A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

Commonweal

JUNE 1, 2019

KENNETH WOODWARD ON
FR. TED HESBURGH

GRIFFIN OLEYNICK ON
RECOVERING FROM ABUSE

REGINA MUNCH ON
HOW TO TEACH HISTORY

CHARLES MCNAMARA ON
TRUMP & TRAGEDY

$3.95 US/$4.50 CAN

www.commonwealmagazine.org

Founded in 1924
Commonweal

Editor
Dominic Preziosi
Senior Editor
Matthew Boudway
Associate Editor
Matthew Sitman
Managing Editor
Katherine Lucky
Production
Tiina Aleman
Assistant Editors
Regina Munch & Griffin Oleynick
Contributing Writers
Rita Ferrone, John Gehring, B. D. McClay, Massimo Faggioli, Paul Moses
Senior Writer
Paul Baumann
Contributing Editor
Rand Richards Cooper
Editor at Large
Mollie Wilson O'Reilly
Copy Editor
Susanne Washburn
Development & Publishing Assistant
Gabriella Wilke
John Garvey Fellow
Nicole-Ann Lobo
Intern
Felix Robertson
Business Manager
James Hannan
Development
Christa A. Kerber
Poetry
Rosemary Deen
Stage & Television
Celia Wren
Columnists
E. J. Dionne Jr., Anthony Domestico, Rita Ferrone, Luke Timothy Johnson, Cathleen Kaveny, Jo McGowan, Charles R. Morris, Mollie Wilson O'Reilly, Margaret O'Brien Steinfels
Cover Design
Cecilia Guerrero Rezes
Subscription Information
845-267-3068
subscriptions@commonwealmagazine.org
Advertising Manager
Regan Pickett
commonwealads@gmail.com
703-346-8297
Publisher
Thomas Baker

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

Commonweal articles are available at many libraries and research facilities via ProQuest and OpinionArchives. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional offices. Single Copy, $3.95. Yearly print subscriptions, U.S., $65; Canada, $70; other parts of the world, $75. Special two-year rate: U.S. $108; Canada, $118; other parts of the world, $128. Add $45 for airmail.

Cover: Gado Images / Alamy Stock Photo

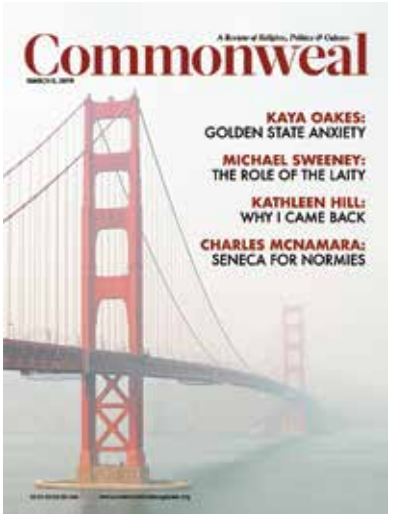
LETTERS

Sexism and clericalism, the role of the laity & more

HALF "THE BAPTIZED"

Michael Sweeney's article ("Beyond Personal Piety," March 8) identifies a crisis that is but a symptom of our church's real crisis. A cure requires more.

The church's real crisis is the unmitigated commitment of "the hierarchical priesthood, the priesthood of the ordained" to the ideology of patriarchy. It is this ideology that has for centuries legitimized—in both theory and practice—myriad forms of the demeaning and denigrating of women. The name for this is sexism. And it is sexism that is the taproot of the church's clericalism, the abusive exercise of power that is endemic to any religious system where the authority to govern resides solely in those (in the church's case, men) with sacralized identities (or the "ordained").



Nothing that Sweeney advocates ever questions the church's clericalist corruption nourished as it is by its sexist root in its patriarchal soil. In fact, it could be argued that emphasizing the laity's role in the church's "redemptive mission...for the sake of the world" can lead to the consequence, however unintended, of diverting the laity's attention away from the clear need for "transforming the very structures" of the church itself.

Hence, while advocating for "the ecclesial role proper to the laity" is better than claiming that the laity's only appropriate vocation is "to be cared for," Sweeney's suggestions still preserve a dichotomous ecclesial system as androcentric as it is patriarchal, as sexist as it is clericalist.

It is long past time for those among the ordained to recognize that "the redemptive mission of Christ" includes taking seriously the full implication of Sweeney's claim, that "each of the baptized [is] an *alter Christus*—another Christ." At this point in human history, not recognizing what that means for a sacramental church, where over half of "the baptized" are excluded from one of its seven sacraments, is a clear sign that the game is over.

BARBARA PARSONS
Platteville, Wisc.

THE LAITY AS TEACHER

Congratulations to Michael Sweeney for his insightful contribution to the evolving theology of the laity. At least three issues emerge from Sweeney's essay that may prove pivotal to the line of theological development he appears to have in mind.

First, Sweeney makes a rather sharp distinction between the ministry of the church to the laity and the mission of the church to the world. The former pertains to the responsibilities of clerics; the latter, especially since Vatican II, has been considered the appropriate sphere for the mission of the laity. But one wonders whether this distinction is sustainable. The problem, or so it seems to me, is beginning with the traditional distinction between clerics, religious, and laity. Religious leave the world and clerics are called to service at the altar. The laity are the remaining People of God; they live ordinary lives in the world. In general, they marry, raise families, and serve as the backbone of the economy and society. The laity ask how Christian marriage and family life can respond to the changing roles of women in society and an economy that requires both spouses

continued on page 4

Commonweal

JUNE 1, 2019 • VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 10

to work in order to support a family. Is it natural to repair a hernia, to treat cancer, to medically control conception, to insert a PEG tube or start a respirator in order to artificially prolong the lives of the dying? These are some of the questions the laity confront in the course of their ordinary lives personally and professionally. They pose questions of meaning and value. The laity, simply because they live in the world, have a privileged perspective on the identification and articulation of contemporary religious questions, as well as the adequacy of responses to such questions.

Sweeney proposes the notion of "coresponsibililty" as a hermeneutical tool to sort out the respective duties and obligations of clergy, religious, and laity. The term captures as well as or better than any other the emerging awareness of the People of God as a whole for the ministry and mission of the church. But how are we to discern the respective duties of clerics, religious, and laity in this new model of the church?

This question leads to my second point. The entire People of God, by virtue of their baptism, partake in the three offices of Christ: prophet, priest, and king. They are called to teach, to sanctify, and to govern. But it remains unclear what the active voice of the laity ought to be in the teaching office of the church, its sacramental office, and its governance. Does the laity's response to *Humanae vitae* (granted, there are a number of different responses) constitute an example of the active teaching office of the laity? The sorting out of the appropriate responsibilities of the clergy, religious, and laity is a crucial theological question that cries out for clarification.

Third, if "coresponsibility" has become a central category in the discernment of the appropriate roles of clergy, religious, and laity in the life of the church, what is the term that it replaces? The answer to that question, I believe, is "authority." The hierarchy has in the past served as the exclusive arbitrator of the roles and functions of clerics, religious, and laity. If the laity are to have an active voice in the teaching, sacramental, and governing offices of the church, the hierarchy will need to relinquish some dimensions of its control and governance of the church. Any discussion of an emerging theology of the laity must address the issue of authority in the church.

JOHN A. GALLAGHER
New Buffalo, Mich.

O SACRED HEAD, SURROUNDED

Thank you for David Unger's article "I Thought I Knew Him" (March 22). His understanding of this wonderful painting touched my soul. It is easy to dismiss the humanity of Jesus, especially in the realm of spiritual suffering. That the human Jesus experienced depression that "folded in" on his mind had never occurred to me. I had imagined he shared our physical suffering, but not the kind that plagues our scattered brains.

NOEL ZEISER
Cincinnati, Ohio

Francis Follows Through

When the Vatican summit on clerical sex abuse concluded in February, the editors of this magazine argued that its effectiveness would be demonstrated by what happened after it was over. Would it prove more than a public-relations exercise? Would the searing testimony of abuse survivors send bishops home determined to undertake the work of accountability and reform? Would Pope Francis actually deliver the "concrete measures" he indicated were forthcoming? Not all of these questions can be fully answered yet. But just three months after the summit's conclusion, Francis has proved that at least his own words were not empty promises, handing down *Vos estis lux mundi* ("You Are the Light of the World"), a *motu proprio* that establishes universal laws for reporting and investigating sex abuse.

The first section of the document states that bishops, priests, and members of religious orders must report to church officials both abuse and the cover-up of abuse. This applies to the abuse not only of minors, but also of vulnerable adults, including those forced "to perform or submit to sexual acts" through threats or "abuse of authority"—a clear reference to seminarians preyed on by those with power over them. The *motu proprio* takes effect this month, and within a year, "public, stable, and easily accessible" systems for submitting reports of abuse must be instituted in dioceses where they do not currently exist.

The document also provides protections for those who report abuse. Any retaliation or discrimination against whistleblowers is prohibited. The document underscores that reporting abuse does not violate "office confidentiality," and that those who submit a report have no obligation to "keep silent" about their claims.

The second section of the *motu proprio* sets forth guidelines for investigating bishops or religious superiors who commit abuse or cover up abuse, following the so-called "metropolitan model" proposed by Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich. In these cases, a bishop would be investigated by the metropolitan of his ecclesiastical province; in cases where the metropolitan himself has been reported, the investigation would be undertaken by the Vatican. And all such claims must be handled without delay—an investigation must be opened within thirty days of receiving a report and concluded within ninety days.

Taken together, these new rules amount to a significant step forward in the church's handling of sex abuse. But is it enough?

Anne Barrett Doyle, a co-director of BishopAccountability.org, acknowledged that the decree makes important changes, but laments that it does not specify penalties for those found guilty of abuse: "[I]t's still entirely possible for a bishop to punish a child-molesting priest with a slap on the wrist and to keep his name hidden from the public." The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), while admitting the *motu proprio* includes "some good things," also issued a statement criticizing it for not mandating that bishops report abuse to law enforcement, though it does require bishops to comply with the relevant civil laws in their jurisdictions. "We would have been far more impressed if this new law required church officials to report to police and prosecutors instead," SNAP said. "Oversight from external, secular authorities will better protect children and deter cover-ups." Others have complained that the document does not demand lay involvement in investigations, and so matters are left to church officials.

These criticisms are not without merit. But reporting abuse to the police, for example, should not be required everywhere. In places where Catholics are a persecuted minority, it would do little to ensure justice—and perhaps put the lives of priests at risk. And greater lay involvement would no doubt be a good thing, though the mechanisms for such involvement are not nearly as developed in other parts of the world as they are in the United States.

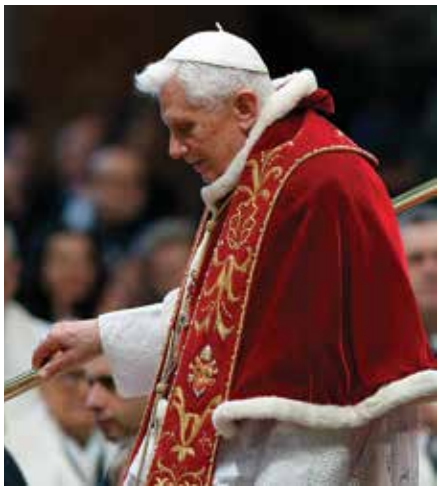
What's essential to keep in mind is that Francis's *motu proprio* is a necessary and constructive next step when it comes to handling sex abuse and its cover-up. It provides fundamental rules that apply to the entire church rather than a patchwork of procedures tailored to every diocese worldwide. This is in keeping with the "healthy decentralization" Francis has encouraged since the start of his papacy. Nothing prevents local bishops or bishops' conferences from doing more than the document requires—it is a floor, not a ceiling. In the United States, lay involvement has generally been deemed an important part of the Dallas Charter's success, a key element of transparency and accountability in handling accusations of abuse against the lower clergy. When the USCCB meets in June, they certainly should consider the use of qualified lay people to investigate bishops accused of wrongdoing.

Vos estis lux mundi should be received with neither cynicism nor complacency. It is one of the most decisive actions Rome has taken since the emergence of the sex-abuse crisis decades ago. We can acknowledge this while regretting that it took so long, and insisting that there is still much more work to do. ■

Cathleen Kaveny

Putting Justice First

WHAT BENEDICT'S LETTER ON ABUSE GETS WRONG



The debate about Benedict XVI's recent intervention on the sex-abuse crisis has focused on his account of its root causes, which occupies the vast majority of his letter. To the delight of conservatives and the consternation of progressives, he blames the lax sexual morality of the 1960s, rather than the enduring phenomenon of clericalism.

In my view, the problem with Benedict's letter is far more fundamental. It also transcends the American progressive-conservative divide. He gets the basic moral description of the acts of sex abuse wrong. He frames them as acts of sacrilege, rather than grave injustice.

So what? Benedict clearly thinks these actions are unacceptable—why quibble about details? Because details matter, both theoretically and practically. If we get the description of a misdeed wrong, we fail to grasp the underlying moral reality of the situation. That, in turn, can lead to disastrous strategies for reform.

What is the bedrock moral description of an act of clergy sex abuse? Is it a terrible act of injustice toward vulnerable persons, especially children? If so, then clergy sexual abusers belong in the same category as others who have betrayed their position of authority in this manner: they are like sexually abusive teachers, Scout leaders, and medical professionals. Trading upon their power, they have inflicted physical and psychological harm on their victims. In this perspective, the fact that the perpetrator is a Catholic priest is a circumstance that exacerbates the wrongfulness of the act but does not change its core moral description as an act of gross injustice.

Or should clergy sex abuse be understood most basically as a grave act of sacrilege? If so, clergy sex abuse should be grouped with other acts of sacrilege, such as desecration of the Host, blasphemy against the Blessed Mother, and the commission of any serious moral wrong inside a holy place. From this perspective, the fact that the perpetrator is a priest does not merely exacerbate the wrongful act; it constitutes the core of it. The priest is befouling his holy vows. The fact that he does so by abusing a child adds to the wrong, but does not change its core moral description—it is an act of sacrilege, akin to celebrating a Black Mass.

Benedict's letter seems to put clergy sex abuse in the category of sacrilege, not injustice. He does not use the term "sacrilege." But it is the category that best fits his account of why the act is wrong, especially when sacrilege is understood broadly as a violation or misuse of the sacred. He presents the major victim of abuse as the Faith itself—not the children whose integrity was violated. According to Benedict, the "alarming situation" is that "the Faith no longer appears to have the rank of a good requiring protection." What bothers him most about one of the human victims he encountered is that she can no longer hear the words of consecration without distress, because her priest-attacker used them in the course of the abuse. He says nothing about how the abuse would have affected the entire course of her life. He does not issue a forceful call to protect children, but rather implores us to "do all we can to protect the gift of the Holy Eucharist from abuse."

