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BREXIT IN DOVER

JOHN THOMASON ON
HANNAH ARENDT

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Cover: A mural by graffiti artist Banksy in Dover, Britain. Han Yan / Xinhua / Alamy Stock Photo

LETTERS

Does the church do paradigm shift?

THE RISKS OF DISJUNCTION

In his article "The Risks of History" (May 3), George Dennis O'Brien unfortunately risks promoting the facile disjunction of "pastoral" and "doctrinal" that has bedeviled much of post–Vatican II theology and practice. Already in 1985, on the twentieth anniversary of the council's close, the Extraordinary Synod had cautioned: "It is not licit to separate the pastoral character from the doctrinal vigor of the documents."

O'Brien contends that Vatican II was an "explicitly pastoral" council. True enough, if one also admits that it was an explicitly dogmatic council as well. Indeed, two of its four constitutions self-identify as "Dogmatic Constitutions": one on the church (*Lumen gentium*) and one on divine revelation (*Dei verbum*).

Undergirding much of O'Brien's analysis is the view of the distinguished church historian John O'Malley that "the council's aim was not to declare doctrine, but to persuade." But surely the theologian may rightfully press upon the historian the crucial question: Persuade about what? And I think the conciliar response is patent: to persuade about the Good News who is Jesus Christ, "the Light of the nations," "the mediator and fullness of God's revelatory Word." The council's prime aim, therefore, was and remains to evangelize, to proclaim and share its faith in and love of Jesus Christ.

Happily, O'Brien forthrightly confesses his faith that "Jesus lives on as the eternal host at the table of fellowship, as we acknowledge his real presence in bread and wine." Had he pursued these promising insights, he would have found ample resources to transcend the specious opposition of pastoral and doctrinal. For absent this Christological and Eucharistic foundation, the church will only founder, both pastorally and theologically.

A not unimportant postscript: the dogmatic teaching that "Jesus Christ is truly man and truly God" stems from the Council of Chalcedon, not Nicaea (as the article asserts).

FR. ROBERT P. IMBELLI
Bronx, N.Y.

GEORGE DENNIS O'BRIEN REPLIES:

Fr. Imbelli largely bypasses the main issue in my article. Suppose Cardinal Parolin is correct and the church is undergoing a paradigm change. What exactly is a paradigm change? How might it affect church thought and practice? By ignoring the paradigm questions, Imbelli seems to end up with George Weigel: the Catholic Church doesn't do paradigm shift.

In my article I cite John O'Malley's short list of basic church categories: doctrine, theology, spirituality, and pastorality. Any description of the church would probably include at least these four factors. How are they related? O'Malley suggests that they are not independent. Vatican II "dissolved the boundaries separating them and restored them to a coherence...that they lost in the thirteenth century." Rather than independent aspects of Catholic life, Vatican II affirmed their interdependence. A paradigm analysis would go one step further and claim that one or the other of the four is the basic governing principle. If one accepts the framework of a basic paradigm, my article suggests that Vatican II offered a "pastoral" paradigm to govern how we understand doctrine, prayer, and sacrament. Rather than doctrine determining pastoral strategy, building the beloved community tests the meaning of doctrine. There are other possible paradigm claims. One of most venerable is *lex orandi, lex credendi*: the law of prayer is the law of belief. If you can't pray it, you can't believe it.

Imbelli argues strenuously that Vatican II was as much a doctrinal council as a pastoral council. True enough. All councils are doctrinal in the sense that they proclaim a teaching even if—paradoxically—the doctrinal teaching is that doctrines are tested by their pastoral or prayerful efficacy.

Strutting & Fighting

In the noise surrounding Alabama's recently signed abortion law, both its defenders and its critics have failed to notice there's nothing very new about it. As the Brookings Institute reports, Alabama has had just such a law on the books since 1901, one that effectively outlaws abortion from the moment of conception, with no exceptions for rape or incest. Though unenforceable since 1973's *Roe v. Wade* decision, it was never repealed. Were *Roe* to be overturned, it could go into effect immediately. So could the new law, which does not, as rumored, ban abortions in the case of ectopic pregnancies or when the mother's life or health is at risk. Moreover, some experts believe a vaguely worded provision for mothers with a diagnosis of "serious mental illness" also leaves room for exceptions in cases of traumatic pregnancies—whether resulting from rape or incest or even from consensual intercourse.

All this may matter little to those at either extreme of the abortion debate. Prolife and pro-choice activists have both seized on Alabama's law to energize their supporters. Opponents of abortion generally hail what they see as principled legislative action, animated by genuine prolife convictions, to force the Supreme Court to revisit and perhaps overturn *Roe*. Abortion-rights advocates decry what they see as the latest in a series of incremental attacks on the legal right to abortion, or even as a decisive blow against women's rights in general. These reactions demonstrate the success of the measure as an exercise in performative politics. The Court already has a similar case on the way—regarding a Louisiana statute upheld by a lower court—and is also likely to take up at least one legal challenge of fetal-heartbeat laws long before considering Alabama's law. It seems possible that Alabama lawmakers were not acting out of good faith but simply *acting*, intent on advertising their ideological purity to the like-minded.

For similar reasons, their counterparts on the progressive left are also prone to theatrics. Failure to sufficiently profess pro-choice bona fides means becoming a pariah in certain liberal circles and risking ostracism from the Democratic Party. But then, performance has been a large part of abortion politics from the moment *Roe* was decided. The winner-take-all dimension of the ruling made this inevitable, guaranteeing polarization, rewarding confrontation, and militating against consensus. Pro-choice Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg herself has expressed misgivings over *Roe* for these reasons. Suppose, she said in 1992, the Court had not proceeded "to fashion a regime blanketing the subject [of abortion], a set of rules that displaced virtually every state law then in force.… A less encompassing *Roe* might have served to reduce rather than to fuel controversy." It is not possible to know for sure whether an incremental approach, undertaken more in accordance with the give-and-take of democratic deliberation and judicial review, would have made for a less contentious politics. Yet it does not seem out of the question.

Should *Roe* fall—the conservative makeup of the current Court gives anti-abortion advocates what seems like reasonable hope—the matter of abortion as a legal question will return to the states. But it's hard to see how this on its own will have a moderating effect. The issue will remain divisive as long as abortion's most vocal advocates do not give sufficient credence to the genuine qualms that many people—not just Catholics—have about it. Meanwhile, some of the most zealous opponents of abortion still need to give greater consideration to the unique nature of pregnancy: that only one half of humanity can experience the development of another body within their own necessarily raises questions about a woman's autonomy and agency that can't be dismissed out of hand or theorized away. Some common ground needs to be staked out here. Perhaps it can be found in the simple idea that a commitment to life is about more than a commitment to birth. Where access to abortion is restricted, there must be policies for helping women and families through pregnancy and into child-rearing, such as guaranteed access to health care, including pre- and post-natal treatment and contraception; mechanisms for ensuring economic and environmental security; and aid for education and housing. Fighting for the dignity of the yet-to-be-born entails the obligation to improve the circumstances of those who are already born and don't have the things that all of us need. ■

Rita Ferrone

Learning to Notice

HOW MYSTAGOGY OPENS UP THE LITURGY

How do we "live from the liturgy"? This question is at the heart of a book about mystagogy, *The Spiritual Meaning of the Liturgy: School of Prayer, Source of Life*, by the Italian monk and liturgical theologian Goffredo Boselli (Liturgical Press, English translation 2014). I think this question is even more urgent and timely today, as Mass attendance continues to decline and old structures of belonging that used to undergird liturgical participation are either crumbling or no longer there. If Catholics do not develop effective ways to derive spiritual nourishment from the liturgy itself, it's not clear what else will keep them coming.

The reason to live from the liturgy is that Christ is present in the gathering of his people and in the breaking of the bread. Christ himself is the mystery to which the liturgy gives access, and it is his presence in the liturgy that nourishes and gives life. Yet drawing on the mystery of Christ in the liturgy to nourish one's own life of faith is not always a self-evident or easy thing to do. Many people don't know how to do it, and therefore go away feeling they derived little from the celebration.

After the Second Vatican Council there was a great flourishing of interest in gaining spiritual nourishment from the Word of God. Various forms of spiritual reading of the scriptures enabled the faithful—priests, laity, and religious alike—to find inspiration and strength for Christian living. *Lectio divina*, for example, has served as a tool for praying with the sacred text and listening to the Word at ever deepening levels. But a similar development with respect to liturgy simply has not happened. The reason for this, Boselli argues, is that we have not put into people's hands the premier tool we have for fostering spiritual engagement with the liturgy. That tool is mystagogy.

What is mystagogy? Many people assume, wrongly, that mystagogy consists of "explaining" the signs and symbols of the liturgy. The church fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries—bishops such as Chrysostom, Theodore, Ambrose, and Augustine—preached mystagogical homilies after the rites of initiation and are often said to have thereby "explained" them. The methodology those ancient preachers used, however, is more subtle and complex than this description suggests. We don't really understand it if we think of it as an ordinary explanation, i.e. one that clears up confusion and dispels mystery.

Indeed, rather than dispelling mystery, mystagogical preaching served as a means to enter the mystery more deeply. It was an aural art form that interwove the liturgical signs, the world of nature, and the moral and ethical demands of Christian living. It evoked more than it explained. Its chief characteristic, as the Augustine scholar William Harmless once described it, was abundance. Allusions and images in such preaching piled up and overlay one another, setting off resonances; it was more akin to poetry than to didactic instruction.

Mystagogy nowadays is something simpler and more accessible. It is a practice that anyone can employ and is not limited to people with special skills or those charged with the ministry of preaching. Boselli describes mystagogy in parallel to *lectio divina*, that method of scripture reading in which one quietly listens to what the scripture is saying, and allows its words and phrases to echo in the heart, shaping one's soul and life. You don't need an advanced degree in order to do it.

I know this kind of mystagogy well from having used it in Christian initiation. Two basic questions are the hardy perennials that catechists use to guide their charges into prayerful reflection: What did you notice in the liturgy today? And what did this say to you (about God, Christ, the church, etc.)? Mystagogy encourages us to become more present to our own experience in the liturgy, and to discover its religious meaning on a personal level. What is the liturgy saying to us? What does it ask of us?

Left to our own devices, we might focus only on the occasional things that jar, annoy, or surprise us. But the beauty of mystagogy as an ongoing spiritual practice is that you begin to notice more of what's around you. There are traces of the holy in simple, ordinary things: light shining through a stained glass window, a hand clasp at the sign of peace, a word spoken, the taste of bread and wine. Our experience grows richer as we pay attention to it, and open our hearts to receive what it has to tell us. ■

Syriac Catholic Archbishop Yohanna Moshe of Mosul, Iraq, elevates the Eucharist during a liturgy at St. Thomas Syriac Catholic Church, February 28, 2019.

CNS PHOTO / KHALID AL-MOUSILY, REUTERS

Felix Robertson

The View from Dover

WHAT WOULD BREXIT MEAN FOR THIS VERY BRITISH TOWN?

Britain has many historic towns, but few display their history so clearly as Dover. Often dubbed "The Gateway" of Britain, Dover sits on the far southeast coast of England, her iconic white cliffs stretching far along the coast, welcoming ferries from Europe. At the narrowest point of the Dover Strait, the town sits only 20.7 miles from Calais, and on a clear day one can easily see the French port from Dover beach. This location, which has given Dover a unique role in British history, may soon make the town uniquely vulnerable to the effects of a no-deal Brexit.

Evidence suggests humans have occupied Dover for well over three thousand years. Major road construction in 1992 revealed a nearly intact Bronze Age boat, which could be the oldest intact seagoing vessel in the world, now housed in the extensive Dover Museum. A thousand years later, the Romans considered Dover a crucial strategic location, constructing multiple forts and other dwellings, including the well-preserved Dover Roman Painted House, the site of the most expansive Roman frescoes north of the Alps. In 1066, the town was sacked by William the Conqueror, and by the time of Henry II, work had begun on Dover Castle, now the largest surviving castle in England. Multiple churches were built and restored, including St. Mary in Castro, which is over a thousand years old and is still used for services today.

Over the medieval period the town solidified its crucial role, becoming a key port and access route to Europe and beyond, and playing host to a dizzying range of monarchs, noblemen, and foreign leaders. The town became a critical line of defense against a potential Napoleonic invasion in the early nineteenth century and served the same crucial role in the wars of the twentieth century. The first bombs to fall on England fell close to Dover Castle in 1914, and the town's strategic position made it a key focus of Hitler's "Operation Sea Lion," the planned invasion of Britain in World War II. While the invasion was never attempted, the East Coast was shelled so heavily during the war that the area surrounding Dover earned the grisly nickname "Hellfire Corner." Multiple covert command centers and fortifications were built into the white cliffs, and during the Cold War bunkers were developed for use by senior regional figures in case of a nuclear strike.

