming a celibate religious order dedicated to the life of art; but Morris soon drifted away from religion, and abjured the consecrated life.

By the early 1880s, Morris was beginning to perceive the threads that connected the "swinish luxury of the rich" to urban destitution and imperial brutality.

Propelled by his "hatred of modern civilization," Morris's quest for the life of art and beauty led him inexorably to Ruskin, who made an indelible impression on the young and increasingly rudderless Romantic. After reading the first four volumes of *Modern Painters* while a student at Oxford, Morris proclaimed him "a Luther of the arts"; almost forty years later, in a preface to "The Nature of Gothic," Morris declared the aging sage "my master" and praised him as a great "teacher of morals and politics." Despite Ruskin's aversion to socialism, Morris learned from his "teacher" and "master" that "art is the expression of man's pleasure in labor," that beauty is "a natural and necessary accompaniment of productive labor," and that the craft ideal must be revived and reaffirmed as "the hallowing of labor by art."

In the almost three decades after he left Oxford in 1856, Morris embarked on an apostolate of art, a secularized "hallowing" project that turned out to be remunerative but not revolutionary. He apprenticed to a London architect and befriended Rossetti and other pre-Raphaelites, whose dreamy medieval reveries aroused his own poetic imagina-

tion; he wrote *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858) and *The Earthly Paradise* (1870), as well as *Love is Enough* (1872), and published illustrated translations of medieval Icelandic eddas and sagas. In 1861, along with Burne-Jones, Rossetti, and other partners, he founded a decorative arts firm, Morris and Company (also known as "the Firm"), which produced furniture, tapestries, stained-glass windows, and murals for walls and ceilings. Determined to recover medieval craftsmanship in the Firm's day-to-day operations, Morris became a virtuoso of craft, mastering carpentry, embroidery, ceramics, weaving, dyeing, and printing. Objecting to architectural restoration that involved the removal of medieval accretions to buildings, he formed the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings ("Anti-Scrape") in 1877.

Morris theorized his devotion to craft and architecture in "The Lesser Arts" (1877), a lecture that encapsulated some of the basic concerns that would animate his socialism. Aiming at the exaltation of Art, he rejected the separation between the decorative or "lesser" arts and the supposedly "higher" arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture. Because of this chasm, the decorative arts had grown "timid, mechanical, unintelligent," while much of the art of the galleries and museums consisted of "dull adjuncts to unmeaning pomp, or ingenious toys for a few rich and idle men." Morris traced the invidious distinction between the arts to the belief that beauty and utility are mutually exclusive. Rather, he maintained, they are mutually reinforcing; "nothing can be a work of art which is not useful." The duty of the artist—now understood as an artisan—is "to beautify the familiar matters of everyday life." Morris realized that this was a profoundly democratic conception of art: "I do not want art for a few any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few."

Still, Morris imagined this democracy of art within the mercantile parameters of capitalism; the erasure of illegitimate aesthetic boundaries would foster "the pleasure of cheerfully *buying* goods at their due price" and "the pleasure of *selling* goods that we could be proud of." Like other *bien-pensant* Victorian intellectuals, Morris looked to culture rather than politics for a solution to "the social question," hoping that his prodigious literary and artisanal production could elicit transformation:

> To what a heaven the earth might grow
> If fear beneath the earth were laid,
> If hope failed not, nor love decayed.

Yet the Firm's clientele was overwhelmingly bourgeois, and despite his disdain for middle-class life Morris found himself "ministering to the swinish luxury of the rich." (This goes a long way toward explaining what his biographer E. P. Thompson perceived to be the "evasive" quality of his verse.)

By the mid-1870s, Morris was no longer politically indolent. Still, if he had died at that time, he would have been remembered as a prototypical bourgeois bohemian, a Romantic liberal espousing what he later called "ordinary middle-class radicalism": extension of the suffrage, some modicum of reform, and a pronounced distaste for the more egregious atrocities of British imperialism. Recoiling from London's poverty and squalor, he evinced no support for socialism or the trade-union movement. In 1876, outraged by Conservative Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli's indifference to Ottoman atrocities in the Balkans, Morris joined other dissident Liberals in the Eastern Question Association (EQA). But when Disraeli's Liberal successor, William Gladstone, pursued similar policies elsewhere, Morris learned his first important political lesson: there was an effective consensus among Tories and Liberals about maintaining the imperial system. The Liberal Party, he realized, was "made for and by the middle classes" and "will always be under the control of rich capitalists." Then as now, "bipartisan consensus" was the talisman invoked to ratify and obfuscate injustice.

By the early 1880s, Morris was beginning to perceive the threads that connected the "swinish luxury of the rich" to urban destitution and imperial brutality. In 1883, he joined Eleanor Marx, H. M. Hyndman, and others in the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), Britain's first socialist party. For the rest of his life he threw himself wholeheartedly into revolutionary agitation—even after he and other disgruntled SDF members defected in 1885 to form the Socialist League. He also entered the most prolific phase of his career, writing essays and pamphlets as well as his utopian masterpiece, *News from Nowhere* (1890). Having apparently embraced Marxism, Morris, it seemed, had repudiated his old "master" Ruskin, the radical Tory. In Thompson's neat formulation, he had completed the ideological metamorphosis "from romantic to revolutionary."

But *was* Morris a Marxist? To make his case in 1955, Thompson had to finesse or evade some fairly obvious counterevidence. As Thompson himself noted, Friedrich Engels considered Morris "a sentimental socialist"—decidedly not the "scientific" variety. Moreover, Morris himself disclaimed the theoretical prowess that Thompson attributed to him. In "How I Became a Socialist" (1894), his own account of his political transformation, Morris admitted that while he "put some conscience toward trying to learn the economical side of Socialism"—he "even tackled Marx" and his "great work," *Capital*—he experienced "agonies of confusions of the brain." Besides, Morris wrote, he "had no transitional period"; while the SDF afforded "a hope of the realization of my ideal," that ideal itself had already been formed.

Indeed, the wellspring of his socialist commitment, he asserted, was the medievalism of "Carlyle and Ruskin," especially the latter. Through Ruskin he had "learned to give form to [his] discontent" which was "not by any means vague." For all his eagerness to align himself with "scientific socialism," Morris remained a revolutionary Romantic. (In an appendix to the 1977 edition of his book, Thomp-

son conceded curtly that his original argument had been marred by "some hectoring political moralism as well as a few Stalinist pieties.")

Morris's revolutionary Romanticism was most evident in his writing on work and technology. It's important to remember that, for Marx, the dehumanization of production is a tragic but ultimately liberating objective. In his dialectically promethean account of "machinery and modern industry" in *Capital*, the dispossession of artisans and craftsmen from control over the means of production and their conversion into wage laborers—in short, their proletarianization—are the necessary conditions of both technological innovation and socialism. Driven to lower costs by gaining mastery over the social and technological processes of production, capital introduces mechanization—what we now call automation. While the relocation of human skill in machinery enhances the power of capital over labor, it also creates the material basis for socialist and communist society. Now, machinery increases the exploitative intensity of capital; after the revolution, it will relieve human beings of drudgery and allow them the pleasures of free time. This is Marx's "realm of freedom" adumbrated today in briefs for automation such as Frase's *Four Futures* (2016) and Aaron Bastani's *Fully Automated Luxury Communism* (2019).

But there is a price for this emancipation, one that Morris thought exorbitant: the degradation and monotony of labor. "Labor cannot become play," Marx observed; the realms of necessity and freedom are forever divided by an impenetrable wall. This demarcation was of a piece with Marx's disdain for "utopian socialism," his epithet for any radical politics he considered disconnected from the Forces of History, among which was capitalism's "progressive" technological development of productive power. Just as he was unwilling to accept the separation of the "lesser" from the "higher" arts, Morris devoted his career as a socialist to the joyful reunion of labor and play—a reversal, not a culmination, of the alleged trajectory of history. In a series of essays—"A Factory As It Might Be" (1884), "How We Live and How We Might Live" (1887), "The Society of the Future" (1887), and "Useful Work versus Useless Toil" (1888)—as well as in *News from Nowhere* (1890), Morris transformed his "desire to produce beautiful things" into a revolutionary project, turning Ruskin's Tory Romanticism into a template for Romantic communism.

Marx and Morris agreed that the problem of work and technology was a political one. But for Marx it was *quantitative* (automation reduced the amount of necessary labor and increased the amount of free time), while for Morris it was *qualitative*. Promulgating "the semi-theological dogma that all labor, under any circumstances, is a blessing to the laborer," capitalism both keeps us "terrified for our livelihood"—servile and harried as we sacrifice ourselves for the sake of shareholder value—and shifts our attention to the length of the workday and away from the way it damages us, eroding our manual and imaginative dexterity by the progress of mechanization. Against the inferno of busywork enforced by stockholders, managers, and technicians, Morris posed the ancient ideal of *poiesis* and upheld the medieval icon of the artisan who "stamped all labor with the impress of pleasure." Rather than demand higher wages—"improved slave-rations," in Morris's view—workers should demand the abolition of wage labor and the full delights of production and leisure: "hope of rest, hope of product, hope of pleasure in the work itself." In a world of artisanal communards, the slavery of the Protestant ethic would yield to a new freedom *in* labor, not *from* it.

Rather than demand higher wages—"improved slave-rations," in Morris's view—workers should demand the abolition of wage labor and the full delights of production and leisure: "hope of rest, hope of product, hope of pleasure in the work itself."

Morris did not oppose all mechanization; some machines were indeed "miracles of ingenuity," but they should be used only to minimize "unattractive labor." The point, for Morris—as one would have thought it was for his Marxist comrades—was that *workers*, not a class of technical and managerial specialists, should control the design of production technologies and their deployment in the workplace. If workers think that "handicraft is better than machinery for production and pleasure"—and Morris clearly believed they would—then "they will certainly get rid of their machinery." Machines may be efficient in some strictly technical way, but in a new world of playful labor, "people will be able to use them or not as they feel inclined." (The same principle would conceivably apply to the labors of care—doctors, nurses, teachers, janitors, and others should determine the practices and technologies they employ.) Morris's insistence on what Lewis Mumford would later call "democratic technics" stemmed both from his socialist convictions and from his lifelong commitment to the hallowing of labor.