Benedict's approach has dangerous consequences. If the real victim is the Faith, then the overriding task is to protect the institution of the church, which instantiates the mystical Body of Christ in time. If the worst consequence of the crisis is the widespread loss of faith in the church's credibility, then it is better to handle specific instances quietly—so as not to scandalize the faithful. Offending priests should be quickly laicized, so that they do not continue to befoul the Body of Christ. Once they are no longer part of the hierarchy, they are no longer the church's problem. Victims should be encouraged to remain quiet, perhaps with a legally binding confidentiality agreement, so they don't erode the church's ability to pass on the faith. They should be discouraged from seeking monetary damages from the church, since it is the original and primary victim of the priest's transgression. Finally, secular law enforcement should not be involved in most cases, since their involvement occludes the mystical and transcendent nature of the problem.

By framing the basic offense as a matter of sacrilege, Benedict reinforces the disastrous playbook that has guided the church's response to the abuse crisis for the past fifty years. He provides a lofty theological rationale for protecting the institution rather than the victims. He offers not a clean, well-lighted path to reform, but rather a detour back into the muck.

Benedict's intervention is ironic. He blames revisionist moral theologians for the crisis, claiming that they look only at the motive and circumstances of sinful human actions, rather than focusing on the moral quality of the act itself. But Benedict himself is the one who refuses to look closely at the sinful acts in question here. This implacable defender of the existence of intrinsically evil acts refuses to call these acts by their most basic moral name: child rape. ■

CNS PHOTO / PAUL HARING

Danny R. Kuhn

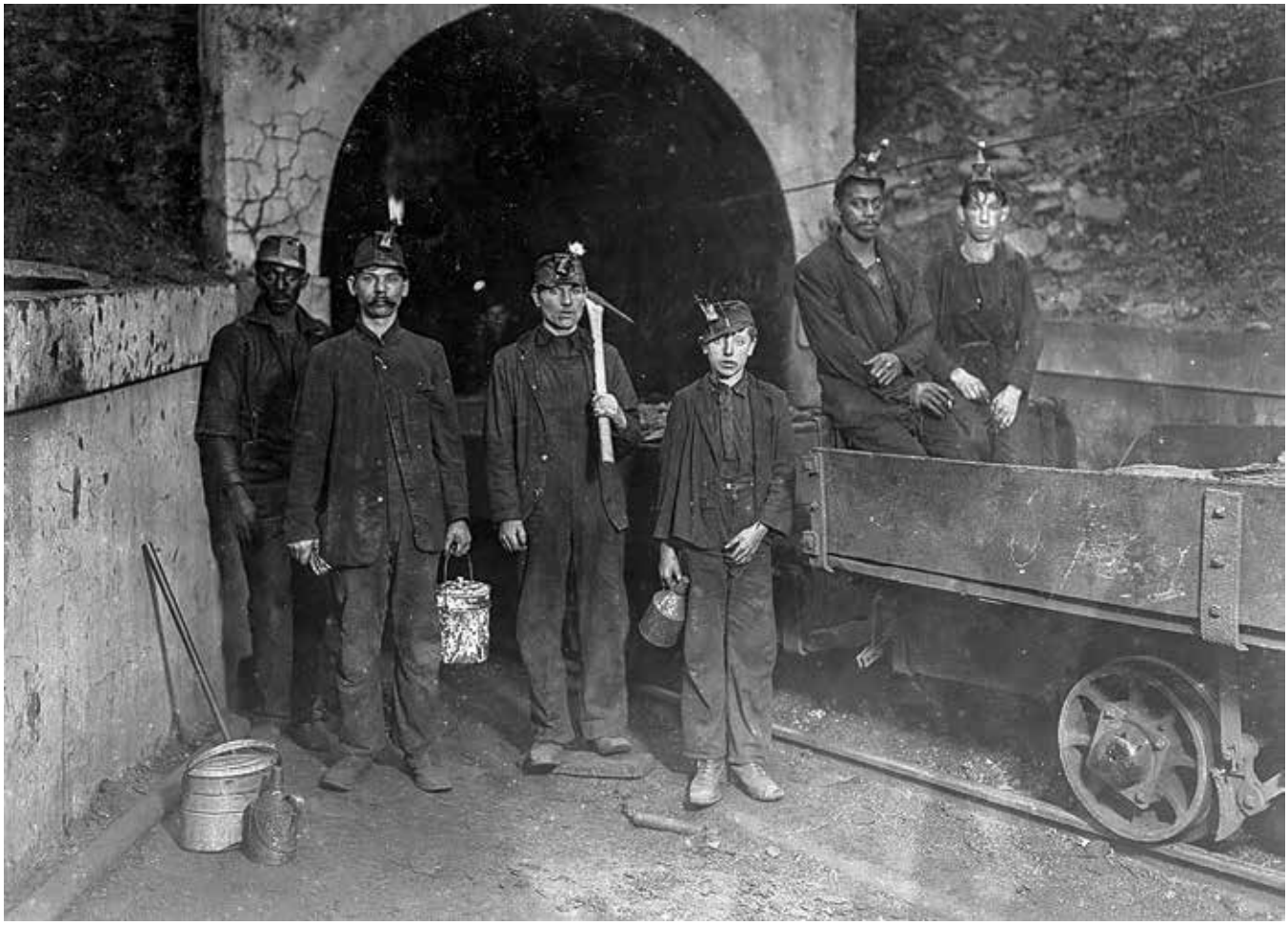
Seams of Resentment

WHAT HAPPENED TO WEST VIRGINIA?

Fahad, the young Uber driver, arrived promptly for my trip back to JFK Airport, so I put a lid on my cup from the hotel lobby and asked if I could bring it along. I always ask. "Sure, sir," he smiled. "A man needs coffee. So, where are you from?" I told him I now live in South Carolina but am originally from West Virginia. "Ah. West Virginia. I see." His smile faded. "*Don Blankenship* West Virginia?"

It surprised me a little to hear that name on the corner of Flatbush Avenue and Tillary Street in downtown Brooklyn. But Blankenship, the millionaire West Virginia coal operator who was found guilty of conspiring to violate mine-safety standards after twenty-nine miners died in an explosion in 2010, was recently back in the news. He was running for a U.S. Senate seat and describing himself as "Trumpier than Trump."

I am proud to be from West Virginia. I request John Denver's song "Country Roads" ("Almost heaven, West Virginia…") from bar bands and have sung along with it, quite badly, in six countries and at sea. During football season, I fly yard flags of my two alma maters, Marshall and West Virginia Universities, even though I now live deep in Clemson territory. I sent money to help support the late-winter 2018 teachers' strike in West Virginia that inspired similar teacher uprisings in other states. Traveling the country over the past twenty-eight years, I have heard all the stereotypes, and gotten used to responses like "Oh, I had a college roommate from Richmond" (different state since 1863) and "Is it against the law to marry your first cousin there?" (Yes it is, though it's still legal in California and Massachusetts.) But today comments like those remind me of a more innocent time, the good old days before Donald Trump started coming to West Virginia to hold rallies where people chant "Lock her up!" and "Build that wall!"



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Mine workers, Gary, West Virginia, 1908

Neither of my parents graduated from high school, and we all helped out on our small leased farm to supplement Dad's wages. The mine where he worked was "low coal," often less than thirty inches from floor to ceiling. He genuinely loved his job, but he was adamant that my brother and I go to college and get "inside jobs." He saved every spare cent to that end. By the time Dad died of lung disease (common among coal miners) in 2007, my brother was a high-school guidance counselor, and I was a manager and trainer for the federal court.

There was a reason Eleanor Roosevelt came to West Virginia to showcase the need for anti-poverty programs in the 1930s, followed by John and Bobby Kennedy in the 1960s. We finally got a flush toilet in our house when I was nine, but hot showers had to wait until I left for college. I was born the year before the state gave JFK a decisive victory over Hubert Humphrey in the 1960 Democratic primary, proving he could win over non-Catholic voters. Many of my relatives' houses had portraits of FDR and labor leader John L. Lewis hanging in their living rooms when I was a boy. FDR was replaced with JFK memorial photographs in thin gold frames after November 1963. Talk of the "hard times" before the Mine Wars—before miners had secured the right to unionize the coalfields and before New Deal programs had improved education, nutrition, and health care—still dominated adult conversation. Listening to my elders talk politics, a child could conclude that the two American political parties were the Democrats and the Damnrepublicans. In truth, there wasn't much difference between the parties on the state level. Democrats held most statewide offices, but elected leaders across the board were beholden to Big Coal, Big Gas, and Big Timber, while West Virginia consistently languished near the bottom of national statistics in health, education, and transportation.

But from my youth to today, the Mountain State has turned from a reliable source of Democratic national leaders such as Senators John "Jay" Rockefeller IV and Robert C. Byrd to a bastion of support for Donald Trump. In fact, Trump did better in West Virginia than anywhere else, receiving 68.5 percent of the state's vote. The year Trump was elected, the GOP also won a majority in the state legislature promising "right to work" (anti-union) legislation. During this period of political transformation, the state has become older and poorer. The median age of its population is surpassed only by that of Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire. Only Mississippi has a lower per-capita income. Across the board, the statistics are grim: the lowest high-school graduation rate in the country, the highest rate of drug-overdose deaths—thirty-five per every hundred thousand residents.

What happened? I ask myself that often. My wife and I moved to the coast after I retired from my full-time job in 2010, but much of our family remains in West Virginia, and I return every June for our annual family reunion. At the 2016 reunion, "Make America Great Again" caps and bumper stickers were popular among the gathered descendants of the men and women who, two generations earlier, had risked their lives to unionize the coalfields. Coal jobs (and union membership) have greatly diminished in the state over the past two decades, and there was talk of Trump "bringing coal back" from years of decline. My relatives blame that decline on bad trade deals, environmental regulations, and illegal immigration. They rarely mention new labor-replacing technology, increasing supplies of natural gas, the declining international coal market, and the fact that most of the remaining coal seams are harder and more expensive to mine.

"Yep, I could take care of them illegals coming to take our jobs. Just give me a high spot with a tree stand and my deer rifle," a cousin proclaimed between bites of apple dumpling. I could have told him that West Virginia has the nation's lowest percentage of foreign-born residents. But what good would it have done? This was not about numbers, or facts. What had ended the state's eighty-year run of progressive politics was a change of attitude, one easier to describe than correct.

The following day, I accompanied some cousins to place a homemade grave marker in the cemetery where my great-great-grandfather, a Confederate veteran, was buried 112 years ago. The cemetery is located on Cabin Creek in south-central West Virginia, on land owned by a coal company. We had to ask the company's permission to hoist the stone over the locked gate. The path up the hill was much too steep and rough for a vehicle, so we pulled the hundred-pound stone on a dolly, trying in vain to avoid the luxuriant poison ivy, and checking ourselves for wood ticks each time we stopped to catch our breath.

A concrete machine-gun nest, or "pillbox," dominated the crest of the hill. Its purpose was unmistakable: it was placed at the optimal angle to spray death down onto the no-longer existent village of coal-mine "company houses" below, while its narrow slits provided protection for the gunners. It was built by the coal company in 1913 to quash an early unionization effort, but still stands sentry on the mountaintop. I had seen similar installations left over from World War II while visiting Guam.

This pillbox was in the heart of Appalachia, where, according to most history timelines, no military action had taken place since the Civil War. My cousins and I knew better, having heard our grandparents' stories of machine guns mounted on railroad flat cars being fired indiscriminately into miners' houses, and pro-union men simply disappearing without a trace. The mine owners even used the primitive airplanes of the day to drop bombs on the miners.

In the early twentieth century, trying to unionize the coal mines of West Virginia was considered a capital offense by the mine owners. Those suspected of this crime could be executed with impunity by mercenaries hired by the mining

companies. The same year this particular pillbox was built, the unionizer Mary Harris "Mother" Jones was placed under house arrest in Charleston for eighty-five days, without the benefit of the civilian judicial process.

The struggle reached its climax a few years later, in the Battle of Blair Mountain, fought over steep terrain in 1921. It was the largest armed battle on American soil since the Civil War, involving some thirteen thousand participants. Historians estimate that a million rounds of ammunition were fired. As in the Civil War, relatives and friends lined up on either side of the conflict, some content with the near-starvation paycheck offered by the coal companies, others deciding it was worth risking their feudal life in pursuit of freedom. In the end, President Harding's threat to send in the regular army infantry and air corps caused even the stout-hearted Mother Jones to call for a truce, in order to avoid a massacre and live to fight another day.

There was no victory for the union cause until sweeping New Deal legislation made organizing a right and instituted basic safety regulations for the mines. The lives of coal miners slowly began to improve, and continued to do so as a result of Great Society programs in the 1960s and a series of well-negotiated United Mine Workers of America contracts. Though West Virginia owed its existence to the Republican administration of Abraham Lincoln in 1863, the state became reliably Democratic during and after the Great Depression.

But long before that humid, tick-infested day at the cemetery, things had changed. The drive up the hollow had taken us past countless front-yard Trump signs; they were a regular part of the landscape, like the aging mobile homes and junked cars. It was during that trip that it finally dawned on me that maybe the old Confederate soldier I had just risked Lyme disease and a heart attack to honor might be partly to blame for this sorry state of affairs—at least in my own family. Becoming a farmer and later a coal miner after the Civil War ended, my great-great-grandfather evidently passed down the myth of The Lost Cause and the expectation of white supremacy to his descendants. I suspect the old family rumor that his son was a member of the Ku Klux Klan is true.

My grandmother grew up with the old Confederate soldier living with her family. A staunch Fundamentalist Evangelical Dominionist who bore sixteen children, she used to bring me and my cousins into the bedroom after Sunday dinner to read us Bible stories, most of which dealt with white horses, sounding trumpets, rivers of blood, and unquenchable fire. It could all happen, she reminded us, before the day was over. Her stories used to scare the hell out of me. They also confused me, because no matter how terrible it all sounded, my grandmother seemed so *satisfied* with the gnashing-of-teeth scenario. Then there was her opinion of black people, for whom she used a different term. *The* term. She didn't believe they actually had souls like the rest of us. Even my six-year-old self, eager to get story time over with so that I could play in the barn, found something dubious about the whole thing. But maybe some of my cousins did not, and still don't.

West Virginia's population is only 3.6 percent black and 1.6 percent Latino. Yet, to a populace trodden down by generations of corporate exploitation, being told one is superior to someone else is a powerful motivator. LBJ said it best. After seeing racial epithets scrawled on signs in Tennessee, he told his press secretary, Bill Moyers, "I'll tell you what's at the bottom of it. If you can convince the lowest white man he's better than the best colored man, he won't notice you're picking his pocket. Hell, give him somebody to look down on, and he'll empty his pockets for you." After LBJ's support for civil rights and Nixon's willingness to exploit white fear, the Solid South began its slow transition from monolithically Democratic to even more monolithically Republican. West Virginia took longer than some states to come into the fold, but it's firmly there now. Bill Clinton was the last Democrat to win the state.

