A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

Commonweal

MARCH 24, 2017

INTERRELIGIOUS ISSUE

DAVID PINAULT ON THE HISTORY OF ISLAM

JAMES FREDERICKS ON FRANCIS'S 'DIALOGUE OF FRATERNITY'

JULIA MARLEY ON THE MARTYR COMPLEX

RICHARD ALLEVA ON 'PATERSON'

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LETTERS

Getting religion, Castro

NOT GETTING 'GETTING RELIGION'
Nancy Dallavalle's review of *Getting Religion: Faith Culture and Politics from the Age of Eisenhower to the Era of Obama* ("Our Man at Newsweek," February 10) reveals many things about myself and my book unknown to me before.

For starters, she writes that as an undergraduate at Notre Dame I "soaked up the excitement and teachings of the Second Vatican Council." And all these years I've assumed I graduated from Notre Dame in 1957—one pope and five years before the council opened. As I write in the book, "bad theology" was the only kind available to undergraduates of my era, and when *Newsweek* hired me off the street in 1964, "with two young children and a third on the way, I hadn't given the goings on in Rome that much thought."

Again, I was surprised to learn that I'm dismissive of Dietrich Bonhoeffer when in fact my book defends him against misreadings of his *Letters and Papers from Prison* by '60s "secular" theologians. Elsewhere, Dallavalle attributes to me statements and attitudes that are solely her own. I do not mention, much less "concede," that on the religious right "the hypocrisies are too numerous to mention." Nor do I detect, much less mention, any "alliances between Catholic bishops and the Republican Party"—although in the fifties there were several of them with Democrats in places like Boston and Chicago.

To be fair, Dallavalle is not an historian of any kind and, to judge by her website résumé, most of the events in *Getting Religion* occurred before she left high school and many of them happened before she was born. From her review the reader would never know that *Getting Religion* is a social history of the second half of the twentieth century that puts religion at the center of the narrative and manages to make connections among, for example, the collapse of the white nuclear-family structure, the emergence of more than three hundred religious cults, and the one million mostly middle- and upper-class adolescents, who, on average, ran away from home in the 1980s.

My problem with this review is a problem that has no name. Reading it, one might imagine that an opinion blog, not a history book, were under review. Smack in the center we find a pastiche of passive-aggressive bleats about Mary Magdalene, women in jeans, "the androcentric Christian tradition," and more.

What these refer to, without naming, is my chapter on women and religion that explains why the feminist project in Biblical criticism associated with Rosemary Radford Reuther and a few other scholars failed; how Protestant hymnaldoctors, both male and female, disfigured Protestant hymns by neutering all male references to God (God the Parent rather than God the Father) and all words (such as Lord) connoting hierarchy; and how the ethos of Protestant seminary training was transformed for male students once women were in the majority.

Commonweal would have better served its readers had it identified Professor Dallavalle as a teacher of feminist theology. From her review, the reader would never guess that *Getting Religion* has been praised by leading historians of American religion, notably Martin Marty

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The next issue of Commonweal will be dated April 14.

From the Editors

Beyond Belief

Of all Donald Trump's signature verbal tics—from "bigly" and "tremendous" to "sad!"—perhaps the most telling and ominous is the phrase "believe me," which he uses as a kind of exclamation point. He likes it so much he often says it twice, as though he were afraid his audience might have missed it the first time.

Careful speakers are as sparing with the words "believe me" as careful writers are with exclamation points, and for the same reason: both are subject to the law of diminishing returns. People who say "believe me" a lot can't help suggesting one of two things—that they have reason to worry we *won't* believe them, or that we should just take their word for it and not ask too many questions. In the mouth of a politician, "believe me" always sounds either fishy or authoritarian.

In Trump's mouth, it now sounds both. His growing reputation for mendacity has tainted his pet phrase with unintentional irony. Believe *him*? Why should we? Lies and half-truths were the fuel of Trump's presidential campaign; shameless whoppers that would have destroyed a more conventional candidate ended up carrying him to the White House. Since taking the oath of office (with his hand on *two* Bibles—*believe him!*), Trump has kept up the torrent of untruthfulness.

His falsehoods are often pointless or trivial. They wouldn't help him much even if most people believed him—and most people don't. He has lied about the scale of his electoral victory, about the size of the crowd at his inauguration, about the murder rate, the unemployment rate, and other empirical facts available to anyone with access to Google. He has also made up, or passed along, nontrivial falsehoods, such as the claim that his phones were illegally wiretapped by President Obama.

This background of casual dishonesty is what makes the stories about Trump's possible collusion with the Russian government so troubling. Trump insists there's nothing to them, and for all we know, he's right. It's possible that the ongoing communication between Russian intelligence officials and members of Trump's campaign, first reported in February by the *New York Times*, was all routine and above board. It's possible it had nothing to do with Russian efforts to help Trump's campaign by hurting Hillary Clinton's. It's also possible that if anything was *not* above board, Trump himself was not involved. But we can no longer take his word for it, and he should not ask us to.

This would be true even if Trump had a sterling reputation for truthfulness; it is especially true because he does not. Nor, for that matter, do the people with whom he has surrounded himself. His first national security advisor, Michael Flynn, had to resign after it was revealed that he had lied to the vice president and the FBI about the subject of his post-election conversations with the Russian ambassador to the United States. A few weeks later the *Washington Post* reported that Jeff Sessions, the new attorney general and one of Trump's earliest supporters, had misled Congress under oath when he insisted during his confirmation hearing that he "didn't have communications with the Russians" before the election. It turned out that he, too, had spoken with the Russian ambassador—twice.

The day after that was revealed, Sessions announced he would recuse himself from any involvement with the FBI's ongoing investigation into "matters that deal with the Trump campaign." That was the very least he could do, but for Trump even that was too much. The president complained bitterly to his closest advisors about Sessions's decision to step aside. And one can well understand his point of view: What was one more little fib when there had already been so many?

A man who routinely lies when nothing is at stake can be counted on to lie when everything is. If Trump's campaign did collaborate with Russia's interference in the presidential election, that would be an impeachable offense, as well as a criminal one. In that case, Trump would be in no hurry to come clean. The only way to find out what really happened is to let our intelligence agencies continue their investigations without interference from the White House. Once they've finished their work, they should report their findings not only to the House and Senate intelligence committees—whose Republican chairmen have already been enlisted by the Trump administration to do damage control—but also to an independent commission made up of nonpartisan experts rather than elected officials.

Such a commission might well end up exonerating the president and his campaign team. We should all hope so. But if it's discovered that Trump's people were in on the Russian attempt to compromise the election, congressional Republicans must treat Trump the same way they would treat a Democratic president in such a case. One thing is certain: if any Trump operatives were up to no good, we will never hear about it from our president. Believe us, that's not his style. ■

March 7, 2017

and Mark Noll, and even by feminist scholars like Susannah Heschel. Surely the editors of *Commonweal* could have found a reviewer of similar stature for this book.

Kenneth L. Woodward
Chicago, Ill.

NANCY DALLAVALLE REPLIES:
During the editing process, in an effort to clarify some ambiguous phrasing on my part, Kenneth Woodward's years at Notre Dame were gotten wrong. I should have caught the error, and I apologize for not doing so. (On the bright side, Woodward's letter assumes that I am decades younger than I had thought, so I'm going with his judgment on this account as well.)

Woodward is angry that he is being reviewed by a non-peer, a fact I readily concede. He is angry about feminism, blaming its adherents for the decline of the nuclear family and the rise of women students at Protestant seminaries. He is angry about historical-critical scholarship in the hands of women, and the efforts—often clunky—of liturgists who attempt to include women in the texts that shape the faith we share.

He says this problem has no name. I disagree.

Nevertheless I welcome this book, as it addresses a concern that deeply troubles us both. Woodward's social history documents how "we" used to "get" religion, and how the conditions for that possibility have eroded. He is quite right to parallel changing family structures with the decline in religious affiliation as well as—alarmingly, I believe—a decline in institutional affiliations of all kinds. He is quite right to lament the rise of abortion and the inability of our current liberal society to hold out a vision for human flourishing, although he seems blind to the ways in which economic policies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries play into these, and in fact require what their proponents loudly denounce: a gig economy, a gig family, and a gig spirituality.

We are living with this now. Young adults are indeed estranged from institutions of all kinds, they don't "get" religion because they may not "get" anything at all, surrounded as they are by institutions that have crumbled in the onslaught of "alternative facts." Patient work in our communities, the forging of intergenerational ties, the retrieval of narrative as a welcoming and redemptive form—these horizontal efforts seem the most fruitful directions at this point. These may not make young adults "get" the religion they've bypassed, but they may, one can hope, give all of us a starting point for renewed structures that would nurture the social commitments Woodward and I both value.

Nancy Dallavalle

CASTRO CONNECTIONS
I wish to commend Tom Quigley both for his recent article ("Faithless Fidel," February 24) and for his deep knowledge of Latin America. I am grateful for his work.

I certainly agree that much of the published material about Fidel Castro has been incorrect.

Based upon my studies, the course I co-taught at the University of Notre Dame last autumn titled "The Church and the Dynasty," and various trips to the island, I would recommend that journalists interested in the Cuban Catholic Church look into some of the following areas:

1. The Fifth General Council of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean (which met in Aparecida, Brazil, in 2007) studied the situation of the Catholic Church in Cuba, along with other key missions of the Church across the continent. The Cuban bishops' final document is extremely informative.

2. The book, *Fidel and Religion: Conversations with Frei Betto on Marxism and Liberation Theology* (Ocean Press, 2006) proves that Fidel Castro was reflecting about these matters in depth, and that he was much better informed than is widely assumed.

3. The house churches of Cuba, both Roman Catholic and evangelical Protestant, are thriving, particularly in rural areas. Interference by the Cuban government has been minimal.

There are other examples of promising developments between the Cuban government and the church that cannot be ignored. The Cuban Catholic Church is definitely worthy of our respect and of journalistic attention!

Rev. Robert S. Pelton, CSC
Notre Dame, Ind.

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Another Abu Ghraib?

HOW TRUMP'S IMMIGRATION POLICIES COULD LEAD TO ABUSE

Americans' traditional optimism about the future is steadily giving way to the conjuring of worst-case scenarios. With Donald Trump in office, Pollyanna is turning into Chicken Little: if the sky isn't falling today, it will tomorrow.

Chicken-Little-in-Chief Donald Trump has us peering around corners for the next disaster. Chaos and carnage rule our cities. Murder rates are up. Jobs are down. Terrorists and bad hombres stream through open borders. The media is the enemy of the people. Is it any wonder that citizens begin to fear that policies based on these worst-case scenarios may produce worst-case scenarios of their own.

For example: in a *New York Times* op-ed, veteran war correspondent Tom Ricks raises the alarm about immigrant detention centers. He asks whether they will become like Abu Ghraib. On the face of it, Ricks's comparison seems absurd. Yet he points to some potent similarities. The infamous practices of Abu Ghraib, recorded in photographs taken by the soldiers themselves, were not official policy; they were the by-products of haste, carelessness, ignorance, inexperience, and, as then–Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld put it, a "few bad apples."

During the first days of the Iraq war, finding those who made the bombs and IEDs that were killing and maiming U.S. soldiers became a top priority. That led to random round-ups of Iraqis, who were often seized in the middle of the night and hustled without notice to Abu Ghraib. The prison was soon overcrowded, and many U.S. soldiers serving as guards were inexperienced and overwhelmed. The officer in charge of the unit exposed by the infamous photos encouraged the humiliation and abuse of prisoners. The harsh conditions were known to superiors and ignored; when a brigadier general in charge complained about overcrowding, she (yes, she) was told to put up tents. In the end, the ratio of prisoners to interrogators was so great that some were never questioned. Though none of this was intended, it followed a series of decisions that led predictably to the abuse. Will rounding up and detaining undocumented immigrants in ever-greater numbers repeat this mistake?

An ICE arrest

Ricks does not believe that "immigrants are being tortured in the horrific way that prisoners at Abu Ghraib were." What concerns him is the aggression and military bearing of immigration enforcement agents, as well as similarities of language ("shackles off") and practice, the dawn raids, and workplace round-ups. Does this forecast a regime of abuse?