In the world Morris envisioned, workers would labor (and rest) in conditions worthy of their human nature. As Hammond, the narrator's guide in *News from Nowhere*, explains, because the utopians are no longer driven by the consumption of goods, "we have time and resources enough to consider our pleasure in making them." Morris imagined the factories of the future as both workshops and community

centers, with libraries, schools, dining halls, and venues for theatrical and musical performances. Rather than specialize in one trade or profession, people would vary "sedentary occupation with outdoor" (everyone, he believed, should learn at least three crafts), while instruction in the liberal arts and sciences would be open to people of all ages. And while Morris focused (too much) on work, he thought four hours a day sufficient for all necessary, reasonable production—as Hammond tells him, "we have now found out what we want, so we make no more than we want"—to be followed by idleness, or the free pursuit of interests, or the manifold forms of love and conviviality. (The subtitle of *News from Nowhere* is "an epoch of rest.") The spirit of the post-revolutionary world would be gentle, lighthearted, and voluptuous, with a love of the earth "such as a lover has in the fair flesh of the woman he loves."

It's not clear that Morris grasped just how profoundly incompatible his views on technology were with those of Marx. (Thompson certainly didn't: Soviet factories, he wrote, were "the poet's dream already fulfilled.") While Marxists often denigrate the ideal of craftsmanship as a "regressive" or "petty-bourgeois" fondness for a vestigial mode of production, the craft ideal enables us to ask questions about automation that its current enthusiasts seem disinclined and even unable to pose. If industrial technology under capitalism is designed not only to increase productivity, but also to give capital untrammeled control over the social as well as material processes of production, isn't that technology marked ineradicably by the politics and sensibility of domination? For all its legitimate uses in eliminating dangerous and tedious labor, doesn't automation deprive human beings of the pleasures of agency, ingenuity, and tactility? While writers such as Richard Sennett, Matthew Crawford, Wendell Berry, and Nicholas Carr have addressed these unfashionable concerns, anarchists have long envisioned the reconciliation of craftsmanship and automation, from Peter Kropotkin's forecast of "industrial villages" to Murray Bookchin's vision of "liberatory technology" that blends cybernetics with artisanal fabrication. By contrast, today's left-wing votaries of robotics seem content to take whatever comes from Silicon Valley.

Perhaps even more significant, Morris challenges us to rescue socialism, even communism, from what Thompson called the "enormous condescension of posterity." Before the Bolshevik Revolution, there was considerable debate on the left over the meanings of "socialism" and "communism"; the Marxist vernacular was only one among many. But whatever else they meant, "socialism" and "communism" meant the abolition of property in the means of production, and thus the overthrow of the aristocratic and industrial elites who exploited workers and peasants. Both words denoted the achievement not only of equality but also of *freedom*: from landlords, bosses, and stockholders. It meant the freedom of workers—like Ruskin's imperfect artisans—to arrange their own affairs and design their technology without the supervision of managers or technocrats. Bringing property and production under workers' control, socialism and communism represented not the bureaucratization of tyranny, as its critics claim, but rather the consummation of democracy.

Thus Morris helps us remember that socialism is not the sum of reforms to capitalism. Conservatives will usually vilify any restriction on the power of capital as "socialism"; liberals—"the more democratically inclined part of the ruling classes," as Morris rightly perceived them—constitute a more complicated opposition. Because conservatives mock them for their oversensitivity, while socialists deride their moderation, liberals tend to see themselves as sensible pragmatists. And they *are*, within the horizon of capitalist rationality: they want wage slavery "somewhat ameliorated" (higher wages and benefits, a welfare state, perhaps even a universal basic income) as long as the imperatives of capitalist property remain the fulcrum of society. Contemporary liberals comprise the left wing of the neoliberal ruling class.

To be sure, Morris did not oppose reforms; what mattered was "what else is being done, while these were going on." Unless reforms were part of a broader effort to overcome capitalism, they would turn out to be only "makeshift alleviations" that capital would terminate at the first opportunity. Indeed, if the history of the welfare state in the North Atlantic democracies offers any lessons on this score, it's that New Deal liberalism and social democracy flourished only as long as business put up with them; always chafing at taxes and restrictions, capital threw them off as soon as they became politically vulnerable. (Accordingly, many liberals and social democrats morphed into business-friendly neoliberals.) What Morris would emphasize now to Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and other self-avowed "democratic socialists" is that the reformist political imagination will always be circumscribed by the imperatives of capital.

Which is why we need utopia back, leavened by the Romantic desire for beatitude with which Morris endowed it—and more. Christians in particular have been warned about the seductive dangers of utopian hope, chastised with Augustinian platitudes about the intractability of human imperfection. But we might also think of utopianism as a form of realized eschatology, a proleptic politics rooted in a faith that the future can pay a visit to the present. Though a prodigal son from orthodoxy, Morris the Romantic captured something of this sacramental imagination; he praised (and, one suspects, envied) those medieval men and women "to whom heaven and the life of the next world was such a reality, that it became to them a part of the life upon the earth, which accordingly they loved and adorned." If, in the Kingdom, we live as a beloved community of godlike beings—akin to those haymakers in Oxfordshire, but manumitted from oppressive toil—why not insist on flourishing, to the extent that we can, on this damaged side of the eschaton? Turn the page, I say. ■

The Death of a Mental Patient

What My Brother Gave Me

Jay Neugeboren

On the evening of October 28, 2015, three days after my brother Robert's death, I held a memorial service for him in my Manhattan apartment. Despite a torrential rainstorm, more than fifty friends and relatives came, arriving from various parts of the city as well as from New Jersey, Connecticut, and upstate New York. I was surprised that so many people had come, especially given the short notice, the weather, and the fact that, except for my son Eli, not one of them had seen Robert, or had any interactions with him, for at least two decades. Robert had spent most of his adult life—more than fifty years—in and out of mental hospitals, psych wards, and halfway houses, and during those years—our parents having bailed out on him and moved to Florida—I'd been his sole caretaker and advocate. Our father died three years after their move and never saw Robert again; our mother lived for another thirty years, during which she saw Robert twice.

Until Robert's first breakdown, in 1962 at age nineteen, he had been an exceptionally gifted boy and young man. Famous in our neighborhood as an actor, singer, and dancer, he performed on street corners, in candy stores and barber shops, and invariably won leading roles in school and summer-camp stage productions. In his teenage years, he was a published poet, winner of a citywide essay contest, a good tennis player, and an excellent chess player. At Brooklyn's Erasmus Hall High School, he and Bobby Fischer were in a chess club together; Fischer was already National Junior Chess Champion, but refused to play with my brother. When Robert would ask why, Fischer would reply, "Because you play crazy."

For the first day or so after Robert's death, I fantasized about having a memorial service where I would ask those who came to honor him in death why they had never visited him while he was alive. What would it have cost them to stop by for a cup of coffee at one of the two residences in Manhattan where he'd lived, or to have taken him out for lunch or dinner, especially when several of them lived no more than a short walk or ride away? But I knew that this was how friends and family dealt with people afflicted with those conditions we call mental illness. I usually visited Robert at least once a week, yet in the half-dozen years he lived in a halfway house on West Forty-Seventh Street—a handsome brownstone that was home to fifteen residents, all diagnosed with serious and persistent mental illness—I never saw a single family member visit one of the other residents. The sad reality for individuals with chronic mental illness is that the longer they shuttle back and forth between psych wards, halfway houses, and the streets, the more people fade from their lives.

Aware that our friends and family had behaved no differently from the way most people behaved, I put aside the idea of haranguing them. Although I *felt* the situation personally, I told myself not to *take it* personally, and while this did not allow me to forgive them (and I didn't), it did allow the anger I felt to dissipate. When it did, I was able to realize how much I was missing Robert. His absence was an enormous presence, reminding me that he had been important not only *in* my life, but *to* my life; that who he was had made me who I was.

Most people, I knew, would be coming to the service not to memorialize Robert, but to comfort me, and—as I knew from messages I'd been receiving—to praise me for what I'd done for Robert. More than ever, my instinct was to deflect praise. Over the years I'd written about my brother and our relationship, and in question-and-answer sessions following talks and readings I gave, individuals would ask how and why I'd been able to stay the course for so long. My answer had always been the same: because he was my brother. What other answer was there? The more important question was not why I'd done what I'd done, but why others—family members as well as mental-health professionals—had *not* stayed the course. In any case, what I desired to explain to the guests at the service was not what I'd done for Robert, but what Robert had done for me.

I talked of how, blessedly, he'd had a peaceful ending to a most unenviable life, and of how in that life he'd outper-

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Robert Neugeboren (left) with his brother Jay, in 2002

formed and outlived all prognostications. I talked of his incomparable resiliency. One measure of that resiliency, and of his remarkable courage, was that despite more than fifty years in and out of mental hospitals and psych wards, he had somehow lived, with brain, memory, spirit, and sense of humor largely intact, to the same age, almost to the day—seventy-two years and six months—that our father had lived. And he had done so despite the abundance of medications that had been poured into him, despite a multitude of medical problems—many brought on by medications and abuse—and despite having been abandoned by parents, relatives, friends, and mental-health professionals.

To conjure up Robert's presence and his distinctive sense of humor, I told stories. I talked about the time I took him for a stress test at St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital, of how terrified he was, and of how, once he was on a treadmill, he kept shouting, "*I'm not a mouse! I'm not a mouse!*" I talked about the time we were visiting on New Year's Day, and I said that I thought we had a lot of things to be thankful for. Robert defied me to name three, and when I began with, "Well, first of all, we're still here," he smiled his most mischievous smile.

"—*and mother's not!*" he exclaimed.

I spoke of how Robert raged against the forces that beat him down, and how he never fully submitted, either to the demons within, or to those individuals and institutions that exacerbated the wretchedness he endured. I said that I was not on this evening going to rehearse the heartlessness and dysfunctionality of those institutions and systems that shaped Robert's life—or minimize how difficult, and nasty, *he* could sometimes be—but would simply state that Robert was always more human than those who had done their utmost to dehumanize him.

There were, of course, individuals who, through the years, had worked to give him a better life. I talked about Doctor Alvin Pam, Director of Psychology at Bronx Psychiatric Center who, two decades before, and against the consensus of his staff, had believed that Robert did not have to live on locked wards for the rest of his life; because of his good offices—and a treatment plan that included once-a-week, old-fashioned talk therapy—Robert had come to live outside hospitals and psych wards for a dozen consecutive years, with a room of his own, able to get around by himself in the city he knew and loved. They were his best and happiest adult years.