Dover's location remains important, now for commerce rather than war. Dover Port continued to grow throughout the twentieth century, and is now one of the busiest passenger ports in the world. Last year, the port handled nearly 5 million vehicles and well over 11 million passengers. Its trade has also continued to grow, and now an astonishing 17 percent of the United Kingdom's trade goes through the Port of Dover. It remains the "Lock and Key" of Britain. But away from the busy port, much of the town itself stands in a sorry state. On the once-grand High Street, shopfronts now stand bleak and deserted. Some properties have been empty for nearly fifteen years. On the seafront, the walls and windows of houses are scarred by the black fumes poured out by hundreds of ferries. Housing prices were once some of the lowest in the UK, and though they have lately risen somewhat, they're still far below those of even relatively close areas, such as Deal. In 2017, an informal poll of Britons cruelly dubbed Dover the worst place to live in the United Kingdom.

The White Cliffs of Dover

IMMANUEL GIEL

In fact, Dover has seen some positive changes over the past few years. Its Western Docks have been undergoing a substantial development, funded in no small part, it should be noted, by the European Union, in order to provide new areas for leisure and retail as well as extra space for shipping. Behind the seafront Gateway apartments, a new retail development has recently been completed. It's also the case that Dover's remaining problems are hardly unique. A *Guardian* analysis reported in January that one in twelve UK high-street shops has closed in the past five years, indicative both of the decline of retail and of the effects of austerity on consumer spending. Coastal towns are especially affected, with Eastbourne and Blackpool suffering from the second and third greatest high-street reductions in England and Wales—Eastbourne lost more than one fifth of its high-street stores. Against the backdrop of these stark changes, one could argue that Dover has been improving just as one might have expected it to fall further behind. While its present situation is still in many ways unbefitting of a town of such historical importance, Dover is slowly on the rise.

At least for now. A dark shadow looms over Dover: the threat of a no-deal Brexit. Back in March, Parliament voted narrowly to reject any no-deal option, and last-minute negotiations in April succeeded in delaying Brexit till October. The threat of a "cliff-edge" departure is no longer as imminent as it has been. But with the Conservative government in disarray following Theresa May's resignation, and (thus

far) limited success in cross-party talks, doubts have been voiced as to whether Britain will be able to meet the new October deadline with any sort of plan. Should the EU decline to continue extending the deadline, Britain may have no choice but to leave without a deal. And that could be devastating for Dover.

The predictions vary, and the relevant numbers are fiercely contested, but a significant body of research suggests that economic impact on Dover would be severe. The Port of Dover reports that trucks arriving from the EU now take around two minutes to process, while non-EU vehicles take as long as twenty minutes or more. At present, barely 1 percent of vehicles are non-EU, and yet the roads around Dover are still extremely busy. The events of summer 2016, where motorists were delayed for up to fourteen hours due to French understaffing at customs, showed how vulnerable the system already was. But the impact of a no-deal Brexit could be far worse. Even if the passage of trucks could be highly streamlined, reports show that a delay of only two minutes per truck could cause queues of up to seventeen miles. Unpublished information presented to MPs and obtained by the *Financial Times* calculated that such queues could lead to delays of as much as six days, reaching a situation of "no recovery," or "widespread permanent gridlock." And without such streamlining, the consequences would be even more severe. A twenty-minute delay could lead to tailbacks of over 70,000 vehicles. The queues could last for weeks or even months, and Dover's key roads would be brought to a near standstill. Tourism would slump as the roads in and around Dover became hopelessly clogged. Key areas of development, such as the St. James Retail Park, stand right next to key roads to the port. Pollution could increase to highly damaging levels. In effect, the proud town of Dover could be reduced to one long, dirty, and apparently unending traffic jam. For the Port it would be a severe logistical challenge and for the country an embarrassment, but for the town itself it would be a potential death sentence.

The situation is, of course, highly uncertain. No one knows exactly what a no-deal Brexit would look like. And there's still a real chance it won't happen. Jeremy Hunt, a key Tory leadership candidate, has warned that a no-deal Brexit would be "political suicide" for the Conservative Party and, while Nigel Farage's Brexit Party won the largest single share of the British vote in the recent EU elections, the success of the Liberal Democrats, who oppose Brexit and favor a second referendum, has shown that the population is far from united. But time is running out, and the next Conservative prime minister, who will probably not take office till late July, will need to move fast to develop a deal palatable to both the turbulent House of Commons and the European Union. Failure to do so could leave the United Kingdom with no choice other than no-deal exit on October 31. Boris Johnson, the person who now seems most likely to replace May, appears to be OK with that.

It would be melodramatic (and premature) to claim that Dover will cease to exist in the event of a no-deal Brexit. It should be noted that the majority of Dover residents voted in favor of Brexit and believe that Dover will survive, or even thrive, after a split from the European Union. Many of the available statistics may suggest that they are wrong about this, but Brexit is finally about identity, not numbers. Its proponents argue that it will safeguard and increase Britain's independence, and protect its ingenuity and character. Those are all hard things to measure. But it would be a cruel irony if the first blow in this quest for British identity lands squarely on a town that, in many ways, exemplifies it more than any other. ■

Felix Robertson, *a recent* Commonweal *intern, will read theology at Peterhouse, Cambridge, this fall.*

THE NUCLEAR WINTER

> "Their steadfast resolve not to speak of those who were to blame, not to say that the event had been caused by human beings, not to harbor the least resentment, even though they were the victims of the greatest of crimes—this really is too much for me, it passes all understanding."
>
> *—Günther Anders, after his participation in the Fourth World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs*

"Surpassing understanding," Anders scrawled—
Survivors never spoke of fault or blame.
Blown mushroom clouds had grayed all wills away.
"Too much for me," he told his diary.

When Anders searched their souls for discontent,
These Japanese acquitted all abuse.
Tsunami is the word the victims used
To name what happened at Hiroshima.

Hydrogen—imagine—"natural disaster."
As though anatomies of moral ills
Split when men flowered the island with evil.
Such man-made blooms outsize the human scale.

In nuclear winters of the moral will
The windows' frost hides housed and heated guilt.

— Joshua Hren

Joshua Hren is Assistant Director of the Honors College at Belmont Abbey. He also serves as editor emeritus of Dappled Things: A Quarterly of Ideas, Art, and Faith, *and as Editor-in-Chief of Wiseblood Books. His first collection of short stories,* This Our Exile, *was published by Angelico Press in January 2018.*

Anne Klejment

Staten Island Spirituality

DOROTHY DAY'S 'TRUE STORY' COLUMNS

In early 1931, Dorothy Day and her five-year-old daughter Tamar returned to New York from a lengthy sojourn in California, Mexico, and Florida. Eager to settle into her modest Staten Island beach house, Day sought employment with the local newspaper, the *Advance*. Her travels had been occasioned by her conversion, a decision that led to a break with her partner, William Forster Batterham, who objected on principle to marriage before church or state. As a practicing Catholic, she could no longer live with him.

Day contributed two columns to the *Advance* that spring. One was a gardening column that showcased local flora and provided "advice to local planters." Accompanied by Tamar, Day drove her secondhand Ford around the island to admire flower beds and interview home gardeners. Not surprisingly perhaps, this column reveals little about her life and beliefs. But before this she had written another column titled "True Story *Fictionalized*: An Island Diary." It ran for a month. "True Story" featured a plucky family challenged but undefeated by the economic ravages of the Great Depression. Besides their entertainment value, the upbeat stories of everyday life offered hope and practical tips for getting by. Extolling the island's access to nature's bounty and beauty, Day, who once worked for an island real-estate agent, engaged in unabashed boosterism. More unobtrusively, the column revealed the new convert's thoughts about faith, family, and community during an otherwise obscure period in her spiritual development. Day was already sketching an impressionistic version of the radical Christianity that would be associated with the Catholic Worker movement.

The first installment of "True Story" appeared on March 19, 1931, the feast of St. Joseph, to whom Day would later appeal as the protector of the Catholic Worker. The column was written in Day's signature style—intimate, lively, and richly detailed. Around that time, she had also been writing a few articles for the *New Masses*, a Communist magazine edited by her old friend Mike Gold, and for *Commonweal*. But writing for the *Advance* enlarged and broadened her audience and guaranteed a predictable, if temporary, income. Then, too, writing was a way to address, and perhaps to resolve, troubling personal matters.

Day lightly embellished material culled from her diaries,

Dorothy Day in 1916

which burned in a fire during the mid-1930s. Fragments from these journals would reappear, scattered throughout early issues of the *Catholic Worker* and in her autobiographies. The similarity of the *Advance* stories to some of Day's later nonfiction hints at their authenticity. In truth, Day's writing was always at its best when conveying what she had experienced, witnessed, or heard. (Her efforts at pure fiction were less successful.)

"True Story" highlighted the activities of a Catholic working-class family of five, headed by a fictionalized couple, Dorothy and Bill Day. Bill appeared only occasionally, since he was traveling from city to city to search for employment, and when he found work, could only return on weekends. The resilient Days sometimes sat down to a plain dinner of "boiled carrots, hot biscuits, honey, and tea." The three children, Bill Jr., Jerry, and Teresa, absorbed their mother's enthusiasm for the simple life. They learned by example "to economize—to recognize the value of money" and developed their "creative instinct" and "initiative" by making their own toys. When the eldest, Bill Jr., collected loads of driftwood, he proudly announced that using the wood for heating would "save on coal bills." As cash-strapped Staten Island readers worried about how to pay the bills (this was the second year of the Depression), Day enthused about the bounty of the bay, beach, woods, and gardens. Such abundance, free for the taking, could feed poor islanders. Staten Island's seasonal manna consisted of plentiful seafood and wild greens, such as dockweed, dandelion, and chicory. Even a child could gather lobster, blue shell crab, eels, and shrimp at low tide. Inexpensive activities such as bird watching and fishing enabled families to appreciate nature while releasing them from the grip of the acquisitive culture of nearby Manhattan. On one nature walk, the Days returned with "club moss to grow in the house," gorgeous daylilies for transplanting, specimens for the children's collections, and a perch for dinner. Indoors, a comforting cup of hot tea and "the latest books from the library" provided Mrs. Day with a few moments of relaxation. "Those who want the least" could become "the happiest in this world," Day concluded.

The Day family's simple-living ethic contained the seed of a radical critique of contemporary society. Its adoption would permit ordinary folks to undermine the profit-seeking capitalist economy by cutting needless consumption (and debt) and by promoting self-reliance. Even modest household changes could amount to a first step toward a nonviolent revolution. Much later, Day would endorse the "little way" of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, which emphasizes the spiritual importance of even our smallest activities. But Day was already concerned with the larger social implications of seemingly trivial routines when she wrote the "True Story" columns. Her abiding concern for social justice shone through the comforting domestic vignettes. In her first column, Day skewered Manhattan landlords for gouging poor tenants by dividing up apartments and raising rents. In later installments, she aimed her criticism at the capitalist system itself and the consumer habits that enabled it.

To illustrate her critique of bourgeois society, Day wrote about Lefty, who later appeared in her autobiographies as either Lefty or Smiddy. In one "True Story" column, she described him as "an admirable character" who "lives from day to day and insists on his freedom of body and soul." Lefty believed that money was the root of evil and a source of oppression. By sheltering himself in a tiny beach shack, adopting a diet rich in seafood, and occasionally selling his catch for petty cash, he satisfied all his needs. Free from middle-class expectations, he "firmly" announced, "I am happy as I am." His creative spirit enabled him to transform the seafood varieties scorned by others into delicious dinners. When Day called skate "repulsive looking," he shared with her his recipe for it, which she printed for her readers. Despite his limited means, he could always offer the welcome hospitality of a big cup of coffee accompanied by "a thick slice of buttered toast." Dorothy shared with Lefty a lengthy passage from *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in which William James celebrates "the strenuous life." James thought one should choose poverty over acquisitiveness as the courageous path toward self-liberation: an "unbribed soul" was essential for "the spiritual reform which our time stands most in need of." Day reports that Lefty heartily agreed. She touted Lefty's simple living as a survival strategy and a path toward lofty spiritual heights. And still ignorant of modern Catholic social teaching, Day relied on James's theories and Lefty's lived example to confirm her long-held belief in the core teaching of the Gospel: a profound and inclusive love of neighbor.

Surrounded by poverty in Chicago and New York as a child and young adult, Day had already grasped the radical implications of Jesus' teaching. The individualistic pursuit of gain, blessed by some prosperous Christians as a sign of God's favor, misrepresented Jesus' message by neglecting the needs of others. Her stories implied that by adopting a simple life, Staten Islanders could not only survive the economic downturn, but could do so without sacrificing authentic Christian values.

Appearing during an era of increasing nativism, anti-Catholicism, and anti-Semitism, Day's column rejected commonly held social fears. Earlier in the 1920s, harsh immigration laws imposed extremely restrictive quotas on southern and eastern Europeans. The nationwide grip of the resurgent Ku Klux Klan was targeting not only blacks but also Catholics, Jews, and all newcomers. As historian Linda Gordon writes, "the KKK may actually have enunciated values with which a majority of 1920s Americans agreed." In a reassuring portrayal of her Staten Island community, which Dorothy described as "an international neighborhood," Catholics, Jews, and recent immigrants threatened the well-being of no one.