Grandma was a Democrat. Her final vote was cast for Jimmy Carter in 1980, and she was a reliable supporter of Democratic presidential candidates in all but two elections, her first in 1928, and again in 1960. That was because Al Smith and John Kennedy were Catholics—lost souls. No JFK memorial portrait in *her* house. I think a mini-conspiracy in the family kept her from finding out that I eventually became a Catholic myself.

On the morning of November 9, 2016, I fielded tearful calls from my two Millennial daughters. "I can't believe it. How could this happen?" I told them it would be bad, but that surely there would be reasonable people around Trump who would keep him from sending the country off the rails. They told me my assurances reminded them too much of the time I said their goldfish Leonard had gone away to live with his family.

The most poignant conversation I had that morning was with my mother, then eighty-five years old, the daughter of the woman who thought black people had no souls. Whenever someone says, "Oh, that's just how she was raised," as an excuse for someone's racism, I refer them to my mother. "I can't believe it," she told me the morning after the election. "Working people will find out what they've done, and be sorry. They've spent all these years hating President Obama because he's a black man, and told all those lies about Hillary, and now look what we have. And the preachers support it! Support that *nasty man* Trump and the things he says. That's the part I can't understand." It was very sad, what she told me, but it was also true; and I found that somehow comforting. Now, whenever Trump visits my home state to drum up more politically convenient anger, I give my mother a call. Hearing her anger gives me hope. ■

Danny R. Kuhn *is an author and corporate trainer.*

Blind Spots

I Was an Adult. I Was Also a Victim of Abuse.

Griffin Oleynick

In late 2015, a few months after it happened, I found myself on the phone with Kathleen McChesney, a retired FBI agent. She'd begun her career in the 1970s by helping catch the serial killer Ted Bundy, later rising to hold the third-most-senior position in the Bureau. In 2002, after news of clerical sex abuse and cover-up in Boston, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops appointed her to establish and lead its Office of Child and Youth Protection. A prominent author, consultant, and expert on clerical sex abuse, McChesney had offered to listen to my story in order to help me determine the best way of moving forward.

Admittedly, in my case, her high-profile background seemed like overkill. But I did feel I needed serious professional advice. For most of 2015, I'd been a postulant with a monastic community in Italy. My novice master, a priest in his late thirties, had psychologically abused me for months before making sexual advances on me. I was twenty-nine at the time (I'm thirty-three now). While I managed to defend myself and escape, I felt the need for an institutional response to what had happened. I'd asked to speak with McChesney in order to find out what my options were.

McChesney heard me out, listening patiently as I narrated the events leading up to the abuse, beginning with my arrival at the monastery in late December 2014 and concluding with my departure in late October 2015. At the points where I thought the most awful affronts had been committed (*Can you believe he did this? And that the community did nothing?*), she would slow me down, asking a series of short questions that soon became a kind of refrain: Were there children present at the monastery? Or in the guesthouse? Did you ever see your novice master interacting with them? No, I would respond, before continuing with my story.

After about an hour, McChesney gently informed me that based on what I'd said, nothing illegal had occurred. It was what investigators call "adult misconduct"—harrowing and distressing behavior, to be sure, but not against the law. "You might think about it this way," she said. "Your former novice master 'hit on you,' an adult. In a terribly abusive, uncomfortable way. But his behavior doesn't rise to the level of a crime. You *could* ask a canon lawyer whether he may have violated his vows, but you need to decide on the kind of resolution you want." I thought about it briefly, and told her I simply wanted the monastic community to know the real reason why I'd left, and to ensure it never happened again.

McChesney encouraged me to mail a detailed report to several offices in Italy: the monastery itself, the local diocese, and the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL, the Vatican dicastery that governs religious orders) in Rome. That way, I would almost certainly receive a response. Furthermore, my former novice master would likely be disciplined; more importantly, he might be prevented from abusing other young men in the future. "You've got a great future ahead of you," McChesney told me. "Don't be discouraged. You'll recover."

She was right. In fits and starts, I did begin to heal. After I sent the report (in March 2016, just after *Spotlight* had won the Oscar for Best Picture), two monks from my former community wrote back. They told me that they believed me, apologized, and informed me that they'd been in touch with CICLSAL. My former novice master had immediately been relieved of his duties. He would no longer be in contact with postulants, novices, or other young monks in formation. At the time, I considered this a satisfactory outcome. It meant that my story had been heard, and that I had contributed to making the monastery a safer place.

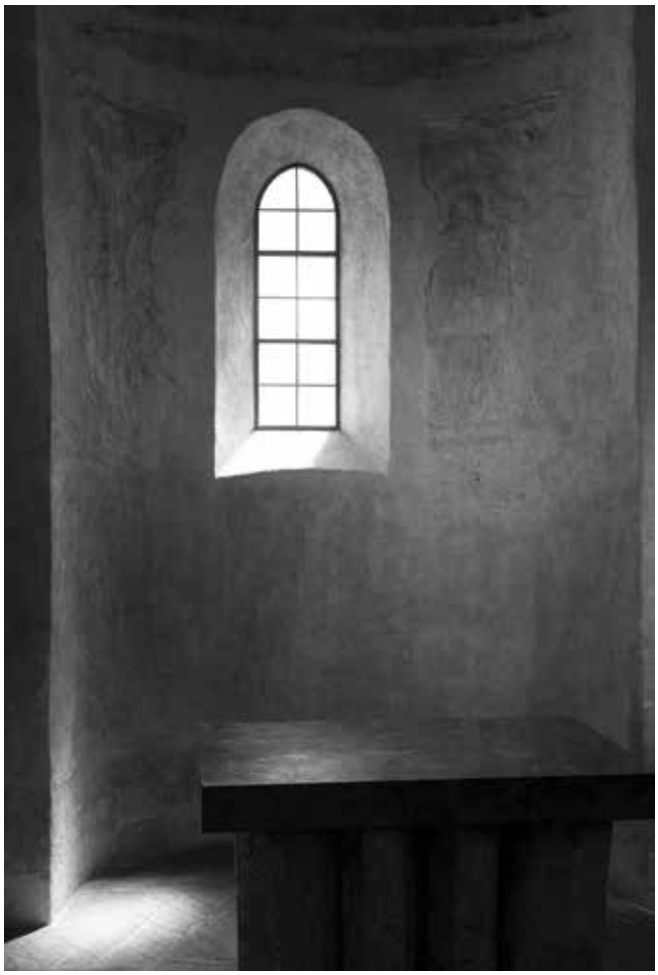
But then, last summer, revelations emerged about Theodore McCarrick, with detailed reports that the former U.S. cardinal had abused adult seminarians for decades. His priests and brother bishops had heard rumors about it (and in some instances had actual evidence of misconduct), yet mostly did nothing. That McCarrick managed to continue this pattern of abuse for as long as he did was indeed a "failure of fraternal correction," as Fr. Boniface Ramsey, one of the primary whistleblowers in the McCarrick case, wrote in a *Commonweal* article last fall. Only now, with a swath of victims behind him and still no admission of guilt, has the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) finally brought McCarrick to justice. Acknowledging that his abuse of adult seminarians was a sin "against the Sixth

Griffin Oleynick *is an assistant editor at* Commonweal.

Commandment," the CDF also cited "the aggravating factor of the abuse of power" in its decision to laicize him.

Of course, everyone knew that McCarrick's behavior (exposing himself and forcing seminarians to share his bed) was wrong. Still, even after McCarrick's conviction by the CDF, I've noticed that many commentators still tend to minimize the seriousness of McCarrick's misconduct with adults. It's an understandable reaction: men in their late teens and early-to-mid twenties aren't children; they can defend themselves and resist abuse by simply saying no. Or so the argument goes.

But having had direct experience of clerical abuse, I've learned that things aren't always that simple. The power that a religious superior wields over a young religious in formation, even today, is nearly absolute. In monasticism, the model of the spiritual father, inherited from late antiquity, stipulates that in order to make progress in the spiritual life, novices must yield to their superior's guidance in nearly every aspect of their lives. Not just in the way they dress, their schedule, and work assignments, but also in their diet, health care, prayer, even recreational pursuits. In a healthy setting, such relationships can be loving and productive. But the openness and vulnerability required for genuine growth always carries the risk of abuse. An unscrupulous superior, heedless of the trust placed in him by his novices or seminarians, can inflict serious harm. Cultures of abuse in religious houses are real and entrenched, and if the church wants to emerge from the current crisis, it has to address them systematically. Defrocking McCarrick is a good first step, but it won't solve the problem.



FORTGENS PHOTOGRAPHY VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

I first met Antonio (not his real name) in the summer of 2012. Back then I was in the middle years of a doctoral program in Italian literature, just starting out on my dissertation on Dante and St. Francis of Assisi. Antonio was one of the younger monks at the monastery (he was about thirty-seven), recently ordained as a priest, and a part-time professor of medieval theology at one of the pontifical universities in Rome. He was leading a retreat for young people (mostly Italians), which I had learned of after I inquired about spending a few days there to pray. I was hoping for a respite between research trips and visits with friends.

And that's just what I found. Besides the monastery's beautiful medieval architecture and its idyllic setting in the Apennines, I was immediately impressed with Antonio's charismatic personality. Not only was he very funny, he was also one of the most intelligent people I'd ever met, giving talks on philosophy and theology and leading tours of the community's rare-book library. Antonio was open and friendly with everyone on the retreat, but he seemed to take a special interest in me, meeting with me privately and at length. We not only talked about my research, but discussed my vocational aspirations as well.

For a few years I'd been discerning a call to religious life (Thomas Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain* had inspired me), and I found Antonio's intuitive understanding of my spiritual journey both gratifying and encouraging. I trusted him, and soon we became friends, emailing each other every so often after I returned to school. The following summer, I returned to the monastery for another retreat, this time living in a cell, joining the community for meals, and taking part in daily spiritual direction with Antonio. Monastic life felt like a natural fit, and as I chanted the hours, worked alongside the other monks, and prayed alone in my cell, I felt at peace and at home.

I was planning to complete my thesis and graduate the following spring, so before I left, Antonio asked me to consider returning in the summer for a three-month observership. That way I could really see what monastic life was like and further discern whether God was in fact calling me to join the community. I agreed, and in June 2014 I returned to the monastery for an extended period of silence, solitude, and prayer.

I had long hours to myself. I was free to go hiking in the mountains or sit in a comfortable chair in the walled garden of my cell, where I'd read and write in my journal during the quiet afternoons. In this tranquility I learned more about myself, and more about Antonio, too. He was from an old

aristocratic Italian family (there'd been princes, cardinals, and popes among his ancestors) but in his mid-twenties he had decided to give everything up to pursue a hidden life of poverty and prayer. His renunciation of power made me feel I could trust him even more.

Yet, for all of Antonio's professions about poverty and solitude, he'd stayed in contact with what he called "his world," and soon began bringing me into it. That July I found myself at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence, sitting with him in the director's office. The two were friends, having organized a major book exhibition the previous year. After I was presented as Antonio's friend, an aide took me to the manuscript section for a rare viewing of Galileo's hand-drawn maps of the moon. We also saw the oldest extant manuscript of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, copied by the poet's son. Riding back to the monastery along the River Arno, I told Antonio how grateful I was. "This is what your vocation was meant to be," he told me. "You'll become our rare-books librarian, you'll teach in Rome, or France, or England. You'll organize shows, and participate in Italian cultural life at the highest level."

It was everything I'd always wanted, a monastic vocation and a call to scholarship. It seemed to me that Antonio was the person who could help me achieve it. So after a conversation with the prior, Don Bernardo, we decided in August that I would return for a year of postulancy, the first stage of monastic formation. Right after Christmas, on December 29, 2014, I entered the monastery. I had every intention of staying for good.

A victim of clerical abuse is rarely aware in the moment that he is being "groomed." Things just unfold, playing out gradually and cryptically over a period of weeks, months, or even years. You only realize what's happening once it's already too late.

Still, from the moment I arrived to begin formation, part of me sensed something was off, that things weren't going to be the way they'd been in the summer. A few days before my arrival, Don Bernardo had sent me a long confidential email with a few "pointers" for how to behave upon entry. Most of his suggestions were straightforward and unsurprising: cut your hair a bit, keep quiet in the hallways, and listen to the relatively conservative opinions of the older monks with a grain of salt. But Bernardo warned me to maintain a "safe distance" from Antonio, and not to become too involved in his "projects." In the few months I'd been away, Antonio had been elected novice master. As such, he'd exert enormous influence over my daily life.

There were only three of us in the novitiate, and we spent almost every hour of every day together with Antonio. It didn't take long before his initially euphoric spirit of welcome turned into a dour, controlling, and unpredictable moodiness. He kept me constantly on edge by insisting I change my routine in ways that struck me as arbitrary and counterintuitive. With respect to my spiritual life and methods of personal prayer, I was forbidden to keep a journal or pray the Ignatian *examen*—because these things were too focused on me rather than God. I was also told to stop going for runs. Antonio claimed that this old habit of mine betrayed an inner anxiety I needed to overcome. He told me to be wary of close relationships with friends and family outside the community. I needed time to adjust to my decision to become a monk; the anxieties and suspicions of my parents and friends back in the United States would only confuse me. Whenever I objected to these instructions, or told him about my misgivings, Antonio would remind me that monasticism was all about learning to "let go of my ego," to die to myself, to relinquish the well-polished "mask" I'd spent so many years cultivating and hiding behind.

But it wasn't just Antonio's incursions into my spiritual life and physical routine that I found so disturbing. The community itself was also in constant disarray, lurching from one crisis to the next: the buildings needed costly repairs; dwindling vocations had left many of the monks feeling demoralized and fatalistic; there were even problems with the ingredients in the natural products sold in the gift shop, one of the community's main sources of income. There always seemed to be some new battle in the community, and Antonio invariably found himself at the center of it. He often lamented that his intellect wasn't properly valued by his brothers; he felt overworked and underappreciated.

I tried to keep all this in mind whenever he lashed out at me, as he did with increasing frequency and ferocity in the first months of my novitiate. The pretexts for his rage were always minimal, and his reactions disproportionate. Once, during morning prayer, I'd gotten up and adjusted a staticky microphone. Antonio berated me for my presumption and "privileged" attitude: I needed to know I wasn't special. Another time, serving Mass, I'd taken a few extra hosts to him after he'd already closed the tabernacle, so that he had to unlock and reopen it. Embarrassed in front of a few dozen guests, he shouted at me, threatening reprisals if I ever got on his "bad side" again.