Stating the obvious, I noted that our relationships with our siblings were generally the longest of our lives. Contrary to what some might think, my relationship with Robert had never been a one-way street, and I listed gifts I'd received *from* him: first, and most essentially, that he *knew* me better than anyone, and that it was a source of ongoing strength and love to be truly known. Starting in childhood, Robert and I had been best friends and allies. Although like all brothers we sometimes fought, we both knew (and bragged to one another) that we were far closer with each other than any of our friends or cousins were with their siblings. And in knowing me, Robert was able to put aside whatever disappointments he'd felt about his life, or resentments about mine.

Thus, three months earlier, when we were eating dinner in his room at the nursing home, and he was going on and on in a manic soliloquy about Adlai Stevenson, Ed Koch, Dylan Thomas, E. E. Cummings, summer camp, and childhood friends, and stopped for a moment, I commented on how good the dinner was, and said that perhaps, since I was getting on in years, I might someday move into his nursing home. Robert's mania disappeared

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

FIRST LOVE

For a long—long
Time I couldn't remember
Your name—
The word for you
I had forgotten
But carried the image
Within me like
First love—a ghost that hid
In an empty room
Behind a door that was always
Closed—

In the country ruins
Of two lost souls
Around which the years
Of neglect and growth
Crumbled stone and mortar
Now made entry impossible—

But who sat in the drawing room
Sipping tea from white china
Without me—and sketched
A vision of you from memory?

—Stephen Rybicki

Stephen Rybicki is a poet and reference librarian at Macomb Community College, and lives in Romeo, Michigan.

instantly. "Oh Jay—" he said softly "—you don't ever want to live here, believe me."

Nor were we blindly supportive of one another; just as I would often tell Robert he was talking nonsense, so too, when I talked nonsense, he would correct me with a simple, "Oh, come *on*, Jay—who do you think you're kidding?"

For a multitude of reasons having to do with what information I sensed Robert could or could not tolerate on any given day, I'd learned that it was often best to withhold certain thoughts and feelings; merely because I felt and thought something did not mean I had to express it. When our mother was in her eighties, and Robert in his fifties, she was still asking him when he was going to get married, have children (she seemed unaware he was gay), and get his college degree. I could sense both the frustration her unfulfilled hopes caused her, and the pain that her voicing them caused Robert. So I tried to appreciate Robert for who he was, and for the rich life that he in fact did have (even if, at times, it was rich mainly in madness and misery), and not to talk or even think, more than was necessary, about the life he did not have. In time, such learned responses, *not* doing or saying what I might otherwise have felt compelled to say or do—and not asking questions that would be perceived as accusations—served me well in my own life, especially as parent to my children and, above all, in the years when I was a single parent to them.

By the pride Robert took in the book I wrote about us (*Imagining Robert: My Brother, Madness, and Survival)*, and in other writings that revealed his history of breakdowns, hospitalizations, and furies—mad acts of which others might have felt ashamed or humiliated—he helped set me free from things in *my* life about which I might otherwise have felt ashamed and humiliated. Once, at a book signing, when a woman asked Robert if it embarrassed him to have me write about his life as a mental patient—"as a *madman* is what she means," Robert whispered to me—he shrugged, and said, simply: "This book gave meaning to my life, and I hope it can give meaning to yours." By his generous acceptance of my life and achievements, Robert taught me how to accept my own frustrations, and to curb the envy of others I sometimes felt. By the fact of his survival—his recovery again and again from circumstances and experiences that would have done in most people—he taught me about the vast reserves of courage, humor, and resiliency that lie within us. And he taught me about the damage anger can do to oneself and others, as well as the ways anger can, in the service of survival, become one's friend.

Robert and I, to use a familiar figure of speech, were mirrors of one another. In childhood we were both bright Jewish boys with blond curly hair, both about the same weight and height, both talented at athletics and the arts. We performed well academically, even though teachers summoned our parents for conferences because, bored, we either daydreamed away our school hours, or distracted classmates with jokes and mischief. But mirrors reverse images as well as duplicate them, and Robert and I had frequently defined one another, and were defined by others, by our differences. Thus, at a funeral for one of our uncles, when Robert was out on a pass from a mental hospital, an older cousin had approached us and, shaking his head, said, "Why can't you just grow up already, Robert, and be like your brother?" And the more permanent Robert's condition as a mental patient became—the more frequent the episodes of madness that undermined his chances to lead an independent life—the more determined I became to lead as outwardly conventional a life as possible, so as never to go mad…or at least never *seem* to be going mad.

During Robert's early breakdowns and hospitalizations, I often wished I could change places with him, thereby setting him free while at the same time punishing myself

The author and his brother, Brooklyn, 1996

for whatever it was, in my character and actions, that had enabled me to survive. (It took many years for this feeling to fade, and to be replaced, though never completely, by the knowledge that even if, metaphorically, I did clip *my* wings, doing so would not enable *him* to fly.) And, too, if society defined *me* as crazy—and here my envy for the attention he received as "the sick child" revealed itself —I would be given license to say, write, and do anything *I* wanted, and thus become the free, flamboyant spirit Robert had often been and I had often longed to be.

I also became aware that writing about Robert had set me free both as a man (father, brother, son) and as a writer, for if I could write about things that were close to the heart and bone of my actual life, then I could write about anything. The constancy of Robert's presence in my life, and my attempt, as brother and writer, to explore his life—to imagine what it might be like to *be* Robert—had enabled me to reimagine my own life. Our collaborations and our friendship, that is, had set me free to remember, conjure up, and reflect on painful memories, as well as on shameful and angry feelings I'd previously suppressed or left unexamined, and to be able, by bringing them to consciousness, to deprive them of their power over me—to trust them, and to draw on them in my life and in my writing.

The ongoing tragedy of Robert's life had fired my imagination and—a gift no one else could have given me—provided me with some of my abiding subjects and themes: those characters, in story after story and book after book, who, like Robert, did not get to live out their early dreams and promise, and who, for one reason or another—suppurating emotional wounds, worldly circumstance, inner demons, lousy luck—had the lives they might have lived stolen from them. All this I received from my brother; all this I owed him and owe him still.

From the time of our father's death in 1976, I'd been carrying on imaginary conversations with him, conversations in which he'd become more like the warm, confident, wise father I'd longed for. In those forty years I'd also taken to talking regularly with other relatives and friends who had passed away. And so, on the day Robert died, and on those that followed, Robert and I talked; and when a thousand-word lead obituary appeared in the Sunday editions of both the *New York Times* and the *Boston Globe*, I read it aloud to him.

Only when I was done reading did Robert tell me that where he was now—"splendid panoramic views, by the way," he said—he had, of course, already seen the obit. Freely admitting that, like our mother, he'd always loved being the center of attention, he confessed delight at the fact that of all the individuals who had had the bad judgment to pass away during the previous week, these newspapers had deemed him the most important.

"You're not the only famous son in this family, you know," he said.

"I know," I said. "And do you know what else?"

"Tell me," he said.

"That obituary confirmed something I've often thought but rarely expressed aloud. Something I can now clearly see—"

"Now that I'm *gone*, you mean," Robert said.

"Okay," I said. "Now that you're gone. Yes. But I *am* very proud of you, Robert, and now that you're gone, I can clearly see something else: that although your life was, as I said at the memorial service, an ongoing tragedy, it was also—"

"—*a triumph!*" Robert exclaimed.

"Yes," I said. "Your life was a triumph, Robert."

Robert was silent for a second or two. "But really, Jay—who knew?" he said. And then: "It didn't always *feel* like a triumph, though. I can tell you that." ■

Travis LaCouter

Motherhouse of Cinema

LETTER FROM CANNES

The city of Cannes on the Côte d'Azur has long been a place of retreat. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Lord Chancellor of Great Britain Henry Brougham began vacationing there. His regular patronage helped establish the small port town as a luxury getaway, especially among Anglophone travelers. A couple of decades prior, Napoleon had decamped just outside Cannes at the very start of his "Hundred Days" march back to Paris from Elba. And late in the eleventh century, long before *le petit caporal* strode the earth, Cistercians built a community on the small island of Saint-Honorat that sits a short distance from Cannes' sunny coast, where Christian monks had been since at least the fifth century. Though today the former backwater has become a global name, it still retains, implausibly, something of that former sense of escape and sanctuary.

At least that's the way it felt to me as I arrived for the start of the seventy-second annual Cannes Film Festival last month. I was there on a short-term pass, and during my brief visit I felt that I had come to a place both familiar and fantastical. Sure, the trappings of wealth were all too obvious: gaudy $100 million yachts cluttering the harbor; boutique jewelers dotting the boulevard; glitterati and social climbers preening for the cameras. And yet, the festival stands as a latter-day monastery dedicated to film—with the sprawling Palais des Festivals a kind of motherhouse, welcoming weary pilgrims from all corners of the world. Languages blend together, strangers strike up conversations on the street, giddy excitement swarms around the most highly anticipated premieres—the spirit is not at all dissimilar to what one finds at the great cathedrals of Christendom. A common love covers over a multitude of small differences. All this lends the festival a certain charm, a naïveté, quite at odds with its actual purpose.

After all, Cannes is distinctly an *industry* event. Unlike the Sundance or Toronto festivals, tickets are not on sale

NORBERT SCANELLA / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Workers roll out the Cannes Film Festival's red carpet.

to the public (though a number of passes are granted to "cinephiles"—mostly film students and enthusiasts). Production companies are there to acquire new clients; producers introduce star actors to potential financiers; journalists and critics sniff out storylines that will last until awards season; and investors come to Cannes to see and be seen. One feels distinctly that this is where the sausage is made. Much like the great cathedrals of the world, Cannes is simultaneously a place of worship *and* a place of business. And business is booming: the U.S. box office raked in $11.86 billion in 2018, easily outpacing an anemic 2017; the British box office had its best year in decades; Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia (especially China), and the Middle East are all large, growing markets; and worldwide ticket sales in 2018 reached a new high-water mark of more than $41 billion. It has become fashionable in recent years to lament the waning prospects of the film industry, but commercial trends simply don't bear out such pessimism.

It's true, of course, that the industry's renewed success is largely a result of gargantuan blockbusters of dubious artistic merit—at the time of this writing, *Avengers: Endgame* has single-handedly earned more than $2.6 billion in global sales. But the Marvel machine hasn't yet colonized Cannes: the glitziest film among the official selections this year was *Rocketman*, the ham-handed Elton John biopic starring Taron Egerton (*Kingsman*) and directed by Dexter Fletcher (*Bohemian Rhapsody*). Films like these serve their purpose: they get people in the door and help keep entire studios afloat. Even for the auteur directors and discerning critics of Cannes—high priests of the global church of cinema—it is impossible to ignore or dismiss the changes to the industry landscape wrought by the mega-franchises. Still, most of the films in competition were quieter, more richly textured meditations on love, loss, and identity. What's more, younger audiences are refusing the choice between splashy smash hits and indie art films, instead opting for both. The Canadian director David Cronenberg may have admitted last year that he had barely been to the movies in the past five years, deciding instead to trust the Netflix algorithms; but industry figures from Germany, America, and elsewhere suggest that young people who frequently use online streaming services are *more* likely to attend the cinema, not less.