These were regular folks, "kindly and tolerant." If they had flaws, they were no worse than those of their native-born neighbors. "Human failings which are common to us all," she observed, "are excused on the grounds of our nationality." The Days socialized with Americans and immigrants alike—among them, Swedish Britta, "a truthful woman," and Russian Manuel, whose tall tales were "noted for their point" rather than "for their veracity."

In contrast to common stereotypes of Catholics mindlessly obedient to a foreign power, ignorant of democracy, culturally unassimilated, and threatening to the American experiment, Day's portrayals of Catholics showed them performing their religious duties unobtrusively. A priest reads his missal on the ferry. A foreign-born couple stops loading rocks as chapel bells chime the hour of the Angelus. The Catholic Days were themselves quintessentially American, embracing the ideals of hard work and self-reliance. They were friendly to all and generous toward the less well-off.

Day also used her "True Story" columns to try to persuade the father of her child to reconsider his opposition to marriage. Batterham was a voracious newspaper reader, though it's impossible to know whether he saw the column or simply heard of it from friends. In any case, his resemblance to the fictionalized husband, Bill, is hard to miss. Bill and Batterham shared character traits and interests, including an obsessive love of fishing that provided what Day described as "an ecstasy of contentment." Like Batterham, Bill worked in the city and traveled home to Staten Island on weekends.

The Day family of "True Story" shows the joys of married life. The fictional Day avoids proselytizing and counts an impressively diverse group of women among her friends. She repeatedly expresses contentment with her life as a wife and mother. She watches her children's activities but does not try to control them. She knows, for example, that her teenage son Billy and his friends secretly drink weak dandelion wine, but she chooses to look the other way. She lovingly describes each child's personality, hobbies, and preferences. A chance encounter with a pregnant friend leads to such unrestrained joy that Dorothy kisses her in the middle of a busy Manhattan street. "I miss a baby in my arms," she confesses, now that her own children are older. The column functions as, among other things, the portrait of an ideal mother. Batterham was missing out.

"True Story" provides a glimpse into Dorothy Day's early attempts as a Catholic to find a spirituality of radical Christian social responsibility. Even before her formal conversion, she had adopted an ethic of simple living, but now she was beginning to explore its spiritual benefits. Batterham never was persuaded to marry, but Day eventually created another kind of family by inviting others to form a community around the shared values of service and voluntary poverty. Like any real family, the Catholic Worker community had its share of trials and feuds, but it somehow survived them all, thanks in part to Day's own resourcefulness, which the "True Story" columns keenly convey. In retrospect, it's easy to see how these columns anticipated the Catholic Worker. The core values of the movement are all there: radical hospitality, simplicity, solidarity. A year and a half after the last of the "True Story" columns appeared, Day was introduced to Peter Maurin, a man a lot like Lefty, if Lefty were a Catholic intellectual. Together, the two would translate the values that animate "True Story" from the pages of the *Staten Island Advance* to the streets of Manhattan. ■

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THE RETURN

Everything can be replaced—
the trilobite kissed into the fragile shale,
the cup I hold high and see
lamplight around my fingertips,
even the kestrel
circling high over the creek.

But the replacement is never satisfactory—
a quail for a heron, a thunderstorm
for a mountain, a child on a tricycle
for some equivalent innocence,
but not the same, not even close.

The fractured fossil is swept,
and an ashtray takes its place, or a plate
of apricots pecked with
slapdash scars by the jays.
The fallen oak is replaced by a view
of sailboats, and the small craft themselves
are taken by a squall that

is broken by dawn.
That's why this poem will be
unfinished. The deer steal down
to eat the new landscaping
and no one sees them.
They leave the bare stems
of the ivy, and return to the eucalyptus,
trees as slender and tawny
as the secretive young
who by this midsummer
must be gone. Grown,
I mean. Still here.

—Michael Cadnum

Michael Cadnum's most recent book is Kingdom, *a collection of poems about animals, many of which first appeared in* Commonweal.

Have You Tried Scotus?

Aquinas Didn't Know Everything

Peter L. P. Simpson

In the years before Vatican II a young man named Anthony Kenny entered the priesthood after studies in England and Rome. Some years later—but still before Vatican II—increasing doubts induced him to leave the priesthood. His doubts were about various things, but he relates a particular doubt in a talk he gave on theology and philosophy. It concerns the claim of St. Thomas Aquinas that Christ's body is present on the altar because something that was there before, the substance of bread, has been converted into that body. The "accidents" of the bread—for example, its whiteness and roundness—remain, but these do not belong to the body of Christ; otherwise that body would have to be white and round, which it is not. So far, so good.

Among the other accidents of the bread, however, is its location, there on the altar. For *what* a thing is, its substance, is no more the same as *where* it is than it is the same as how it looks (round and white). But in that case, how can we say that Christ's body is there on the altar—since, *ex hypothesi*, it cannot get its "where" from the "where" of the consecrated bread? The doctrine of transubstantiation, as explained by Aquinas, thus fails to secure the real presence of Christ's body on the altar. "I do not know of any satisfactory answer to this problem," Kenny continued. "If I did, I would give it. Since I do not, I must leave it, as the writers of textbooks say, as an exercise for the reader" (*A Path from Rome*, 1986, 167–168).

These questions may seem abstruse, perhaps even improper, since the sacrament is rather to be adored than quibbled over. But the question of Christ's presence now on the altar is a genuine one, and central to the consecration and adoration of the Eucharist. It is a question that many others besides Thomas Aquinas sought to answer, and a seriously inquiring intellect might rightly be disturbed, even scandalized, if forbidden to ask it. But for a long time Thomas's answer was accepted just because it was his. This was an unnecessary constriction of Catholic thought. Unfortunately, some Catholic intellectuals seem still to be constricting themselves in this way. One might call their position "exclusivist Thomism."

Thomas's answer to Kenny's question can, in fact, be found in other Scholastics who variously adopt the principle that "that into which something is converted is where the converted thing was before." This principle is dubious and was not universally accepted. Since transubstantiation converts only the substance of the bread into Christ's body and not also the accidents, why should *any* of the accidents of the bread be kept by Christ's body if, according to the doctrine, the accidents are not part of the transubstantiation?

In fact, there is another way to answer the question that troubled Kenny, but you will not find it in Thomas. It is in the work of Blessed John Duns Scotus, an author that a young pre-Vatican II seminarian would likely have been discouraged, if not forbidden, to read. The subtle Scot distinguishes between presence and transubstantiation, claiming that one can exist without the other (*Ordinatio* IV d.10 q.1). Christ could be there on the altar now without transubstantiation, and the bread could be transubstantiated without Christ being there on the altar. Christ's presence on the altar is not a matter of his appropriating the "where" of the transubstantiated bread, or of his retaining this particular accident and not others. The presence of Christ's body on the altar is a distinct fact, distinctly caused. Transubstantiation does not explain it and is not meant to explain it. The significance of transubstantiation nevertheless remains—that Christ's body is there under the species of bread, to be received as spiritual food.

The further details of Scotus's exposition of Christ's presence on the altar are not important here. What is important is that Scotus did have an answer to Kenny's question. But that answer was not offered to Kenny, and one doubts that his teachers would have known of it, or mentioned it if they had. In his studies the young Kenny was taught, in good pre–Vatican II fashion, out of Thomistic manuals. Thomas's original texts were not used, nor were seminarians encouraged to read them. Not that this would have helped,

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because, again, Thomas's work does not have the answer to Kenny's question.

Perhaps Scotus's answer isn't the only or best answer. Perhaps Thomas's position too could be finessed or developed in order to produce another answer. The key point remains: an answer needs to be found, and if one possibility is ignored simply because it is not from the work of Thomas, how could that not hinder the church's theological training? An exclusivist Thomism, which foreswears the teaching of non-Thomist theologizing, is a problem the church still needs to confront.

Indeed if, as seems true, there was something deficient about pre–Vatican II theological training, even in Rome, the deficiency will not be made up by a return to an exclusivist Thomism, much less to the old Thomistic manuals. A return to Thomas read and studied in the original texts would doubtless help. But such a return would not have helped the young Kenny with his question. For the theologian who had a good answer, Duns Scotus, is barely studied, if studied at all. His very name raises hackles or eyebrows or both. The man is accused by some of causing the theological decline of the West. It is said that he precipitated the destruction of a magnificent and glorious edifice with his falsely subtle distinctions, his flattening metaphysics of univocity, his skeptical undermining of rational proofs for the faith, his tortuous Latin.

Duns Scotus

Such complaints are particularly associated with the modern Radical Orthodoxy movement, but they are not new to it. Étienne Gilson popularized something like them in the early twentieth century. Prior to both was Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni patris* (1879), which gave support to the emergence of the Neo-Thomist movement of the early twentieth century. But even Leo does not seem to have been an exclusivist Thomist. The subtitle of his encyclical speaks about Christian philosophy *ad mentem Sancti Thomae Aquinatis*, which means something like "to, or toward, the mind of St. Thomas Aquinas." Paragraph 31 of *Aeterni patris* reads "We hold that every word of wisdom, every useful thing by whomsoever discovered or planned, ought to be received with a willing and grateful mind." It is unclear what we are to make of these qualifications, but the Franciscans, at least, did not think it meant study of Thomas alone, for they proceeded to reprint in modern format (presumably in response to Leo) Jerome of Montefortino's arrangement of Scotus's writings according to the divisions and questions of Thomas's *Summa Theologica*.

A preference for Thomas is perfectly acceptable, of course, and many have adopted it to their profit. Indeed, his *Summa* (expressly written for "beginners") had a unique advantage among Scholastic writings. Within its covers just about any question of theology can be found easily by consulting the contents, and to this question a clear and orthodox answer is given with admirable directness and concision. A better handbook of theology for purposes of teaching and learning would be hard to find. But why make Thomas exclusivist or even primary? He was not so in any of the centuries that followed his death, not even in the nineteenth century before Leo. Scotus was still often studied at that time, and not just because of the Immaculate Conception (dogmatically defined in 1850), which he was the first of all the Scholastics to defend. His distinctive views about the Incarnation—that Christ would have become Incarnate even if Adam had not sinned—were fairly widely shared.

The Dominican Order naturally preferred Thomas, who was one of their own. They made him the Order's chief Doctor very early on. Deviation from his positions was discouraged. When the Dominican Durandus de Saint-Pourçain strayed from Thomas and started taking a path of his own, his Order required him to revise his views.

But other religious and priests were under no such compulsion, and Thomas was by no means the only, or the most studied, theologian in the Scholastic period. The Franciscans among others tended to follow Scotus, but not exclusively. Ockham, for instance, went his own way. Unlike the Dominicans, the Franciscans did not make any Doctor their special master in theology, even if Scotus stood out. They required only that Franciscans who chose to read Thomas read him in the light of the critique written by William de la Mare in his *Correctorium Fratris Thomae*. Scotus would have read Thomas after first reading William. But he did not need William to find Thomistic positions questionable.

The most famous difference between Scotus and Thomas is the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which Scotus got right and Thomas got wrong. But surely, one might say, we no longer need Scotus to tell us about the Immaculate Conception. Didn't Blessed Pius IX tell us all we need to know in his dogmatic pronouncement? Perhaps. Note, though, that Thomas was not alone in failing to defend the Immaculate Conception. Every Scholastic theologian before Scotus, including fellow Franciscans like St. Bonaventure, failed in the same way. None was able to give a defense of it that would avoid creating a serious theological problem somewhere else.

Consider in this regard one of the arguments that Thomas himself gives against the Immaculate Conception (*Summa Theologica* III q27 a2). If the Virgin Mary had in no way incurred the stain of sin, she would not have needed Christ as her savior and so Christ would not be the savior of *all* men and women. Scotus's answer is that Christ is indeed Mary's savior, for he saved her *in advance* of her incurring the original sin that, as a natural descendant of Adam, she would have incurred otherwise (*Ordinatio* III d.3 q.1). Christ is thus her savior, as he is the savior of everyone else. Moreover, he is her savior in the most excellent way possible, for he saved her from ever having had sin, including original sin, while everyone else is saved only after incurring *at least* original sin.

Now if Scotus's arguments are fully weighed and set alongside those of Thomas, it is quite possible that Thomas himself would have agreed that Scotus was right. In fact, one suspects that Thomas, and others like Bonaventure, would really have been glad to say Mary was immaculately conceived. They were just unable to see how to make it work. But what happened when Scotus first defended the Immaculate Conception? He was attacked and condemned, especially by Dominicans. His defense, however, was so penetrating, powerful, and decisive that belief in the doctrine had become almost universal in the church long before Pius IX made it the church's official teaching. Indeed, only the Dominicans seem to have opposed the doctrine—in deference, one presumes, to Thomas—and some of them, though by no means all, apparently went on doing so almost to the end. But it was not Thomas himself or even Thomism per se that could induce one to go on rejecting the Immaculate Conception even after Scotus's comprehensive solution. It was an exclusivist Thomism.