I complained to Bernardo, but was brushed off. Antonio's astrological sign was Cancer, he said, so of course he had a crabby disposition. But he was harmless, and I shouldn't take his outbursts so personally. Antonio said the same thing: I was too sensitive, and I should learn to cultivate indifference.

But Antonio's aggressiveness also began to express itself in physical ways. It would start playfully and innocently enough: he'd snap dish rags at me as we cleaned the refectory, or he'd shake me by the shoulders when he caught me yawning. But sometimes he came at me more forcefully, punching me in the chest, or trapping me from behind with a wrestling hold. I told Giovanni, the vice-prior and Antonio's superior, that such behavior made me uncomfortable. He agreed that it was inappropriate and asked Antonio to stop. Incensed that I'd given Giovanni the wrong idea, Antonio refused

to speak to me until, days later, I finally confronted him. I'd misinterpreted his behavior, he said. It was all a sign of his esteem and affection for me. And if I didn't like it, or couldn't understand it, perhaps I ought to go back home to America. Maybe the monastery wasn't the place for me.

Still, I felt like I couldn't just leave. Prior to entering the monastery, I'd arranged all my plans—including my finances and my academic career—around becoming a monk in Italy. I was convinced that monastic vows and priestly ordination were what God most wanted for me. It was also, I should add, what I wanted for myself. So no matter how much Antonio's strange behavior bothered me, I was determined to persevere: my vocation, and my life's work, were at stake. I told myself I just needed to hang on, and things would get better.

I was convinced that monastic vows and priestly ordination were what God most wanted for me. It was also, I should add, what I wanted for myself. So no matter how much Antonio's strange behavior bothered me, I was determined to persevere. I told myself I just needed to hang on, and things would get better.

Instead, they got worse. By mid-September 2015, I was badly depressed, often unable to attend prayer, or concentrate on my reading or work. I'd begun seeing a therapist, a friend of the community with a private psychoanalytic practice in Mantua, a four-hour drive to the north. Every other week, along with Matteo (a year ahead of me in formation), I'd travel up the A1 highway for back-to-back therapy sessions. Antonio remained back at the monastery, staying in touch via cell phone.

The therapist's methods struck me as a little unorthodox. He discontinued my medication, which I'd taken regularly since early in graduate school. He also went on and on about a psychological "labyrinth"—an inner landscape of dreams, desires, and fears that I was supposed to traverse under his guidance. As we made our way through, he warned, I would likely experience a great deal of pain. But that shouldn't discourage or scare me. Emotional distress, he said, was a sign the process was working.

My distress *did* grow worse, and Antonio took advantage of it. Telling me I needed a change of atmosphere to clear my head, he proposed that we take a day trip together to Rome. He didn't invite anyone else. We drove down and parked on the Aventine Hill, high above the city center. Antonio told me I needed to view the city through his eyes, so we toured the university where he taught, as well as the churches and piazzas where he'd spent his childhood. We also visited his favorite cafés, restaurants, and bookstores. He kept telling me how highly he thought of me, and how much he cared about me, patting my back and putting his arm around me as I expressed doubts about my intelligence and my vocation. He bought me an expensive scholarly edition of the *Divine Comedy*. He told me he was glad I was finally coming out of my shell, that the therapy was working. By then I'd become so depressed that I craved these affirmations.

Then, back at the monastery, the physical abuse began. It always happened in closed spaces, like my cell, or his, or the library, archive room, or empty refectory. And always when I was most emotionally vulnerable. (Homesick and doubting my worth, I was often upset.) Antonio would sit with me on my bed, or beside me on a chair, and comfort me as I cried. He would embrace me, rubbing my back and shoulders until I calmed down. He'd say that he understood what I was feeling, that he'd experienced the same thing when he'd done psychoanalysis. Though I was suffering now, I'd soon be in better control of my emotions, he assured me. I just needed to hang on, and the suffering would pass.

Antonio also became bolder in what he allowed himself to say to me. His "esteem," he told me, had grown into something deeper. He said he loved me. He wished he could take me away to a place where he could heal me. He even proposed that we escape to one of his "palaces," where we could be alone, away from all the chaos and conflict of the monastic community, living and praying and working in peace.

And now he wanted me to reciprocate his affections. He demanded I perform what he called *un gesto spontaneo d'affetto*, a spontaneous gesture of affection. First, this meant that I had to give him a hug; after a week or so, he demanded that I kiss him on the cheek or forehead, and let him do the same. At first, I tried leaving the room without doing it, but he'd always block the door (he was taller and heavier than me). Only after performing the gesture was I permitted to leave. As I wrote later in my letter to the priors and the Vatican, I did so, but only "under extreme coercion and with grave emotional disturbance." The abuse continued this way for about ten more days.

What finally prompted my departure was a deep awareness that I wasn't free. It wasn't just Antonio. It was everything: my therapist's bizarre advice, the monastery's insular culture, the community's infighting, even the remoteness of the secluded, forested mountains. I'd never felt more alone. I told Antonio that I wanted to go home, that I didn't feel like myself. "So what?," he replied. He told me I didn't have a self. I was "*niente*," nothing.

But God, in his mercy, had a different view, and provided an escape. It was Sunday, October 18, 2015. Mass and the midday meal had ended, and evening prayer wouldn't begin for another few hours. The corridors along the cloister garden were empty, and Antonio was away for the afternoon. I felt anxious and homesick. So on a whim, I called my former spiritual director, a Jesuit living in New York City.

"Griffin, so good to hear from you! How are you?" "Not good," I told him. He responded with frank concern. "When I hear a person's miserable in religious life, it usually means God's no longer calling them to be there." I told him I didn't understand what was happening. "I've never felt this awful before," I said. He asked if I wouldn't mind doing a bit of spiritual direction right then and there, over the phone.

"Sure," I said. It had been so long since Antonio and I had done actual spiritual direction. The contrast was obvious: my former director listened for the Spirit, and pointed me to God; Antonio had only ever pointed me to himself. I told my former director what was going on with Antonio. His concern grew, and after I told him that Antonio had been forcing me to kiss him, he said without emotion: "You should *not* be kissing your novice master." He was right, of course, and his blunt comment punctured the deceptions Antonio had drawn around me. I told my former director that I'd stay in touch with him over the next few days by email.

The next day, as I was returning from therapy in Mantua, I drove past the city of Bologna, where I'd studied for a year as an undergraduate almost a decade earlier. The sun was setting above the city, and it illuminated everything I felt: that I'd been trapped, my boundaries violated, my body and soul defiled. I resolved then and there to leave the monastery and return to the United States as quickly as I possibly could.

Somehow, Antonio already knew. That night at the monastery, he made one final attempt to dissuade me. But I communicated my firm decision to leave, and then tried to sleep. Early the next morning, I used my credit card to book a one-way ticket from Rome to Philadelphia. The flight was scheduled to depart the following morning.

Without informing the rest of the community, I packed my bag and prepared to leave. Antonio insisted on accompanying me, on the grounds that I wasn't emotionally healthy enough to travel to Rome alone. Not wanting to cause a scene at the monastery, I agreed. On the train, he acted normally enough, as if my departure were a simple case of a failed vocation. That's what he'd told the others in the novitiate, anyway. But when we finally arrived at the monastery in Rome where he'd booked two rooms in the guesthouse, he lost control.

I was unpacking my overnight bag. Antonio entered my room without knocking and advanced toward me. Then he put his arms around me, and started kissing me—trying for my lips but landing with his mouth all over my face. I pushed him away, said "no," and he yielded. I then gave him the monastic community's sign of peace, making it as clear as I could that he was (for a few more hours at least) my brother and my novice master, and nothing else.

I didn't want to have to get the police involved, and focused instead on leaving without further incident. Antonio insisted on walking with me through downtown Rome, where he pointed out the advantages that I was losing. As we proceeded, I stuck to well-lit, open areas, always staying in full view of other pedestrians. Antonio couldn't stop weeping, bemoaning the fact that he'd also "lost others" before me. He lamented that he'd have a hard time getting over me, but said that in the end he'd manage.

Back at the guest house, I locked my door, and slept fitfully. Early the next morning I took a train to the airport at Fiumicino. I checked in for the flight, collected my ticket, and cleared security. As the plane took off from the runway, I exhaled a sigh of relief. It was over.

That doesn't mean that once I left the monastery life became easy. Healing has taken a long time. But once I came home, I returned to relationships—personal, professional, and spiritual—that helped me recover the sense of self that Antonio had eclipsed. Connection with others helped me overcome what, in my experience, was the worst part of abuse: the feeling of loneliness and shame that it entails, the sense that it was somehow my fault.

Some readers may be wondering why I didn't leave sooner. I often wondered that myself, after it was over. Why had it been so hard at the time for me to grasp what looked so clear and obvious in hindsight? Soon after I left the monastery, I began working with a therapist who helped me understand what had happened. We assessed the blind spots that had made me particularly vulnerable to Antonio's manipulations. I had refused to allow myself to think that Antonio was anything other than the great monk and priest I'd initially understood him to be—no matter what my senses told me. The first step toward recovery, then, was learning to attend to what I actually see and feel.

After three and a half years, I've come a long way. I sometimes have flashbacks, but I'm no longer angry, and I've come to realize that what happened was not my fault. The anger was helpful at first: my indignation motivated me to do something concrete about the situation, to set the mechanism of reporting in motion. But then it became a kind of trap, preventing me from moving forward with my life. I knew that I had finally relinquished my hatred of Antonio

when I found myself able to pray for him. As far as I know, he is still a monk, and remains a priest in active ministry.

The church knows what happened. The detailed letters I sent to the monastery priors, the local bishop, and the Vatican made three charges: that Antonio had abused me emotionally, had interfered with my therapeutic treatment, and had subjected me to prolonged sexual harassment. The priors accepted and acknowledged all three. In March 2016, I wrote separately to Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, the prefect of CICLSAL, to express my sadness and disappointment at having been so badly mistreated. I have a receipt acknowledging that my letter was delivered, but I never heard back from Braz de Aviz.

Just as I had blind spots that had be corrected, so too does the church. As I learned during my time in the monastery, one of the key factors that contributes to abuse is the closed environment of most seminaries and formation houses. Under these conditions, abuse is difficult to prevent and easy to conceal. Had more people had their eyes on Antonio, had they been given a fuller picture of his actions, perhaps the worst of the abuse might not have happened. Formal ways of reporting Antonio's behavior, rather than isolated, ad hoc conversations with his superiors, would also have helped. I draw a simple lesson from my experience: for the church to begin solving the problem of adult abuse, first it needs to admit, openly and without flinching, that it has one.

Some wonder whether the abuse of adults really deserves that definition, since unlike children, adult victims are capable of withholding consent. The distinction is important, and that's why the abuse of children is treated as a crime. But as clerical abuse survivor and former member of the pontifical commission on sexual abuse Marie Collins argued in a recent *Commonweal* interview, adult abuse is still abuse. The church, she said, must expand its definition of whom it considers vulnerable—not just those with impaired mental faculties, but any adult in a position of relative powerlessness with respect to an abuser. (Pope Francis's new *motu proprio, Vos estis lux mundi*, does just that, stipulating that "vulnerable persons" now include those whose "deprivation of personal liberty" impedes their ability to "resist the offense"—in other words, seminarians, novices, and religious in formation.) Criminality seems like the wrong standard, and the church cannot content itself with "preventing crimes" against minors alone. Christ invests it with the keys of heaven and hell, the power to loosen and bind sins, including sins that are not crimes. It needs to take this responsibility seriously.

In a way, I was lucky. I was twenty-nine, not a child or a teenager. I was also well educated and well connected, with loving parents, friends, and mentors who supported me as I got back on my feet. I had access to sound legal advice and the resources to pay for an excellent therapist. I finally extricated myself from the monastery because I had the option to do so. And I recovered because I had a robust support system waiting for me. Many victims have none of this.

For years, the laity have been looking for a sign that the church's leaders finally understand the full extent of the abuse crisis, and that they will act in a manner commensurate with the pain inflicted by decades of inaction. I used to look for that sign, too. That's what I wanted from Rome—some sweeping, apocalyptic gesture to make everything all right.

But such a sign will never come. Nothing the pope can say, nothing the bishops can decide, no amount of protocols and best practices or promises of transparency can ever make up for the horror of the injustices done to each and every victim. We must therefore alter our expectations. Not because the hierarchy tell us to, and not because reform isn't necessary (it is), but because even the most radical reforms won't change the past. Old wounds will remain. Only repentance and mercy can heal them, and only once the truth has been told. We are members of a broken institution, but we're also a beloved people, accompanied by a provident God, who heals all wounds and wipes away our every sin. ■

SEPTEMBER MORNING

Sky clear after rain,
alleviating six weeks of drought;
sunny, with a hint of coolness
in the shadows beside the barn

and under the trees, speckled
with fringe of fleabane;
the orb weaver web on the porch,
sticky with spiral capture silk,

containing another victim—
a praying mantis wrapped in
a winding sheet; and
the Queen Anne's lace bending

in the meadow under the weight
of a heavy dew.

—Wally Swist

Wally Swist's books include The Map of Eternity *(Shanti Arts, LLC, 2018),* Singing for Nothing: Selected Nonfiction as Literary Memoir *(The Operating System, 2018), and* On Beauty: Essays, Reviews, Fiction, and Plays *(Adelaide Books, 2018).*

History or Hit Job?

An Unflattering Bio of Fr. Ted Hesburgh

Kenneth L. Woodward

In 1966, the American Council on Education issued a study that failed to uncover a single Catholic university with a "distinguished" or even "strong" graduate department among the three-hundred-plus Catholic universities and colleges in the United States. This prompted Monsignor John Tracy Ellis, then the leading historian of American Catholicism and a tart critic of Catholic intellectual life, to suggest a radical consolidation.

"I don't think we should have more than three Catholic universities in this country," he told me in an interview for *Newsweek*: "one on the Atlantic seaboard, one in the Middle West and one on the West Coast."

Given the autonomy of each institution, Ellis knew that a reduction in numbers in the service of concentrated excellence would never happen. But that didn't prevent a public-relations contest among the larger Catholic universities. Should Georgetown or the Catholic University of America represent the East? Which Jesuit university should survive in the West? But in the middle of the country, the winner seemed obvious: it had to be Notre Dame.

Why? The biggest reason was Theodore M. Hesburgh, who in 1952 had begun his remarkable thirty-five-year tenure as the university's president—or its "second founder," as one historian at the university has put it. In addition to driving Notre Dame into the front ranks of higher education, Hesburgh distinguished himself in public service, serving six U.S. presidents in sixteen various assignments, including the National Science Board, the Presidential Commission on Civil Rights, and the Select Committee on Immigration and Refugees. He was on Harvard's Board of Overseers and represented the Vatican to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

On his ninety-sixth birthday in 2013, lawmakers from both political parties threw Hesburgh a gala in Washington during which they unveiled a portrait of him that now hangs in the National Gallery—the only Catholic priest so honored. He had long since been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Medal of Honor. At his death two years later, a great many admirers, myself included, hailed Hesburgh as the most consequential American priest of his era.