President Trump has promised an all-out effort to deport the "bad hombres." Border and ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) agents, whose union leaders endorsed Trump, are eager to get to work. If Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly succeeds in hiring an additional ten thousand ICE agents and five thousand border guards (a big if), then many more eager beavers will go to work, some of them inexperienced. Add to Kelly's to-do list the need to build more detention facilities. Their capacities are measured in "bed days"—beds available for the time a detained immigrant awaits deportation. Currently there are some 34,000 bed days available. Under Trump's plan, that number could grow to 200,000. Even now, the government depends on outsourcing; in 2015, profit-making corporations ran 64 percent of the detention centers and made billions of dollars. As with private prisons generally, widespread complaints include lack of medical care and government oversight, as well as insufficient food and the violation of detainees' legal rights.

The actual outcome of the Trump administration's deportation promises remains to be seen. Yet even in the absence of clear policy and published regulations, immigration and border agents have gone to work with enthusiasm. The airport fiascos following the executive order of January 27, which included detaining and deporting travelers with valid documents, demonstrates the problem of ill-conceived policies combined with poorly supervised enforcement.

Is the sky falling? Is Ricks's comparison overblown? Will Secretary John Kelly, a retired Marine general, preside over the rerun of a major military scandal? Will he support a policy that is being hastily and carelessly implemented? Will he remove the inevitable "bad apples"? Has he learned the lessons of Abu Ghraib, and will he heed them? ■

David O'Brien

Mission before Identity

A RESPONSE TO JOHN GARVEY & MARK ROCHE

The College of the Holy Cross

I was discouraged by the recent essays by Catholic University President John Garvey and Notre Dame Dean Emeritus Mark Roche about hiring Catholic scholars in order to insure that their institutions maintain their "Catholic identity" ("Hiring for Mission," February 10). For decades Catholic leaders have questioned the identity and integrity of most Catholic colleges and universities (Catholic University of America, run by the U.S. bishops, has been exempted) even though they have prospered by every academic measure. Exactly forty years ago, I joined that debate in a *Commonweal* essay urging the Jesuits to translate into academic practice their new mission statement of the service of faith and promotion of justice in the context of the preferential option for the poor. A few years later, Pope John Paul II changed the conversation when he proposed what became *Ex corde ecclesiae*. For decades since, Vatican officials, post–Vatican II bishops, and assorted lay militants have argued that U.S. Catholic colleges and universities have achieved academic and economic success by compromising their Catholic faith. This relentless assault on the integrity of Catholic universities and their leaders reached fever pitch when Notre Dame invited newly elected President Barack Obama to its 2009 graduation. Hardly anyone noticed that the attack on Notre Dame for inviting Obama was an attack on those of us who voted for him.

The broader charge that Catholic universities like Notre Dame succeeded by placing professional excellence and shared public responsibility ahead of Catholic faith and responsibility called into question the integrity of the middle-class Catholic laity who took their professional and civic responsibilities seriously. For a while, Catholic mission and identity had started with solidarity, participating fully in the works of our democratic society, including its intellectual and academic life. But increasingly Catholic identity seemed to center on what made us Catholics different from others and what placed Catholics apart from, and in opposition to, the so-called secular culture we shared with others. The answer centered on supposedly nonnegotiable moral stances on abortion and gay marriage and support for the hierarchy's almost infallible opposition to the ordination of women. When bishops in the name of Catholic integrity refused Communion to Catholic politicians in 2004 and Catholic anti-abortion activists helped destroy the careers of prolife Catholic Democrats who voted for the Affordable Care Act, the integrity of many Catholics who had reservations about such actions was called into question. That is why university presidents and deans calling for "hiring Catholics" make some Catholics, and many other academic colleagues, nervous.

Nevertheless, Garvey and Roche are not alone. Almost everyone now involved in Catholic higher education, including its very best leaders, attends to "Catholic identity" in the terms set by the critics: hire self-identified Catholics, hope for a majority, avoid speakers and policies that might offend the local bishop, pay lip service to a museum-like "Catholic intellectual tradition," and get on with business as usual. The problems are so obvious that it is a little embarrassing to point some out. One has only to look around the local parish, listen to one's own children and/or their life partners, or acknowledge that public officials named Biden and Ryan and Pelosi and Bannon are all Catholics, and you can see that hiring self-identified Catholics might be tricky (no one has suggested investigating the candidate's Catholic practice, at least not yet). As Roche and most other deans found, "hiring for mission" helps a little, but not much, in sorting out Catholics, and it helps a lot to open the door to sympathetic non-Catholics or to no-longer or not-quite Catholics.

But the next problem is figuring out what exactly is the mission one hires for. Before answering too quickly, Catholic

DEE & TULA MONSTAH

readers might think about their own Catholic mission, or that of their parish. What is it that we are supposed to do, personally and together? And then bring that question to the Catholic campus and decide whether the local Catholics answer that question alone, like a family firm, or with their neighbors and colleagues, as we would expect in most communities in which we participate. That route may take you to places like my Holy Cross, where we decided our mission was to carry on a conversation about "fundamental human questions" such as how we find meaning in life and in history and what our obligations to one another and to the poor are. At our very Catholic college we thought that, for the good of the church, the country, and our students, such questions were best engaged *with,* and not apart from, others—all others. And to that conversation Catholicism brings great intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral resources that can enable and enrich the academic vocations of all who hope to address such questions, at our college and in our shared life as citizens and, in many cases, disciples of Jesus. And when everyone agrees to this mission, hiring for mission, including hiring Catholics and other religious believers, becomes everybody's responsibility. But that approach often carries people across the boundaries many want to erect, without lay participation, between ourselves and others, and between the church and our world. Follow *Ex corde* and the wisdom of Garvey and Roche and identity shapes mission, as Pope Benedict always said it should. Follow the life and work of many Catholics, and the practices of many Catholic colleges, universities, and scholars, and mission shapes—and critics would say endangers—identity. That difference defines what some call a fight for the soul of the Catholic Church.

There are many questions that have been left unaddressed as the result of the ill-defined emphasis on Catholic identity. What is the mission of the church, here in the United States? Are Catholic institutions, or lay Catholics, simply to leave the work of the church to the clergy and bishops? Have Catholic academic leaders anything to say to the rest of the church about the role of women, about human sexuality, about pastoral care and institutional management, about economic justice, about peace? Is the church to define its mission without them, and are they to adapt as best they can, maybe by hiring Catholics who don't ask too many questions? Is that return to clericalism and lay irresponsibility the future of American Catholicism? And what about Catholic intelligence and imagination? In *Pacem in terris* Pope John XXIII wrote that for most Catholics "scientific training" is "extended until it reaches higher degrees" while "religious instruction...remains at an elementary level." With the help of the Catholic University of America and Notre Dame and many other colleges and universities, may the day finally come when that changes and the already good enough American Catholic community is smart enough and imaginative enough to help everybody achieve *Pacem in terris*, as Pope John thought we could. That is to say that the very idea of a Catholic college or university depends less on hiring Catholics who show up than on how Catholicism in the United States and across the world works out. And, despite appearances to the contrary, that is the shared responsibility of all Catholics and a special responsibility for those of us who live and work in Catholic institutions. In that work of renewing and rebuilding the church, *Commonweal* and its readers have an important role to play. ■

David O'Brien *is professor of History and Loyola Professor of Catholic Studies Emeritus, College of the Holy Cross.*

FROM *MULTUM IN PARVO*

"For the least of these"

Goods in their stolen shopping carts piled high,
the homeless labor down this frozen street,
and there but for the grace of God go I.
Replete after my feast of wine and meat
I fall asleep, dreaming of squeaking wheels.
Tonight Fargo must feed three thousand meals.

Lenten Duties

Last night I delved deep into David's Psalms.
    Needing to gain some weight
    I musn't fast, but fate
granted me ample means for giving alms.

Prayer has salvific power when it calms
    the wild spirit within
    or expiates a sin.
Kneeling, I shape a steeple with my palms.

A Breakfast

For flatbread crackers innocent of leaven,
    red salmon caviar,
    cream cheese and cucumber
I thank Thee, Lord, then die and go to heaven.

The Contender

I've so many transgressions to repent
I am my Pastor's poster boy for Lent.

—Timothy Murphy

James L. Fredericks

The Dialogue of Fraternity

POPE FRANCIS'S APPROACH TO INTERRELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT

"Ours is not a relation of 'tea and sympathy,' that is not my way, and it is not Bergoglio's way." Abraham Skorka, a prominent rabbi in Buenos Aires, was answering a reporter's question about his close friendship with Pope Francis. "We must advance by building bridges, through a living dialogue; not a dialogue of words, but a dialogue of actions that reflect our commitment." The rabbi's friend has now been pope for more than four years. What is he saying about interreligious dialogue?

Every pope since the Second Vatican Council has provided a vision of how the church is to pursue its ministry of interreligious engagement. Paul VI was no exception. In *Ecclesiam suam*, Pope Paul gave an extended reflection on "dialogue," a term that, back in 1964, had only recently come into currency in Rome. Dialogue is a "mental attitude" that Catholics must embrace as they engage the modern world in the spirit of the council. More specifically, Paul called for a "dialogue of salvation" in which the most basic questions of human life might arise.

John Paul II's agenda was based on his deep belief in the universal working of the Holy Spirit. Citing *Gaudium et spes* repeatedly, he reminded us that we ought to believe that "the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with [the] paschal mystery." The working of the Holy Spirit can be present even in the many other religions created by the human heart touched by the Spirit. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, therefore, provides a basis for affirming a universal human spirituality. In an important 1995 address to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), John Paul called for a "dialogue of spirituality," based on his recognition of this universal human spirituality. The church's dialogues must reflect "a universal vocation to holiness." The historic interfaith meetings at Assisi bear testimony to John Paul's beliefs in this regard.

Benedict XVI had significant reservations about interreligious dialogue. He warned against a shallow eclecticism in regard to disparate religious teachings and what he called, in another context, the "dictatorship of relativism." In an address to the PCID, Benedict praised the dialogue of spirituality, as promoted by John Paul II, but cautioned that "the great proliferation of interreligious meetings around the world today calls for discernment." The church's encounter with other religious believers must be based on "truth" as well as "charity."

What can be said of Pope Francis and interreligious dialogue? In June, 2015, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the PCID, spoke to a meeting of Catholics and Buddhists who had gathered at Castel Gandolfo as part of the Vatican's observance of *Nostra aetate*'s fiftieth anniversary. "In a world where diversity is seen as a threat," Tauran observed, this gathering should be seen as a "commitment to human fraternity." Since the council, dialogues between Catholics and Buddhists, in various part of the world, were focused on theological questions and spiritual practices. A similar statement can be made, to a lesser or greater extent, for the church's engagement with other religious traditions. Now Cardinal Tauran was asking for a "new form of dialogue" that would build on the more traditional encounters "by fostering interreligious collaboration" aimed at addressing social problems. The cardinal made clear that the impetus for this initiative is coming from Pope Francis himself. Francis believes that the time has come for Catholics to invite their neighbors who follow other religious paths to a "dialogue of fraternity."

What does the pope mean by "fraternity" and what will this mean for interfaith encounters? In my view, answering these questions requires us to look into how the church's social ethics has formed Pope Francis's pastoral imagination. "Fraternity," for Francis, is a pastoral appropriation of the more technical principle of "solidarity" as found in the social teachings of John Paul II. John Paul developed his notion in *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, where he addressed the ethical challenges of globalization. After taking note of the growth of the social, economic, and political interdependence, John Paul warned against a "moral evil" in which the ethical failures of individuals contribute to the construction of "structures of sin." Then, he made what can only be called an affirmation of faith that is critical to understanding Pope Francis's notion of fraternity. John Paul wrote that a proper recognition of the structural character of sin brings us to "the path to be followed in order to overcome it." Our response to structural evil cannot be limited to "a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far." Rather, what is required is a commitment to the common good. For John Paul, this commitment constitutes the "virtue of solidarity."

"Fraternity," in the writings of Pope Francis, has deep affinities with this virtue. This can be seen in the 2007 Latin American Bishops' Conference Aparacida document, which was supervised by Jorge Bergolio, as well as in *Evangelii gaudium* and *Laudato si'*. At Castel Gandolfo, however, Cardinal Tauran advised us to look to the pope's 2014 Message for the World Day of Peace for a succinct statement of Francis's view.

Pope Francis greets a Buddhist monk during a November 3 audience with religious leaders at the Vatican.