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Gerard Manley Hopkins found in Duns Scotus someone who gave him more comfort in Catholicism than anyone else. "Who of all men most sways my spirits to peace," he wrote in his poem "Duns Scotus's Oxford." Hopkins was not alone in preferring Scotist positions; many did so in the nineteenth century, including many Jesuits. Some Jesuits, of course, were strong Thomists and Hopkins had at least one of them as his theology teacher. Whether he failed his theology exam because he gave Scotist answers to that teacher is disputed, but it does at least seem to be the case that he failed because he gave answers that were considered insufficiently Thomist.

If non-Thomistic theological resources were ignored or cut off, especially in seminaries, as they seem to have been in the years leading up to Vatican II, it is hardly surprising that feelings of dissatisfaction or even resistance would be spreading before the Council started. It is hardly surprising too that, after the Council, Thomism, or at least manualist Thomism, was abandoned, sometimes in favor of questionable novelties. But Vatican II's call to renew the church should have led to bringing lots of things, Scotus included, back

onto the list of available resources. One cannot, however, bring things back onto a list if one does not know what they are or what their value is.

Exclusivist Thomism bears some responsibility here. And it will bear some responsibility if those on the so-called conservative wing of the present-day Catholic Church (or supporters of Radical Orthodoxy and the like) return to it and persuade others, especially seminaries and universities, to return to it. The same mistakes that were apparently being made before Vatican II are likely to be made again. For there are clearly other and orthodox answers to theological questions that one cannot find in Thomas.

What sort of possibilities does an exclusivist Thomism remove that an openness to other positions, in particular those of Scotus, would bring back? Apart from the case of how to explain the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, consider a few others.

Can animals go to heaven or be resurrected? Pope Francis was recently reported to have said that they can—but inaccurately, as it turns out. Still, the pope said enough in his encyclical *Laudato si'* to suggest the thought that it's at least possible. Section 243 of the encyclical reads: "At the end, we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God, and be able to read with admiration and happiness the mystery of the universe, which with us will share in unending plenitude.... Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe, in which each *creature*, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place and have something to give those poor men and women who will have been liberated once and for all" (emphasis added).

Does this remark mean that animals can or will be in heaven, not indeed as sharing the beatific vision, but as sharing resurrected life with beatified human beings? Thomists will say no because the sense-souls of animals, unlike the rational souls of humans, perish at death, and what has altogether perished cannot be brought back numerically the same. Scotus thinks this view false and argues, in his usual subtle and involved way, that the numerically same thing could in principle be recreated after having ceased to exist. He appeals in defense not only to divine omnipotence but to reported miracles of saints actually bringing animals back to life (*Ordinatio* IV d.44 q.1 n.19). Let those, then, who want to think of their pets being with them in heaven be consoled with Scotus, and perhaps with Pope Francis, for assuredly they cannot be consoled with Thomas. But then, if Thomas is not the unique measure of orthodoxy, there can be no harm or fear in leaving him for Scotus and Pope Francis—and one's favorite pet.

Let those who want to think of their pets being with them in heaven be consoled with Scotus, and perhaps with Pope Francis, for assuredly they cannot be consoled with Thomas. But then, if Thomas is not the unique measure of orthodoxy, there can be no harm or fear in leaving him for Scotus and Pope Francis—and one's favorite pet.

Another view of Scotus's that is fairly widely known, though not as widely shared, is that there can be many angels of the same species, whereas the Thomist view is that each angel is a distinct species unto himself. More interesting here, and less well known, is that Scotus thought that the angels who fell did not fall all at once after a single sin. He believed, on the contrary, that they committed several sins in a progressive order (*Ordinatio* II d.6 q.2 nn.33–63, d.7 n.18). Scotus is particularly dismissive of the view (held by others besides Thomas) that angels, once they choose, choose irrevocably (*ibid.* d.7 esp. nn.9–26). The possibility is expressly left open by Scotus that some angels sinned but repented (*ibid.* d.6 q.2 n.78). That means some angels might be converts, as we are when we repent.

What one makes of these contrasting views of Scotus and Thomas seems to be entirely a matter of individual persuasion. None seems decisively settled by the several arguments, or at least not decisively settled in favor of Thomas. Let there be freedom, then, in preferring one to the other, or in remaining undecided. Thomists may go their way and Scotists and others may go theirs.

For my claim is not that we should prefer Scotus to Thomas, or Thomas to Scotus. My claim is, rather, that we should restore a just sense of the richness of the church's theological patrimony. Thomism is not Catholicism, neither is Scotism. They are like other positions in the church (such as Karol Wojtyła's phenomenological personalism) that are not of the faith—or *de fide*, as they say—but are compatible with the faith. Let us be free to enjoy them, and not let exclusivist Thomism stand in our way or generate perplexities that a more open-minded orthodoxy could easily resolve. Let the old rule apply: *in necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas*—unity in necessary things, liberty in doubtful things, love in all things. ■

Miracle Workers

What the Resistance Can Still Learn from Arendt

John Thomason

When Hannah Arendt accepted the Emerson-Thoreau Medal from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in April 1969, she used the occasion to reflect upon the contributions of one of its namesakes. Because Arendt did not step foot in America until she arrived as a stateless refugee in her mid-thirties, her early exposure to its culture was limited. As a student in pre-war Germany, Emerson was one of the few American authors she read closely. Arendt praised Emerson for being a humanist rather than a philosopher, a serene thinker who "wrote essays rather than systems." As with the other (rare) occasions in which Arendt dispensed unqualified praise, there was an unspoken subtext of deep personal identification. This is apparent in her conclusion, a long quotation from Emerson describing what for Arendt remained the essence of the humanities:

> For though the origin of most of our words is forgotten, each word was at first a stroke of genius, and obtained currency because for the moment it symbolized the world to the first speaker and hearer. The etymologist finds the deadest word to have been at once a brilliant picture. Language is fossil poetry.

Arendt's project was to recover the original poetry of the words that structure our world, and her devotion to it is responsible for the irresistible force of her prose, which is precise but never clinical, passionate but always lucid. Her writing, so often itself rooted in etymology, is suffused with wonder at the multitudes contained in individual words, the pictures they paint and the worlds they conjure.

The grand challenge that Arendt gave herself was the retrieval of the words most associated with politics—and therefore the words most ravaged through centuries of overuse and distortion. Thus we find a constellation of everyday terms turned over like stone artifacts again and again in her work: *freedom*, *action*, *revolution*, and *politics* itself. Recovering the vitality of these terms—something Arendt would never have claimed to have definitively achieved—would be an uphill climb, she argued, because Western philosophy since Plato had shunned the active, collective life of humankind that these words referred to, and instead concerned itself with the interior life of man. (This is why Arendt rejected the label "philosopher" for herself, too.) But Arendt felt that she could not truly understand the world she actually lived in—and the calamities she lived through—without taking a different course: interrogating the perils and promise of the *vita activa*.

Half a century after Arendt paid homage to Emerson, her work has experienced a sudden rise in popularity and prominence—thanks mostly to the parallel rise of the most demagogic American president in at least a hundred years. Nationwide demand for her first major book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), surged after the 2016 election; even Amazon ran out of copies. "A dead WWII-era philosopher understands Donald Trump better than anyone on CNN," declared the politics website *Splinter*. "She Called Out Trump's Lies Decades Ago," announced the *Daily Beast*. "Hannah Arendt's philosophy can teach us about Trump, Brexit, and the dangers of isolation," echoed *Vox*. *New York Times* op-ed columnists Roger Cohen, Thomas B. Edsall, and Michelle Goldberg all cited *Origins* in columns published during Donald Trump's first year in office.

What has interested journalists most about Trump is his lies, and *Origins* does indeed contain insights into the role of lies in totalitarian movements. "What convinces masses are not facts," Arendt writes, "but only the consistency of the system of which they are presumably part." The application of this insight to contemporary American politics is obvious. Trump's rhetoric has substantial appeal precisely *because* it subordinates truth to a closed but consistent ideological system. These sorts of systems are so resilient, Arendt argued, because they appeal to both gullibility and cynicism, conditioning people to "believe everything and nothing, to think that everything was possible and that nothing was true." These are the conditions that allow a leader like Trump never to have to account for his lies. *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is therefore a prescient corrective to

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naïve claims that appeals to facts and truth can combat Trumpism.

Arendt has thus been welcomed to the #Resistance primarily as a prophetic psychotherapist, one who foretold the pathological appeal of Trumpism to the masses. It's likely that nothing would have pleased her less. Her account of the way totalitarian movements engulfed mid-century Europe was never meant to be merely descriptive. By examining how societies had become so debased that they fell prey to movements that treated every individual as utterly expendable, Arendt was taking the first steps toward articulating and recovering a positive vision of the kind of politics that might redeem those societies. In other words, her perennially popular *descriptive* views of the great crimes of the twentieth century (outlined most famously in *Origins* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*) cannot responsibly be severed from her *prescriptive* views about the proper flourishing of politics.

Hannah Arendt in 1944

DPA PICTURE ALLIANCE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Those views are expounded at length in *The Human Condition* (1958) and *On Revolution* (1963), but an anthology published last year, *Thinking Without a Banister: Essays in Understanding, 1953–1975*, provides readers with an opportunity to trace the post-*Origins* development of Arendt's thought in a single volume. The essays and lectures it collects—many of them available to the general public for the first time—provide an accessible point of entry into nearly every aspect of Arendt's political theory. The thesis of each one of her major published works (and some unpublished, like her book on Marx) is distilled into one or more provocative lectures that she delivered during the last two decades of her life. Book reviews, letters, and interviews provide insight into her preoccupations at specific points in time, and comments on current events (including the 1960 election, the assassination of JFK, and the Vietnam War) provide some insight into the applicability of her thought to specific contemporary problems, something she was reluctant to do in her books. That the collection is titled and marketed as if it were some sort of intellectual self-help book belies the almost exclusively political concerns that Arendt addresses in it.

Just as it's a shame that the "banality of evil" thesis has long been taken as Arendt's primary insight into the Holocaust (*Origins* itself contains dozens of different and equally acute insights on that subject), it will be a shame if Arendt's understanding of lies and the appeal of closed ideological systems is all the professional anti-Trumpists learn from her work. Yet there are compelling reasons that many thinkers ignore Arendt's more prescriptive ideas about politics—chiefly, that they can come off as (1) inscrutable, and (2)

retrograde. Her refusal to provide concrete examples or definitions of the terms she valorizes—"politics," "action," and "freedom" among them—is responsible for this inscrutability, and her seeming enthusiasm for legitimately retrograde historical episodes, chiefly the Athenian *polis*, is largely responsible for the sense that her thought is, well, retrograde.

These are not small problems, and *Thinking Without a Banister* does not and cannot "solve" them. What it does, and does with relative economy, however, is show Arendt working through these problems herself over the course of her final two decades. Those of us who agree that Arendt's thought does provide a compelling diagnosis of our times would do well to consider how the politics she advocated might offer a constructive alternative to Trumpism and contribute to our collective flourishing. Otherwise, our "resistance" is no more than a futile flailing within a historical current we feel we cannot alter. Arendt believed, in spite of all the traumas of the twentieth century, that it was still possible to chart a new course for our destiny.

For Arendt, *the* essential question of modernity was how to reconcile universal equality with freedom. The challenge was that freedom had historically relied on *in*equality—some toiling in perpetuity so that others could be free.

Thinking Without a Banister begins in the immediate aftermath of the career-defining success of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. It contains a series of writings and lectures delivered between 1953 and 1960 that bridge the seeming pessimism of the book that made her name with the humanistic optimism of *The Human Condition* and *On Revolution*. Indeed, no sooner had Arendt published *Origins* than she found herself uncomfortable with its reception. In an introduction to the 1958 revised edition of that book, collected in the new anthology, she clarifies that she did not intend for *Origins* to be read as a conventional history in which certain episodes and trends from the past seamlessly "caused" the outcome in question. Rather, the "origins" she identified—namely, organized anti-Semitism and imperialism—were grotesque responses to fundamental dilemmas faced by European nation-states: among them, how to reconcile diverse peoples to mass societies, and where to channel the surplus populations created by economic upheavals. The genocidal and imperialist responses to these dilemmas were actively integrated into totalitarian ideologies and state strategies, and the results were Nazism and Stalinism.

Nevertheless, the dilemmas themselves were real, and Arendt insisted that they could have been (and could still be) resolved otherwise. So she announces that she has added a chapter about the "amazing reemergence of the council system during the Hungarian Revolution," which broke out two years earlier (and three years after the publication of *Origins*), as a kind of countervision to totalitarianism. While totalitarianism may express "the inherent tendencies of a mass society," the organic establishment of deliberative citizens' councils—which Arendt saw emerging, however briefly, at some point during the course of every modern revolution—opposes those tendencies, appearing as the perennial "result of the wishes of the people."