Wilson D. Miscamble is having none of it—or at least very little of what he dismisses as "the learned hagiography of [Hesburgh's] obituaries." His *American Priest* is the first biography of Theodore Hesburgh since his death and—more to the point—the first to measure the man and his achievements from a conservative political and theological perspective.

An Australian, a fellow priest of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, and a former chair of Notre Dame's history department, Miscamble writes well and is an able historian. He obviously cares about Notre Dame and, inevitably, invites reflection on what has been lost as well as gained in Catholic higher education. Notre Dame during the Hesburgh era is as good a place as any to ask what happened.

American Priest
The Ambitious Life and Conflicted Legacy of Notre Dame's Father Ted Hesburgh
Wilson D. Miscamble, CSC
Image, $28, 464 pp.

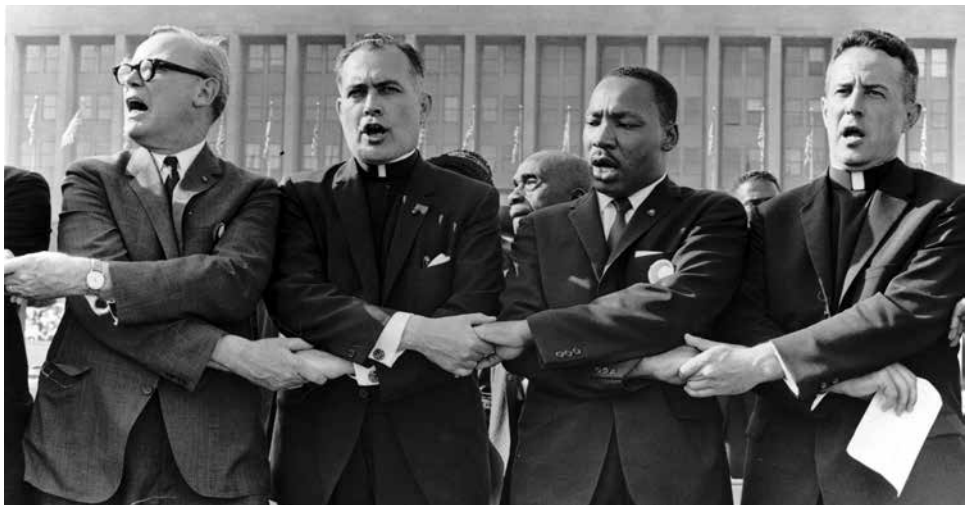
But *American Priest* is a biography, after all, and what Miscamble concludes about the character and motives of his subject can be simply put: Theodore M. Hesburgh bartered away the Catholic mind and soul of the university he loved for the pottage of academic prestige, and in the process he himself became the liberal establishment's "accommodating and acceptable priest."

As Miscamble makes clear in his preface, he never witnessed Hesburgh in action—never saw him command a room, which he did far better than most politicians, or chair a board, and never enjoyed even so much as an extended conversation with the man until 1998 when Hesburgh, then eighty-one, agreed to a series of interviews at the university's rural retreat in Land O' Lakes, Wisconsin. The sessions began at 8:30 p.m. in the evening, with Fr. Ted

Kenneth L. Woodward, *author of* Getting Religion, *was religion editor of* Newsweek *for thirty-eight years.*

swirling his favorite Scotch toddy, and over six days amounted to about twenty-four hours of questions and answers. To judge by his endnotes, a great many of Miscamble's questions dealt with issues like what Hesburgh thought of the priests who were contenders to succeed him—gossipy inside baseball of interest to few people outside of the South Bend campus.

Miscamble's original aim, he says, was to write a "comprehensive biography of the 'life and times' sort that would build on" Hesburgh's own as-told-to memoir, *God, Country, Notre Dame*, published in 1990. And that is how he sold his proposal to Fr. Ted. But two years later, he tells us, he participated in a formal university-wide conversation about the nature and challenges of a Catholic university at which "a sizable element on the university's faculty seemed determined to emasculate Catholicism's role in the academic heart of university." Stung by that experience, Miscamble jettisoned his original idea in favor of "a more honest and authentic account of his life" than the "always positive persona of 'Father Hesburgh'" so effectively presented in the best-selling memoir.



Fr. Hesburgh with Martin Luther King Jr., Rev. Edgar Chandler, and Msgr. Robert Hagarty at the Illinois Rally for Civil Rights, Chicago's Soldier Field, 1964

"Honest" and "authentic" are not the words that came to mind as I read Miscamble's book. The chief conflicted figure in this book is the author himself. It is almost painful to watch him try to reconcile his instincts as a sober historian with his compulsive ideological thrusts. Time and again he undercuts his skillful narratives of Hesburgh's manifest gifts and accomplishments with brief, Brutus-like stabs at his subject's character and moral integrity. For instance, throughout the book we are told that Hesburgh "basked" in the praise he received from this or that secular audience, that he "did his best imitation of Uriah Heep" when it appeared very likely he would become president of Notre Dame, and so on. Had Miscamble worked like historian Robert Caro, say, to authenticate his otherwise gratuitous assumptions, readers would be less inclined to dismiss them as snarky efforts to portray his subject as vain and status-seeking.

In the same vein: no sooner does Miscamble tell us that Fr. Ted lived in a small room at Notre Dame overlooking a dumpster than he adds that, when in New York on business with the Rockefellers and other members of "the liberal elite," Hesburgh often stayed in a suite at the Commodore Hotel—the unstated argument being that he lived extravagantly when on the road. In fact, the Commodore was a very ordinary hotel down the street from *Newsweek* that had seen better days, and the suite was corporate-owned and maintained for use by visiting board members. Lodging there saved Hesburgh from expensing the university.

Again, Miscamble several times tut-tuts Hesburgh for spending his Christmas breaks with the families of two wealthy friends on California's Baja Peninsula. What he doesn't tell us is that during those vacations, Fr. Ted celebrated Mass every morning for the peasant workers there, many of them Mexican immigrants, or that with the financial help of his Protestant hosts he built a chapel for them as well.

Miscamble's chapters on Hesburgh's service on behalf of U.S. presidents and the Vatican are generally accurate, at times even admiring. But having jettisoned his initial plan for a wide-angle focus on Hesburgh's life and times, he inevitably skirts important contexts that would have dictated different conclusions.

For instance, Miscamble observes that during the civil-rights era, Hesburgh did not join protest marches (lest the famous photo of Fr. Ted singing "We Shall Overcome" with Martin Luther King Jr. in Chicago should make people think otherwise). He does acknowledge the important role Hesburgh played as chairman on the Civil Rights Commission. But for an author who considers Hesburgh's legacy "conflicted," he completely ignores how Hesburgh's highly public support for civil rights brought him into conflict with Notre Dame's white and mostly conservative alumni and donor base. I know because, as a civil-rights reporter in Omaha in the mid-1960s and later as a journalist in New York, I saw firsthand the Catholic anger he ignited, not only among conservative Nebraskans but also among the very Irish Notre Dame alumni living in liberal New York City.

Decades later in the biography, when Hesburgh is old and cannot see well enough to read, Miscamble is still biting at his subject's heels. Hesburgh had student volunteers come up to his office on the thirteenth floor of the Hesburgh Library to read to him from a stack of newspapers and

magazines. But Miscamble mentions only the *New York Times*, which, he adds condescendingly, "he still thought contained all the news that's fit to print." This slow drip-drip of snide asides and mischaracterizations continues to the end of the book.

What is it about Hesburgh that provokes Miscamble to abandon his historian's cool? It's partly the company he kept: this American priest ate with sinners. Miscamble's Exhibit A is Hesburgh's acceptance of an invitation from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1961 to join its board and, later, its executive committee. At the time, the foundation was deeply concerned about global population growth and ways to combat it. Hesburgh stipulated that he would not vote on issues involving abortion and contraception. Nonetheless, Miscamble believes that his board membership made him complicit in the foundation's support for both. Miscamble fails to mention that the Vatican itself participated in the global conversation on population through its designated expert, Fr. Arthur McCormack, and that in a twenty-article supplement on the subject published in 1972 in the *New York Times* and paid for in part by Planned Parenthood International, Hesburgh's contribution argued against both abortion and state-sponsored population controls: "To redeem the times, and the population problem as well, we must redeem sex—to make it once again the language of love, of generosity, of children responsibly and lovingly begotten."

Equally pernicious, in Miscamble's view, was the tradition Hesburgh began of inviting pro-choice politicians to the Notre Dame campus despite their position on abortion (though, to his credit, he cites Hesburgh's cool deconstruction of Mario Cuomo's famous but fatuous speech). Sometimes these politicians—such as Presidents Jimmy Carter (who waffled on the issue in 1976) and Barack Obama (who pretended to)—were given honorary degrees. Miscamble tells us that the aged Hesburgh "basked" again during Obama's visit. But perhaps because he was busy protesting the president's presence on Notre Dame's sacred soil, Miscamble failed to notice that the most eloquent speech that day was given by the president of the university, Fr. John Jenkins, who managed to welcome Obama while insisting on the university's commitment to defend the life of the unborn.

Indeed, it is Hesburgh's failure to trumpet his pro-life commitment more publicly that impels this nasty assessment of his moral character:

> To speak on abortion would have put him at odds with so many of his friends in the American establishment—with the Rockefellers, with Bob McNamara at the World Bank, with Mac Bundy who was then heading the Ford Foundation. It was not simply a concern about putting at risk the personal status and acceptance he had won; he represented Notre Dame, and his university was in the midst of striving to improve and to build its reputation as a modern American university. To speak out on civil rights brought favorable recognition to Notre Dame from the people who mattered in academe, the media, and the foundations. But abortion was quite different.

> What might they think of Notre Dame if its leader stood to the fore of the pro-life movement?

In a word, Hesburgh was a toady.

The charge is scurrilous and unsubstantiated. It is also craven. To judge by the endnotes, Miscamble used his brief time interviewing Hesburgh to ask him about everything *but* what really interested him—abortion, contraception, population control, and why he took Notre Dame and, indeed, all of Catholic higher education, in the direction he did. He could also have probed Jimmy Carter, Joseph Califano, and many other political figures who knew Hesburgh well about just how honestly and vigorously he did or did not represent the teachings of the church.

The simple truth is that Hesburgh supported Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's Consistent Life Ethic, which Miscamble obviously doesn't, and found opportunities to defend the church's reasoning on abortion that were closed to bishops and cardinals. That's a major reason why Hesburgh rebuffed several opportunities for an ecclesiastical career—decisions Miscamble finds suspect. But Hesburgh regarded the role as too confining. In any case, David Rockefeller, Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, and the other super-wealthy Republicans among the "liberal elite" knew full well that their "American priest" was opposed to abortion and *Roe v. Wade*, and I'm sure that it simply didn't matter. Hesburgh served on many boards in his lifetime. Most of them needed him more than he needed them, and in numerous cases—like a Notre Dame graduate's rural hospital in Ecuador and my cousin's small not-for-profit that aids Christians in the Holy Land—Hesburgh lent his name to help them attract donations. Miscamble's book gives us nothing of that side of the man.

Miscamble's second major complaint against Hesburgh is that he convinced the Congregation of Holy Cross to relinquish control of Notre Dame to a lay board of trustees and then, Pied Piper–like, seduced a core group of Catholic university leaders into backing the so-called Land O' Lakes statement, which framed the Catholic university as a place free of outside institutional control, and called to create a community of learners and scholars "in which Catholicism is perceptibly present and effectively operative."

Miscamble recognizes that Hesburgh's aim was to assure that Notre Dame and other Catholic universities would enjoy academic freedom, not only for their faculty but also for the schools themselves. But he treats this solely as a declaration of independence from ecclesiastical authority. To be sure, Hesburgh knew from experience that academic freedom was not a value highly prized by some Vatican education officials. But had Miscamble provided the relevant historical context, the reader would better understand why these moves came when they did.

One immediate goad behind the push for academic freedom was eighteen months of extraordinary turmoil on Catholic campuses. There was an unprecedented faculty strike at St.

John's University in New York, then the country's largest Catholic university, over the abrupt firing of thirty-one professors without explanation. Theologians and other faculty at the Catholic University of America went on strike to protest the firing (also without explanation) of moral theologian Fr. Charles Curran. Other campuses erupted, demanding reforms like faculty senates with the power to protect academic freedom and an end to the seminary-like rules that, historically, had governed student life. Clerical control of universities was seen as high-handed and outmoded, especially since three out of four professors were lay. A handful of Catholic colleges went wholly secular. But the long-term threat, as David Riesman and Christopher Jencks saw in their penetrating 1968 study *The Academic Revolution,* was this: as the nation's Catholics moved up the economic and social ladder, more of them would do what Joseph P. Kennedy had done with their sons—bypass Catholic universities altogether—unless they upgraded the education they offered.

And then there was the financial incentive, which Miscamble also overlooks. Early on, Hesburgh recognized that those who handed out grants to universities prized academic freedom and were wary, to say the least, of institutions that answered to outside religious authorities. He also recognized that securing wealthy university-trustee board members was essential to raising the kind of money needed to make Notre Dame a "great university." During his first ten years he increased average faculty pay nearly ten-fold, and over his entire tenure boosted the university's endowment from $9 million to $30 million. (Today it stands at $13.1 billion.)

Miscamble's third major charge is that Hesburgh deliberately abandoned the university's commitment to the tradition of Catholic thought and culture that he inherited from his predecessors. But where's the evidence? Hesburgh's writings on higher education fill several of the record 444-and-counting feet of shelf space in the Notre Dame archives, not to mention commencement addresses delivered upon receipt of his 150 honorary degrees (a Guinness world record). Surely a study of these would cast light on the development of his thought on this topic. Instead, Miscamble relies on a two-page article Hesburgh wrote for *America* in 1962. In it, he explained why he thought Newman's *Idea of a University*, written a century earlier when the limits of knowledge and inquiry were vastly narrower, was an insufficient blueprint for the range of knowledge and inquiry a modern university ought to provide. Miscamble cites this as evidence that Hesburgh had turned his back on Catholic philosophy and theology in higher education, a reading that the text does not support. This is gotcha journalism parading as historiography.