CNS PHOTO / L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO

Francis begins his 2014 message with language reminiscent of John Paul's concerns about "interdependence." First, Francis takes note of the "ever-increasing number of interconnections and communications in today's world" that should make us aware of the "common destiny of the nations." Also in keeping with John Paul's encyclical, Francis laments the fact that the moral demands of this emerging situation are often obscured by "the globalization of indifference." Finally, Francis sees in our interdependence the seeds of a "vocation to fraternity." For John Paul, the proper ethical response is to work for the common good by practicing the "virtue of solidarity." For Francis, the proper response to the globalization of indifference is to embrace the "vocation of fraternity." John Paul uses the language of political science ("interdependence," "solidarity") and Christian moral theology ("virtue"). Francis, without abandoning John Paul's terminology, turns to the pastoral language of Christian spirituality ("vocation," "fraternity").

Moreover, the link between fraternity and solidarity can be seen in the proximity of these two terms as deployed in Francis's 2014 message. For example, Francis teaches that "inequality, poverty, and injustice" are indications of not only a "lack of fraternity," but also "the absence of a culture of solidarity." He goes on to argue that the pursuit of peace is an "*opus solidaritatis*" and that "fraternity is its principal foundation." In addition, the "spirit of fraternity," according to Francis, places on the privileged the "the duty of solidarity."

What will it mean if the Catholic Church reorients its encounters with those who follow other religious paths according to Francis's emphasis on fraternity? This question cannot be answered yet for a number of reasons. First, each of these conversations has its own specific character. In our dialogue with Jews, for example, questions arise that are quite different from those that arise with Hindus or Sikhs. A dialogue of fraternity may very well increase these differences. Second, Catholics should not presume that those who follow other faith traditions are interested in, or capable of, a dialogue of fraternity. For example, a dialogue of fraternity with "engaged Buddhists" in Taiwan would seem to be full of promise. A dialogue of fraternity with Buddhist nationalists in Sri Lanka would seem to be considerably less promising. What would a similar encounter look like in Israel with Jews and, just a few miles away, with Muslims in Palestine? Third, we must remember that terms whose meaning seems self-evident to Catholics may be incomprehensible or even alarming to others. Many Buddhists, for example, believe that the assertion of human rights actually contributes to what they call "social suffering." "Social justice" is a Christian term that has no precise equivalent in their tradition.

Our interfaith partners will have to discern from the perspective of their own tradition if they are willing to enter into a dialogue of fraternity and, if so, how they might do so. A Muslim's understanding of terms like fraternity, solidarity, and justice may be very different from a Catholic's. I hasten to add that this should be seen as an opportunity for mutual enrichment, not a problem to be overcome.

In one respect, Francis's hope is not at all new. *Nostra aetate* itself calls for such engagement. The council's *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* exhorts us to "recognize, preserve, and promote the good things, spiritual and moral" to be found in the lives of those who follow other religious paths. But the declaration enjoins us to do this not only by means of dialogue. The council invites us to do this by means of "dialogue and collaboration" ("per colloquia et collaborationem"). We might say that the first Latin American pope has read the fine print and is showing us the way to reap the blessings of *Nostra aetate* anew as we begin its next fifty years. ■

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Peter Steinfels

A Turn That Went a Long Way

REMEMBERING MICHAEL NOVAK

Any adequate account of the swirling currents in Catholic intellectual life during the decades following the 1960s and Vatican II—think names like Wills, Greeley, Berrigan, Ruether, Hesburgh, Buckley—would have to give a major place to Michael Novak, who died at age eighty-three on February 17.

Novak was a frequent contributor to *Commonweal* from the late 1950s to the middle '70s. In these pages and in the *National Catholic Reporter, Time* magazine, and elsewhere, he was a skillful exponent of the work of Vatican II and a passionate champion of the radicalism arising from campus opposition to the war in Vietnam. From 1967 to 1971, he was listed on *Commonweal*'s masthead as "Associate Editor (at large)," although, in my experience, he had no real presence in editorial matters. He did write a regular column for the magazine from 1972 to 1975. I was also a *Commonweal* columnist during those years.

Our columns sometimes became duels. Novak was beginning his gradual, then sharp, turn to the right. That turn went a long way. Last November, having been noticeably missing from the contingent of conservative Catholic intellectuals publicly opposed to Donald Trump, Novak welcomed Trump's victory as a decisive smashing of "Progressivism," indeed as nothing less than "a work of Divine Providence."

That species of rhetorical (and intellectual?) excess was not atypical for Novak. It often took the form of gross generalizations about broad categories of people and their motives, psychologies, and cultures—liberals, radicals, "elites," ethnicities, nations, religions. This was true during his relatively brief radical years as well as his conservative decades, and this tendency frequently undercut his real insights and accomplishments.

Following his death, friends and admirers testified to Novak's kindness, unselfish mentoring, tireless determination to make the world a better place, and devotion to his faith. Despite his long and my much longer association with *Commonweal*, my personal contact with him was surprisingly minimal. I recall one dinner at the Novak home, a debate at Holy Trinity Church in Washington, passing hellos at conferences. But nothing I experienced contradicts these warm testimonies. My intellectual and political differences—focused not on his theological or ecclesiological positions but on his social and economic ones—were quite another matter. But it was not uncommon to hear people sharing my criticisms refer to him as "sweet."

There is no question that Novak's defection from liberal Catholicism or, as he was wont to say, from the "left," was an important moment in the postconciliar American Catholic story. From his position at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, Novak led well-organized attempts to counter the U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral letters on nuclear defense and on the economy. While traditionalist Catholics fought internal church *aggiornamento*, Novak helped form a Catholic neoconservative opposition focusing on public policy and general culture.

Michael Novak

CNS FILES

For Novak this shift in outlook and allegiance was major. Decades later he would still replay his renunciation of the illusions and evils of the "left" like an evangelical testifying to his "come to Jesus" moment. His forsaken left-of-center companions had not seen the shift coming (or the extent of it), were baffled by it, and sometimes, mirroring Novak's own weakness, attributed it to less-than-worthy personal ambition.

No doubt Novak's ambition was thwarted by successive disappointments in academia, in the Democratic Party, and in literary culture. Certainly he wanted to be influential in the circles of the powerful and clearly enjoyed it when he

succeeded, but his ambition never appeared to be of the self-seeking or material variety. Novak simply hoped to get a hearing for people whom he felt liberals ignored or scorned, Americans still close to ethnic, working-class, and religious roots.

Someone who knew him for a long time once replied this way when asked about Novak's trajectory in the church and politics: "The question really is how and why he was ever a liberal. He ended up in his own traditional sociological path." I took that to mean the path of a gifted, enterprising, lower-middle class, religiously devout, morally traditional, and upwardly mobile male striving for a place to exercise his talents and calling.

In Novak's mind, that calling was to give voice to the voiceless, to represent the unrepresented. I am confident he was absolutely sincere in this—he radiated sincerity—even if it seemed quite a stretch to imagine that Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, or the captains of finance and industry were among the muzzled and unrepresented.

In truth, there were many Novaks. The Niebuhr Novak, for instance, and the Jeremiad Novak, and the Booster Novak. As a Niebuhrian, Novak was alert to tragedy, irony, and mixed motives. He sniffed out the unacknowledged egoism, pride, and power-seeking of progressive do-gooders. (He was less likely to do this with those in his own camp.)

The Jeremiad Novak, whether writing from the radical left or the Chamber of Commerce right, spelled out impassioned and eloquent narratives of lost American or Catholic values.

The Booster Novak celebrated his chosen causes of student radicalism in the late sixties or entrepreneurial capitalism in the early eighties with a naïve enthusiasm that belied, for example, the gap between his theory of "trinitarian" democratic capitalism and what was actually described in the business pages. Obviously these three Novaks showed themselves selectively and sometimes at cross-purposes.

Novak's critics, myself included, spent more time puzzling over his intellectual and political realignment than in reflecting on what shortcomings of our own facilitated it. Novak's writings on democratic capitalism certainly filled a vacuum that liberal Catholicism had ignored. In my experience, Novak's suggestion that liberal Catholic thinkers and activists were inclined toward socialism was untrue. They were certainly inclined to government action à la the New Deal or the "social market economy" that Christian Democrats had forged with Social Democrats in Europe. At the same time, especially in view of Catholic anti-Communism and the manifest failure of the Soviet command economy, liberal Catholics took an economy built on private ownership and free markets for granted and concentrated their religiously inflected activism on limited questions of labor organization, welfare provisions, government regulation, or at the outside wage controls or industrial policy. The bishops' letter on the economy explicitly mirrored this concern with concrete problems, not fundamental structures. There was lingering interest from the 1930s in cooperatives and more recently in profit-sharing. But very few liberal Catholic thinkers and activists were (like me) interested in socialism or overall economic restructuring. Even the interest in liberation theology usually focused on opposition to U.S.-supported dictatorships in developing nations and on the methodology of base communities.

BLUE HERON

Shimmering in sunlight glancing from the lake
Poised on stilts, patient for its prey:
Dawn apparition—portentous presence
Imperceptibly distilled into air.

—Robert Imbelli

All of which is exactly what left a vacuum. Most Catholics were engaged in the private economy, either as workers, managers, or owners. Liberal Catholics proposed checks and balances on their activities but outside of professions like medicine and law, offered little in the way of vocational guidance or theological understanding of ordinary work lives beyond being reliable breadwinners, generous parishioners, and faithful members of the Holy Name Society or Knights of Columbus. Novak recognized this vacuum and filled it with *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*. Those of us surprised at its reception had only ourselves to blame.

Finally, both Novak and his critics were victims of "the big sort," the division of Americans into ideological enclaves. Catholic publications like *Commonweal* and the *National Catholic Reporter* did not expel Novak from their pages. He expelled himself, attacking the two publications in 1976 and six years later founding *Catholicism in Crisis* (later *Crisis*) to rival them. He was occasionally invited back for comments, but the gap in assumptions—and respect—was too wide to be easily bridged.

In fact, what was shared remained enormous, beginning with the mysteries of faith that Novak always treated as calling for further exploration. His thinking was filled with insights about secularization, political dynamics, economic creativity, and many other topics. If only his pitch had been lower and liberal resistance less acute, they might have greatly enriched both liberal and conservative Catholic engagement in public life.

May he rest in peace. May his family and friends find consolation in a life fully lived and in the love of God, whom Michael Novak never ceased to serve. ■

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The Story of Islam

A Primer

David Pinault

Events of the past two decades have brought Islam onto the radar of the West with a centrality few could have imagined. The terror attacks by al-Qaeda and other groups; the calamitous invasion of Iraq; the rise of ISIS; the devastation of Syria and the refugee crisis; the caricature-of-the-prophet controversy; the conflicts over burqa and hijab and the role of women; the religious and cultural clashes embroiling Europe: we live with an ominous anticipation—fueled by anxiety and exploited by some politicians—of global religious strife. Our last president said "We are not at war with Islam," while our current one insists that "Islam hates us." Trump's former national-security adviser warned of "a world war against a messianic mass movement of evil people, most of them inspired by a totalitarian ideology: radical Islam." Can you blame Americans for being confused?

Part of the problem is a profusion of terms and concepts not well known to most of us: jihad, fatwas, the caliphate, sharia law, the Sunni-Shia split, and on and on. Even the basics of the religion we are supposedly at war with remain opaque to many Americans. And so I offer a miniature primer for readers looking to familiarize themselves with some of the basic historical, theological, and cultural contours of Islam.

Jahiliyah: Desert and City in the Arab World before Islam

In order to grasp the impact of Muhammad's Islamic message, we need to look at the context in which it appeared. The society into which Muhammad was born in 570 AD is often referred to as the Jahiliyah, an Arabic term meaning "the age of ignorance"—that is, ignorance of Islam. The pre-Islamic Arab world was profoundly tribal. In an arid desert setting where resources were scarce and tribes fought over water, food, and control of caravan trade routes, individuals derived their sense of loyalty and identity from their tribe; intertribal vendettas were frequent, and defending a clan's honor was paramount. Each was led by a sheikh (literally, an "old man"), who presided over the *sunnah*, the "exemplary way of the elders" that defined customs and ethical behavior for tribal members. The *sunnah* was transmitted from generation to generation via poetry; each tribe would have at least one poet, whose job it was to glorify and immortalize the deeds—often involving death in combat—of heroic members.