In that added chapter, Arendt recounts how an unremarkable student demonstration in 1956 "spontaneously" metastasized and gathered strength, toppling a statue of Stalin in central Budapest. As demonstrations continued the following day, factory workers and the greater part of the national army walked off the job to join the growing crowd. Soon, the Soviet apparatchik government had lost control of the entire country. What was most remarkable for Arendt was the way the people who took power promptly organized themselves into deliberative public bodies. "Wherever people were together in whatever kind of public space they formed councils," Arendt notices: councils of army members, councils of factory workers, councils to address political and economic matters. Crucially, she claims, questions about ideology and power played no role in their deliberations. The primary question they addressed, she observed, "was how to stabilize a freedom that was already an accomplished fact."

For Arendt, the root of freedom and therefore politics is just this kind of spontaneity, the ability of any person or group of people to initiate an unforeseen or unexpected event. How to promote and sustain this freedom is one of the slipperiest questions in Arendt's work. But even though the Hungarian Revolution was quickly crushed by the Soviet behemoth, in the five years that followed Arendt only became more convinced that this "fact" of freedom could not be stamped out from the human condition entirely. In a 1960 lecture called "Freedom and Politics," she explained why. "If one is serious about the abolition of political freedom," she declares, "it is not sufficient to prohibit what we generally understand by political rights.... One must take posses-

sion of even those areas we are accustomed to regard as outside the realm of politics, precisely because they, too, contain a political element." One recalls here Václav Havel's account of the grocer who one day simply removes the state party's slogan from his shop window, and in doing so exposes the nakedness of the regime to his neighbors. As long as necessity and coercion do not exercise complete and all-consuming rule over one's life, this kind of spontaneity, and therefore freedom, is always possible.

This account of freedom corresponds to something like Maslow's hierarchy of needs; at the base of the hierarchy are subordinate, lesser freedoms—freedom from want, freedom from coercion—that must be satisfied for the best and highest form of freedom to flourish. The pinnacle is *public* freedom, in which individuals can fully exercise their capacity for spontaneity in full view and appreciation of their peers and equals. Arendt believed that something called politics could only correspond to the full exercise of this highest freedom, the only kind that could mean "more than *not being forced*."

"Every action touches off not only a reaction but a chain reaction," Arendt declared in a 1964 lecture. "One deed, one gesture, one word may suffice to change every constellation."

Arendt believed that this loss of a higher, positive vision of political freedom was the result of a Western philosophical tradition that disdained politics in favor of contemplation, one concerned, as Arendt would put it, with man and not with men. For the pre-Platonic Greeks, however, politics was an end in itself: the participation in shared enterprises with their peers, the expression of their full humanity in word and deed. In a 1953 lecture at Princeton, Arendt called this a "unique, outstanding way of life, of being-together, in which the truly human capacities of man, as distinguished from his mere animal characteristics, could show and prove themselves." Even though Western philosophy utterly abandoned this conception, in Arendt's view, it could not excise it from language. Therefore, it could not excise it from thought: "To the historical belongs what is really an astounding fact...that in all European languages we use a word for politics in which its origin, the Greek *polis*, can still be heard."

This is one reason Arendt believed there was still hope to restore the ethos of the *polis* in modern times. But we need not exalt the ancient Greek *polis* and its attendant injustices to recover the virtues that Arendt felt it promoted. For Arendt, *the* essential question of modernity was how to reconcile universal equality with freedom. The challenge was that freedom had historically relied on *in*equality—some toiling in perpetuity so that others could be free. (It was women, children, and slaves who took care of this for the Athenians.)

Because of their opposing approaches to the question of reconciling freedom and equality, Arendt felt that the American Revolution was a qualified success and the French Revolution an unqualified failure. In the latter, the question of material equality, freedom from want, was so acute that higher freedoms could not be pursued at all. In the former, however, the absence of a destitute peasant class and the assumption that the colonies' slave population was not fully human meant that raw questions of want simply were not visible to the revolution's participants, allowing them to focus on higher ends. (In other words, even if Arendt felt that the American Revolution was a success in terms of promoting freedom *for some*, it was not one that she felt could or should be replicated.)

We are left, then, with no historical "model" for how to recover Arendt's politics for our present moment. The Hungarian Revolution might have suited—Arendt pointed out that Communism had largely solved the "freedom from want" question—had it not been crushed from without. But the search for models, for one-to-one correspondences, is not in keeping with Arendt's intellectual spirit. Like Emerson, she wrote "essays rather than systems." Therefore, it's perhaps best to look in her work not for models but for metaphors.

Arendt ends "Freedom and Politics" with a metaphor that is, for her, from the unlikeliest of sources. For Arendt, the Christian tradition writ large was antipolitical in much the same way that Platonism was: it advised the withdrawal from worldly affairs and the passive acceptance of truth as revelation from God. It was another form of the *vita contemplativa*. Arendt felt that this emphasis originated with Paul and has dominated ever since. (The only meaningful departure, in her view, is Augustine's *City of God*.) However, she says, "I am convinced that this impression would change considerably if we were to look more intently at Jesus of Nazareth—the man and his teachings."

The gospels in Arendt's reading contain "an extraordinary understanding of freedom" in their discussion of the miracles of Christ. This is because, for Arendt, "freedom" in its highest form was the ability to act deliberately and

spontaneously, to break out of the automatic processes of daily life and initiate new and unforeseen events in the world. Miracles, actions that actually defy nature, capture the essence of this. "All miracles interrupt some natural series of events or automatic processes in whose context they constitute the entirely unexpected," Arendt says.

Of course, Arendt is not arguing that we can utterly defy the natural world. She was a realist in the sense that she believed that material and bodily imperatives would very often take precedence over loftier goals. What she was arguing against, however, was any sense of fatality in the face of historical, social, and political developments. We may not be able to walk on water, but we can, under the right circumstances, initiate the "entirely unexpected," resisting the inertia that dictates the course of humankind's collective life.

If the analogy between Christ's miracles and something like the Hungarian Revolution sounds grandiose or far-fetched, Arendt asks us to consider the frequent human triumph over daunting probabilities. For the cynics in the audience, Arendt posed the question: We accept the defiance of extreme probabilities in the history of the natural world, so why shouldn't we accept and even expect it in the course of human events? In other words, if raw nature can triumph over extreme probability—as it did with the formation of the earth and the evolution of humankind—then surely so can we. We feel comfortable speaking of these events as "miracles of nature," so why not speak of the human achievement of the utterly improbable as a miracle as well? A cursory glance at human history, in which seemingly inexorable social processes are frequently punctured by individual and collective initiative, testifies to this human ability to triumph over probability.

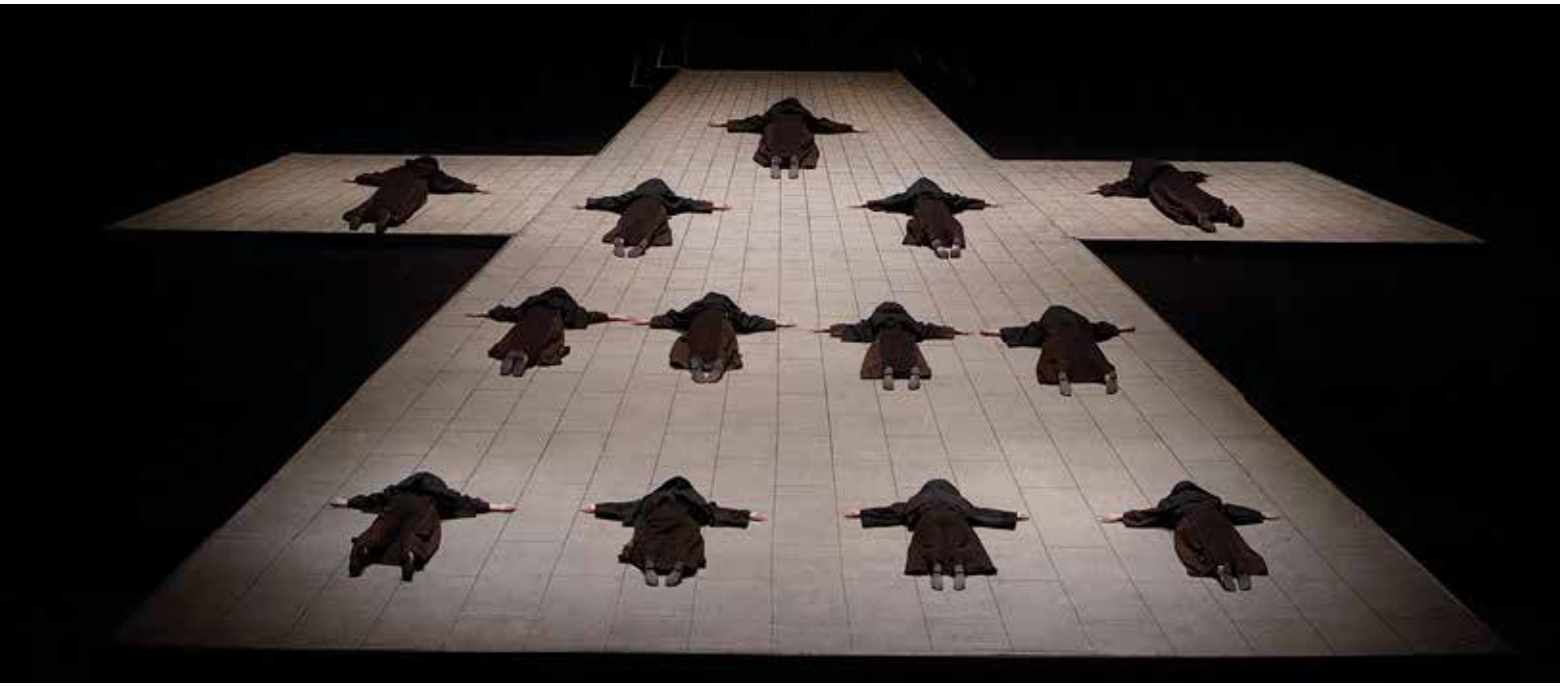
If these "miracles" are so commonplace that they don't seem miraculous at all, then Arendt argues this is because there is one difference between natural "miracles" and those brought about by humans: the latter are the result of initiative, of agency, of will. "In the latter case there is a miracle worker, which is to say that humans appear to have a highly mysterious gift for making miracles happen," she concludes. "This gift is called action."

What Arendt does in this extraordinary lecture is unearth an affirmative argument for freedom from radically empiricist premises, premises normally associated with much more skeptical outlooks. If, as David Hume argued, we cannot speak of ironclad natural laws but only of the constant conjunction of events, then Arendt argues that we have no choice but to believe in our own ability to sever those conjunctions, and initiate events that are entirely new and unforeseen.

It was exactly this that Arendt observed in the Hungarian Revolution, and though that uprising was crushed by the Soviet army she remained cautiously hopeful about what it portended for the persistence of human freedom in the modern age. "I am not at all sure that I am right in my hopefulness," she concluded in her 1958 introduction to the reissue of *Origins*, "but I am convinced that it is as important to present all of the inherent hopes of the present as it is to confront ruthlessly all its intrinsic despairs." As a reading public that is becoming quite adept at confronting Arendt's despairs, we would do well to confront also her hopes. It's true that she approached history with a clear-eyed realism, but it was precisely that realism that convinced her that she could not give up hope entirely for the new beginnings that any group of people can initiate when they shun the seemingly automatic motion of regular, quotidian life.

Recent years have seen the outbreak of several genuinely unexpected world-historical events; the election of Donald Trump is only the most obviously astonishing example. Were these events the only evidence in favor of Arendt's faith in human initiative, we might be justified in our despair after all. But a post-Trump revival of local democratic participation is underway across the United States, and it looks a lot like Arendt's account of the council system. After more than a year of field research, the academics Lara Putnam and Theda Skocpol concluded that an organic, mass mobilization of suburban women occurred in the wake of the 2016 election. From Wisconsin to North Carolina there were "newly formed citizens groups" that "spread like wildfire" throughout 2017, spurred not by any existing organization or call from above but instead by a sense that the course of the nation's political trajectory could not be left uncontested. And so people with little or no formal power decided to contest it. In Pennsylvania alone, these groups fielded sixty mostly first-time candidates for local office. Four out of five of them won their races—often in places where the Democratic Party itself had long given up hope.