Besides commercial concerns, another specter loomed at the festival this year, too. The long shadow cast by a particular president's orange bouffant covers the globe, and Cannes is no exception. In Cannes as in Hollywood, Trump is a figure of near-universal scorn; but Trump's name was almost never explicitly mentioned at the festival, and in general the crowd here opted for icy neglect instead of histrionics. Which is not to say politics was avoided altogether. Speaking at a press conference toward the beginning of the festival, Alejandro G. Iñárritu (director of *Birdman* and *The Revenant*, as well as the first Mexican to head the prestigious Cannes jury) bemoaned the social isolation upon which our "cruel and dangerous" politics seems to turn, and presented film as a way of overcoming "otherness." "Cinema must try to raise the global social conscience," Iñárritu said later. Describing what "these guys"—by whom he meant populist leaders across the globe—are doing, Iñárritu warned: "They are writing fiction and making people believe those things are real. [But] we know how this story ends," he said, referring to the outbreak of World War II in 1939.

Iñárritu's reference to storymaking is interesting. On its surface, the charge might seem hypocritical, because that is exactly what everyone is at Cannes to celebrate: fiction, making people believe. But then this suggests that perhaps the familiar animosity between Hollywood liberals and conservative politicians is not so much a clash of ideological opposites as it is the sort of rivalry that arises between practitioners of the same trade: the ancient craft of mythmaking. Power always avails itself of a narrative, and a narrative that is capacious enough to include others is more powerful. At a time when Trump's

narrative takes up so much space (as an American living abroad I've come to expect the "T-word" within the first ten minutes of a new conversation) it is only natural that these fellow storytellers find themselves threatened. The fight for control over the stories we tell—over what images are projected onto the walls of the cave—is at least as old as Plato.

Which brings us back to those cavernous theater spaces at Cannes. There is an acute irony to the whole exercise: here we were in a sun-drenched Eden, leaving behind the coquettish enticements of the surf and the sand in order to march into primordial caves and sit silently for hours on end. These dark spaces are a central aspect of the festival's enduring mystique. The Grand Théâtre Lumière, the flagship venue at the Palais, can seat more than 2,300 viewers. Simply being gathered together with that many people makes watching these films feel different, especially from the average viewing experience at a cramped local cinema. Gone was the endless crinkle of snack wrappers, the half-hour of mindless commercials and infantilizing preliminary chastisements, the intrusive glow of tiny blue light from an errant mobile device. Rather, we were all engaged in the act of viewing—we were all enthralled. Within the Grand Theater, we were one body, vulnerable in that vast darkness to the stories we were being told.

The Oxford theologian Graham Ward, writing about the human capacity for imagination and its relationship to film and filmmaking, emphasizes precisely this "transcorporal" dimension. For Ward, diving into the caves of imagination is like being "devoured" and digested. The cave/theater becomes a stomach or, even better, a "womb" in which "bodies are entering and interacting with other bodies, *emerging* from other bodies." Indeed, film is to be distinguished from other art forms—even from another representative art such as painting—by the fact that it depicts *bodies in motion*. And the language we attach to the filmmaking process—the camera as an eye, for instance—likewise evokes the idea of embodiment. The craft of filmmaking, then, might be judged by the extent to which it decenters our sense of self: Does a given film leave us as it found us, or (worse still) all the more confident in the categories we've devised for making sense of the world? Does it leave our body intact? Or rather, does it raze the bastions we've erected against "otherness" and push us toward some new exercise of imagination, toward some new birth of self? Thus Ward: "True film-making…offers us a seat in the planetarium of our vast and deep collective minds." It is on this basis that we should understand Iñárritu's criticism of Trump, from one mythmaker to another.

Some of the films I saw at Cannes succeeded by this measure: Monia Chokri's *La Femme de Mon Frère* probed the porousness of the lines separating one person from another with wit and love. *Bacurau*, a standout Brazilian work by Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles, won the Jury Prize this year as a psychedelic, genre-bending exploration of group identity and memory. Other films failed miserably: Kantemir Balagov's depraved sophomore outing, *Beanpole*, left me feeling only a cold disgust at the prospect of any human connection. But most of the films at least aimed at this kind of midwifery, this initiation into a more universal imagination.

What were we there in Cannes to worship, we pilgrims for film? And what were we seeking sanctuary from? The answer to both questions is the same: some sense of self, some experience of the other. We wanted to be digested in the belly of a story not our own. Whether these stories ultimately free us or enslave us is a question of politics—*the* question of politics. But they are our stories, as much in the viewing as in the telling. And in that sense, at least, the prayers that go up from Cannes this May will sustain us another year at least. ■

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Rand Richards Cooper

The Exonerated Five

'WHEN THEY SEE US'

Americans fifty and up will recall the notorious 1989 case of five teenagers of color accused of brutalizing a white woman jogging in New York's Central Park. At a time of surging violent crime in U.S. cities, the attack spawned a scary term, "wilding," that fueled white fear of young black men as malign predators; the nightly news, showing the five suspects being hustled out of a police station, heads down, inscribed in the white collective mind an image of guilt that their confessions and subsequent convictions only reaffirmed.

Except that they didn't do it.

Ava DuVernay's four-part Netflix docudrama, *When They See Us*—the title evokes the distorting lens of racial bias—chronicles how five young American males of color were railroaded into confessing to a crime they didn't commit. Held without food or sleep, kept isolated and mostly without legal representation, they were badgered by detectives who continually promised that if they would implicate others in the group they could "go home." "Let's make a deal," a cop says to one of the boys. "You give something, you get something." Eventually they caved in and assented to confessions spoon-fed to them by investigators. It was a textbook case of faulty interrogation techniques, driven by a cynical heedlessness born of racism. Psychologists and criminologists have amply documented the ability of innocent arrestees to provide false confessions, once they are broken down. In the event, all five quickly recanted their stories, but it was too late.

The case brings back the poisonous zeitgeist of late-1980s New York, where a new über class of wealthy young Wall Streeters disported itself amid the wreckage of a crack-cocaine epidemic among the city's underclass. Violent crime reached levels unimaginable today (the city suffered 2,250 murders in 1990; twenty-five years later, just 330); looking back in 2002, *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert described "a city soaked in the blood of crime victims.... [where] rapists, muggers and other violent criminals seemed to roam at will." The Central Park jogger attack brought to the surface a latent social narrative among the city's dominant classes—that of wild young black men preying on white people—and energized whites to vehement outbursts of self-righteous race anger. "This was a proxy war," *New York Times* reporter Jim Dwyer recalled years afterward. In that war, Kevin Richardson, Antron McCray, Yusef Salaam, Raymond Santana, and Korey Wise—who ranged in age from fourteen to sixteen—didn't stand a chance.

With a few important differences (more on that shortly), DuVernay follows in the steps of the 2013 Ken and Sarah Burns documentary, *The Central Park Five*. But fictionalization allows her to deepen the portrayal of the characters and their families, adding immensely to the story's power. *When They See Us* informs, challenges, and moves a viewer in equal measure, capturing the nuances of the human story even as it lodges a pointed political critique of race and the justice system. It isn't easy to be forcefully accusatory without sentimentalizing. This is the rare work whose beauty arises from focused moral anger.

Central is the question of perspective: Whose lens will be used to view these events, whose viewpoint privileged? Who is seeing—and characterizing—whom? Putting forth a belated counter-narrative to the dominant (white) narrative that proved so damning in 1989, Part One quickly establishes the routine innocence of the boys, their

ATSUSHI NISHIJIMA / NETFLIX

Caleel Harris in When They See Us

preoccupation with sports and girls and clothes. DuVernay is similarly at pains to reinscribe "wilding" as an innocent term: "They probably just wilding out," says one of the boys, as a group of laughing kids rushes by. Does wilding involve some aggressiveness? Yes, and DuVernay portrays it: the badgering of two bike riders in the park; the unprovoked pummeling of a white guy. But such incidents are far from a brutal rape; and in any case, none of the five boys ultimately charged with the rape did any of the aggressive wilding, either.

The early scenes, which show us each boy in his own individual life, take a trope of disaster films—who happens to get on the plane, and who doesn't?—and deploy it to profound dramatic effect. We see Korey flirting with his girlfriend at a fast-food restaurant as his friend Yusef, heading for the park, stops and pounds on the window, urging him to follow. Korey's girlfriend tries to persuade him to stay. He hesitates, then leaves; he gets on the plane, a moment of destiny that will be revisited with excruciating regret later on. The get-on-the-plane trope cannily configures what is about to happen as a kind of calamity, a random disaster for which the boys are hardly more to blame than a passenger on a doomed aircraft would be.

Yet that calamity is no act of God, but a creation of human attitudes. As Linda Fairstein (Felicity Huffman), the Manhattan DA's lead prosecutor on the case, struggles to whip events into shape in her mind, we see a blatantly faulty syllogism emerge: a brutal attack happened in the park; these black male teens were in the park; therefore, these black kids committed the brutal attack. That's a logical fallacy a ten-year-old could see through, right? Wrong. What's missing is the underlying assumption supplied by racial bias: that these young black men are the *type* to do this; that they were up to no good. And so the presumption of innocence is vaporized by the hot glare of racism.

When They See Us delivers a lesson in the mechanics—the linguistics, really—of dehumanization, whereby groups in power marginalize others through invidious language. Police, prosecutors, and the press refer to "these animals" who "rampaged" and "terrorized," a "wild pack," all pitted against—as Fairstein puts it—"our lady jogger." (Such language sprang up among whites irrespective of political orientation; the liberal *New York Times*, in an editorial, referred to the accused boys as "a savage wolf pack.") No one would want to minimize the suffering of the victim, a young investment banker named Trisha Meili (and one of the many hard-to-watch scenes in this series is her halting, limping, and profoundly damaged appearance at the trial). But DuVernay makes crystal-clear how her suffering was exploited and wielded to preempt any fair inquiry into whether these boys did it.