Glory via poetry was important because of Jahiliyah views on the afterlife, in which good and bad alike were believed to share a cheerless shadow-existence reminiscent of the grey underworld of the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh epic. Given such beliefs, the immortality considered worth striving for was an enduring reputation within one's tribe. And the way to secure this was to do a deed worthy of a poem. So powerful were the words of the poets that many were believed to be paired with spirit-helpers known as jinns. Those upon whom the spirits descended were deemed *majnun*—"possessed by a jinn." The jinns acknowledged by Jahiliyah pagans can be understood as nature spirits: amoral and capricious, able to help or harm depending on their mood. They were believed to inhabit caves, odd rock formations, desert ruins, and dust storms. The Jahiliyah responded to these ubiquitous nature-spirits via ritual, offering libations and animal sacrifice. For moral guidance, however, people looked not to the capricious desert gods but to the *sunnah* of the tribe.

Cities also played a vital role in Jahiliyah culture, and two in particular: Mecca, Muhammad's hometown; and Yathrib (later renamed *Medinat al-nabi*, "the prophet's city," or simply Medina), some 280 miles to the north. Both were located in the Hejaz, the coastal area of the Arabian peninsula near the Red Sea. In the late sixth and early seventh centuries AD, during the time that Muhammad grew up and began his career, Mecca was a center of commerce and pilgrimage. Business interests were dominated by a tribe called the Quraysh, to which Muhammad himself belonged.

The Quraysh were also custodians of Mecca's principal shrine, the Kaaba. This site is renowned today as the focal point of the hajj, the pilgrimage all Muslims are required to make. Less well known is that for centuries preceding Islam, Mecca was a center of polytheistic worship, and Jahiliyah Arabs made the hajj just as Muslims do today. For generations before Muhammad, and continuing into his

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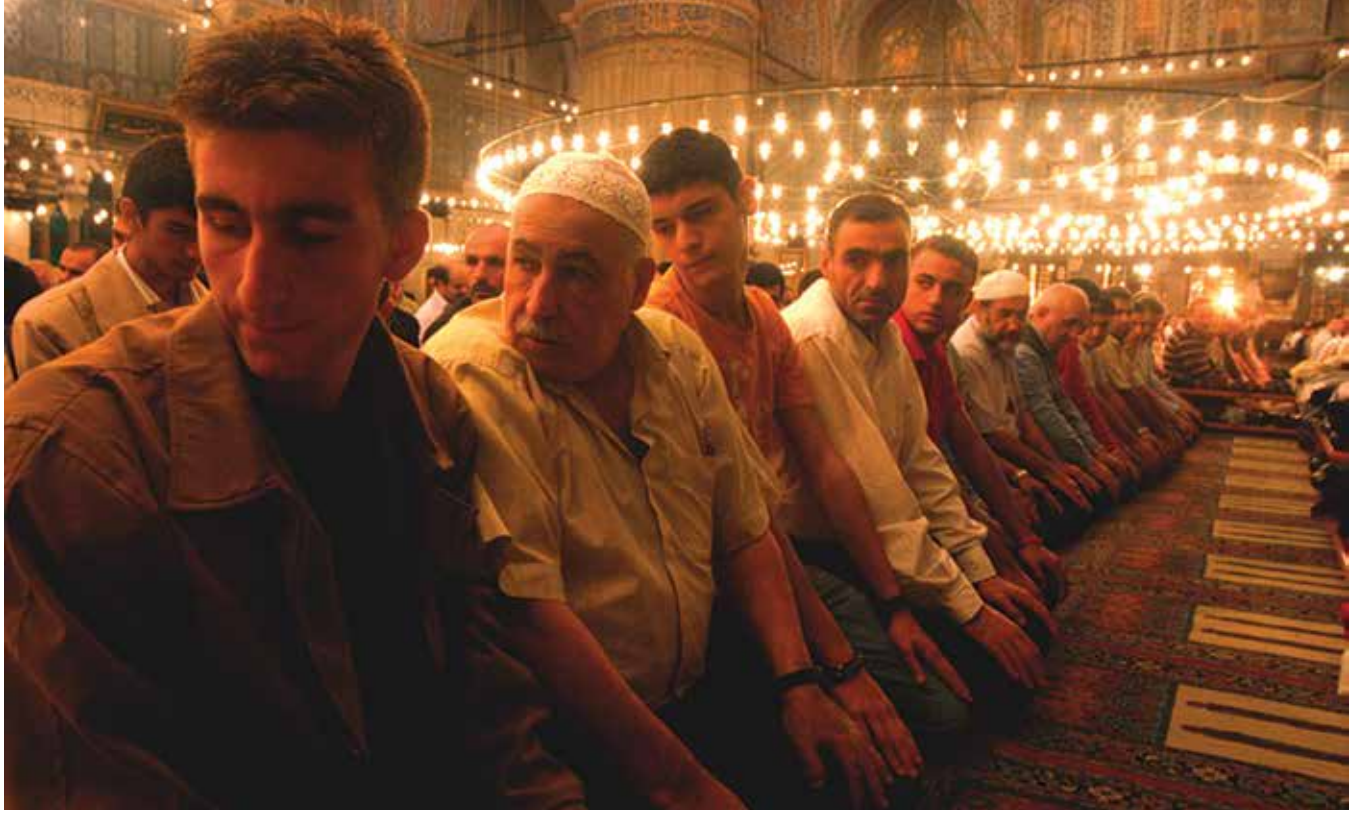


Turkish citizens pray during the first Ramadan night at the Blue Mosque in Istanbul on October 4, 2005.

CNS PHOTO / EPA

own lifetime, the Kaaba was surrounded by a circle of 360 stone idols, probably representing tribal spirits of outlying desert regions. But the chief pagan divinity, venerated as a creator and sky god, was a deity known as Allah, probably from *al-ilah al-akbar*, "the greatest god." Muhammad didn't introduce the worship of Allah; his accomplishment was to modify the understanding of Allah and Allah's nature.

Encounter in the cave: the angel's revelation and Qur'anic doctrine

As a young man, Muhammad was employed by a wealthy widow, Khadija, who ran a business operating caravans from Mecca to Syria and Yemen, and who eventually became Muhammad's wife. Upon returning to Mecca from his merchant travels, Muhammad often retreated to a cave on nearby Mount Hira' for solitary prayer. It was there, in the year 610, at the age of forty, that he experienced what he subsequently believed to be the *da'wah*: the "call" or divine "summons" to preach Islam. According to early Muslim sources, Muhammad was alone in the cave when a stranger mysteriously appeared and uttered a one-word command: *Iqra'* ("Recite!") the word from which is derived the name of Islam's scripture, the Qur'an or "Recitation." The stranger dictated a number of verses in prose-rhyme—verses later revered as the initial revelations of the Qur'an—and then vanished.

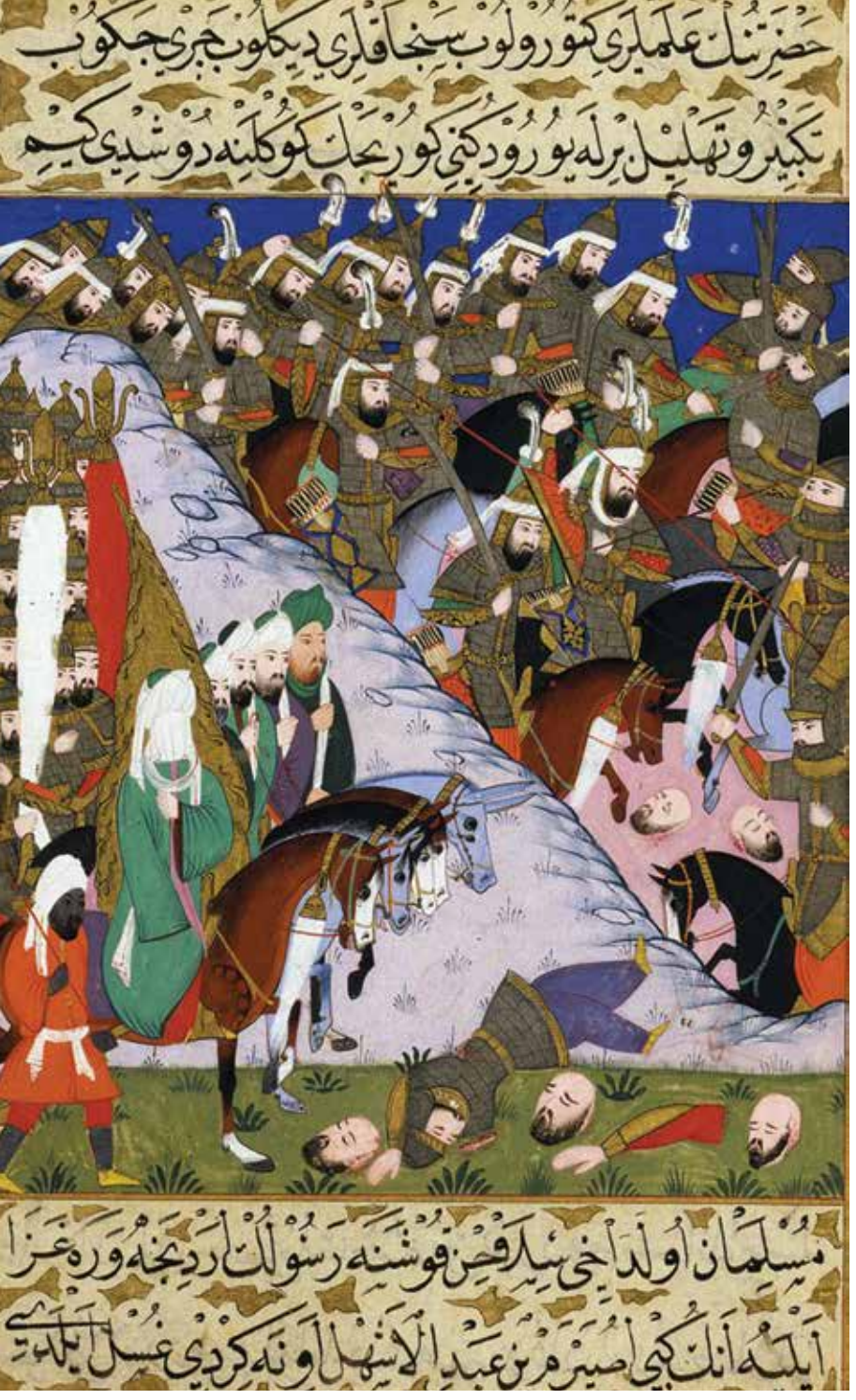
Muhammad was left alone in the cave, unnerved and afraid he was becoming *majnun*—a shattering thought, since he mistrusted both jinns and ecstatic poets. It was his wife, Khadija, who reassured him. She consulted her cousin Waraqa ibn Naufal, a Christian, who announced that the stranger in the cave was none other than the angel Gabriel. Thereafter, for twelve years, Muhammad preached to his Meccan neighbors the messages revealed to him by Gabriel. These revelations, gathered together into what would become known as the Qur'an, combined Jahiliyah traditions with elements of the Jewish and Christian faiths.

Central to Muhammad's message was *tawhid*, "the assertion of absolute oneness" summarized in the creedal statement *La ilaha illa Allah*: "There is no god except Allah." Rather than deny the reality of the Meccans' chief deity, the Qur'an confirmed this god, acknowledging Allah's traditional attributes as creator and bestower of rainfall. But Muhammad modified pagan understandings, insisting that Allah was "gracious and merciful"—traits not often associated with Jahiliyah gods—and also "master of the Day of Judgment." As in Judaism and Christianity, the implication was that at death each soul would account for its individual actions and be rewarded accordingly with either heaven or hell.

La ilaha illa Allah is the first half of the *shahadah* or Islamic creedal statement. The second half is *Muhammad rasul Allah*: "Muhammad is Allah's messenger." This assertion introduces the doctrine of prophethood, another concept derived from Judaism and Christianity. The Qur'an emphasizes that humans are transgressive by nature and neglectful of their duties to Allah; throughout history, prophets have been dispatched to us, all bearing the same Islamic message, reminding us to submit to Allah.

Abraham, Moses, Jesus: Qur'anic understandings of Biblical figures

A pilgrimage center on a vital trade corridor, Mecca was a wealthy place, subject to fresh influxes of people and ideas. Part of the region's cultural-religious mix was a substantial presence of Jews and Christians in pre-Islamic Arabia.