While it's impossible to state the direct effects of this small-d democratic renewal beyond these sorts of local election results, it's a fair assumption that this mobilization contributed materially to the Democrats' tremendous victory in the 2018 congressional election. But, from an Arendtian point of view, positing this sort of cause-and-effect relationship is really beside the point. The point is instead to show how easily the normal causes that we think dictate the course of political life—fundraising, media prominence, formal organization and party support—can actually be rendered moot by dogged human initiative and direct participation. For Arendt, the point of this kind of political engagement was exactly that it was unpredictable in its effects, that it appeared quixotic until the moment its successes demonstrated the utter fragility of systems that were previously taken to be unalterable. "Every action touches off not only a reaction but a chain reaction," she declared in a 1964 lecture. "One deed, one gesture, one word may suffice to change every constellation." This possibility is what made such engagement nothing short of miraculous. ■



THE METROPOLITAN OPERA

B. D. McClay

The Burden of Suffering

FRANCIS POULENC'S *DIALOGUES DES CARMÉLITES*

To begin with, there really were sixteen Carmelites, the martyrs of Compiègne. They really did vow martyrdom as an act of reparation on behalf of France, and they really were executed in July 1794. All this would be fictionalized first as a novel, then as a play, then as a movie, and finally, famously, as an opera: Francis Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*, recently revived at the Metropolitan Opera for a brief three-night run.

For Poulenc, composing *Dialogues* was an emotionally intense experience, one which began with a manic spree of activity that would give way to depression and hospitalization. By the time he finished the opera, Poulenc himself was on stable ground, but his lover, Lucien Roubert, was dying of cancer. If his ex-lover Raymond was "the secret" of his previous work, Poulenc wrote to the baritone Pierre Bernac, then Lucien was the secret of *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Poulenc even entrusted Lucien to his "sixteen blessed Carmelites: may they protect his final hours." (Lucien would die soon after Poulenc wrote this letter.)

Poulenc's relationship with Lucien had not been a smooth one. Poulenc had alternately blown hot and cold in his relationship with the younger man, jealously possessive yet wary of losing his own freedom. A year before, Bernac had written Poulenc a pointed letter telling him that he had "worn down the affection of this loyal but not very interesting boy.… You are neither the first nor last to suffer a broken heart." But the end of Poulenc's artistic suffering coincided with Lucien's own sharp decline. In the same letter in which he calls Lucien "the secret" of his opera, Poulenc also tells Bernac, "I am haunted by Bernanos's phrase: 'We do not die for ourselves alone…but for, or instead of, each other.'" Was Lucien dying *on behalf of* Poulenc?

Dialogues tells the story of the (fictional) Blanche de la Force, an intensely fearful French aristocrat who joins a Carmelite community as a way of hiding from the world. The prioress who permits Blanche to enter dies shortly afterward in a state of despair, convinced God has abandoned the community. But despite this, life within the convent goes on: a new prioress is elected, and the Carmelites are largely unaware of the revolution happening outside their doors until they are expelled from their monastery. Mother Marie of the Incarnation, the sub-prioress, convinces all the nuns to take a vow of martyrdom, from which Blanche recoils and then flees. This vow is fulfilled when the sisters (except, painfully, Marie) are caught by the police secretly meeting together. Blanche returns at the eleventh hour, joining her sisters as they go singing to the guillotine.

Like Poulenc himself, *Dialogues* is the

product of a particular French Catholicism, one that spiritualized suffering and emphasized the possibility of suffering in someone else's place. What it means to suffer or to be spared suffering, to be granted or refused martyrdom, is at the heart of the drama of *Dialogues*. The martyrdom of the sixteen Carmelites has always existed as an act of spiritual and political significance. So, too, does its artistic legacy.

For their own production of *Dialogues*, the Met chose to revive an older, minimalist staging by John Dexter from 1977—one of Dexter's first attempts to show opera didn't need to be, in his words, "grandiose beyond the limits of Cecil B. DeMille." Dexter's stage is, for the most part, bare of props or scenery, and what is there tends to be more suggestive than definite (for instance, the convent is sometimes represented only by a grille). The sparse setting—which, in its own way, works as an illustration of Carmelite spirituality—means that one's eye is truly drawn to a few objects on stage and to the conflicts, spiritual and political, taking place. This decision also means that there are moments when the set design can quietly support the opera's own theology of suffering: as each nun walks toward the guillotine singing "Salve Regina," they exit through the space where the altar of their chapel had seemed to be.

Dialogues suggests, both overtly through its libretto and in the coincidences of its plot, a mystical mortification and substitution that happens in the kinds of suffering we face up to in our lives. There is the actual martyrdom on behalf of France, "to give our lives for the glory of Carmel and the salvation of our land," in which the nuns hope to absorb some of the divine anger they feel to be focused on their country. But there are smaller moments, too. In the Met's staging, many of the nuns comfort each other on the way to their deaths, but the very last—Sister Constance, Blanche's fellow novice and friend—breaks down, tries to flee, and is rescued from her own fear by Blanche's appearance. Earlier in the opera, Constance votes against communal martyrdom because she thinks Blanche will, too, and doesn't want her to be alone in that refusal. They mutually save one another from their own fears.

These moments revolve around the decisions of individuals, but they never happen alone. Fearful Blanche, when she joins the Carmelites, requests the title "Blanche of the Agony of Christ." Initially, this request felt grandiose to me. But in reality Blanche is starting to join her fear with the suffering of Christ, a process that takes place falteringly, but unmistakably. Blanche is timid but wants to be free from her fear, a process that involves not only conquering it (and, as another character suggests, conquering her fear of fear), but ceasing to be alone even in the decisions she makes in isolation. Her suffering is Christ's, the burden of her fear shared. The nuns who die do so not only for France, but for her.

Yet in some ways the most compelling emotional moment in the opera is not Blanche's. It is instead Mother Marie's, who has been so eager for martyrdom, and now faces the brutal fact that she will not die. Marie's absence from the execution leads her to grapple with what it might mean for God to will her to live, but it also, in a sense, provides the dramatic space for Blanche to appear as number sixteen.

Why does Blanche, who never even vowed martyrdom, get to embrace it while Marie is forced to live? While Blanche fears most to die—enough that she is, for a time, willing to endure humiliation rather than face death—living, too, can be its own form of martyrdom. Marie's thirst for public martyrdom is quietly rebuked throughout the opera. She must suffer in her own way, and part of that suffering involves knowing that the reason she must go on living will be obscured to most of those around her.

The story of the martyrs of Compiègne was revived, initially, by a German novelist named Gertrud von le Fort. In 1931, she published *Die Letzte am Schafott*, in which the story of Blanche de la Force first began. Observing the rise of the Nazis, she wanted to remind fellow Catholics of the duty to accept martyrdom—a calling some would accept and others refuse.

The novel, in turn, would be loosely adapted into a play by Georges Bernanos, who had by then fled France and was residing in Tunisia, but didn't have his copy of the book. What he wrote was more of an improvisation on what he remembered than the actual text. Bernanos infused the story with his own beliefs about vicarious suffering; that's what Poulenc found compelling about it. Watching the opera, I wondered: What is this call to martyrdom and suffering saying to people—the people in the audience—*now*? Martyrdom in its most literal sense still exists—one need only look at the recent deaths in Sri Lanka. But most people going to the opera, if they are Christians at all, do not live under the possibility of really dying for something they might or might not believe in. Still, this doesn't mean that the commitment to suffering expressed in the opera leaves them untouched; one does not need to die in order to suffer for another person.

Vicarious suffering is not the easiest sell. For one thing, it is not really easy to believe that one person can suffer *for*—not with, not over—another person. And its potential pathologies have been well explored, including the reasons they can form a large part of women's spirituality. Suffering, self-denial, and self-excoriation are presented to women as their own particular burden to bring through the world, and in that way are *naturalized*. But just as posthumous diagnoses of anorexia are not a sufficient way of understanding saints like

Catherine of Siena, so, too, the pathological aspects of embracing suffering are not a sufficient way to understand this spiritual practice; even when they are present they are not, by themselves, an explanation.

A refusal to accept the burden of suffering, or a refusal to acknowledge that our lives are not lived for ourselves and contain a meaning we cannot understand, is more of a cultural problem today than the kind of fetishization of suffering that might lead a person to refuse medical care. (The latter, of course, can remain an individual problem without being widely adopted—the solution to one error is not to adopt its opposite error.) Vicarious suffering, much like prayer, is one way of seeing how people are mystically and tangibly connected to one another. It is a rebuke to self-protective fear, to self-preservation, to anything that distinguishes between those we suffer for and those we suffer from.

Much political evil at this time involves refusing to acknowledge this interconnection—between the rich and the poor, between wars and migration. Afraid, not of suffering, but of discomfort, people move toward safety. Fearful and loving parents do not vaccinate their children; fearful and loving citizens support punitive measures toward immigrants. Christians, increasingly fearful that some kind of societal reckoning is coming for them, have in many cases cast their lot in with a strongman who they think can be relied on to protect them.

Christianity is in that sense apolitical, even antipolitical; it does demand the end of such enmity. There can be no division between those the strongman protects and those he defends against. There are many things it might be reasonable to value and protect, but nonetheless, one is not allowed to value or protect them. You must be ready to renounce your family; give anyone the shirt off your back; pray for those who hate you (and for those who, presumably, you hate). There is no person God loves less than myself, and no person God loves more. This belief can be both a comfort and hard to understand. But for a Christian no person is a number and no person is disposable. No person can be first of all, or only, an enemy.

But Christianity is also political—not only in the sense that it demands particular social stances, but because it emphasizes the obligations we all hold toward one another. The rich and the poor cannot be separated from each other. The sort of loyalties, political and otherwise, that seem natural to us may be things God asks us to mortify. Living against our fears, choosing to love and live in self-sacrifice, may be what God asks of us.

When I think about the promise that vicarious suffering makes, I think of another French Catholic, Élisabeth Leseur, who wrote privately in a notebook that

> I believe that there is flowing through us—those on earth, those in purgatory, and those who have reached true life—a great, unending stream made up of the sufferings, merits, and love of everyone, and that our least sorrow, our slightest efforts, can through grace reach others, whether near or far, and bring them light, peace, and holiness.

This is both ever-present and very far. It is hard to believe we really can suffer on behalf of others. Yet it is true that we can—spiritually and materially. God promises to us that nothing we do is meaningless or in vain. We really can help one another if we have the courage to do so. This can be a frightening promise. But encouraging, too. ■

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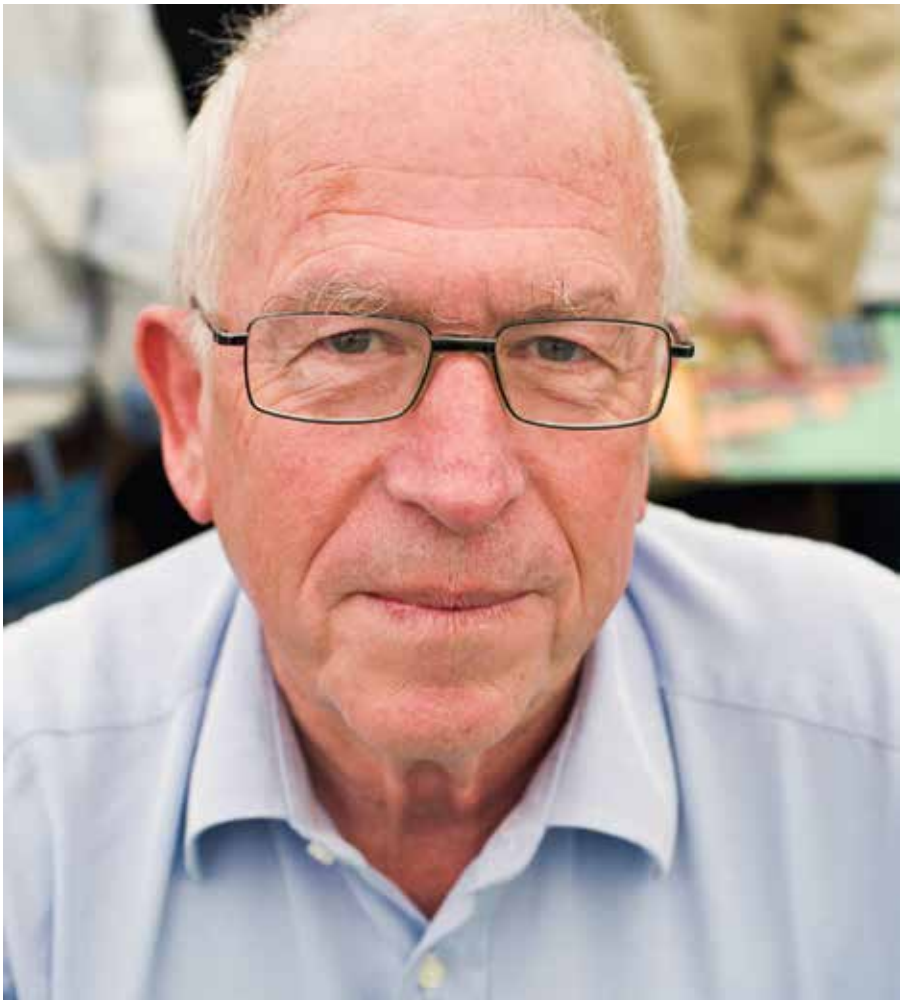
John Schwenkler

Inconvenient

On Truth
Simon Blackburn
Oxford University Press, $12.95, 160 pp.