I find Miscamble's account of Notre Dame under Hesburgh faulty for two basic reasons. First, it ignores (conveniently, it seems to me), too much of Phillip Gleason's *Contending with Modernity*, an elegant and authoritative account of Notre Dame and Catholic higher education before and during Hesburgh's tenure. Second, Miscamble presumes that the undergraduate education at Notre Dame was more grounded in the Catholic intellectual tradition than it was, and that Hesburgh was personally more responsible for the transformations in the university's Catholic culture than I think he was. I say this because I was an undergraduate there between 1953 and 1957, whereas Miscamble, who was educated in another country and at a later time, has to rely entirely on a few short books for his information about pre-Hesburgh Notre Dame. Moreover, because of my steady interaction since then with Hesburgh and with the university (both of my sons are graduates and one was a university associate vice president), I know or knew almost everyone mentioned in *American Priest*.

At the time Hesburgh was appointed president, Notre Dame was essentially a college, with only a slender number of graduate and law students. It was a university only in the sense that it had distinct undergraduate colleges of science, engineering, business and architecture, besides the College of Arts and Letters. There was no department of theology until Hesburgh created one, and the required religion courses were barely a step up from high-school apologetics.

To be sure, neo-Thomism was the philosophy that students were taught, but it was hardly the integrative discipline imagined by Miscamble. And when, by the 1960s, neo-Thomism had lost its hegemony in the philosophy department—as it did at Catholic universities across the country—it was not because of Hesburgh, as Miscamble suggests, but because of intellectual divergences and disagreements among neo-Thomists themselves.

A minority of us undergraduates did of course read Newman, Christopher Dawson, Josef Pieper, Jacques Maritain, and Étienne Gilson, plus the novelists and poets associated with the "Catholic Renaissance" that developed during the interwar era. Some of us even went to hear these figures when they lectured on campus. For the most part, though, we were the students of the legendary English professor Frank O'Malley, whose courses "The Philosophy of Literature" and "Modern Catholic Writers" were utterly unique and available to only about sixty students a year. O'Malley was also the advisor to the student literary magazine, the moderator of the Bookmen and the Wranglers, (the two intellectual undergraduate discussion groups), and the faculty advisor for those students—mostly his own—who applied for, and often won, Woodrow Wilson, Danforth, and other graduate scholarships, including a couple of Rhodes.

Miscamble cites O'Malley as if he were paradigmatic of a hearty Christian humanism pervading undergraduate classrooms. But in fact he was virtually a one-man band. Worse, Miscamble deploys an unsourced Hesburgh quote dismissive of O'Malley's classroom performance (he was an alcoholic and mumbled at first when shucking a hangover) in order to advance his claim that Ted was at best indifferent to the Catholic element in Catholic higher education. This is another instance of gotcha journalism. The truth is that Hesburgh greatly admired O'Malley, and at the two-day conference on his work that opened Notre Dame's sesquicentennial celebration in 1991, he acknowledged the irony that O'Malley, one of a number of outstanding Notre Dame teachers of that period who hadn't bothered to get a PhD, would for that reason not be offered a teaching position by the now research-oriented Notre Dame that Hesburgh had himself created.

A deep commitment to undergraduate spiritual and intellectual formation, such as O'Malley's, is not a virtue nurtured in graduate schools. And the specialization that *is* fostered there—together with the gradual transfer of authority over faculty hires to department heads—did more to transform Catholic higher education than the inability of Catholic universities to find an ideological replacement for the old Catholic pedagogy based on neo-Thomist manuals.

Did Hesburgh make mistakes? Of course. As Miscamble notes, one was lifting Fr. Richard McBrien out of obscurity and giving him the department of theology to run, which he did for eleven years. As dean, he was often asked to comment on television, where his reductive political approach to the post–Vatican II turmoil in the church did not reflect well on an otherwise distinguished faculty. I also think Hesburgh erred in agreeing to co-chair the Clintons' Legal Expense Trust in 1994. I'd like to think their money-grubbing since Bill left office gave him second thoughts.

I also agree with Miscamble that Hesburgh's later emphasis on service to others was a wholly inadequate marker of a Catholic education—especially since even some state schools now require proof of volunteer work on college entrance applications. Jesuit universities, with their pledge to form students into "men for others," make the same mistake. I think Fr. Ted was a romantic about Notre Dame, convinced that the religious atmospherics of the place alone were transformative. My guess is that by the mid-1970s, he had been away from the university so often that he failed to realize that most Catholics entering Notre Dame had a poor grasp of the basics of the faith—and that most of them also *left* without much improvement.

Toward the end of *American Priest*, Miscamble writes that by investing his time and energy, and that of the university, in causes like civil rights, poverty eradication, and world peace, Fr. Ted hoped to create "the Kingdom of God on Earth"—as if he had been a nineteenth-century Protestant post-millennialist. To the contrary, Hesburgh brought to the major ills besetting the twentieth century an optimism rooted in the frank recognition of humankind's propensity for evil. If it were not already taken as the title of another priest's biography, the title I would have chosen for a book about Hesburgh is "Witness to Hope." ■

Rand Richards Cooper

Hope's High Stakes

'RAFIKI'

Rafiki marks the international debut of the thirty-nine-year-old writer-director Wanuri Kahiu. The first Kenyan feature ever officially screened at Cannes, the movie, which portrays the deepening relationship between two girls in their final year of secondary school, was banned in Kenya, the country's Film Classification Board charging it with "legitimiz[ing] homosexuality against the dominant values, cultures and beliefs of the people of Kenya."

Rafiki—the word means "friend" in Swahili—follows several weeks in the lives of Kena (Samantha Mugatsia), who plans to go to nursing school, and Ziki (Sheila Munyiva), a free spirit dreaming passionately about a dazzling life in some faraway place. Living in a cramped Nairobi flat with her divorced and lonely mother, who finds solace in the Bible and the fellowship of an Evangelical church run by a charismatic minister, Kena is conspicuously boyish, wearing her hair short, preferring boys' clothes ("my body is allergic to a dress," she complains), skateboarding, playing soccer with the guys. She's a serious, even solemn young person, while Ziki is a glamorous party girl who favors colorful hair braids, short skirts, and purple lipstick.

The two opposites attract, their intimacy developing through chance encounters around town and laughs shared at a local chai shop. They find an abandoned VW bus to use as their hideaway; bedecked with pink bougainvillea, it is a bower of sorts, and an escape from a world that not only doesn't comprehend their burgeoning tenderness, but harshly condemns it. Out there, the two are "friends," a designation holding the same ambiguity in Swahili that it once did in English—a careful euphemism in a society still shaming, and hiding, the love that dare not speak its name.

The backdrop to *Rafiki* is the hostility to homosexuality that continues to hold sway in many African countries; Kenya retains colonial-era laws banning same-sex relationships, while neighboring Uganda has notoriously passed the continent's harshest proscriptions. In the United States, a lesbian relationship among young adults might mean disapproval. In some parts of Africa, it could mean death. And so a romance that seems tame to American audiences (the erotic content is exceedingly modest) resounds, in Kenya, with danger and the possibility of tragedy. Furthermore, though non-East-African viewers may not pick it up, the relationship between Kena and Ziki bridges another divide: Kena is Kikuyu and Ziki is Luo, the two most powerful ethnic groups in Kenya, that have vied—sometimes bloodily—for power ever since the country's founding in 1963. This history of animosity adds a Capulets-and-Montagues dimension to the star-crossed lovers—a theme reinforced by their fathers campaigning against each other in a city-council election.

Though her sympathies are clear, Kahiu never preaches progressive values, but treats all parties with dignity; even those who view gayness as an unholy possession— "You are filled with demons!" Kena's mother yells at one point—and wield their Christianity forcefully in an attempt to extirpate it are not reviled, but portrayed as fal-

BIG WORLD CINEMA

Samantha Mugatsia and Sheila Munyiva in Rafiki

MOON-MADE

I thought I'd had it buried, but it kept coming back—
this time-worn desire, this ritual throb. And because
it had a pulse, kept shrinking, then expanding,
it could always reach out, or pull itself back.

It had something to do with the sea, some sense
of welcome and reproach, and wanting
to reciprocate, if only within, if only as a sign
that desire is also the hatred of desire

as much as it is love of anything else. The question
in this way is limitless, though not less than it is, well,
anything else. It floods and then it ebbs, then it pours all
in again, as what I learn is simply my soul swims on.

—Jack Hanson

Jack Hanson is a doctoral student at Yale University. His work has appeared in the Kenyon Review Online, PN Review, *the* New Criterion, Salamander, *and elsewhere.*

lible humans operating within a highly constraining set of social, cultural, and religious values. We see the poisonous role played by gossip, especially in the person of the woman who runs the tea shop and spreads hateful rumors about the girls. Such malice helps push events to a scary crisis when a mob catches the two girls in their bower, drags them out, and beats them, meting out the kind of vigilante mob justice not uncommon in African cities, where a purse-snatcher on a crowded street may put his own life at risk.

The comparison of same-sex love with common criminality is a telling one, and the American viewer of *Rafiki* should keep in mind the harshly normative values of its milieu. Scenes of quiet tenderness in a film like, for instance, *Call Me by Your Name*, register differently here; this is not an Italian villa enjoyed by vacationing liberals, but an abandoned minivan in an African city, where violent persecutors might descend at any moment. The pervasiveness of a stringent, even hysterical taboo ups the stakes significantly, and adds extra giddiness to the already rapturous experience of young love.

The daughter of a businessman father and pediatrician mother, Wanuri Kahiu grew up in Nairobi and went to film school at UCLA. She won multiple African film awards for her 2009 movie, *From a Whisper*, a fictionalized account of the 1998 terror attack on the U.S. embassy in Nairobi, then followed with a documentary about the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai, and a futurist film, *Pumzi*, depicting life in a post-apocalypse community.

In a whimsical but quietly impassioned 2017 Ted talk, Kahiu discussed her interest in sci-fi, fantasy, and popular culture generally, and defended the right of African filmmakers to make movies not merely about poverty, famine, political corruption, AIDS, and other headline issues that define Africa to the West, but rather about life in all its routine daily humor and pathos—that is to say, to work like filmmakers generally. Advocating "art for its own sake...just for the sake of imagination," Kahiu described herself as making films about "nothing particularly important," dissociating herself from "agenda art" in favor of the "fun, fierce, and frivolous." Christening this movement "Afro bubble gum," she has founded a media collective by that name, dedicated to helping African artists broaden their mission.

I know what Kahiu is getting at, but the phrase does her work a disservice. *Rafiki* is by no means frivolous, and *From a Whisper* is—literally—deadly serious. Delving into the plot to blow up the U.S. embassy, and into the abiding repercussions in two Kenyan families a decade later, that film meticulously weaves two time frames together in an ominous drama that is at once political and personal. "Bubblegum" hardly seems an apt designation. Both of Kahiu's films also scrutinize fundamentalist theological imperatives that place doctrinal purity and stringency over individual humanity, mercy, and love—and explore the nature of the difficult forgiveness that ensues when those imperatives cause pain. Again, no bubble gum there.

Whatever she chooses to call it, *Rafiki* is a fine film. Kahiu takes up a broad cause in the most persuasive way—by presenting a highly particularized human story, and unfolding it with sympathy and quiet pathos. "I see the way you look at me," Ziki says to Kena in the VW bus. We do, too, and that look—a searching gaze, full of longing—stays with us all the way to the film's ending, with its note of guarded and ambiguous optimism. Interestingly, it was not the mildly sexual scenes that the Kenyan film board cited as the reason for its ban, but rather that ending—which the board asked Kahiu to change (she refused), and which the censors described as putting "too hopeful" a spin on gay love. Is this perhaps the first time a film was ever explicitly banned for hopefulness? That is surely something for a filmmaker to take pride in. ■

Charles McNamara

Not Tragic, Just Sad

The Case for Trump
Victor Davis Hanson
Basic Books, $30, 400 pp.

At its etymological root, tragedy has something to do with goats (*tragos* "goat" + *ōidē* "song"), but the Western understanding of the genre has largely left these capric origins behind. Whether we like it or not, our notion of tragic drama is grounded in the thinking of Aristotle, specifically in the literary criticism of his *Poetics*. Although it was written well after the first examples of Greek tragedy, Aristotle's dominating analysis has made it practically impossible to sit through *Oedipus Rex* or *Othello* or even Mahler's "Tragic" Sixth Symphony without thinking of the *peripeteia* ("reversal of circumstances") at the heart of his model of tragic plots.

Despite Aristotle's profound influence on our idea of the "tragic," no literary term has been so misunderstood and misapplied (with the possible exception of "ironic"). It is often erroneously taken as a synonym for "calamitous" or even simply "sad." But the notion of the tragic—at least as Aristotle sees it—is something more complicated. He famously defines the genre as the "mimesis of an action that is serious, complete, and grand," one which uses its principal tools of "fear and pity" in order to effect a kind of "catharsis" in viewers. A cursory search of recent academic publications in classics shows that we're still sparring about what catharsis really means and still confused about why a drama that terrorizes through fear nevertheless produces pleasure.

With his new book, the Greek-military historian Victor Davis Hanson amplifies our misunderstanding of tragedy by shoehorning the current occupant of the White House into the tradition of Sophoclean protagonists, positioning Trump as a so-called "tragic hero." In *The Case for Trump*—whose occasional trafficking in Uranium One conspiracy theories and sophomoric Homeric epithets like "polished teleprompter reader Barack Obama" I shall graciously pass over—Hanson asks us to see in Trump a modern Ajax or Antigone, or even a "tribal" "outlier" like Achilles whose "service is never rewarded commensurately by the Greeks' deep-state leaders." The problem, of course, is that being a tribal, "unstable loner" has nothing to do with the tragic genre, properly understood. Donald J. Trump may be many things, but a tragic hero he is not.

Before turning to our commander-in-chief, it's helpful to return to Aristotle, on whom Hanson explicitly relies for his understanding of tragedy. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle repeatedly underscores the central importance of "fear" and "pity," and he emphasizes that tragedy should not "show the very wicked person falling from good fortune into bad…for it will not arouse pity or fear." Pity, Aristotle continues, "concerns the undeserving victim of adversity, and fear concerns the person who is similar to ourselves," one whose life we can imagine inhabiting.

A scientist at heart, Aristotle collects tragic specimens in the *Poetics*, clarifying through examples how this pitiable undoing emerges in various plots. He points to figures like Thyestes, who unwittingly devours his sons at the hands of his diabolical brother Atreus. But in Aristotle's eyes, no tragic figure exemplifies the genre as well as Oedipus. We pity Oedipus for his mistaken participation in his own destruction, and strange as it may sound, we fear finding ourselves in his place—not so much that we might end up in bed with a parent, but, as E. R. Dodds puts it in his landmark article "On Misun-

GAGE SKIDMORE

Donald Trump at a campaign rally in Prescott Valley, Arizona

derstanding the *Oedipus Rex*," that we similarly suffer from the "blindness of man and the desperate insecurity of the human condition." We, too, "grope in the dark as Oedipus gropes, not knowing who he is or what he has to suffer." Despite the unimaginable content of his transgressions, we must ultimately recognize that "Oedipus is every man and every man is potentially Oedipus."