The Prophet Muhammad and the Muslim Army at the Battle of Uhud, from the Siyer-i Nebi, 1595

Jews lived as merchants and traders in and around Medina; many of their families traced their lineage to the diaspora that resulted from the Roman conquest of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. Christians were also a significant presence in Jahiliyah Arabia. Particularly impressive to the pagan Arabs of the time were the desert monks who sometimes welcomed travelers at their hermitage dwellings. According to the earliest Muslim biography, as a young man—years before becoming the prophet of Islam—Muhammad journeyed in a merchant caravan to Syria, and near the city of Busra, a monk named Bahira emerged from his monastery cell to offer food and engage him in conversation. And the annual fair of 'Ukaz, near Meccca, where tribal poets competed in verse competitions, was frequented by a Christian priest who, perched high on a camel, addressed the crowds in cadenced prose-rhyme, preaching to them on mortality and life's fleeting quality. Among those who listened, Muslim sources tell us, was Muhammad himself; he came away impressed by the Christian's teachings.

Given this background, it's not surprising that among the prophets in the Qur'an are names familiar from the Bible: Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Each is said to have been a Muslim prophet, sent to a particular people to preach *tawhid* so that they would accept Islam. But most listeners spitefully responded with *tahrif*, the willful distortion of Allah's message. Thus Moses is said to have received from Allah the Torah and preached it to the "Children of Israel." Originally good Muslims, the Israelites—says the Qur'an—distorted the Torah, worshipped the Golden Calf, and fell away from Islam into Judaism. This necessitated another Muslim prophet—Jesus—and another tawhidic revelation. Unto Jesus, says the Qur'an, was revealed the *Injil*, a term derived from the Greek *Evangelion*. His followers, too, were originally good Muslims, but distorted the *Injil*, engaged in Trinitarianism, and fell away from Islam into Christianity. Hence the need for one final and eternally uncorrupted scriptural revelation—the Qur'an.

The Qur'an denies Jesus' salvific death on the Cross, his identity as a person of the Trinity, and his status as Son of God; nor is reference made to his compassionate suffering in solidarity with created beings. More intriguing is the Qur'an's treatment of Abraham. Borrowing from the Haggadah, the ancient Jewish folklore tradition, Islamic scripture tells how Abraham as a young man denounced his own tribe's polytheistic practice and smashed the idols they worshipped. Outraged, his family threw him into a fire, from which he was rescued by Allah. Abraham's defiance of his father, family, and clan is an endorsement of the primacy of individual conscience over collective identity—a shocking sermon for Muhammad's Jahiliyah audience in Mecca, rooted as it was in tribal solidarity and the authority of the sheikhs.

But the Qur'an also uses Abraham to integrate Jahiliyah Meccan tradition into Islam. Together with his son Isma'il (the Biblical Ishmael, ancestor of the Arabs), Abraham is said to have built the Kaaba as a monotheistic shrine to Allah—an assertion that ultimately saved the Meccans' favorite place of worship from destruction when Muhammad finally triumphed.

Ritual Practice

At regular intervals throughout the day, Muslims are required to perform salat (canonical prayer entailing Qur'an-recitation and a prescribed series of ritual movements involving standing, bowing, and prostration). This is distinct from du'a' ("supplication" or personal petitionary prayer). Sunnis perform salat five times daily; Shias combine the five sets of prayer into three prayer-times during the day.

Salat is typically performed individually or in a small-group setting, with one's family at home or during intervals of work during the day. But once a week, at midday on Friday, Muslims are required to assemble for jum'ah (congregational prayer). The site where they gather is called a masjid ("place of prostration"), from which is derived "mosque" in English.

Visitors observing Friday prayer will note that within each mosque, set within a wall, is a mihrab or prayer-niche indicating the qiblah (direction of prayer: Muslims are required to face Mecca when they do salat). Before jum'ah begins, some worshipers arrive early, to undertake what are known as sunnah-prayers (these are optional, supplemental prayers—regarded as mustahabb, "meritorious but not mandatory"—which, according to Islamic tradition, the prophet Muhammad used to perform; the term sunnah describes Muhammad's pious lifestyle—his sayings and doings—which believers are expected to imitate to the extent they can).

Between sunnah-prayer and jum'ah, a khatib (preacher) will recite briefly from the Qur'an and then offer a sermon in the local vernacular language. The sermon usually concludes with an invocation and more Qur'an-recitation. Thereafter the imam (prayer-leader) takes his place at the head of the congregation, and worshipers get to their feet and stand in rows. They are required to stand together closely enough so that their shoulders touch. Also required is that all the congregants perform the ritual actions of jum'ah—prostration, kneeling, bowing, standing—in unison. This is one of the most important meanings of jum'ah—the heart of Friday-prayer—namely, that it's both an evocation and demonstration of communal solidarity.

An example of a religious duty shared equally by women and men is sawm Ramadan (fasting during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar). From sunrise till sunset, one is required not only to abstain from eating, drinking, and sexual relations but also to refrain from indulging appetites such as anger and malevolent thoughts. This points to the underlying ideal of the month of fasting: to develop one's spiritual discipline.

Paradoxically, Muslim friends have occasionally lamented to me that Ramadan is the month when they gain weight, because this is a time of night-long feasting and celebrations. I have good Ramadan memories of wandering the streets of cities ranging from Egypt to East Java, at twilight just as the sun sets, and seeing families pull out tables and chairs as they assemble in alleys and courtyards and pile plates high with food. Many a time I've been invited on the spot to such gatherings for iftar (fast-breaking). It made no difference that I was a stranger and a Christian: Ramadan nights are a time of hospitality for all.

D.P.

Exodus and triumph: the Muslim community in Medina

Most Meccans rejected Muhammad's message, and in 622 he undertook a *hijrah* (exodus or emigration) to Medina, where together with other exiles from Mecca he established the Islamic *ummah*, or community of believers. Initially Muhammad hoped that Medina's Jews and Christians would embrace Islam and accept him as a prophet; indeed, for the first sixteen and a half months after the *hijrah*, he mandated that his followers' *qiblah*—the direction of Muslim prayer—be toward Jerusalem. But when Medina's Jews and Christians weren't impressed with this nod to their sacred city, he abruptly switched the *qiblah* to Mecca—an index of his increasing frustration with the "People of the Book."

The Qur'anic revelations Muhammad is said to have received in Medina during the last decade of his life differ notably in tone and theme from the earlier, Meccan verses. Those Meccan revelations focus on universal doctrinal points: *tawhid*, personal accountability, heaven and hell. In Medina Muhammad became not only a civic and religious leader but a warlord, engaged in jihad (holy "struggle" or divinely mandated warfare) against the pagan Meccans. From this period comes the verse that tells Muhammad's followers, "Kill the unbelievers wherever you find them." Also from this period are verses on how to distribute plunder from the battlefield, and the order to fight the People of the Book "until they pay the *jizyah* [a discriminatory tax] and feel themselves humiliated." And finally, it is during this Medinan period, when Muhammad commanded a Muslim army of fervent followers, that he authorized the assassination and beheading of opponents—including Jewish prisoners of war accused of collaborating with Meccans, as well as storytellers and poets who had defied Muhammad in verse.

Conquest and caliphate

In the year 630 Muhammad conquered his enemies, reentered Mecca in triumph, and "purified" the Kaaba for Muslim worship by breaking its circle of idols. And in the last years before his death, Muhammad began a series of

attacks against Christian outposts of the Byzantine Empire, in order to enlarge the ever-widening "House of Islam." This militant tradition was continued by the caliphs—a word derived from *khalifat rasul Allah*, "the successor of Allah's messenger"—who became the political-military leaders of the *ummah* after Muhammad's death. As they conquered lands that resisted Muslim rule, the caliphs imposed a system of sharia, or Islamic law, that drew from the Qur'an and the *sunnah*. Rather than signifying "exemplary tribal custom," as it had during the Jahiliyah, *sunnah* now referred to the exemplary lifestyle—the sayings and doings—of just one man: the prophet Muhammad.

The caliphate lasted from the seventh century to the twentieth, changing capitals from Arabia to Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo, and Istanbul. In 1924, with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, eager to discard pan-Islamism and create a modern Turkish state that was secular and nationalist, led the movement that abolished the caliphate. But as we see today, this did not spell the end of the pan-Islamic dream. In 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, leader of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), declared the revival of the caliphate and the implementation of sharia in territories conquered by his followers. The thousands of Muslims who flocked to the new caliphate from throughout the world testify to the concept's lingering attractiveness—an attractiveness enhanced by the Islamic themes deployed by ISIS propagandists.

How truly Islamic is the harsh sharia system imposed by ISIS? Certainly in beheading prisoners, enslaving unbelievers, and relegating Jews and Christians to discriminatory second-class status, it can point to examples from the *sunnah* of Muhammad; and like other Islamic terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, ISIS uses confrontational Qur'anic verses drawn from the Medinan phase of the prophet's career to justify its own brutality. Yet ISIS's version of sharia—which is supposed to be Allah's will made manifest on earth—is a legal system conspicuously emptied of those attributes of Allah most frequently mentioned in the Qur'an: his graciousness and divine mercy.

Religious authority in Islam

Within the religion itself, questions of contending versions or values of Islam are left to a method of doctrinal discernment and structures of religious authority that differ in key ways from those familiar to Christians. Islam doesn't recognize the concept of ordination or priesthood. Instead, religious authority inheres in those recognized for conspicuous piety and learning. Traditionally, the path to religious leadership begins in the madrasah—a "place of study" or Islamic school—where individuals study the Qur'an, hadith (accounts of the prophet Muhammad's deeds and sayings), and sharia. During the centuries of the caliphate, many madrasahs were run by the state, and graduates could look forward to roles in state-sponsored religious establishments as religious scholars, or as muftis—those authorized to issue fatwas, learned opinions or decrees on how to live a religiously observant life.

The minority denomination of Shia Islam, predominant in Iran, recognizes a formal hierarchy of scholars, with the highest ranks (*ayatollah* and *ayatollah 'uzma*, or "grand ayatollah") having supreme authority. But Sunni Islam—the majoritarian form of the faith—is more decentralized. Religious scholars compete for credibility and congregations; and charismatic imams can establish themselves as self-appointed authorities. Thus many Muslim clerics were dismayed when al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, a Sunni who lacked formal religious credentials, took it upon himself to publish internet fatwas calling on Muslims to attack unbelievers. Such developments illustrate a challenge and major source of contention in the Muslim world today: Who, exactly, is authorized to speak for Islam? That question animates the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia for example.

According to the principles of Islamic jurisprudence, when a mufti promulgates a fatwa that's incorrect or misguided, it's the responsibility of other clerics to issue a counter-fatwa educating the Muslim public on the proper application of the faith to conduct. This learned debate on contentious issues is how doctrine is derived in Islam, on theological matters as well as broader cultural issues such as the proper role of women in Islamic ritual and in society more generally. Here the received tradition includes norms that many Western Christians find vexing. The Qur'an asserts that men and women are spiritual equals, equally expected to devote themselves to Allah. But traditionally, only men are required to pray at the mosque, while women have been expected to pray at home. Mosque prayer is gender-segregated. Typically, there is a relatively small space at the back of a mosque set aside for women. And menstruating women—viewed as *najis*, or ritually unclean—are forbidden to enter a mosque at all. Institutionally, for centuries men alone have held the positions of preacher, imam, and muezzin (who gives the call to prayer) within the congregation. But in recent years, investigative journalist Asra Nomani and Qur'an scholar Amina Wadud have argued for the right of women to have greater visibility and a larger public role in Islamic prayer life.

The existence of such voices suggests a greater diversity of views and potentials within Islam than the more alarmist views in Europe and the United States allow. Still, the challenge facing the Muslim world is clear and formidable. In the face of the intimidation and coercion practiced by ISIS, can Muslims articulate an alternative Islamic vision? One way would be to turn away from the militancy of the Qur'an's Medinan verses, and back toward the universalist teachings of the earlier, Meccan ones. It's there, as noted earlier, that we find the example of Abraham, who had the courage to stand alone and resist the pull of the group. Today more Abrahams are needed—figures of conscience who denounce the cruelties of religious tribalism. Perhaps 2017—the five-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's transformative religious movement—might mark the start of Islam's own Reformation. ■

The Martyr Complex

'Jesus Freaks' & Donald Trump

Julia Marley

Donald Trump stands during a service at the International Church of Las Vegas, October 30, 2016.

AP PHOTO / EVAN VUCCI

If you were an evangelical Christian in 1995, there's a good chance you've heard the song "Jesus Freak" by DC Talk. When I learned that Donald Trump had been elected president, in part because of the support of 81 percent of white evangelicals, I realized that song, and the ethos that produced it and celebrated it, was a precursor of this moment.