What should one expect of a philosophical theory of truth? One possible answer is that such a theory should shed light on what truth itself *is*, revealing to the inquirer what the truth of a thought or statement consists in. Another is that a theory of truth should be a theory of how truth can be arrived at or *discovered*, to the extent that this discovery is possible in any given case. Finally, we might want a theory of truth to account for why truth is *valuable*, a theory that explains why we should care about getting at the truth and disapprove of views that are false or merely conventional.

The best outcome, it seems, would be to have a theory that manages to do all three of these things at once, telling us what truth is while also explaining why it is something of value that in certain circumstances we are able to discover. Moreover, ideally the answers to our three original questions will inform and reinforce one another: for surely the questions of what truth is, how we are able to get at it, and what value there is in doing so, are not entirely independent of one another.



Simon Blackburn

JEFF MORGAN 06 / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

What makes it difficult to carry off this task is that the concept of truth is so *fundamental* in our thinking about the world that it can seem impossible to elucidate this concept in terms of any other concept that is better understood. If we want a theory of gold, then we can explain what it is by appeal to its chemical composition, explain how to identify it by noting which of its superficial properties are most revealing of its nature, and explain its value by appeal to the contingent human attraction to shiny things. Truth, by contrast, seems impossible to analyze along such lines. When we try to speak generally about what it is, we fall back on formulations—like the infamous slogan, "truth is correspondence with the facts"—whose meaning a person cannot really grasp except by reference to the very concept in question.

The philosopher Simon Blackburn's recent book *On Truth* attempts to work around this dilemma by approaching his topic piecemeal. Blackburn considers several different domains, including ethics, aesthetics, religion, and the interpretation of legal documents and other written texts, in which we tend to care about the truth while also regarding it as difficult or even impossible to ascertain. The hope is that, by means of these focused investigations, we will get ourselves in a position to think more fruitfully about what is at stake in our concern with truth in general.

In Blackburn's hands, the thrust of this inquiry favors a broadly pragmatist account of truth and its value, though one freed of some of the anti-realist tendencies that became prominent in the pragmatist tradition through the writings of William James and Richard Rorty. Stated baldly, pragmatism is the view that truth is what *works* for us, what helps us *succeed* in achieving our aims. It should be no surprise that views of this sort have tended to invite various forms of relativism, for human goals are various and contingent, and some of the things we aim for, such as satisfaction with our lives and confidence that things will work out in the end, seem better served by a refusal to face unpleasant realities than by apprehending how things really are. Since Blackburn rejects these implications, holding for example that James was wrong in thinking that religious belief could be justified by the subjective satisfaction that it brings, he needs to show how the pragmatist approach can lead us in the end to a view of truth as something both objective and ascertainable.

In a short chapter on the value of reason, for example, Blackburn points out that skepticism of the distinction between reasonable and unreasonable thoughts and actions would entail regarding all movements of the mind as nothing more than a chaos of sensation and feeling. If our thinking and acting are unconnected with truth, then they are not really *thinking* and *acting* at all, and all our talk and action amounts to nothing more than a series of movements and sounds. Abandoning the concept of truth in this domain means losing our grip on many of the phenomena that make human life amount to something more than pure chaos.

In other cases, however, Blackburn's pragmatist analysis ends up offering some rather thin gruel. For example, in his chapter on truth in ethics, the core of Blackburn's argument is that practices like speaking the truth, keeping our promises, and repaying our debts are good because they are *useful* for us in living together. This position invites the response of Thrasymachus in the opening books of Plato's *Republic*: while it is indeed useful to have *other* people abide by these conventions, as far as *I* am concerned the value seems to lie very often on the side of ignoring them. From this perspective, it is only out of weakness or irrationality that a person would respect the interests of others when doing this is not to his or her own advantage. It's true that society itself would collapse if too many people lived by such a code. But it is possible for there to be some such people, and their lives may seem hugely successful. (They might even be elected president.) A proper account of ethical truth needs to support an explanation of why it is wrong to live this way even when it is expedient to do so.

Another fundamental question that Blackburn's pragmatism is ill-equipped to address is that of *whose* interests are really served when conventional moral norms are widely taken for granted,

enforced by social sanction and even the power of law. Blackburn writes confidently of what "we" desire, and of "our" shared interests in the goods that can be obtained through cooperative behavior, but since this "we" can pick out neither everyone nor a mere majority of any given population, one needs to decide what to do with the perspectives of those whose flourishing seems not to be served by our usual ways of going on. And Blackburn does not have much more to offer here than an appeal to common sense and natural human propensities. Such an approach may help us guard against metaphysical excess and skeptical despair but, when offered as the final word on the subject, it locks us into conservatism and complacency, and effectively precludes any radical reconsideration of the extent of the moral community and our relation to a common end.

In the *Republic*, Plato's response to Thrasymachus's challenge turns on his famous image of a cave, in which those at the lowest level are chained in place as they witness a spectacle of shadows. The only means of freeing them from this imprisonment is through a long and painful process of education that begins with a literal turning around, away from the shadows and toward the light by which those shadows are cast. For the prisoners themselves, tales of a world beyond shadow are heard at first as an expression of lunacy, and the reorientation that Plato envisions begins with coercion rather than choice. Truth is inconvenient, unsettling, contrary to our standing purposes, blinding at first to eyes that have grown accustomed to what is merely conventional. Yet for all that, it is only through truth that we can ever be freed from our chains, brought into a shared reality that transcends our subjectivity, and permitted to apprehend a good that is no person's private possession. ■

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Julia Lichtblau

West Africa's New Wave

She Would Be King

Wayétu Moore

Graywolf Press, $26, 312 pp.

The Hundred Wells of Salaga

Ayesha Harruna Attah

Other Press, $16.99, 240 pp.

In the late 1960s I lived in Côte d'Ivoire, where my father served as an American diplomat. The second decade of African independence was a period of intense interest in African cultures, for themselves and as wellsprings of Black American culture, and African writers were being recognized as major international literary voices for the first time. On my parents' bookshelf and in school, I discovered Amos Tutuola's antic and surreal *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* and *The Palm Wine Drinkard*; Chinua Achebe's spare masterpiece *Things Fall Apart*; and the poems of Léopold Senghor, poet-president of Senegal, and Guinean writer Camara Laye. Though I lived in a different part of West Africa, I recall the pleasure of recognition I got from reading these books—that gratifying feeling of "getting it" and also of initiation into what I missed, as a young white foreigner, about tradition and the trauma of colonization.

In the following decades, African culture largely receded from Western awareness, for reasons that included a contempt toward African countries for "failing" to live up to the promise of a headier era. Now, African influence is

YON LEVY

Wayétu Moore

resurgent in world fashion, music, visual arts, and, increasingly, literature. Since her 2003 debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, Nigeria's Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has become an international literary star, and her commercial success has apparently emboldened international publishers to publish women writers from other West African countries. Whereas Adichie's novels are set in modern times, a number of these women are writing historical fiction about such fraught subjects as African slavery, African participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and traditions that subject women to pain and suffering. Two recent debut novels—*She Would Be King,* by Liberian-born, American-raised Wayétu Moore, and *The Hundred Wells of Salaga,* by Ghanaian writer Ayesha Harruna Attah—are part of this new literary wave. Both are set in the nineteenth century, after Europeans had outlawed the slave trade and were seeking other ways to exploit Africa.

At a 2018 Brooklyn Book Festival panel about sub-Saharan fiction, Moore and other writers spoke of a collective debt to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. But *She Would Be King* reminded me more of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, with its ghost daughter and supernatural elements. Gbessa, the protagonist of Moore's protean novel, is an outcast from her village who marries the leader of the Liberian colony, wins freedom for condemned men from her village, and returns a reluctant heroine. The story rests on a core, magical-realist premise: its heroes have superpowers. In the opening scene, Gbessa is bitten by a snake, but won't die. Born on the unlucky day Ol' Ma Nyanpoo killed a cat, she is considered a witch—the "proof" is her red hair—and as such she is mocked, imprisoned, and eventually left to die. The omniscient narrator recounts Gbessa's plight in a voice ranging from mythic ("Ol' Ma Famatta—who they say is sitting in the corner of the moon...") to textbook ("...when the Vai people arrived from war-ravaged Arabia through the Mandingo inland in the early eighteenth century..."). A mysterious first-person voice whispers comfort when characters

Ayesha Harruna Attah

suffer, and Moore uses patois to approximate the Vai language. This is a lot of voice-shifting, but Moore's voice steadies when describing Gbessa's ordeals. Here Gbessa's mother watches her drink as if for the last time:

> Gbessa gulped and crossed her eyes toward the bottom of the bowl. She finished and when she lowered the drink from her lips, Khati's face was hidden in her palms and she wept into them until her fingers and arms were dripping wet.

Gbessa's one friend is the chief's son, Safua, with whom she speaks through a chink in her wall. When she reaches thirteen, he's charged with leaving her to die. She survives—her first inkling that she's immortal—then later returns and carries on a secret affair with Safua, only to be chased away again, falsely accused of killing his son (who lives).

A new section shifts to a plantation in Virginia, which really is the bush of ghosts. The first-person narrator, Charlotte, is a slave who died intervening in a child's punishment, and now haunts the kitchen and quarters. When a runaway slave is captured on the property, she cares for him. (It's not clear he knows she's dead.) Miraculously, she gives birth to a live child. Charlotte names her baby June Dey, but he's called Moses and is given to a slave woman whom the master forced to abort their child. Moses proves invulnerable—bullets bounce off him—and he manages to escape, boarding a ship to New York. Sleeping through his stop, he ends up in Monrovia. The third section follows Norman Aragon, son of a slave woman who dreams of returning to Africa, and her English master. The master is a nasty piece of work, and eventually the mother, who can become invisible, escapes with Norman. She perishes in the effort, and her son—inheriting her power of invisibility—stows away on a ship to Africa.

The three characters connect on a beach in Liberia, where they recognize their kindred superpowers but are soon separated by slavers. Gbessa, rescued by the black colonists, learns English and marries the colony's handsome leader. Threatened by European and African marauders, the colonists plan to execute Vai prisoners. Gbessa identifies Safua's son, persuades her husband to enlist the men as allies, and marches to the village with them. She is recognized as the witch, confounding the stunned villagers. It's a Joan of Arc moment, rendered with this devastating line: "The Vai people, blinded and unbelieving, did not know whether they should praise her for her proven tenacity and immortality or cast her away again." The story takes still further turns. Our heroes reconnect in a rousing battle fending off the French, but not before June Dey learns his real name from the mysterious "I"—who turns out to be none other than Charlotte, the ghost mother.

Writers are either "putter-inners" or "taker-outers." Moore, a putter-inner, sometimes overwhelms her own best writing, and inconsistencies in her narrative voice can weaken some of the strongest elements of the novel. Char-

lotte's inability to raise her baby or save her lover is as poignant as Orpheus's inability to keep Eurydice from sliding back into the underworld. She is every enslaved mother, every African woman who lost a child to slavery. But as a whispering enigma, she's confusion. Yet such flaws do not seriously compromise a novel that is both imaginative and ambitious.

In *She Would Be King*, we watch the birth of a nation, Liberia; in *The Hundred Wells of Salaga*, the end of a kingdom. Ayesha Harruna Attah's novel is set in Ghana of the 1890s, with the slave market in the commercial town of Salaga still in full swing. The title refers to the wells used to bathe slaves before sale. The novel's protagonists, Wurche and Aminah, one royal, one common, become mistress and slave, their points of view presented in alternating chapters. The story begins with Aminah, a young girl of Botu, scanning caravans from Salaga in hopes of finding her missing father, a shoemaker. She looks after her twin sisters and a baby brother, conceived on her father's last return. Months pass. Meanwhile, in Kpembe, the royal precinct outside Salaga, Wurche is to be married to placate a rival tribe.

In alternating chapters, Wurche chafes, while Aminah, along with one of the twins and a brother, is captured by slavers—her mother and baby sister burned to death, and the other twin taken. The brother dies. She and her sister are sold to a man who sexually abuses her. Wurche, meanwhile, meets Moro, a handsome slave trader, behind her husband's back. Eventually, she buys Aminah, who takes care of her son. The two become almost friends. Wurche's father weakens; his power plays fail. Moro, meanwhile, breaks off with Wurche, having fallen in love with Aminah.

Attah, like Moore, faces the challenge of rendering nineteenth-century African speech in modern literary English. Variants of this problem have bedeviled many a translator and historical-fiction writer. Attah doesn't attempt an approximation like Moore's patois. Instead, her narration tends toward a flat, generic voice. "Wurche wanted to tell her father that he was still enabling the trade, that he was never in danger of ending up as a slave…. What solution could she offer to replace the lucrative trade?" I respect the choice; it's like playing Shakespeare in modern dress. Yet "enabling" and "solutions" are words straight from a corporate conference room. Such bland language is all the more incongruous because Attah takes great care to make other details vivid, such as the ceremonial leopard skins which Gonja kings sat on, or the tying of the slaves to baobab trees in Salaga, or "the small forest, redolent of dust and cinnamon," where Wurche practices shooting.