Setting aside the president's stated desire to date his own daughter, we might find it strange that a Trump supporter like Hanson would want to install him in a tradition of child-devouring, mother-marrying predecessors. Categorizing Trump as a tragic protagonist is all the more perplexing because Hanson doesn't see in this presidency an Aristotelian fall "from good fortune into bad." His Trumpist panegyric instead intends to document triumphantly "why he ran for president, why he surprised his critics in winning...and why...Trump's appointments and his record of governance have improved the economy" and otherwise resuscitated American greatness. The ever-rising dramatic action of *The Case for Trump* is designed to inspire awe and admiration, not fear and pity.

The absurdity of viewing a victorious Trump as a Sophoclean tragic hero stems from Hanson's fundamental misconstruing of core terminology in Aristotle's text. In Hanson's model, a "tragic hero's change of fortune—as Aristotle reminds us, always from good to bad—is due to an innate flaw (*hamartia*). Nonetheless, at least in some cases, this intrinsic and usually uncivilized trait can be of service to the community, albeit usually expressed fully only at the expense of the hero's own fortune." This picture of the "uncivilized" but ultimately useful tragic figure appears elsewhere in Hanson's text. He asserts that such characters know that "the natural expression of their personas can lead only to their own destruction or ostracism from an advancing civilization that they seek to protect." On another page, he writes that "tragic heroes cannot fit in with their times, even at the acme of their success, because they are pre-civilizational."

It is true that Aristotle positions *hamartia* as one of the central elements of tragic plots, but it's not accurate to describe it as an "innate flaw." As Dodds writes in the aforementioned article, "The theory that the tragic hero must have a grave moral flaw, and its mistaken ascription to Aristotle, has had a long and disastrous history." Not some "anti-civilizational" defect of character, a *hamartia* is an error, a mistake, or perhaps a miscalculation. The closely related verb *hamartein* means "to miss the mark"—but not exactly in the sense of aiming for the bull's-eye and clumsily landing a dart in a friend's beer. In the more elevated domains of tragedy and ethics, the concept of "missing the mark" might be understood best as a kind of law of unintended consequences. In his own rendering of *hamartia*, Dodds explains that this "error" is "an offense committed in ignorance of some material fact and therefore free from πονηρία [wickedness] or κακία [evil]." Following the *Poetics*'s citation of Oedipus and Thyestes, Dodds finds that both men "violated the most sacred of Nature's laws and thus incurred the most horrible of all pollutions; but they both did so without πονηρία, for they knew not what they did." Aristotle's tragic heroes lack knowledge, not morality.

By portraying *hamartia* as some kind of practically expedient lack of integrity, moreover, Hanson presents his own master class in Trumpist *paradiastolē*, a "redescription" of vices as virtues and a rhetorical distillation of our "post-truth" era of neck-snapping political spin. Through this tactic—one that deeply troubled early modern thinkers like Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes—playboy notoriety can be recast as renown, crass incivility as forthrightness, felony tax fraud as financial savvy. This repackaging of Trump's moral failings as his most laudable qualities permeates *The Case for Trump*. Through Hanson's redescription, Trump's "anti-civilizational" *hamartia* is rendered as romanticized gunslinger vigilantism. At another point, Hanson says Trump might "be compared by his enemies to the thuggish Roman populist Catiline," but without even denying the charge he immediately reframes this proto-Trump epitome of sedition as an exemplar of "rhetorical power and directness." More broadly, Hanson explains the "chaos" of White House staff turnover as a matter of finding "personalities [who] jibed with Trump's own mercurial moods." For Hanson, Trump's dishonest, foul-mouthed Mammonism is a heroic feature, not a bug.

Even if we can't find genuinely Oedipal, I-didn't-mean-it *hamartia* in the Oval Office, there are yet other *dramatis personae* in our political era who come much closer to the tragic heroes for whom Hanson searches. To my mind, the best candidate is the Central American migrant. Trump gleefully slanders these souls with the bestializing terminology of "animals" who "infest our country," but they're humans escaping not just poverty but imminent threats of violence. Their tragic action inspires pity, for we find in them Aristotle's "undeserving victim of adversity," and with a modicum of empathetic imagination, we also feel fear, recognizing a "person who is similar to ourselves," a desperate refugee who acts just as anyone would. These migrants are errant in every sense, unwittingly catalyzing familial ruin—the rending of children from their parents' arms—not through "wickedness" or "evil" but through "ignorance of some material fact" about the cruelty that awaits them at our nation's border.

But then again, it's hard to see the perilous flight from poverty and violence as "falling from good fortune into bad." It's falling from bad into worse. Unconscionable into imponderable. As it turns out, there's hardly anything "tragic" about our current political drama—it's just plain "calamitous." Trump's "heroic" story certainly isn't serious or grand, and it can't be complete soon enough. ■

Charles McNamara *is a Core Lecturer in the Classics Department at Columbia University.*

Regina Munch

A Textbook Case

Why Learn History
(When It's Already on Your Phone)
Sam Wineburg
The University of Chicago Press, $20, 240 pp.

"Wow, you studied history?" I braced myself for what he (it's usually a he) was going to say next. "So you know when General Patton's birthday is?"

"Uh, I don't," I replied.

"What about the name of Robert E. Lee's horse?"

I actually did know that. "Traveller, but I don't really study..."

"How many people died in the Battle of the Gettysburg?"

You get the idea: a lot of people fancy themselves history buffs. They obsess over names, dates, battles, and numbers, and they love spouting them off at top speed. (And after consuming one too many History Channel specials, anyone would think the American Civil War was the most important event in human history.) I can't blame my interlocutor too much. This way of "learning" history—absorbing and being tested on discrete, disconnected facts from a textbook—is what we're taught in school. If you memorize enough facts, you're an expert.

This is what Sam Wineburg calls "history as Trivial Pursuit"—accumulated minutiae passed off as true knowledge. Wineburg's new book, *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)*, explores the way we teach history to students and the dismal consequences for political and social life in the internet era. Wineburg argues that without learning in school how to evaluate evidence, consider implications, and craft a narrative based on research and debate, we are susceptible to falsehoods, especially now that "fake news" thrives online. And if we can't sort fact from fiction, we fall prey to whatever narrative is the most popular or the most comfortable—and lose our critical faculties as democratic citizens.

Wineburg begins with a familiar question: When anyone with an internet connection can post rants on social media, build a website, manipulate images, and distribute a podcast, how do we know what to believe? Compared with the time when "libraries and archives represented quiet stability" and researching meant poring over card catalogs and scouring indexes, the internet has both overloaded us with information and "obliterated authority." Wineburg writes, "In our Google-drenched society, the most critical question we face is not how to find information. Our browser does a great job. We're bombarded by stuff.... Digital snake oil salesmen compete with reliable sources for our allegiance. Can we tell the difference?" The answer—for students as well as adults—is no.

What's to blame? Wineburg points a finger at textbooks: unambiguous, all-knowing, and often obscure, with minimal evidence demonstrating how authors arrive at their conclusions. They are intentionally crafted to present a narrative and not to bother students with how they arrived at it. This narrative might be partisan or ideologically driven—Wineburg devotes some time to discussing the disproportionate influence of lobbyists and antiquarians on determining what kids learn—but more often, it's whatever "standard" that lawmakers, historians, and authors happen to arrive at. Wineburg tells of a time he asked students where the textbook got its information. "Children find the question puzzling," he writes. "The book knows what happened because, well, *duh*, it's a *history* book." Students,

he observes, are kept in the dark about how historians ask questions, debate, and learn. "Teaching students to separate fact from fiction by reading textbook narratives purged of ambiguity is akin to preparing a swimmer who's never ventured outside a wading pool to navigate the torrents of a raging sea," Wineburg writes, using a memorable image. So what's to be done?

First is to stop expecting students to remember so many particulars, and instead make sure they know broad outlines, trends, and context. Wineburg writes, "We should admit that we cannot insist that every student know when World War II began, or who our allies were, while at the same time administering tests about minutiae like the Battles of Saratoga and Oriskany. (That's why we have a smartphone, anyway.)" What you can't learn from your phone is the actual practice of history, the insight to connect discrete pieces of information into a coherent, and revisable, story.

In one of the book's best chapters, Wineburg discusses his own attempt to teach students this historical thinking. With a grant from the National Science Foundation, Wineburg and a team of researchers taught a sixth-grade class where, on the first day, students entered the room to find a box labeled "Archive Bin" containing scraps of primary sources. The movie *Pocahontas* had just been released, and Wineburg and his team presented them with a question: How true is the movie to real-life events? In their bins, they found excerpts from sources: news stories from the seventeenth-century *London Gazette*, biographies of Pocahontas, modern historians' analyses, and John Smith's own account. The instructors took the back seat; students had to read the sources, discuss and make arguments among themselves, and present findings to the teachers. In other words: they became historians. Wineburg reflects, "Traditionalists fear that lacking a fixed story, children will be left with a hodgepodge of shards that form no useful purpose. Our classrooms proved the opposite. By assuming responsibility for making knowledge rather than serving as receptacles of others' conclusions, students took charge of their own learning." Insisting that students get the "facts" down before they can "think critically" about them guarantees that they won't do the latter. As much as knowing what happened in the past is important, the method of inquiry itself is the lesson.

It is this method, Wineburg claims, that will help us sort through bad information, slanted stories, and outright lies on the internet. The way we've been taught to read, research, and ask questions is no longer enough; all of us, and especially students, need an education in how to navigate the cascade of information that we receive every time we pick up our phones. "What once fell on the shoulders of editors, publishers, librarians, and subject matter experts now falls on the shoulders of each and every one of us," he writes. And we will surely fail at this, Wineburg insists, if we continue teaching history the way we do: as a parade of names and dates, free of evidence, that doesn't require students to support ideas and investigate the claims of others. He writes, "Fed the gruel of documentation-less textbooks, students come to see history as a story without evidence. Don't like this particular story? Doesn't sit well with your politics? Don't worry. Custom order one online more to your own liking."

Wineburg's work is vital, but not without its shortcomings. The book itself is less a coherent monograph and more a series of essays. The topics of the mostly self-contained chapters vary widely: the fundamentally "traditional pose" that Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* takes toward history; the poorly conceived education program Teaching American History that wasted a billion dollars in the 2000s; and one psychologist's faulty pedagogy that shapes classrooms around the world. Each chapter is interesting, but little connection is made between the issues.

More fundamentally, Wineburg's assessment of the changing nature of research betrays some questionable assumptions. Early in the book, he praises the "quiet stability" of decades past when reputable news sources, libraries, professors, and universities controlled what information made it into the public discourse. He contrasts that to today, when "what determines whether you go viral is not the blessing from some academic egghead, but from the digital mob." But in so doing, he overestimates the ability of the previous regime to give good information and underestimates the ability of the new one. The old gatekeepers of information, mostly privileged Euro-American men, consciously and unconsciously propagated their own narratives and priorities to the detriment of people on the outside. But Facebook, Twitter, and similar applications have made it possible for private citizens to document and spread information that traditional gatekeepers either choose not to or are prevented from doing, especially in countries where the state controls the media and censorship is common. There's a lot to be said for bypassing the eggheads.

In other words, Wineburg misleads us by suggesting that our options are either the "quiet stability" of the gatekeepers or the anarchy of the "digital mob." Ultimately, Wineburg knows this—after all, he believes it's possible for us to learn how to be responsible researchers on the internet. "If you want to teach students the difference between reliable information and tabloid gossip," he writes, "you can't confiscate their phones. You have to use their phones to show them what their phones *can't* do." So why learn history when it's already on your phone? Our civic life is at stake: if we can't ask the right questions, discern truth, and craft a coherent narrative, we have no basis for a common politics. ■

Regina Munch *is an assistant editor at* Commonweal.

John Cavadini

Wounds & Caresses

Christian Flesh

Paul J. Griffiths
Stanford University Press, $25, 176 pp.

Readers familiar with Paul J. Griffiths's work know they must be prepared to encounter provocation in his new book, *Christian Flesh*, for Griffiths is a provocateur in the best sense, someone who intends to leave the reader uncomfortable and thereby provoke conversation. Griffiths enjoys a good scrap of the clarifying kind, and in this book I think he has invited readers of various stripes to a variety of good scraps.

The fundamental category of Griffiths's ethical analysis is, as the title suggests, "flesh." "Body" is reserved for inanimate material (including corpses); "flesh is living body" and "haptic," constituted as flesh by its ability to touch other flesh and to be touched in return. Two basic categories of touch are identified: the "caress" and the "blow" (or "wound"), but "the gift of flesh is given and received, among humans, principally by caress." "Caress" includes gestures we normally associate with the word—e.g. the "copulative caress" and other "more intimate" caresses such as lovers "kissing open-mouthed, staring into the darkness of one another's pupils"—but also gestures called "caresses" by a kind of extension, such as the caress "given by mother to child in the womb," the "intimate oral caress" young children offer almost everything, and even "strangling—a caress that is also a wound."

In the "devastation" of the Fall, flesh is fragile, mortal, its very capacity to caress inextricably tied to wounding: "the concupiscent caress…wounds what it touches." The flesh of Jesus is the great exception. As "the flesh of a divine-human person," it is not subject to the vulnerabilities of devastated flesh except insofar as Jesus willed. Jesus' resurrected flesh, in a transitional state, is not available for touch until it has ascended, when it is again available to "lingual and manual caress," in the Eucharist. Jesus' flesh is thus flesh "transfigured." It opens the possibility for our flesh—and the caresses it gives—to be transfigured in and as his own. In baptism our flesh is "cleaved" to Jesus' flesh.

This creates a new category of flesh, "Christian flesh." As Griffiths explains, "Those who are Christian…are by definition so in a fleshly sense; there's no other way they could be Christian. 'Christian flesh,' therefore…labels just and only those who are Christian." Christian flesh has an intimacy with Jesus' flesh that non-Christian flesh does not. From 1 Corinthians 6:12–20, we learn that Christian "bodies are Christ's limbs" and Christ's limbs should not make themselves one flesh with prostitutes. Christians are told to "abandon fornication" and "glorify God in your own body." Thus, Griffiths writes, "Christians are glued to Jesus'

Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, Ugolino and His Sons, *1865–67*

JOSEPHINE BAY PAUL AND C. MICHAEL PAUL FOUNDATION INC. GIFT; CHARLES ULRICK AND JOSEPHINE BAY FOUNDATION INC. GIFT; FLETCHER FUND, 1967

flesh, stuck on it, brought into it, made participant in it…. Their flesh's limbs are, now, analogically and participatorily, Jesus'…. What they do with them is what he does with his." "When Christian flesh glorifies the Lord, it acts in accord with what it is; when it does not," as in fornication, "it speaks against what it is by what it does." Since Christian flesh participates in the freedom of Christ's flesh, "all things are permitted" to Christian flesh, even if not everything is "expedient" (1 Corinthians 6:12). Thus the key question is what is consistent with "Jesus-cleaved" flesh.