"Jesus Freak" articulated the way the evangelical church thought of itself: marginal, scorned by mainstream culture, and, importantly, the victim of violence rather than its agent. The song's speaker aligns himself with two characters. The first is a shirtless street preacher with "Jesus Saves" tattooed on his stomach, who we can assume disturbs the people he attempts to convert—we've all passed such a street preacher, careful to avoid eye contact. The second character is John the Baptist, who is also scorned. "The words that he spoke made the people assume / There wasn't too much left in the upper room," the song continues. But John had more to deal with than an audience rolling its eyes: Herod has him executed. Here lies the crucial sleight-of-hand of the song: we move seamlessly from a man who presumably retains the freedoms of speech and religion (even if his audience ridicules him), to a man assassinated by the state for expressing his religious beliefs. The song conflates criticism of Christianity with the persecution of Christianity. It elevates the eccentric to the status of martyr.

This song dominated Christian radio stations, in part because it actually was really catchy. If lines like "My best friend was born in a manger" didn't make you cringe, it was a decent grunge-rock song. But it also voiced the evangelical church's anxieties and, in so doing, provided a solution to those anxieties. The more secular mainstream culture supposedly became, the less cool it was to be an evangelical. How would the church retain its young believers? Enter DC Talk, who said, "No, you're never going to be seen as cool for being a Christian. But this very marginalization will be your mark of pride." The band encouraged evangelicals to reject the category of cool altogether—and what's cooler than not caring how people see you? To call yourself a Jesus Freak would mean that you would beat your atheist classmates to the punch. "What will people think when they hear that I'm a Jesus Freak?" The speaker answers his own question: "I don't really care."

After the release of the song, DC Talk stayed on the martyr kick. They partnered with the Voice of the Martyrs, an organization for persecuted Christians around the world, to publish *Jesus Freaks: Stories of Those Who Stood for Jesus, the Ultimate Jesus Freaks*, a collection of accounts of Christian martyrs ranging from ancient Rome to contemporary China. They published a sequel and a daily devotional in the same

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vein. These books encouraged young Christians to repeatedly ask themselves what they would do if faced with the command to deny their faith. As I look back on my reading of these books as a teenager, it now seems self-indulgent to fantasize about such a moral dilemma; there are so many pressing social problems—that are actually happening, right here and right now—that demand a response from me. But at the time, I thought I had to be prepared to suffer for my faith, even in the United States. I remember a pastor saying that he could imagine a future where an American could be jailed just for being a Christian. Why did he think this, and why didn't it strike me as absurd?

The evangelical martyr complex, one increasingly shared by other Christians in the United States, can be traced to two types of misunderstandings. This first misunderstanding is the evangelicals' appropriation of the early church's persecution—a kind of interpretive anachronism. In the beginning of the Jesus movement, the Roman Empire put Christians to death for preaching a faith that left no room for worship of the emperor. Its victims included most of the twelve apostles and, of course, Jesus himself. But when Constantine converted and became emperor in 312 AD, this dynamic reversed. Not only did the Roman Empire end its persecution of Christians, it adopted Christianity as its official religion.

In John 15:18–19, Jesus tells his disciples: "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you." Early Christians would have heard these words and thought of the often brutal physical harm they faced. Today in the United States, Christians read these words and might fear trans-inclusive policies or lament the ubiquity of political correctness. Others focus more specifically on the legal tangle surrounding if or when conservative Christians can deny service to gays and lesbians. The problem is that, in all these cases, invoking the early Christians who were beaten, crucified, and killed does nothing but distort the place of conservative Christians in the United States. The white suburban evangelical is not the poor convert on the margins of the Roman Empire, yet too many Christians have lost none of this sense of being the outcast.

The second misunderstanding sustaining the martyr complex relates to the way evangelical and other conservative Christians interpret their eroded hegemony as evidence of persecution. This argument begins with that familiar sentence: "America is a Christian nation." Although the American colonies flirted with theocracy, the writers of the Constitution settled on a secular state with no established religion. But Christians often struggle to recognize that, although Christianity has always been the majority religion in the United States, this does not grant it any special status in the eyes of the government. Christianity's primacy is a historical fact about our culture, not a mandate for our politics.

Here is where Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" comes into play. It's easy to see how the slogan harks back to a whiter and more racially segregated America. But evangelicals may also be thinking of a past when there was prayer in public schools, gay marriage was illegal, there wasn't any mainstream discussion of trans rights, and, of course, you'd only hear "Merry Christmas" during what we now call "the holidays." Conservative Christians see religious pluralism—and the state's reflection of that pluralism—as encroaching on their right to practice their own faith. This response to social change mirrors the logic of the white nationalist, who views immigration as an assault on "white culture" and interracial marriage as a form of genocide. Those in the dominant group see the inclusion of minorities as an attack on their rights, rather than a demand for basic fairness and justice.

I first started thinking about this martyr complex in 2013, when I read a story on a then-college student at the University of Arizona who called himself Brother Dean. His "ministry" consisted of standing on the sidewalks of campus and preaching about the evils of extramarital sex, feminism, and homosexuality—all in a highly inflammatory way. He once followed around a Take Back the Night demonstration carrying a sign that said, "You deserve rape." Reflecting on his approach in an interview, he seemed aware of the social

TWO POEMS BY LOU ELLA HICKMAN

MARY'S JOURNEY

how did you walk, mary
you, graceful one
after Grace came to dwell within you...
such was your journey
one step then another
unknowing yet known
your journey, ours
one step and then another

MINDFULNESS

itself a koan
ask it
how can you be full
yet
empty

cost of his shocking language, but he managed to justify it by appealing to the Bible. "When I decided to start preaching, I decided that I was willing to give up everything," Brother Dean said. "The preaching puts someone into a wilderness, a wilderness of aloneness. If you decide to do what the Bible says, you will be alone most of the time." In using this language, he was invoking Christ's martyred forerunner, John the Baptist—and in a way that doesn't sound all that different from DC Talk. Brother Dean's rationale demonstrates how Christians can interpret John 15:18–19 to justify offensiveness for its own sake. Jesus' words made people so angry that he got himself killed. If Christians inspire a similar level of rage, they must be imitating Christ. I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you.

This is the theology of the internet troll. Is it any wonder that conservative Christians who think this way could forgive Donald Trump for pretending not to know anything about the Ku Klux Klan to avoid repudiating their support, praising Vladimir Putin for having "very strong control" over his country, suggesting the assassination of his political opponent, and admitting to sexual assault? It's possible that the very fact that Trump provokes such outrage earns him credit in their eyes. He is the brave dissenter in a world of political correctness. He is the natural ally of the Christian who dares to "tell it like it is" in saying that gay men are pedophiles, or that trans people are mentally ill. The more that nonbelievers denounce Christians as backward, the more some Christians are assured of their righteousness. And the more that liberals call Trump "offensive," the more he seems like a friend to the church—even a martyr, perhaps.

Of course, many evangelicals balk at Trump's behavior, particularly when it comes to his misogyny. And we can't talk about the religious vote without acknowledging that many Christians will always vote Republican solely because of their opposition to abortion. I'm not trying to work out the calculus of how we arrived at a Trump electoral victory. But the church has been on the defensive for a long time—especially since the sexual revolution, and that fact is essential for understanding Trump's appeal for evangelicals. Today's conservative Christians condemn unbelievers (or progressive Christians) for violating the Bible's rules of sexuality and gender; when unbelievers express outrage at that condemnation, the church sees itself as persecuted by a regime of political correctness. It's a toxic dynamic, but it certainly benefited a politician who defined himself by his defiance of that political correctness. It's no surprise that evangelicals ally with him, even if that alliance requires tolerating a staggering amount of hypocrisy.

The word "holy" means "set apart." You could say that holy means "other." But from the perspective of the Christian who surrounds himself with other Christians, you could also say that being holy means seeing everyone else as "other." In this sense, the church can see itself as marginalized while in the act of marginalizing others. Understanding how this is possible goes a long way toward explaining the alarming political situation we now face.

"Jesus Freak" was the anti-establishment ballad for good, abstinent Christian kids, in which the cool kids were the establishment and the church was the revolution. I remember feeling pretty cool while listening to it, but now it mostly makes me sad. I didn't think to question the gulf that exists between hurt feelings and violent persecution. And now that my generation of evangelicals is all grown up with a President Trump, there's no guarantee they'll learn to make that distinction either. One would think that Trump's election would prove that political correctness hardly rules with an iron fist, but that's no reason to think that the martyr complex will weaken. We may be entering a baffling era when evangelicals continue to cast themselves as martyrs even as their man, Vice President Mike Pence, whispers into Trump's ear and Steve "Church Militant" Bannon churns out executive orders—a period when the evangelical Christian fantasizes about dying under Diocletian even while living under Constantine. It's possible to see yourself as a victim while you're assaulting others' civil rights. And it's possible, as Constantine did, to march into battle under the sign of the cross and fail to notice the irony. ■

Celia Wren

Armed & Musical

'MOZART IN THE JUNGLE'

Art and commerce have long been at war, but the battle is rarely fought at a toxic-waste facility with a pair of dueling pistols—as it is in the delightful Amazon series *Mozart in the Jungle*. In season one, an episode opens with the spectacle of an eco-anarchist violinist performing at a toxic-waste dump, a site she obviously sees as the antithesis of a bourgeois concert hall. With a crazed look in her eye, she grabs two pistols, fires at a music staff printed on a banner, seizes her violin, and plays the bullet holes as if they were notes. "F*** the system!" she shrieks, as a coda to the music.

The scene is a perfect example of how satire blends with sheer whimsy in *Mozart in the Jungle*, which chronicles the personalities and antics backstage at a (fictional) New York symphony orchestra. Recently renewed for a fourth season, the streamable series shifts through a spectrum of comedy and drama as it follows, among other figures, a young oboist named Hailey (Lola Kirke). The show spoofs the predicament of contemporary arts organizations torn between artistic ideals and financial realities. (A tell-all memoir by oboist Blair Tindall inspired the series.)

A central character is the orchestra's conductor Rodrigo (Gael García Bernal), the estranged husband of Ana Maria, the eco-anarchist violinist (Nora Arnezeder). A charismatic and supremely impractical genius, Rodrigo chafes at the need to fundraise, an attitude that places him at odds with the orchestra's anxious head trustee, Gloria (Bernadette Peters). Further complicating the situation is the shadow cast by the orchestra's conductor emeritus, the crotchety Thomas (Malcolm McDowell), who is trying to reinvent himself as a composer. In one droll scene, Rodrigo, Thomas, and several other music luminaries show up in ridiculous-looking body suits studded with motion-capture sensors to participate in the creation of an orchestral-conductor video game. The game will "open up a whole youth market for us," a management representative assures Rodrigo, shortly before the session devolves into an inter-maestro fistfight.

If the satire often echoes reality—a strike-related plotline in seasons two and three echoes the labor battles that have recently shaken many American orchestras—*Mozart* can also be pleasingly unpredictable. You might expect the numerous cameos by real-life classical stars, including Joshua Bell, Emanuel Ax (glimpsed playing a video game in a bar), and Los Angeles Philharmonic music director Gustavo Dudamel. But you might not expect to encounter the dead composers (Mozart, Tchaikovsky, et al.) who materialize—in period attire—for regular chats with Rodrigo. You might be startled when a key plotline involves a curse.

The mercurial personality of Rodrigo (whose celebrity wattage is based on Dudamel's) helps keep the narrative moving. As channeled by García Bernal, who delivers his lines in persuasively off-the-cuff tones, the *maté*-quaffing conductor is a disarming dreamer. It seems wholly in character when he invites a drum circle into his Manhattan apartment; or invites the erratic Ana Maria to play Sibelius at an important concert (bad idea!). In season three, Rodrigo shepherds his musicians to the jail complex on Rikers Island, where they perform an all-Messiaen program. In a nice out-of-left-field touch, the episode takes the form of a documentary shot by a nerdy music journalist (Jason Schwartzman), and it comes complete with pretentious camera angles and an arty title ("Not Yet Titled"). Reportedly filmed at the real Rikers, the episode resonates in part because Rodrigo is just the kind of capricious optimist who would want to bring Messiaen to convicts.