The interrogations of the boys—in which they are relentlessly browbeaten and at times physically beaten—raise the question: What did the cops think they were doing when they extorted these confessions? Did they believe these kids committed the crime? Or did they think it didn't matter? In other words, was the calamity a matter of cynical villainy, or merely grotesque error? Dwyer, in an otherwise approving review of the series, points to what he views as significant simplifications in its depiction of the investigation. Citing "bungling by the authorities," he notes that while the boys' confessions didn't align with the actual details of the assault on the jogger,

> the police and prosecutors are portrayed as immediately aware of these discrepancies. That is false. Chaos does not get its due.... The tunnel vision that took over the investigators is rendered solely as amoral ambition, but the reality of error in the Central Park case, as in most everything, is more interesting and nuanced than cartoon villainy.

There's been much coverage of the belated pushback currently aimed at Linda Fairstein, who vehemently disputes the show's villainous portrayal of her and accuses DuVernay of "misrepresenting the facts in an inflammatory and inaccurate manner." The writers of a recent *New York Times* article assert, like Dwyer, that the script "took liberties" with its depiction of the investigation. And the Ken Burns documentary suggested that apart from a few detectives so fanatically bent on conviction that they didn't care about actual innocence or guilt, most of the white people involved—prosecutors, press, outraged citizens—honestly believed the five were guilty.

For white liberal viewers, these questions of individual intent may loom as central; only by understanding intent, many will insist, can we assess the complicity of those who rammed through the confessions and convictions in the case. This issue may matter less to viewers of color. One stinging question that the current discourse on race has put in the face of white liberals is: Who cares about your intentions, given the fact of systemic racism? A white progressive's idea of himself, in this view, is a kind of epiphenomenon, a squiggly decoration prettifying a rotten cake. And to be sure, a minute sifting of the intentions of those who helped engineer false verdicts is likely to seem less than crucial to someone serving a sentence for a crime he didn't commit.

In the end, it may be a distinction without a difference, given the ugly reality of the mass racial groupthink that determined the case's outcome. Like the Ken Burns documentary, *When They See Us* is a study in what cognitive psychologists call confirmation bias. As long as you assume the five *must* be guilty, their confessions seem damning; assume, however, that they might well *not* be guilty, and suddenly all sorts of flaws and contradictions appear. The problem was that no one who mattered in the Central Park case—in either the justice system or among politicians and the press—made this key assumption. Indeed, even when a convicted rapist stepped forward, years later, and confessed to the crime (a confession confirmed by DNA), many investigators refused to back down. And in 2002, when Manhattan DA Robert Morgenthau, acknowledging "troubling discrepancies" in the original confessions, let the convictions be vacated, he was

reviled by many. (When I interviewed Morgenthau in 2013 for a magazine profile, he called this case the low point of his nearly seventy-year career in law.)

The first half of *When They See Us* covers the night in the park and subsequent arrests, interrogations, and trial; the second (with adult actors replacing the younger actors of the earlier scenes) engages the long aftermath, including hard years spent in prison. There are mordantly enjoyable metatextual ironies, including Felicity Huffman, currently involved in the real-life college-admissions scandal, playing Fairstein as ethically bankrupt. Donald Trump appears as well; the loudmouth developer—then in his forties—takes out full-page ads in all four big New York papers, urging the death penalty. "They got to get that bigot off TV," says one of the boys' mothers. "Don't worry," responds another, "his fifteen minutes are almost up." If only. What seems like a toss-off irony has a deeper point—namely, that whatever hope of exoneration the future might hold for these five, and whatever reforms might ensue from the injustice they suffered, the crass and punitive racism of many in power is far from over. Indeed, the worst of them shall become the first of them, and this knowledge casts a pall of additional pessimism over an already gloomy moral landscape.

However powerful the first two segments of the series, the last two are more harrowing still. Part Three takes us through the indignities that afflict the recently incarcerated. The attempt to find work yields interviews that end quickly once the men's record is revealed. Raymond ends up dealing drugs. Yusef is stunned to find that he can't get certified as a teacher or EMT. "Once you been inside, man," his barber informs him, "they got you. And they keep you." Dedicating fully half the series to the post-incarceration period, DuVernay expresses the critique of mass incarceration that has been formulated in the years since this event, suggesting that recently released inmates are deprived of the means of making an honest living as part of a system bent upon returning them to prison. The critique of race has developed greatly since 1989, when there was no Innocence Project, no Black Lives Matter, no New Jim Crow, no Michelle Alexander or Ta-Nehisi Coates, no mainstream talk of reparations, no Bryan Stevenson and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Alabama, no Museum of African American history in Washington, and on and on. Duvernay's film is the child of these developments. She operates in a conceptual framework that barely existed back then—among white people, that is.

Part Four, which follows the travails of the one boy, Korey Wise, who was tried and convicted as an adult, is the hardest to watch. There are poignant scenes between Wise and his mother, who visits him in prison; she's wracked by remorse, while he struggles to hide how brutally he's being treated by inmates and guards alike. A relatively hopeful interlude, in which one kindly guard plays his protecting angel, alternates with periods in solitary confinement, where Wise's mind circles relentlessly back to that night and his fateful decision not to stay with his girlfriend in the fast-food restaurant. In one fantasy sequence, filled with grief-struck yearning, we see him bursting out of his cell to find himself with her in Coney Island, enjoying a blissful day. In Wise's videotaped confession—which closely follows the actual tape as seen in the Burns documentary—we see the boy continually rubbing his face and eyes, as if trying to wake himself from a nightmare. But there is no waking. In prison Wise eventually stops going to his own parole hearings, and vows to "max out" his sentence, knowing that early release requires admitting remorse for a crime he didn't commit. His and the others' obdurate refusal to renounce their innocence, even with freedom at stake, testifies eloquently to the deep human need for justice.

The close of the series, following the confession made by the real Central Park rapist, brings legal exoneration and financial restitution; the men sue the city and are awarded $41 million in damages. Yet what has gone before makes true catharsis all but impossible, for them and for us. To a man they come across as gentle souls, remarkably free of bitterness even as they remain fully aware of the price they have paid in lost years. "You can't get that back," Raymond's father says to him. "You just gotta move forward." (You can see the actual men discussing their experiences together with the actors who play them.)

The ambivalent close reflects a basic dilemma: What should we focus on when we look at race in the United States? Should it be the fact that recent decades have brought a lessening of overt forms of racism, some acceptance of critiques of systemic racism, and socioeconomic and educational progress for some Americans of color? Or should the focus be on the moral outrage of racism and slavery in the first place, and on how long it has taken to eke out even a minimal acknowledgment of the central role played by that outrage in our national creation myth, and in the ongoing workings of our nation itself?

As DuVernay reminds us, the answer to such questions depends on identity; what you choose to look at depends on who you are. For what it's worth, I—middle-aged upper-middle-class white male—don't take issue with any critique that lays bare America's foundationally racist history and structures. I *do* differentiate between past and present, though; that is to say, I believe progress is possible and that progress has indeed happened. African Americans, meanwhile, are far more likely to view America as ineradicably racist, and to see white racism as something that Americans of color can at best live with—managing it, coping with it, the way one lives with a chronic disease.

It's an apt metaphor, and DuVernay's taut and sorrowful drama delivers an acute diagnosis of how it has afflicted this nation, while reminding us—if we should need reminding—that it is not the business of white Americans to instruct black Americans on when, how, where, or indeed whether at all, to feel hope. ■

Andrew J. Bacevich

Pundit on a Pilgrimage

The Second Mountain
The Quest for a Moral Life
David Brooks
Random House, $28, 384 pp.

David Brooks eludes easy classification. To call him a journalist is the equivalent of calling Donald Trump a real-estate developer: the label may not be wrong, but it is thoroughly insufficient. A columnist for the *New York Times,* author of several bestsellers, regular participant in weekly NPR and PBS news roundups—did I mention his teaching gig at Yale?—Brooks is anything but an ink-stained wretch. He is our Walter Lippmann, positioned above the fray to tell us what it all means.

Brooks differs from Lippmann in at least two respects. He possesses a wry sense of humor, whereas Lippmann seemingly never cracked a smile. And while Lippmann distanced himself from his Jewish heritage, Brooks has never done so. He is thoroughly a Jew, albeit one whose personal Exodus story has now led him to become a kind of Christian as well. That's the big reveal in "A Most Unexpected Turn of Events," the twenty-first chapter of his new book, *The Second Mountain*.

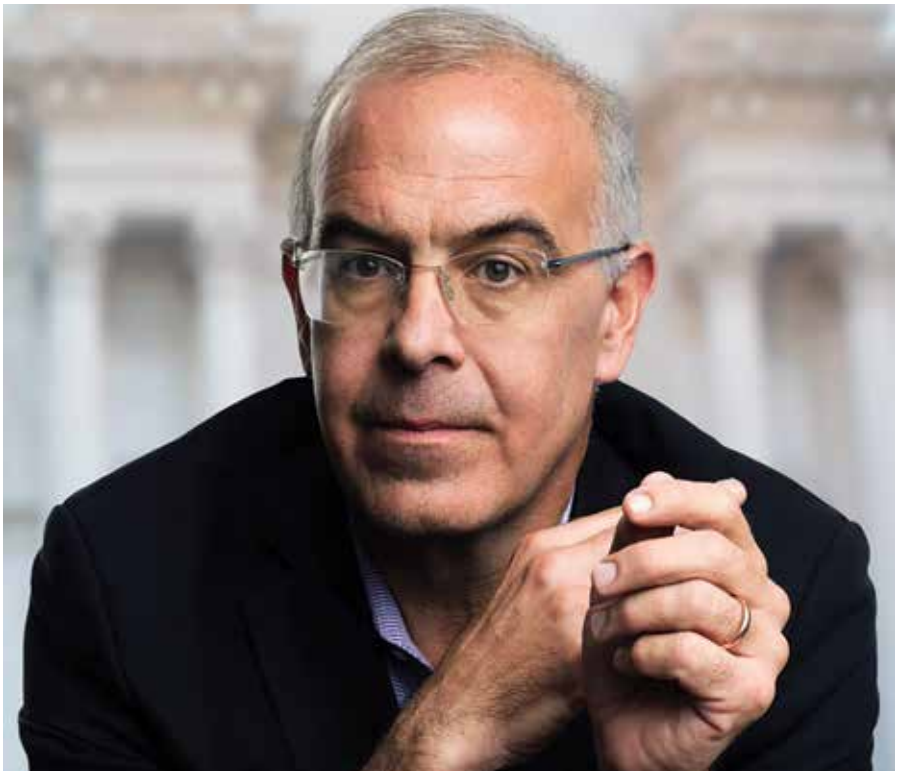
As for the twenty preceding chapters and the several that follow it, I suppose it's all a matter of taste, but I found them formulaic, preachy, and too pat. Skip them or skim them as you will. Yet linger over Chapter 21 with its moving and insightful account of the author's own midlife spiritual awakening.