Baptism is the paradigm of fleshly gift, and because of that it asks nothing of those who receive it, except that they do receive it, and as fully as possible. The extent to which they receive it is the extent to which they reciprocate it, returning it with appropriate passion; and the extent to which they reciprocate it is the extent to which they do not perform fleshly actions that speak against it.

Since all things are permitted—because baptism asks nothing of those who receive it except that they *do* receive it—no act is *malum in se*, evil in itself, at least for Christian flesh: "There are no bans and no precepts and no commandments." Scripture may seem to have bans, but these are all translatable from the imperative to the indicative: "*Don't have sex with temple prostitutes* and *don't eat food offered to idols* can be rendered, when thinking theologically about what they must mean, as *having sex with temple prostitutes / eating food offered to idols isn't what Christian flesh does.*" Thus, "there are no universal norms binding Christian flesh…with respect to matters of the flesh." The "preacher, the catechist, or the canon lawyer" may need more, Griffiths concedes, but moral theology should be content with realizing that "there are uses of the flesh that, for Christians, typically involve idolatrous fornication." But that does not make any of them *malum in se,* including "sex between adults and children." I hasten to add that it is clearly not Griffiths's intention to promote or countenance such behavior. But it does leave this and other acts Griffiths mentions—such as the eating of living human flesh, buying and selling sex as a commodity, and violent pornography—in a kind of uneasy limbo, not to mention cases which go unmentioned, such as the direct killing of innocent human life and rape. Even if one does not regard these as *malum in se* for Christians, wouldn't one at least want to say that such acts are *never* consistent with "Jesus-cleaved flesh"?

After systematically applying his principle to various matters regarding dress, eating, and sex, Griffiths notes that his ultimate disagreement with "magisterial teaching" on sexual ethics is "not a contradiction" of it "but rather a *dubium*," a "doubt about whether in its usual acceptation that teaching is right." Actually, a *dubium* is just a technical term for a request for clarification in cases where a law or statement seems unclear. In *that* sense, I would like to pose some *dubia* to Griffiths.

First, what is the relationship between the moral theology he sketches in this book and natural law? Negative precepts of the natural law—e.g., the prohibition against direct killing of innocent human beings—are universally binding, for Christians and non-Christians alike. One benefit of natural-law theory is that it assumes a certain solidarity among humans *as* humans. It binds us together as aspiring moral agents, both in what we should avoid, and even more in what we can admire and encourage, across cultures and religions. Does Griffiths not believe there is a natural law? Or does he simply believe it does not apply to Christian flesh? Not to believe in natural law at all would seem a much more radical departure from Catholic moral teaching than to disagree about particular teachings. To believe in natural law while also believing it does not apply to "Christian flesh" would seem to set Christians apart from other people in a way that decreases the possibilities of solidarity. It appears to divide Christians from other human beings precisely with respect to that feature of our humanity that one might expect to be the basis of universal solidarity: our common flesh and blood.

Second, is the insistence on "flesh" as the fundamental term of moral analysis related to an underlying ambiguity in sacramental theology? Griffiths makes a point of not using "body" as his fundamental term, yet Catholic sacramental theology hinges on the "body" much more than on "flesh." Individual Christians are not the "flesh" of Christ but members of the Body of Christ. Griffiths does not mention the one place in Scripture where "flesh" is used in this connection (Ephesians 5:31–32), perhaps because there the "one flesh" union is between Christ and the whole church, not between Christ and individual Christians. This makes a great deal of difference. In relation to the rest of the world, the church is characterized not as one kind of "flesh" among others, but as a body. Nor are the members of this body bound together by having a different kind of flesh, or by cleaving individually to Christ's flesh; rather, they are bound together by the one sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, accomplished "for love of the world" (John 3:16). The church—as a body, the Body of Christ—is thus ordered toward the world in the very same love. It is, in this way, "like a sacrament—a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all humans" (*Lumen gentium*, 1). Baptism does not give us a special kind of flesh but rather incorporates us into the Body of Christ and, in so doing, orders us toward love of the world in Christ.

Furthermore, the Eucharist is "body, blood, soul and divinity"; it is not ordinarily described as the "flesh" of Christ (despite John 6:51–55) because such a description would risk literalizing the sacrament. Griffiths, I think, is insufficiently attentive to this risk. It is not enough to say, as he does, that the "flesh" we are "lingually caressing" in the Eucharist is the "ascended flesh" of Christ. He does say that we encounter this ascended flesh "under the veil of bread and wine," but that veil seems particularly thin when one can "lingually

caress" what he also calls the "breadflesh and wineblood," both highly ambiguous expressions. Griffiths does claim that John 6 is speaking of Jesus' "ascended flesh" and not his "natal flesh" when it says that this flesh is edible, but this distinction turns out to be less firm than it seems, for Griffiths later claims that Dante's Ugolino is damned not for eating his children's dead bodies, but for *not* eating their *living flesh* when it was offered: "For Ugolino to weep, to call his children by name, and to eat their living flesh freely offered, would have been to enter into a eucharistic economy, an economy participant in that constituted by the natal flesh of Jesus, freely offered." But Jesus did not saw his natal fingers off and offer them as food to his disciples. The Eucharist is not a sacramental version of cannibalism. Here one can see the connection between Griffiths's unwillingness to say there is anything *malum in se* (such as eating living human flesh) and his alarming tendency to literalize sacramental language.

A third and final *dubium*: Is the ambiguity in Griffiths's sacramental theology related to an underlying ambiguity in Christology? Although he writes that Jesus is a "single person with more than one nature," and the incarnation is "of the Word, the second Person of the Trinity," he also describes Jesus as "a double-natured person, a divine-human person." This is, at the very least, an unnecessarily confusing formulation, as is the claim that Jesus' flesh is "the human flesh of a divine-human person." Why not just say it's the human flesh belonging to a divine person? That would be clearer, more precise, and much more in keeping with the canonical formulation: "He who was crucified in the flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ, is true God, Lord of glory, and *one of the Holy Trinity*" (Constantinople II, *CCC* 468). Or again, when Griffiths writes that Jesus' flesh "is human flesh proper to a person who is both human and the LORD, both Jesus of Nazareth, born to Mary, and the Christ, the Messiah who is the son of the living [G]od," he needlessly suggests two sons—one Mary's, the other God's. These ambiguities obscure the mystery that Christ, for our sakes, lowered himself to *become sin*, persisting in that solidarity through a death he made his own, even though death properly belongs only to the sinful.

In Griffiths's account, the "flesh" of Christ appears oddly disconnected from the very personal act of love by which the divine Word redeemed us. The Incarnation seems to lose its sacramental character of mediating the self-emptying act of the Word to all flesh through the flesh that is unambiguously his. Is all flesh really beloved by God? Or is Christianity just another sect, with a new elite kind of flesh that belongs, unambiguously, to no one except the sectaries, who enjoy a kind of liberty that no one else can claim? Is human flesh as *human* flesh thereby degraded? Is there not a tinge of Gnosticism to this theology? These are the questions raised for me by *Christian Flesh*. This book has prompted me to ponder the issues it raises more deeply, for which I have its provocative author to thank. ■

John Cavadini *is professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame, where he also directs the McGrath Institute for Church Life.*

CLASSIFIED

Baptized in the Charles

Katherine Lucky

The day before my college graduation, I was baptized in the Charles River. Cambridge felt constant: spires in gray sky, brick, swampy air, latent gravitas and muggy discomfort. I stood on the bank in yoga pants, and wondered who else had gone under, how many had stayed the course.

By the time I arrived at Harvard, the school was secular, yet haunted by faith. I lived in a dorm named for an old minister, drank coffee on Church Street, and sat through a prayer before Convocation. My choir sang passions and requiems. The school's early motto, *Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae*, was now *Veritas*. The philosophy building was etched with a quotation: *WHAT IS MAN THAT THOU ART MINDFUL OF HIM.*

Empty churches formed a sacramental landscape. First Baptist. First Parish. Progenitors, all. First Church Cambridge was founded by Rev. Thomas Shepard in 1636, the same year Harvard (a seminary) opened across the street. All were involved with Puritans. Those black-hatted killjoys! They lived in a line of Harvard's anthem, a verse since discarded and replaced: *Be the herald of light and the bearer of love / Till the stock of the Puritans die!*

Before they could join a church, Puritans had to give testimony. First, depravity or despair. Then, a climactic moment of conversion, often occasioned by an encounter with Scripture. The story ended with continued devotion. This narrative was faith's proof, the only evidence required. If elders voted yes, the storyteller was baptized and granted membership. At First Church, Rev. Shepard kept inky records: fifty-one confessions, 1637–1645.

The testimonies contend with salt and ships. Historian Patricia Caldwell writes that "the American version of deliverance is imaginatively meditated…by a real geographical place"—rocky Massachusetts shores. Mr. Andrews, the shipmaster, describes a miracle: his "ship was split and all drowned but a few, four of my men, myself naked upon the main topsail in very cold weather…. And glad I was that I lost my ship and so lost my sin."

One of the testimonies is from Katherine, a woman described as "Mrs. Russel's maid." She makes the decision to move to America: "And thought here the Lord might be found, and doubtful whether I had a call to come because I was to leave my friends."

At eighteen, I had stuffed my suitcases and crossed the country to seek another kind of blessing. And it had come. Books in stacks, money to travel, freedom to dissent. I made breakthroughs at a scuffed-up desk, and sensed I was living in history. My faith became more resilient, honed by basement Bible studies; I joined a church filled with scientists and scholars. In the world and not of it, both salt and light.

Barbary Cutter stood before her neighbors, swished her skirts, and spoke: "Many miseries and stumbling blocks at last removed and sad passages by sea. And after I came hither I saw my condition more miserable than ever. I knew not what to do."

Harvard taught lessons in jealousy, greed, self-reproach. I felt utter vincibility, even near Commencement, an apex of mortarboards and Latin, American elms, bells, and addresses. There was doubt, all around: not of God, but of achievement, which had made me whiny, and insufferable. Narratives conflicted: the "citizen-leaders" and the "least of these," accruing and tithing, college and the real world—and the real world to come. Uneasy, I was starting to suspect that the standards of one place might inevitably contradict those of another.

I waded into the water. Mud squished. The current wasn't cold, as I'd imagined. A small crowd on the bank took in the ceremony. I'd been a practicing Christian for years, but had never been baptized. There were always excuses: pernicious busyness; a desire for my parents to be present; doubt about what the sacrament meant. I felt pretty faithful without it—and yet quietly craved obedient entrance into the People of God.

Two campus ministers held me by the forearms. They prayed, and tipped me back. Those who watched say my motion was graceful, a last-minute upward swoop of my hand to pinch my open nose. I think it was jerky, a sudden reflex. For seconds, eyes closed, I was under murky water. My feet lifted from the river bottom—freefall, float, trust entire. Then I came up, pulling in a breath. Applause. I had done it. Well, God had done it. There was no tingling spine. No enchantment. I didn't feel different. Someone took pictures. I worried about cans on the river bottom, scrap metal tinged with tetanus. Back on shore, my boyfriend strummed hymns on a guitar. My roommate handed me a towel.

A piece of moss clung to my bare foot, followed me home and into the shower I had to take before that day's ceremonies. It was Class Day: there would be speeches in the heat, and a wine-and-cheese reception (of course). I longed for them after the morning's self-death, the weird ritual that didn't translate into status. It wasn't an achievement, but an initiation—a beginning I'd been given, rather than an end I deserved. What I had earned felt more monumental. But that wasn't true. Standing in the hot water, I prayed inchoate prayers, far less lucid than testimony. ■

Katherine Lucky *is the managing editor of* Commonweal.

Commonweal

5 ways to connect with the Commonweal community

Get the magazine and unlimited online access

Subscribe
cwlmag.org/subscribe
Or call **845-267-3068**

Help make *Commonweal*'s voice stronger

Support our mission with your tax-deductible donations
cwlmag.org/associates
Or call **212-662-4200 x5**

Join the conversation

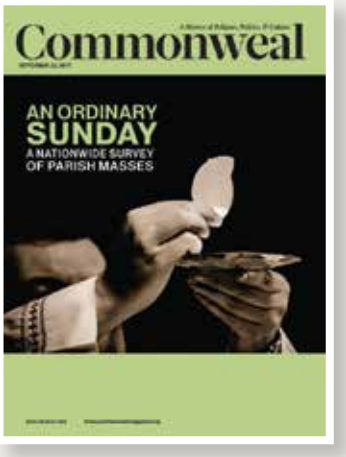
Connect with a *Commonweal* Local Community in your area
cwlmag.org/clc

Get your student subscription

Free for anyone currently in college or recently graduated
cwlmag.org/freestudent

Sign up for our email newsletters

Delivered twice weekly, they take you right to the stories we're featuring
cwlmag.org/newsletter



2019 CATHOLIC IMAGINATION CONFERENCE

THE FUTURE OF THE CATHOLIC LITERARY TRADITION

SEPTEMBER 19-21, 2019 | REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

PLENARY SPEAKERS

PAUL MARIANI | TOBIAS WOLFF | ALICE MCDERMOTT | PAUL SCHRADER
RICHARD RODRIGUEZ | DANA GIOIA | ANGELA ALAIMO O'DONNELL

FEATURING

KIRSTIN VALDEZ QUADE | PHIL KLAY | FANNY HOWE | RON HANSEN
MARY GORDON | SAMUEL HAZO | DOROTHY FORTENBERRY | JOHN F. DEANE
MICHEAL O'SIADHAIL | MOLLY MCCULLY BROWN | PAUL ELIE
RANDY BOYAGODA | LAWRENCE JOSEPH | JAMES MATTHEW WILSON

And many other writers, poets, filmmakers & scholars

Hosted by the Joan and Bill Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage
with support from The Mary Flannery O'Connor Charitable Trust
Loyola University Chicago: Office of the President, Office of Mission Integration,
Gannon Center for Women and Leadership, College of Arts and Sciences, and the Jesuit Community
America Media | Commonweal Magazine
Georgetown University | Dominican University | Fordham University | McGrath Center, University of Notre Dame
Boisi Center, Boston College | Pepperdine University | IFACS The University of Southern California | Loyola Academy
Lumen Christi, University of Chicago | The Polish Book Institute

LUC.EDU/CCIH/2019CATHOLICIMAGINATIONCONFERENCE/