With the iconoclastic Rodrigo and the up-and-coming Hailey as principal protagonists, and the disoriented Thomas skulking in the background, *Mozart* portrays an old order giving way to a new one. It seems apt that the show arrives on Amazon, one of many recently launched streaming services that are remaking the entertainment industry. Like Ana Maria, the new channels can be unpredictable, but they sometimes hit a bullseye. ■

Rodrigo & Mozart

AMAZON.COM

Adam Driver in Paterson

AMAZON STUDIOS / BLEECKER STREET

Richard Alleva

Grounded

'PATERSON'

Recently I wrote of *Manchester by the Sea* that one "rarely comes across a film that captures the drift and flow of daily life and conveys its pungent poetry." Yet, hard upon the release of *Manchester* comes *Paterson*, which not only captures that drift and flow but slows it down, dwelling in the doldrums that most films sail through. Here is a movie that embraces banality so pertinaciously that the ordinary becomes nearly mesmerizing. *Manchester*, after all, was about what happens when a crisis, the premature death of a beloved brother, interrupts daily life, but *Paterson* depicts a week in which nothing much happens to its hero, and shows us how his vocation actually depends on uneventfulness. When a small catastrophe finally strikes at the end of the week, a bit of mysticism out of key with the rest of the movie saves the day.

Paterson is the name of our hero, played by Adam Driver. It is also the name of the northern New Jersey city where he lives and works as a bus driver. Finally, Paterson is the title and setting of William Carlos Williams's verse epic of the commonplace. Paterson himself writes poetry in his spare time. His poems, like those of Williams, that laureate of red wheelbarrows and white chickens, use spare language to turn the mundane into the memorable. The quotidian provides our bus-driving bard not only with his raw material but also with the steady emotional climate he needs in order to practice his art.

Paterson's workday schedule is unvaried. He rises every morning at approximately the same time beside his attractive and effervescent Iranian-American wife Laura, eats the same breakfast (Cheerios), and walks through his grungy but friendly neighborhood to work. (It's not incidental that he possesses neither cellphone nor car. He's grounded in more ways than one.) At the bus depot Paterson takes over from a fellow driver who invariably complains about the same humdrum problems. Paterson drives all morning and afternoon, comes home to supper, chats with his wife, walks his English bulldog Marvin as far as the nearest bar, where he has a beer or two while interacting with the curmudgeonly owner Doc (Barry Shabaka Henley) and some regulars. And so to bed. It's banality *in excelsis.*

But by spotting tiny anomalies within the banality, Paterson finds the subjects of his poetry, and by observing Paterson carefully, writer-director Jim Jarmusch

achieves a peculiar, low-temperature cinematic poetry. The act of noticing is at the heart of both our hero's art and the filmmaker's method. When Paterson takes his place behind the wheel, he's in an ideal place for observation; his seat perches him high above cars and pedestrians, and the front window has the shape, if not the size, of a cinemascope movie screen. The talented cinematographer Frederick Elmes's camera becomes the gaze of our hero as he surveys the streets, sidewalks, and people, as well as all the establishments—bars, locksmith, post office, schools—that have somehow survived urban collapse. The visuals never sugarcoat faces or objects but discover the beauty within the grunge.

Paterson's ears are as open as his eyes. As he drives, he hears two young male passengers talking about the sexual conquests they came close to the night before and inventing excuses for not following through, even though the ladies in question "wanted it, oh yeah, they were definitely hot for it." Both we and Paterson can hear the sexual insecurity beneath the macho boasts, and this is underscored by a quick close-up of the scuffed shoes of these underachievers. Then, as a capper, a brief shot of a girl getting off the bus registers her scornful glance at the losers. We're never treated to a Paterson poem about this incident, but we know it will make its way into one sooner or later.

Sometimes Paterson's noticing leads to a certain disquiet. At home, he admires the frosting design that his wife, an aspiring pastry cook, has squiggled on her latest batch of cupcakes. Then he looks up and sees the same design on the curtains she's sewn and the dresses she's made. Laura is both multi-talented and scatterbrained (she dreams of being a country singer even though she has trouble learning the lyrics of "Old Macdonald"), but a certain innocent monomania is evident in everything she creates. If her husband is good at spotting variations within sameness, Laura, his complementary opposite, seems to see the same patterns in very different objects.

Why is this cinematic compendium of minutiae not boring? (Or at least not boring to those willing to get on its wavelength.) First, just as the lightning-fast editing and a thunderous soundtrack of an action movie jazzes you up and keeps you hungering for more and more violence, Jarmusch's tempo, maintained through lengthy two-shots and conventional close-ups of people in quiet conversations, slows your metabolism down. Instead of hungering for action, you start responding to whatever Paterson notices, quirks of speech as well as visual anomalies—as when Doc's wife storms into his bar and upbraids him for raiding the household money for a chess tournament's entrance fee. "Tournament! You're gonna need a tourniquet if you don't put back that money!" In Paterson, anyone may turn out to be a poet.

The other way this film avoids tedium is by showing us that, though its protagonist is a strictly no-drama guy (and Adam Driver, a master of droll detachment, has never been cast to better effect), there is drama happening all around him. Throughout the movie Paterson observes the ongoing deterioration of a love affair between two bar regulars—the bombastically romantic actor Everett and the attractive, restless Marie. This conflict keeps mounting until it seems ready to explode into violence; instead, it ends in anticlimactic farce. There's also a struggling rapper who turns a laundromat into a rehearsal room, some menacing gangbangers who just might have dognapping intentions toward Marvin, and a little girl who entrances our hero with her own talent for poetry. (Her poem is by Jarmusch himself, while Paterson's poems were written by the poet Ron Padgett.)

Paterson never strays into melodrama. I suspect its detractors would say that it also never ascends into drama. Though I love high drama and low melodrama and can't get enough of Shakespeare and James Bond and Italian opera, I found this blissed-out sloth of a movie to be an admirably eccentric experience. ■

Tzvi Novick

The First Christian?

Judas
A Novel
Amos Oz
Translated by Nicholas de Lange
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, $25, 320 pp.

Amos Oz's latest novel, *Judas*, makes for a somewhat unpleasant read. Not a bad read, but a masochistic one. The sort you might take in when you are trapped in a house with an older woman and a still older man who have, by a combination of circumstance and choice, withdrawn from life. When you are shut in by a winter of unrelenting rain, the kind of winter in which, as Oz writes in his novelistic memoir, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, his own mother took her life. It spins a story that might speak to you at night, in a moment of crisis, of transition, at the point when the future you had envisioned for yourself has fallen from view, and a new vision of the future has not yet come into focus. If you are the protagonist of Oz's novel, the young man in his moment of crisis, and not the older folk who have become their crises, this moment passes. The rains end, you leave behind the house. The things you carry from that house are not without truth, but their truth is the truth of winter, which is after all only one season, and perhaps not the most interesting one at that.

The book's protagonist is Shmuel Ash. In Hebrew, his surname, *ash* (written with an initial *alef*), is homonymous with *ash* "moth" (written with an initial *ayin*), the biblical symbol of decay. When Shmuel shows up at the house in which almost all of the novel takes place and introduces himself to one of its inhabitants, the old invalid Gershom Wald, the latter wonders whether Shmuel's surname in fact begins with an *ayin*. (The book's skilled translator, Nicholas de Lange, makes a brilliant but only partially successful attempt to render this pun in English.) The basic mood is thus set: we are in the midst of decay, and our protagonist, Ash with an *alef*, is caught up in it, but ultimately not a part of it.

Ash himself notes, in the same conversation with Wald, that he is unrelated to "the well-known writer Scholem Asch," and through this only literally true denial, Oz sets the stage for the basic conceit that drives the book and underlies the title (*Judas* in English, but in Hebrew: *The Gospel According to Judas*). For Scholem Asch owes part of his (now eclipsed) fame to a series of historical novels on the rise of Christianity, published between 1939 and 1949. Oz's Shmuel Ash is likewise working on a master's thesis at Hebrew University on the history of Jewish views of Jesus. But he has reached an impasse, and when his long-time girlfriend abruptly announces that she is leaving him to marry a previous boyfriend, Ash decides to withdraw from his program, and to pursue a job posting. His unusual task: to pass a few hours every night in intellectual conversation with the aforementioned Wald.

The house is not in fact Wald's; it belongs to the family Abravanel. As Ash later discovers, Wald's son, Micha, had been married to Atalia Abravanel until Micha's death in Israel's War of Independence. After this tragedy, the

Giotto, The Arrest of Christ (Kiss of Judas), *circa 1305*

Abravanel family—Atalia and her father Shealtiel—took in Wald. Now, some ten years on, Shealtiel is dead, Wald is old and infirm, and Atalia is a confirmed misandrist who finds grim satisfaction, in her work as a private investigator, in exposing infidelity and betrayal.

Over the course of a wet winter, nothing much happens. Ash reflects further on Jesus, and vainly attempts to woo Atalia. He becomes intrigued by her past. Shealtiel, her father, had served on the Zionist Executive Committee, but was forced to resign because he opposed the creation of a Jewish state. For Shealtiel, Jews and Arabs ought to live together in Palestine outside the framework of a state, and model a stateless ideal. "They all thought he was crazy. People abused and reviled him, they called him a traitor, they called him an Arab-lover." As Wald and especially Ash interpret the Gospel story over the course of their conversations, Shealtiel emerges as both a Jesus figure and a Judas figure. A Jesus figure, because he preached an attractive but politically impractical message of love and mutual understanding. And a Judas figure, because he was a traitor to his people out of pure motives. For Judas too, on Ash's view, did not betray Jesus for vicious or venal reasons. He betrayed him, rather, precisely because he was "the first Christian. The last Christian. The only Christian." Judas had become convinced, more convinced than Jesus himself, that Jesus was the Son of God. He arranged for Jesus' crucifixion in the firm expectation that Jesus would descend from the cross and prove his divinity. And when he discovered his error, and thus his guilt, he hanged himself.

Betrayals, sometimes real, sometimes apparent, and often murky, populate the book. Wald himself is Shealtiel's opposite, a man who thinks of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's founding father, as "the greatest Jewish leader of all time" because he was "a clearheaded, sharp-sighted man who understood a long time ago that the Arabs will never accept our presence here of their own free will." And yet Wald, too, is a Judas insofar as he sends his son, Micah, to his death. Not for nothing does Wald appear to Ash, at one point early in the story, "like a hanged man with a broken neck." And despite (or perhaps because of) his opposition to Shealtiel, Wald has a fondness for the prophet Jeremiah, who "betrayed" his people by urging them to reconcile themselves to Babylonian rule. Likewise, Ash's grandfather—a Tobiansky-like figure—was executed by the Jewish underground as a traitor spying for the British, even though he was in fact, Ash insists, a double agent working for the underground.

Ash gets out of the house at the end of the novel. Or more precisely, he is pushed out by Atalia, who knows what is best for him, and for us. We get the impression that he will manage to put the house behind him, as he let go of his master's thesis, although we cannot be altogether sure; the novel ends with a question, with Ash in a Beersheba village street, on his way to the new town of Mitzpe Ramon, standing and "wondering" (literally: "asking himself"). The reader, too, is left wondering. What does this rainy, claustrophobic novel leave us with?

While the answer to this question will vary from one reader to the next, readers of *Commonweal* will naturally take particular interest in the book's use of the figure of Judas. The aforementioned Scholem Asch, author of the trilogy on the Gospels, is but one of many modern Jews who have attempted to recover Jesus for Judaism, especially by highlighting his ethical teachings. Among the most prominent figures in this recovery project was Oz's great-uncle, Joseph Klausner, whose life of Jesus was published in Hebrew in 1922, "the first time such a work has been attempted in Hebrew with neither satiric nor apologetic bias," in the words of Herbert Danby, who translated the book into English in 1926. Danby notes, in his preface, that Klausner's nuanced account of Jesus is facilitated by Zionism: "The Jewish nationalist historian, resident at last in Palestine, assured of the safety of his national life, feels himself free to scan the whole range of his nation's life in Palestine, and he no longer thinks it a danger to look with open eyes at the persons and events which ushered in the Christian age."

Now Oz, Klausner's great-nephew, takes up Jesus' betrayer, Judas, as a vehicle to think through the Zionist project's corollary, the Arab problem. Many modern writers have put forward revisionist, sympathetic portraits of Judas. One thinks, for example, of the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*, or of Jorge Luis Borges's short story, "Three Versions of Judas." What is different about Oz's case is that here we find a Jewish author offering such a portrait. This should strike one as odd. The wicked characters whom we moderns like to revise and to complicate are those of our own traditions, the black ciphers that populate the stories we tell our own. But what has Judas to do with Judaism? Writing a revisionist history of Judas would seem to be a task for Christians, and until now, it has been. That Oz puts his Jewish shoulder to this task is indicative of the degree to which (some) Jews already perceive the Jesus of the Gospels as their own.