What makes *The Hundred Wells of Salaga* notable, despite its sometimes pedestrian writing, is its focus on African slavery—Europeans remain offstage until the end, when a German who's against slavery becomes Wurche's lover—and on both the travails and empowerment of women. Like Moore's novel, Attah's features a woman who "would be king"; all Wurche lacks, as the old ladies of Kpembe say, is "a lump dangling between her legs." She goads her weak father about managing tribal rivalries. She resents her arranged marriage. In the end, when her father kills himself over his son's death, she vows to work for unity against the Europeans.

Reading these two books provoked in me a craving to reread Achebe and Tutuola. I already owned *Things Fall Apart*; in search of Tutuola, I tried bookstores in Brooklyn and Manhattan and the central public library in Brooklyn. In the end, the only place I found a collection of classic African literature was in Harlem, at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. There I propped my feet up and reconnected with Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* and *The Palm Wine Drinkard*. But these new African women writers? You can find their books everywhere. It's a good thing. ■

Julia Lichtblau *is a writer living in Brooklyn, New York.*

Nicholas Clifford

The Little Ivies' Aggiornamenti

From the Cast-Iron Shore

In Lifelong Pursuit of Liberal Learning
Francis Oakley
University of Notre Dame Press, $35, 550 pp.

I've met Francis Oakley only a few times, and only at meetings of academic administrators. The first, in 1982 I think, was on a rainy fall afternoon at a gathering of ACNE (The Associated Colleges of New England), when the president of the host institution interrupted the proceedings with a diatribe against lazy, overpaid, and underperforming professors. At one point Oakley leaned over to me and whispered, "I wish I could cycle our faculty through this once a year so they'd see what they're missing!" He was then dean of the faculty at Williams College, and I'd recently become provost at another institution to the north where I'd been teaching since the mid-1960s.

So not surprisingly I found much familiar in Oakley's new memoir, particularly the parts about the drastic changes that have shaken up higher education in the past five decades: changes in students, in curricula, in public attitudes toward our colleges, and so forth. But though Oakley rose to become president of Williams (1985–1993), this is less a book about higher education and its ways than about "the lifelong pursuit of liberal learning"—learning not just from teaching and scholarship, but also from patient listening to those who disagree with you, whether irate students with their "non-negotiable demands," skeptical trustees, or faculty who find some curricular suggestions to be "just not the Williams way."

Oakley was born into an immigrant Irish Catholic family in Liverpool in 1931, but in less that a decade, he found himself dodging Nazi bombs, and then living in the world of deprivation that remained even after Britain's victory in 1945. Homeschooled by his mother by necessity, he made it to an excellent Jesuit school, and then to Oxford (Corpus Christi College). Graduate study in Toronto was followed by his National Service in the Army, and then a return to North America (not least because of his Connecticut fiancée, whom he'd met in Canada) and a doctorate from Yale in 1959. Thence he went to Williams despite the worries of those who, like so many in the American intellectual establishment back then, assumed that a Roman Catholic could only be happy at an institution controlled by pope and church.

The real question for Oakley at Williams, however, came from his disappointment after the enormous hopes raised by the Second Vatican Council. A historian whose chief interests lay in late-medieval political thought, Oakley turned his attention to the study of conciliarism, increasingly convinced by historical evidence showing that the later rise of papal absolutism had scant historical basis, and was little more than a fearful reaction to the valid claims of conciliar authority that had been made at Constance in 1415. "No ecclesiastical exigency can alter a fact," Lord Acton had said, and Oakley agreed. That question still hovered nervously around some of the doings of Vatican II, only to be

Thompson Memorial Chapel at Williams College

quashed by Paul VI and the "tide of reaction" that came during

> ...the distinguished but in many ways destructive pontificate of John Paul II. So far as Catholicism goes, I was then and have since remained no more than one of the vast gray horde of spiritual walking wounded, shuffling forward, more in hope than expectation, in the presumed direction of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Commonweal's readers may remember an exchange on this subject. (See Oakley's "Authoritative & Ignored: The Overlooked Council of Constance," October 11, 2014, and Robert Fastiggi's response in the letters section of the January 5, 2015, issue.) Was Oakley correct? Not my field, as we historians are wont to say, and I moved from European to Chinese history many decades ago. I'd add only that it has always struck me that among all the problems the Western church faced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—the French Revolution, Marxism, Darwinism, Dreyfus, the *Kulturkampf*, Italian unification, and the self-imposed papal "imprisonment in the Vatican"—the most serious obstacle to the growth of Catholicism was the kind of papal absolutism imposed by Gregory XVI, Pius IX, and their ilk, whose legacy lives on for many today.

Williams was something new to Oakley. First, the small private liberal-arts college devoted to undergraduate instruction is primarily an American phenomenon. And second, few foresaw back in 1961 the great changes that were about to sweep over American higher education. Small colleges such as Williams were about to begin their own *aggiornamenti*, and Oakley watched the "old Williams" (as he calls it), with its WASPy ways and fraternity traditions, giving way to new concerns brought on by the civil-rights movement, the Vietnam war, and the rise of student protests. Many of us elsewhere envied the way in which Williams's leaders in the early '60s had seized the moment to get rid of the college's fraternities relatively rapidly, as we were often imposing on our own fraternities the slow and painful death of a thousand slices. Williams, like many others in those years, also brought in women students. (My own institution had done so almost a century earlier, but less, alas, because of its progressive ideas than its need for the tuition revenues.)

Oakley became dean of the faculty in 1977 and president in 1985. These positions gave him a kind of bully pulpit to forward his own ideas for changes. He was sometimes successful and sometimes not—as with his efforts to get his colleagues to think beyond departmental boundaries. A prodigious scholar himself, he was also a passionate believer that research was essential to the quality of teaching. He convinced his trustees that Williams should give its backing to the formation of the new MASS MoCA (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art) in nearby North Adams, and he helped steer the college through a continuing series of crises major and minor, such as student demands for the college to divest itself from any holdings related to South African apartheid. Somewhat earlier Oakley had been acting president for one semester; I'd done the same thing, but my term in that position coincided with the high tide of the divestment movement, and it's burned into my memory.

He finished his presidency in a burst of success, guiding the college through the celebrations attendant on Williams's two-hundredth anniversary in 1993, finishing a highly successful fundraising drive, and then returning to his teaching and prodigious research. In 2016 his three-volume work *The Emergence of Western Political Thought in the Latin Middle Ages* (Yale) won the Charles Homer Haskins Prize from the Medieval Academy of America.

For all the virtues of *From the Cast-Iron Shore*, I wish that Oakley, with his non-American background, had found room for some words about the uniquely American practice of athletic recruitment, even in small liberal-arts colleges like Williams. Though the NCAA Division III schools have rules governing recruitment, Williams itself a few years ago stated that some 30 percent of all admitted students were recruited athletes, and I suspect that number is similar for other NESCAC (New England Small College Athletic Conference) schools. Yet there's a difference between teaching students how to play sports, which is certainly part of our mission, and the need to produce winning teams, which might not be.

Finally, on a lighter note—that of odd coincidences—is a little domestic tale about the Oakley family horse, whose screams one night brought the whole family out to untangle the poor animal from some webbing that was entrapping her. I can't help wondering if that was about the same time when, a hundred miles north of Williamstown, screams from our own family horse brought out me and my wife and our four pajama-clad girls, they holding flashlights while I managed somehow to cut away the bits of wire fence that had caught up Irish Maid's right hind leg. This was one of many coincidences in this book that sometimes made me feel as if I had encountered not just a kindred spirit but a parallel life. ■

Nicholas Clifford, *a longtime contributor to* Commonweal, *was a historian and former provost at Middlebury College. He died in May at the age of eighty-eight.*

Lingering on the Margins

Mary M. Doyle Roche

In the wake of the sex-abuse scandals that continue to rock the Catholic Church, conversations about staying or leaving it are more prevalent than ever. Those who lived through earlier waves of the crisis find themselves struggling yet again with what to do, while many younger Catholics are experiencing this shock and betrayal for the first time. Still others have suffered frustration and marginalization in the church for ages, their voices silenced and their vocations to ministry, marriage, and family stifled. Catholics from all these groups are understandably wondering if they've finally reached the breaking point. But as I listen to them and reflect on my own faith, I have come to wonder if the language of staying or leaving, of being inside or outside the church, is failing to capture the experiences of many people who live with these tensions.

In almost every aspect of my life as a theologian and ethicist, spouse and parent, friend and colleague, I have been challenged to think beyond binary categories to imagine new ways of understanding our identities, relationships, and responsibilities. Feminist theologians have long been disrupting dualisms that enable patriarchy: body/mind, spirit/flesh, sacred/profane, private/public. Queer theorists have pressed further to challenge essentializing categories that serve heteronormativity: male/female, masculine/feminine, and gay/straight. But it's been the time I've spent thinking and praying with LGBTQ young people that has prompted me to explore another dichotomy: in/out. Are you in the closet or out? Have you disclosed your gender identity or sexual orientation? The answer is rarely a simple yes or no. People come out to different people at different times and in different spaces. LGBTQ young people also challenge the simple claim that being "out" is morally superior or necessarily truer to self. Living safely and well is much more complicated than that. So too is navigating membership in the church.

For as long as I can remember, my strategy during the times I've been especially frustrated with the church has been to stay and work for change from within it. Don't take yourself out of the conversation, I'd tell myself. Claim the Gospel good news for self, family, friends, and all those who suffer unjustly. Claim your identity as Catholic and refuse to be told by those in power that you are not a real Catholic, or a good enough Catholic, or that you are a mere cafeteria Catholic. That strategy has mostly worked, but I increasingly question what it means to do all this "within" the church.

These days I find myself lingering on the edges of the church. Sometimes it is too painful to be present at the liturgy, so I don't go to Mass. Sometimes, when I do go, I just can't bring myself to put a check in the collection basket. Sometimes I wonder if I'm betraying those I love who have never been welcomed for who they are or who they are becoming by not resolving these tensions and just leaving. So I continue to linger—and keep praying, keep seeking out community, keep finding church in unexpected places, keep beating my head against the wall for women, children, and LGBTQ folks. This is a liminal space I'm lingering in: a space of transition, of walking along boundaries, of being neither in nor out, of neither staying nor leaving.

What, after all, really is the geography of the church? Where are its borders? Is it possible that I have been more "outside" the church than I knew while sitting in a pew? Am I more "inside" the church than many would recognize as I seek Christ in new places with those who have long been on the margins of the church? Does going to the margins actually take you to the center of the church?

It all makes me think of the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is speaking to me in new and fresh ways. It poses the deep question we all know: Who and where is my neighbor? It's telling that the Good Samaritan found his neighbor not in Jerusalem or Jericho, but in between them, on the road, during his journey. Did the Good Samaritan ever get where he thought he was going? Did he realize that lingering on the side of the road, where he found a broken and bruised body, was what really mattered? ■

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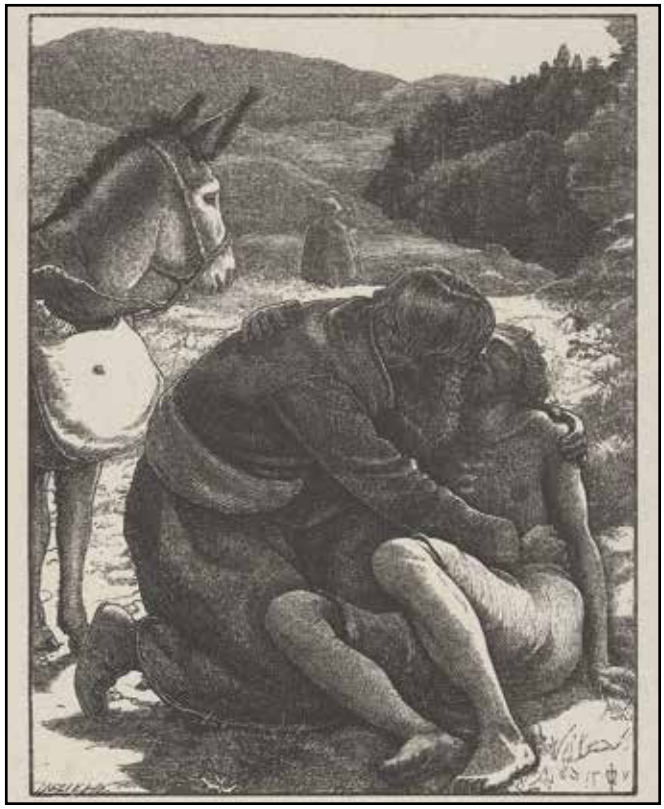

John Everett Millais, The Good Samaritan*, 1864*

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