Even so, as a reviewer I am obliged to summarize and assess the balance of the book. The principal subject of *The Second Mountain* is joy. In simplest terms, it offers a handbook for seekers of joy, a quality that Brooks distinguishes from mere happiness. People who live on what he calls the "first mountain" are motivated by "some vision of prominence, pleasure, and success." They are seeking happiness. For most of us, getting to the top of this first mountain is a lifelong quest. We never reach our goal. "The grand narrative of individual emancipation" turns out to be a hoax.

Some people, however, abandon this fraudulent quest and "rebel against the mainstream culture." Finding themselves, "down in the valley," their motivations radically change. They now "glimpse something bigger than personal happiness." That something bigger is the "second mountain," which promises a "moral joy" that comes from "shedding the ego and losing the self." At the summit of the second mountain is life lived for others.

Brooks set out to write this book when he was himself "down in the valley." His marriage of nearly thirty years was coming apart. His children were growing up and moving away. He was living alone. Changes in the American political landscape left him intellectually adrift. He felt "unplanted, lonely, humiliated, scattered." So he set out to learn "how to do commitments well."

In doing so, he discovered two things. First, the plight that afflicted him afflicts the nation as a whole. "For six decades," he writes, "the worship of the self has been the central preoccupation of our culture."



HOWARD SCHATZ

David Brooks

> Capitalism, the meritocracy, and modern social science have normalized selfishness; they have made it seem that the only human motives that are real are the self-interested ones—the desire for money, status, and power.… The rot we see in our politics is caused by a rot in our moral and cultural foundations…. Our society has become a conspiracy against joy.

Yet second, amidst the rot, some ordinary Americans find ways to subvert this conspiracy and to ascend the second mountain. Brooks tells their stories. And from those stories—reinforced with dozens of inspirational quotations from not-so-ordinary personages, ranging from Dorothy Day and Bruce Springsteen to Leo Tolstoy and Mother Teresa—he constructs a taxonomy of joy, which, he says, is experienced on six levels: physical, celebratory, emotional, spiritual, transcendent, and finally moral.

This mania for breaking things down into discrete categories or components recurs throughout the book. The result is a bit like one of those glossy magazine articles promising "Seven Steps to a Better You" or "Ten Ways to Keep Love Alive." So the culture of hyper-individualism, according to Brooks, rests on five "assumptions": the buffered self, the God within, the privatization of meaning, the dream of total freedom, and the centrality of accomplishment. The failure of hyper-individualism produces "four interrelated social crises": loneliness, distrust, a crisis of meaning, and tribalism. Ascending the second mountain begins with the renunciation of self and a "love-drenched, identity changing" commitment that yields four "benefits": identity, purpose, a "higher level of freedom," and moral character. This leads, in turn, to a "motivational shift" encompassing "six layers of desire" and producing "four commitments" of a different sort: to vocation, marriage, philosophy and faith, and community. As love evolves toward marriage, it follows identifiable "stages of intimacy": from a first glance to curiosity to dialogue to "combustion" and then to "the leap," before finally culminating in "fusion." Making a marriage work for the long haul requires three things: "empathy, communication, and commitment." And just when you imagine that the peak of the second mountain is within reach, there are four "walls" that can disrupt your journey, their effects mitigated by six "ramps" to keep you moving in the right direction. Brooks also offers a "Code of a Neighbor," consisting of nine "common principles"—e.g., "We are enough"; "Village over self." He then appends to the book a "Relationalist Manifesto" consisting of sixty-four articles. The concluding sentence captures the spirit of the whole: "Love emerges between people out of nothing, as a pure flame."

Brooks writes that when down in the valley he wrestled with "what the rest of my life should be, confronting the problems of a twenty-two-year-old with the mind of a fifty-two-year-old." A disenchanted twenty-two-year-old searching for meaning might find value in his answers. But for this seventy-two-year-old, *The Second Mountain* contains more than a little poppycock.

Except, that is, when it comes to Chapter 21. *The Second Mountain*'s longest chapter by far, the "most unexpected turn of events" to which the chapter refers is Brook's own "pilgrimage toward faith."

Brooks grew up in a secular Jewish milieu surrounded by kids who were "implicitly Christian," but without a concrete religious identity. Concluding at an early age that God did not exist, he viewed religion as a matter of no more than "theoretical importance." After Brooks and his first wife married (in a Unitarian church), she converted and embraced Jewish religious practices wholeheartedly. For Brooks, however, Judaism remained a tradition, rather than a religion. He was a "friendly supporter of faith but had none," although conceding in retrospect that "the hound of heaven was nipping at [his] heels."

The hound caught up in New York's Penn Station. Brooks was getting off the subway "surrounded as always by thousands of people, silent, sullen, trudging to work in long lines."

> Normally [he continues] the routineness of life dulls your capacity for wonder. But this time everything flipped, and I saw souls in all of them. It was like suddenly everything was illuminated, and I became aware of an infinite depth in each of these thousands of people.

That summer, hiking in Aspen, Colorado, surrounded by natural beauty and reading from a book of Puritan prayers, he experienced "a sensation of things clicking into place, like the sound of a really nice car door gently closing." He felt a sense of deep harmony: "that creation is a living thing, that we are still being created and we are accepted in it." And with it came a sudden recognition that "there is an animating spirit underlying all creation." After his visit to Aspen, Brooks writes, "I realized I was a religious person."

He now embarked on a journey of spiritual discovery, encouraged by friends who among other kindnesses showered him with over a hundred copies of C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*. He also fell in love with and eventually married a devout Christian woman, who had been his research assistant and is twenty-three years his junior.

Today Brooks describes himself as more Jewish than ever and yet also Christian. "God's covenant with the Jewish people is a real thing," he writes. "On the other hand, I can't unread Matthew." He describes the beatitudes as "the ultimate roadmap for our lives." Then this: "Jesus is the person who shows us what giving yourself away looks like. He did not show mercy; he is mercy. He did not offer perfect love; he is perfect love." Does he believe in the Resurrection? "The simple, brutally honest answer is, it comes and goes." As it does for many.

The Second Mountain offers a choice between Brooks the pop sociologist and Brooks the wayfarer. I much prefer the latter. ■

Andrew J. Bacevich's *new book,* The Age of Illusions: How America Squandered Its Cold War Victory, *will be published in January 2020.*

Katherine Lucky

Friends & Benefits

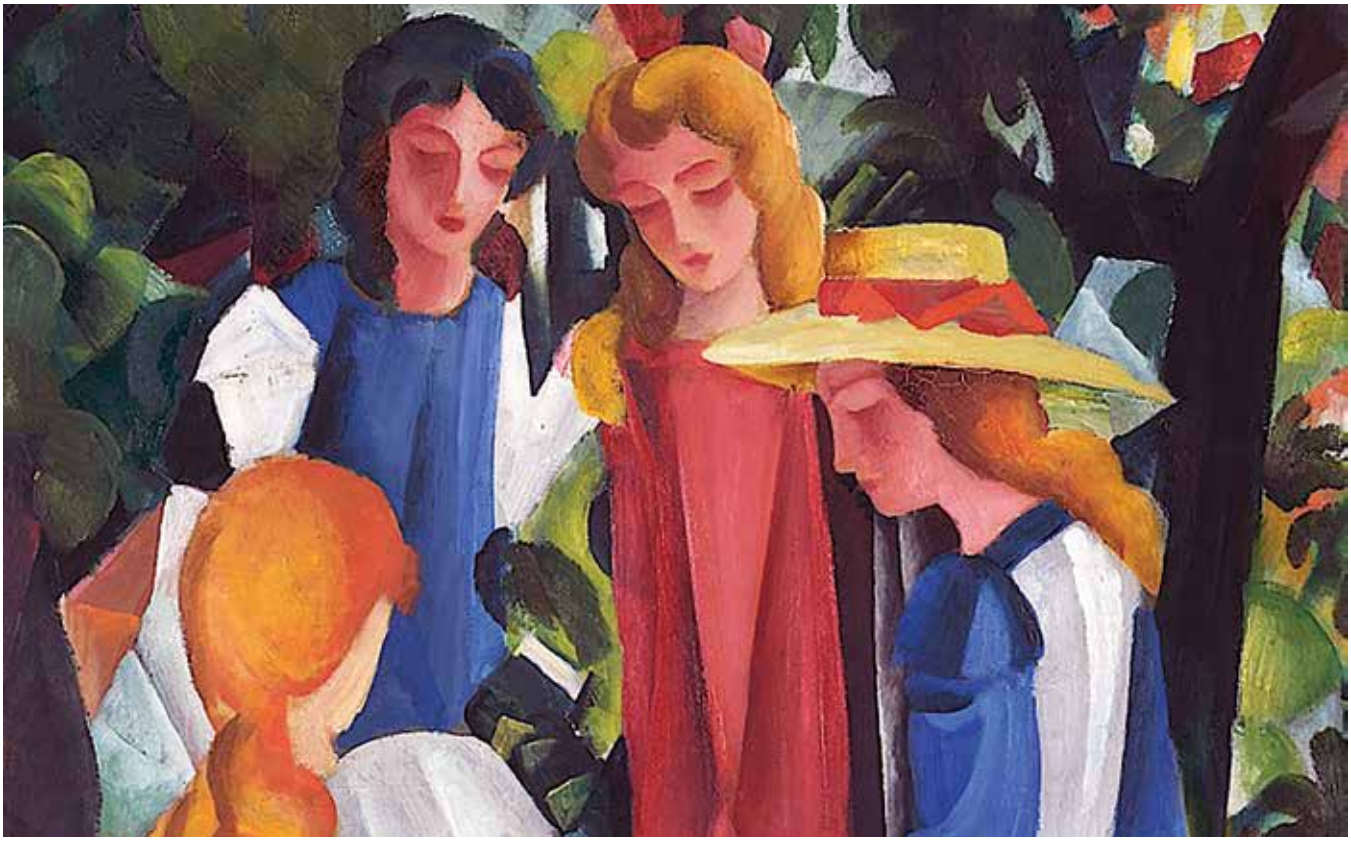
Hard to Love
Essays and Confessions
Briallen Hopper
Bloomsbury Publishing, $27, 336 pp.

I agree with Briallen Hopper about a lot of things. Let's start there. Her new essay collection, *Hard to Love*—which includes personal essays, as well as criticism—is against self-sufficiency and for dependency. I'm into that. In one of my favorite lines, Hopper writes, "My sisters know I'm bossy and my friends know I'm kind, and when I'm alone I'm neither, but really I'm both. My identity is not an independent state." Our livelihoods, ambitions, and tastes are largely determined by others—providers of food and clothing, creators of books and films, those who love and judge us. We are fashioned by weather, history, genes, and stipends. "Independence, to me, is nothing but a dangerous delusion," proclaims Hopper in the collection's first essay, "Lean On." She positions herself against American "bootstraps" independence, insisting that there is no "solitary self."

No surprise that Hopper attended Yale Divinity School, and gave sermons at the University Church. Her rallying cry—that we owe our lives to others—is the humble sentiment that keeps me at church when I am frustrated by it: the admission that there but for the grace of God goes nothing.

Church should expand our notions of family, create commitments in the absence of contracts or blood. Hopper's other big idea is that, in our culture, co-dependence is allowed *only* in marriage. "Romantic partnership," she writes, "can sometimes seem like the only socially sanctioned reprieve from the demand to self-rely." Hopper sets up an alternative paradigm: robust friendships that take on the expectations and privileges of marriages. These friends, mostly female, accompany each other to chemo appointments, offer one another spare rooms in their homes, lend money, take vacations, serve meals, pray. They give "care that [is] neither compulsory nor conditional...lavish, unrationed, unanticipated kindness."

"Lean On" is followed by a series of essays that deal with these two interconnected ideas: that we are dependent people, and that we can depend on people other than romantic partners. Hopper writes about the bar crowd in *Cheers*; her search for a sperm donor; the object-love of hoarding; the enemy-love of siblings; and, most powerfully, the years she and three other women cared for a mutual friend with cancer. Hopper's sharp literary criticism treats women who eschew romantic definition: Bette Davis, the author in the photograph "Pandora in Blue Jeans," Shirley Jackson, Flannery O'Connor.



August Macke, Four Girls, *1912–1913*

MUSEUM KUNSTPALAST / GOOGLE ART PROJECT

Hard to Love emerges from a world I'm familiar with. Briallen Hopper and I are both from the Pacific Northwest, and both recently moved between New York and Connecticut. We both love to bake. We both go to church. We both studied English; she now teaches creative writing at Queens College, CUNY. We even share mutual friends. I recognize the commitment Hopper champions in my own group of friends. I agree with her premises (sacrifice and care), and try to live by them. Often, I find her writing tenacious and lovely. So why did her book leave me not quite satisfied?

Hard to Love repeats the right things about race, gender, sexuality, Trump. Better the right things than the wrong things, of course. But sometimes, liberal pieties seem to stand in for argument, description, complexity.

In an essay "On Spinsters," Hopper writes that she's much more "defined and governed by race, class, gender, and the changing climate" than her relationship status, even though more of these essays are about her relationship status than about any of these other things. The aside feels unduly defensive. In "Girls of a Golden Age," Hopper reasons that home ownership isn't easy: "roofs leak, basements flood, snow must be shoveled and taxes must be paid, neighborhood watch lists can be casually racist." But don't renters have to deal with watch lists, too? Does that problem belong in this list, or is it placed there to signal virtue?

It's not that racist watch lists and climate change aren't important. By questioning Hopper's passing references, I don't mean to belittle the issues, or Hopper's commitment to them. The problem is that the expression of these commitments sometimes seems *too passing*, loosely pegged on and unconnected to an essay's themes.

This pegging-on at times affects Hopper's argumentation. In the opening essay "Lean On," Hopper criticizes Joan Didion for certain sentences in her essay "On Self Respect." Didion, she writes, "require[s] you to see self-respect in cowboys and not Indians; in Rhett and not Mammy; in Jordan Baker and not the residents of the valley of ashes." But Didion's argument can't be dismissed as a symptom of racism or classism—nowhere does she write that Indians or poor people can't possess pride. She's offering (imperfect) examples of people who stay calm under pressure. Hopper criticizes Didion for suggesting that the solitary self is the true self: but this isn't quite right. Didion recognizes how *deeply* the self is made by others; over-reliance on one's public persona, she insists, makes us sad and shaky. It's not that we're most ourselves when we're alone; it's that we must be *comfortable* alone. This is cold libertarianism, claims Hopper: Didion was a "Goldwater Girl in the making" when the essay was written. Whatever one thinks of Didion's essay, its nuances aren't reducible to her early politics.

In "On Spinsters," Hopper acknowledges that marriage has been forbidden to some—slaves, mixed-race couples, gay people—and thus made a tool of oppression. She writes that our culture sometimes "turns unmarried people into second-class citizens." This makes sense. But the example that follows doesn't: Hopper was assigned last place in a grad-school housing lottery. Couples, who need more living space, were prioritized. This seems logical. Hopper calls it a "structural injustice" that honors the commitments of "couples and married people but fails to recognize the validity of other forms of family and the immense caregiving work done by daughters, sisters, aunts, and friends." But the law *does* recognize familial bonds and obligations. As for friends, I'm interested. Should we legally codify the commitments of pals? How? Hopper doesn't really say. She is content with easy denunciation—"second-class citizens" and "structural injustice"—when what the reader really wants is some kind of proposal.

It's not hard to see why all this made its way into *Hard to Love*. This is the language of the academy, the publishing community, Hopper's readers. It's enjoyable to find ourselves in agreement, and easy to excuse the clichés and logical shortcuts.

Some of Hopper's rhetoric could also be trepidation. As a white woman from elite institutions, she must anticipate critiques: too educated, privileged, ivory-tower. She must prove her wokeness. Of course, you can still find chinks in the armor. She laments her teaching salary, but also owns spices for each letter of the alphabet, bakes with

a red Kitchenaid mixer. Privilege! Her friends are writers: they have time for each other. Privilege! She lights candles and binges TV. Leisure, and lifestyle, and privilege! Points awarded for being a woman, liberal, from a working-class family. Points docked for being white, in the Ivy League, a Christian.

But these critiques are reductive. The pact made by personal essayists and their readers requires mutual trust. On the part of the reader, the assumption that an essayist's prerogatives, passions, and politics extend outside the self, even when that's mostly what she's writing about. On the writer's part, the assumption that a reader will be generous and smart, and doesn't need to be flattered or appeased.

Hopper's assumption seems to be that networks of friends are the preferred social arrangement. But if that's the case, then I wished she would address the benefits—financial, legal, familial, social, even spiritual—of coupled partnership. Acknowledge them, or tear them down. Or suggest a way that those benefits, especially codified legal ones, might be extended to friendships.

This tension seeps into the essay "Moby-Dick." Its subject is compelling: Hopper, in her late thirties, wants to have a child. Adoption is fraught and expensive, and so she seeks a sperm donor, first among her male friends. They turn down her request; Hopper says they didn't want "entanglement." Perhaps. But Hopper hopes her donor will be in her life not as a co-parent, but as a godparent, presenting a confusing set of financial and emotional obligations. Perhaps her possible donors wanted to avoid commitment. Or perhaps they did not want to be responsible for the creation of a child on whom they would have limited influence. Hopper calls their "no"'s an "unambiguous rejection." She writes that "the process of trying to get pregnant, which I'd hoped could be kept in the family of my pre-existing friendships, was forcing me to venture outside of them. Instead of validating their sufficiency, it demonstrated their limits." But if it's a mistake to reduce personal intimacy and interdependence to marriage, perhaps it's also a mistake to expect friendship to serve every emotional and practical need. Having a child with someone (I'd imagine) is different than being someone's friend. It demands permanent co-responsibility. It creates an obligation to a person outside the pair. It introduces philosophical questions about fatherhood, practical questions about who watches the baby while you shower.

In "Hoarding," Hopper explores the restraint friendships might require. She describes a long-term stay with her friend Cathy, who's married and has a young child. Cathy offers a guest room to Hopper in a time of financial strain. Hopper keeps the room filthy (she says she doesn't have time to clean it) while Cathy quietly fumes. Meanwhile, Hopper complains that the house is too cold at night; Cathy and her husband are oblivious, because they can snuggle. Tension builds. Years later, Hopper and Cathy heal over a weepy heart-to-heart; Hopper acknowledges that her friend "saved her." She wonders about the "limits of friendship," whether it is "based on responsibilities and rights or on affection and love." What did Cathy owe Briallen? And what did Briallen owe Cathy, even in the midst of her own misery?

Hopper's writing about her biological family is affectionate if complicated. In a gorgeous essay about her brother, a conservative Evangelical, Hopper pays tribute to their youthful closeness while also chronicling their falling out. At the same time, she uses the essay as an opportunity to praise "found family" rather than biological family—a gift given when you are "old enough to appreciate it, a commitment continuously made." Still, found family can't know you from childhood; they don't have "involuntary intimacy." Biological families, she writes, are "consoling and intolerable." There's a beauty there—the "visceral centripetal force" of families of "blood and law." It is that very sense of involuntariness, of inescapability, that I'm not sure we can, or should, reproduce in friendships. In this essay at least, Hopper appears to share that ambivalence.

An answer to some of my objections might be found in the essays Hopper writes about Ash, a friend who has cancer. In "Young Adult Cancer Story," Hopper mediates on the young-adult book and film *The Fault in Our Stars*. She and three other women caretakers read and watch together. Hopper writes about the decadent release of a "three-tissue film," but also acknowledges the need to "keep it together"—"pain sometimes makes demands not to be felt" when supporting a friend through illness. In another essay, "Dear Flannery," Hopper and Ash write letters by candlelight. Hopper may demand much from her friends, but she gives a lot in return.

"Coasting" puts more teeth on this care. It's not a perfect essay. The women of the caregiving team are ambiguous: we don't know much about where they live, what they look like, how they talk. The language can be sappy ("angel baby") and too reliant on shared memories and inside jokes. But the love among these women is rare and astounding: friends taking notes at appointments, tracking medications, booking spontaneous flights. Radical sacrifices of time, money, and heart chasten and inspire. These friends, once bound by dire purpose, now live apart from each other. Some have found partners; some have moved closer to parents. What role are they playing in each other's lives now? Is their intimacy still real and sustaining?

Hopper doesn't say. I'm sure she would have answers to at least some of my questions and doubts. And if she doesn't yet have answers for all of them, that's to be expected. She's still working things out; her recognition of that fact is one of the strengths of this collection. This is, after all, her life she's describing, not just a set of abstract arguments. Arguments, like life, are works in progress. ■

Katherine Lucky *is the managing editor of* Commonweal.

Luke Timothy Johnson

How We Got the Good Book

God's Library

The Archeology of the Earliest Christian Manuscripts

Brent Nongbri

Yale University Press, $35, 416 pp.

Only two biblical topics reliably receive attention in the mainstream media: new versions of "the historical Jesus," and the discovery of ancient manuscripts by archaeologists. When these two topics converge, headlines trumpet the event and interviews ensue, followed by claims and counterclaims from opposing camps of scholars, as for a frenzied few moments the press bestirs itself from its customary lethargy concerning religion (apart from scandal and Vatican politics). The post–World War II era saw the shock created by the discovery of the Gnostic writings at Nag Hammadi in 1945 and the Jewish library at Qumran in 1947. More recent instances include the 1996 claim by Carsten Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona to have uncovered a mid-first-century version of the Gospel of Matthew, and the publication of the *Gospel of Judas*, which earned headlines in 2006.

Such excitement is understandable. In a field notoriously weak in hard facts, archaeology has scientific credibility; dealing with real things and evidence, rather than mere opinions, it is to biblical studies what DNA analysis is to forensic science. The material remains of Christianity, moreover—this most literary of religious movements—tend to be manuscripts, precious artifacts dug out of the desert sands that have preserved them for nearly two millennia. Even for Americans whose attachment to Christianity is tenuous and whose knowledge of the Bible is nugatory, the announcement of new evidence about Jesus or the Gospels can divert conversation, at least for a moment, from fantasy football or the latest Kardashian meltdown.

Brent Nongbri, an Australian scholar and author of many technical studies on ancient Christian manuscripts, now provides a more popularly accessible overview of "God's Library." Building on work done by Larry Hurtado and Roger Bagnall, he sets out to demystify the "discovery" of ancient writings, advancing a more sober and realistic framework for assessing the breathless claims and counterclaims that appear in the media. Nongbri's instincts run toward a highly responsible form of debunking. He wants to show, from a careful analysis of specific finds, that actual field archaeology has had little to do with many of the "discoveries," and that the provenance of many important collections is murky at best. He also seeks to show that while we can know a great deal about the actual artifacts now in our possession, we do not, in fact, have the sort of knowledge that is supposed to support academic and popular claims concerning them.

In his introduction, Nongbri identifies two tendencies that he seeks to counter. The first is press hysteria, a phenomenon he shows is anything but new. When the American businessman Charles Freer purchased four ancient manuscripts from an antiquities dealer in Egypt in 1906—a Greek manuscript with portions of Deuteronomy and Joshua, another containing the Psalms, a third with Paul's letters, and a fourth with all four gospels—the find touched off such headlines as "Biblical Errors to be Corrected by Newly Found Manuscripts," and "New Verse is Added to the Gospel of Mark." The *New York Times* ran a banner headline, "Old Greek Bible Reveals Verses Lost for Centuries." As *God's Library* demonstrates, the actual details of the "discovery" had deliberately been obfuscated, and even today remain considerably in doubt.

Nongbri also seeks to correct the tendency to use ancient manuscripts for ideological purposes, especially through claims relating to the dating of those manuscripts. Critics of traditional Christianity like to champion the antiquity of apocryphal writings as a way of challenging the historical primacy of canonical compositions. Defenders of the canon also use manuscript dating in their arguments; Nongbri cites my own introduction to the New Testa-

BIBLIOTECA APOSTOLICA VATICANA

Bodmer Papyrus VIII

ment, where I argue that a papyrus fragment of John dated to the early second century makes a late second-century composition of that Gospel impossible. Both sides tend to display a confidence in their position, Nongbri says, that is unwarranted by the available evidence.

His final chapter, "Fabricating a Second-Century Codex of the Four Gospels," shows these two tendencies at their worst, examining the 1996 kerfuffle caused by the claims of Thiede and D'Ancona to have discovered a first-century version of Matthew's Gospel—a claim abetted by the self-aggrandizing posturing of well-known scholars and inflated by precipitous publication and publicity. In Nongbri's view, "the main point to take away from this episode is that the first step toward the production of reliable knowledge about these early Christian manuscripts is to be honest about what we *do not* know" (original italics).

As a start toward a better basis for knowledge, Nongbri provides in his opening chapters a chastening overview that will be especially valuable for those approaching the subject cold. "The Early Christian Book" leads the reader through the basics of ancient manuscript production: the materials used; the process of writing by hand; the details of binding and covering (which sometimes used other manuscript fragments as filler for the covers of a codex). It all serves as a reminder that even in the best cases, scholars are faced with daunting tasks of identification and decipherment. "The Dating Game" walks the reader through the means of placing a manuscript chronologically, including handwriting analysis (paleography), ink analysis, and radiocarbon analysis. The latter two methods are scientific, but provide only a broad chronological framework, while paleography is not an exact science even in the hands of the best practitioners, as widely divergent "expert" pronouncements on specific manuscripts make clear. This dating game, like the real-life version, has as many misses as hits.

The chapter titled "Finding Early Christian Books in Egypt" is equally instructive, showing how little genuine archaeological science—and how much entrepreneurship by antiquities dealers—has figured in the various manuscript "discoveries." Dealers, in fact, have been the source of most major collections of texts, and they have a well-documented interest in obscuring the sites and circumstances of their acquisitions. "The main thing to be learned from this overview," Nongbri concludes, "is that reliable knowledge about discoveries of early Christian books is extremely difficult to come by." Buyer beware, in other words—and scholar, too.

Having warned about the ambiguous role of archaeology in manuscript acquisition, Nongbri turns in the second part of his book to the archival evidence concerning three of the great caches of ancient Christian writings. He begins with the Chester Beatty collection, consisting of a large number of biblical manuscripts acquired in 1930. Nongbri recounts the process of acquisition, highlighting the difficulty in reconstructing the exact circumstances of the discovery, and provides a complete catalogue and analysis of the manuscripts. He follows the same procedure with the "elusive collection" called the Bodmer Papyri, the bulk of which appeared in the library of the Swiss collector Martin Bodmer in the 1950s—once more, without a clear or convincing account of their actual finding. Pulling together manuscripts from diverse collections and grouping them as "Bodmer Papyri," Nongbri lists them with their contents, styles of writing, and probable range of dating.

In contrast to the Beatty and Bodmer collections, whose origins are archaeologically uncertified, the manuscripts deriving from Oxyrhynchus come from a genuine archaeological exploration, led by the redoubtable British scholars Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt, who in 1896 struck gold while digging in a town dump in Egypt. So vast is the number of manuscripts they found—perhaps half a million, spanning centuries and languages, only a small portion of them Christian—that their publication, begun in 1898, had reached seventy-seven volumes by 2011. Nongbri provides a helpful catalogue of all the Christian writings identified to date.

Overall, Nongbri suggests, there is every reason to think that more manuscript evidence will emerge in the coming years, not only from new archaeological digs but also from a reexamination, through "museum archaeology," of holdings already hidden away in libraries. Meanwhile, for those wanting to know something of the material basis for the world's most published (and possibly, read) book, Nongbri's own book is a gift. It illustrates how good scientific method, patiently applied, can yield significant results even in an area that is maddeningly obscure. And almost as helpful as its illustrations, maps, and catalogues is its frank admission of the all-too-human motives and machinations that so often lie behind the sensational headlines. ■

Luke Timothy Johnson *is emeritus Woodruff Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University, and a frequent* Commonweal *contributor. Among his many books are* Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity *(Yale) and* Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church *(Eerdmans).*

ERIC KILBY

Fireworks

Jerry Ryan

For perhaps ten years, on the evening before every Fourth of July, there were fireworks over Boston Harbor synchronized with Handel's "Royal Hymn to Fireworks." When this piece was first composed to celebrate the peace treaty that put an end to the War of the Austrian Succession, the fireworks were just the background for the music. In Boston, they were the main event.

I always had a front-row seat. At the time I was working the second shift (3 to 11 p.m.) at the New England Aquarium, on a barge where the sea lions and dolphins were lodged. The band played on a patio alongside the aquarium barge, while the fireworks barge sat in the harbor just behind the aquarium. It doesn't get much better than that.

The whole spectacle was breathtakingly beautiful. The fireworks were perfectly in sync with the music. Smoke would linger with a sustained note. Small, discreet, but extremely graceful fireworks represented the softer, slower parts. The crescendos swept you up with them. Once, as I watched and listened, it occurred to me that this was perhaps the most beautiful manmade spectacle I had ever seen.

It didn't last. People didn't appreciate it—though maybe if they had had my seat they would have. The aquarium barge had a function room on the top deck, and the week before the Fourth the band would come aboard to practice there. I happened to be passing by when one of the rehearsals was breaking up and noticed a woman who had a piccolo in her hand and seemed rather lost. I thought maybe I could cheer her up by telling her how wonderful I thought the show was, and how grateful I was that she was helping to make it happen. She replied, a little sadly, that she wasn't able to see the fireworks because everyone in the orchestra had their backs to the harbor. And, anyway, her whole attention was focused on not making any big mistakes in her piccolo part.

For some reason, that reply impressed me deeply. Aren't most of us in a similar situation? We are locked up in our own little worlds, trying not to get hurt too much or screw things up too badly, and we have our backs to the fireworks going on all around us, to all the activity of the saints, the whole household of God, with the angels and the patriarchs, the prophets and the martyrs, the virgins and apostles—the festal gathering of all those who've accepted the Divine Mercy, who have buried the dead, fed the hungry, and wiped the tears of the sorrowful. The fireworks ascend in various displays of glory and then silently descend as wisps of smoke, symbols of grace. It's like Jacob's dream of the ladder between heaven and earth and God's messengers continually descending and ascending. And there is the mysterious presence of all those whom we have known and loved, who have made us what we are, with whom we're linked forever.

I wish I had thought of this in time to tell the piccolo player, whose name I never knew and whom I never saw again. But, as so often happens with me, I thought of what I should have said too late. I should also have told her that, even though she couldn't see what was going on around her, her piccolo role was very important: without it, something would have been lacking in the spectacle. We must play our part without (yet) knowing its whole significance. ■

Jerry Ryan *joined the Little Brothers of Jesus in 1959. He lived and worked with them for more than two decades in Europe and South America. He and his family now live in Massachusetts.*

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