It might also be understood as a desperate gambit amid the dimmed prospects for near-term peace between Israel and Palestine. Oz is a founding member of the activist organization Peace Now. The two-state solution for which this organization advocates seems more distant now, the political divisions sharper now, than they have been in the recent past. Perhaps Oz, by choosing Judas as his lens on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, means to invoke the violent history of Christian anti-Semitism as a warning against the sort of black-and-white thinking that often underlies accusations of betrayal. Perhaps Oz is suggesting that violence can be averted, peace won, if only we appreciate that as much as Jesus was Jewish, so Judas was Christian. ■

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Jeffrey Meyers

Hurt into Literature

Kafka
The Early Years
Reiner Stach, translated by Shelley Frisch
Princeton University Press, $35, 564 pp.

This first volume of Kafka's life covers the years from 1883 to 1911, just before his creative breakthrough in 1912 with "The Judgment" and "The Metamorphosis." The translator's useful preface explains why this book was published *after* volumes 2 and 3. The unusual order "was dictated by years of high-profile legal wrangling for control of [his friend] Max Brod's literary estate in Israel, during which access to its materials...was barred to scholars." The translator writes that Reiner Stach's biography "offers a panoramic view of Franz Kafka's life in its socioeconomic, political, religious, artistic, cultural, linguistic, pedagogical, bureaucratic, and even medical dimensions." Stach describes "what it was like to be Kafka, a German Jew with a Czech passport in the declining years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire who faced the drudgery of work at an insurance institute while straining to find his path as a writer." The distinguished German novelist W. G. Sebald condemned the "dust, mold, and unrewarding redundant verbiage on every page" of Kafka studies since the 1950s. But Stach's authoritative biography is the great exception. His mastery of complex material, scrupulous examination of evidence, illuminating portrayal of the historical and intellectual background ranks with Joseph Frank's superb five-volume life of Dostoyevsky.

Kafka's name in Czech means "jackdaw," a small black bird in the crow family, gregarious and vocal. He was completely bilingual, and though German was his mother tongue, he felt Czech was a "much more affectionate" language. He was educated by the Piarist Fathers when Catholicism was the dominant religion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Czech majority in Prague was Protestant. Thomas Mann's story "Tonio Kröger" satirized the kind of children's dancing classes that Kafka was forced to attend and described the powerful influence of Schiller's plays that Kafka also studied. Jews made up 10 percent of the Prague population, and the Judaism of Kafka's family was more social than religious. His boring preparation for his bar mitzvah demanded no more than "ridiculous memorizing" and he called it "a kind of skit in which he got to play the lead role for one day." He soon forgot the little Hebrew he had learned.

The adult Kafka had a tall, skinny, scarecrow physique. He was five feet, eleven inches tall, but weighed only 134 pounds. So it's surprising to discover that he was an athlete. He took long hikes, rode a bicycle, loved swimming and rowing in rivers and lakes, played tennis, and went horseback riding. But even before he contracted the tuberculosis that killed him at the age of forty, he felt that his body was a stranger, even a threat, an enemy that had to be transcended or rejected. His vegetarian diet and crankish naturopathy, his hosing and mud cures and drafts of sulphuric water at many German spas didn't improve his health. In "The Metamorphosis" the pathetic hero sheds his body like a carapace and experiences a sudden physical change and shocking rebirth: "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect."

Kafka's unhealthy corporal attitude inevitably affected his active but usually disappointing sex life. His own room in the family flat was an awkward passageway between the parlor and his parents' bedroom, and when he saw their bedcovers turned down by the maid

he wanted to vomit. His own sexual activity wavered between indulging in unrequited fantasies and running the nightmarish risks of venereal disease. The virgin Kafka's first encounter with a prostitute offended his fastidious nature when she emphasized, with an unmentionably crude word, their squalid connection. (By contrast, the more unbuttoned James Joyce told his wife that he was sexually excited by "a sudden dirty word spluttered out by your wet lips.") Kafka ungraciously described the buck teeth, prognathous jaw, and columnar legs of his first lover, whom he seduced when nothing better turned up in a summer resort.

Stach is especially acute on Kafka's demanding job at the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute in Prague. He "had to enforce a complex and abstract concept of safety that assumed a fundamentally stable world" as the empire hurtled toward an apocalyptic war. A specialist in accidents at the workplace, he represented the interests of the insured as opposed to their employers'. While "working on risk classes and percentages, determining insurance premiums, and employing judicial and rhetorical means to handle disputes with businessmen who were unwilling to pay," he conducted essential interviews and inspections throughout Bohemia.

In September 1911—with King Vittorio Emanuele, Gabriele D'Annunzio, and Giacomo Puccini in attendance—Kafka and Brod watched a spectacular air show in northern Italy, sixty miles east of Milan. His detailed and sparkling account in "The Aeroplanes at Brescia" emphasized the fragility of the flying machines: "Up there, some 70 ft. above the earth, there is a man, captive in a wooden frame, fending off an invisible danger he has freely taken on." While in Brescia, the two tourists came up with the innovative idea of publishing travel guides (foreshadowing those of today) that would rival or even replace the stodgy but dominant Baedekers. Their guides would provide information about "practical obstacles, local conditions, the experiences of previous" visitors as well as handy hints about erotic and sexual entertainment. Unfortunately, their plan never took off.

Kafka's literary technique introduced the element of fantasy into realistic narration. He declared that he was made of, not for, literature and famously believed that a book must release the author's innermost feelings and "be the axe for the frozen sea within us." Strach's discussion of the key document of Kafka's youth, *Letter to His Father* (1919), which (luckily) his father never read or even heard about, could be considerably expanded. In this unequal struggle Franz was sure to be defeated by his overpowering father, who never understood his weak adversary and anointed heir. The crucial event in this work is the exact opposite of the mother's comforting goodnight kiss in Proust's *Swann's Way*.

Franz Kafka as pupil before 1900

As the young Franz kept whimpering for water, he later recalled, his father "took me out of bed, carried me onto the *pavlatche* [balcony], and left me there alone for a while in my nightshirt, outside the shut door." The shut door recalls the parable "Before the Law" in *The Trial*, where the hopeless character wastes a lifetime waiting outside the door through which he will never be admitted. Kafka concludes, "Even years afterwards I suffered from the tormenting fancy that the huge man, my father, the ultimate authority, would come for me almost for no reason at all...and that meant I was a mere nothing for him." But Franz's whimpering and the feeling that he "was a mere nothing" do not explain his father's true feelings in this traumatic event. Kafka concedes that his father would have said, "Is that all you're so worked up about?" He was never beaten or abused, but the quivering nerve endings of the sensitive child, abducted from the warmth and security of his bed, turn a comparatively trivial incident into a searing condemnation of paternal cruelty. Franz probably continued to whimper until, after his mother's pleas, one of his parents rescued him and brought him back inside.

The other crucial incident took place when Franz and his father were undressing in the same small bathing hut. "I was," he recalled, "weighed down by your mere physical presence." Ashamed of his own body and frightened by his father's, he added, "There was I, skinny, weakly, slight; you strong, tall, broad." Behind Franz's fear and trembling was the injunction in Leviticus 18:7—"the nakedness of thy father shalt thou not uncover" and the intimidating sight of his father's large sexual organs. His father's overwhelming presence provoked Franz's negative feelings—weakness, frailty, fear, and guilt—and it was precisely these qualities that hurt him into literature. Kafka's dominant themes are isolation, fear and failure, loneliness, torment, and guilt. His characters are like porcupines who are too cold if they stand alone and who wound each other if they move too close together. ■

Jeffrey Meyers *is the author of* Remembering Iris Murdoch, Thomas Mann's Artist-Heroes , Robert Lowell in Love, *and* The Mystery of the Real: Correspondence with Alex Colville, *among other books.*

James L. Fredericks

Here All Along

Muslims and the Making of America

Amir Hussain
Baylor University Press, $24.95, 132 pp.

In this short, readable book, Amir Hussain does not predict that Islam will flourish in the United States. This prediction has often been made, usually as part of an argument that Islamic and American values are compatible. Instead, Hussain has set out to prove that, far from being merely compatible with American values, Muslims have been at the center of the creation of American popular culture.

In itself, Hussain's claim is of interest. But I suspect that this book may be more significant than it seems at first. Knowledgeable observers like Graham Fuller and Ian Lesser have argued that Muslim communities in the United States are more likely to influence their countries of origin than the other way around, a view that is decidedly out of step with the Islamophobia of the Trump era. If Fuller and Lesser are right, then Hussain may be putting his finger on a phenomenon of lasting significance for our future: the influence that American Muslims have on their off-shore coreligionists will be driven in no small part by the fact that American Muslims have had a hand in the making of American pop culture.

Hussain was born in Pakistan, reared and educated in Toronto, and now teaches at the Jesuit university in Los Angeles. Besides his professorial duties in the classroom, he has found time to serve as editor for the journal of the American Academy of Religion. (He is also, I should alert the reader, a friend and colleague at Loyola Marymount University.)

Hussain wants to call into question three assumptions many Americans have about Muslims. First, that Muslims are newcomers to these shores. Second, that Muslims have brought a faith that is foreign to American ideals, and third, that Muslims are a threat to America. Thus the book is nothing if not timely, given the fact that we have officials in the Trump administration that have tweeted that "Fear of Muslims is RATIONAL."

Ahmet M. Ertegun

In recounting the history of Muslims in the United States, Hussain of course tells the story of Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan, and the Nation of Islam. But we also learn that fully 10 percent of the slaves that survived the Middle Passage were Muslims. The first mosque that can be historically documented was built in 1915 in Biddleford, Maine. But we should assume that Muslim slaves were gathering for Friday prayer in the cotton fields of the South centuries before this. Park51, the so-called "ground-zero mosque," was not allowed to be built. However, if it had been built, it would not have been the first mosque in lower Manhattan. There was a mosque south of 14th Street long before the Twin Towers were erected. Moreover, one of the chief engineers who built the towers was a Muslim, Frazlur Rahman Khan.

Hussain also tells the story of Ahmet Ertegun. In 1944, Ertegun decided to remain in Washington after the death of his father, the first Turkish ambassador to the United States. Ertegun had become an ardent fan of jazz and decided to start a record company after the war, once shellac was no longer rationed. Atlantic Records brought us jazz greats as different as Sidney Bechet, Dizzy Gillespie, and the Modern Jazz Quartet. The label also went on to give us rhythm and blues artists like Ray Charles. Ertegun had an ear not only for what music Americans would buy, but also for the music they should listen to in the future.

Hussain also documents conversions to Islam. Art Blakey became a Muslim in the 1940s. Not many of us are aware that his Jazz Messengers is a reference to the messengers (*rusul*) sent by God to give guidance to human beings. The impact of American Muslims on American music, and for that matter, world music, can also be seen in hip-hop and rap. Artists like Everlast, Busta Rhymes, Yasiin Bay, and the Perez Brothers are converts to Islam. Miss Undastood performs wearing the hijab. Perhaps with only a little exaggeration, Hussein can claim that "Islam is hip-hop's official religion."

Hussain looks at American sports as well. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar converted to Islam after reading the *Autobiography of Malcom X* for a class at UCLA. To date, the most prominent American Muslim ever is Mohammed Ali. He became a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War for reasons of faith

and held his course after being arrested and stripped of his titles, only to have the conviction overturned by the Supreme Court.

Hussain's book is not an American Muslim version of John Courtney Murray's *We Hold These Truths*. His goal is not to work out a comprehensive theological vision of Islam in critical dialogue with American civil society and political institutions. A book like Murray's remains for Hussain to write. Moreover, we need to hear more from Hussain as to what it is about Muslim faith that sets the contributions of these American Muslims apart as Muslim. There is something at once both Catholic and American in films like Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* and Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull*. Besides her *hijab*, what is it about Miss Undastood's faith that is discernable in her hip-hop?

Hussain saves his most intriguing comment until last. He draws our attention away from Muslim Americans of renown, toward the ordinary Americans who embrace the "straight path" and who "live lives that give the lie to the popular prejudices that surround them." These ordinary Americans are not violent or misogynist. They have repeatedly denounced terrorism. They in no way pose a threat to their country. In fact, these Muslim Americans are "an American success story" in a way that distinguishes them from the European and Canadian Muslim communities. What are we to say about this story of Muslim success? Muslims are taking their rightful place alongside Italian, Irish, Polish, and Mexican Catholics in the United States. And, once again, we see that the unspoken hope of the immigrant is also the immigrant's wildest ambition. Certainly, the immigrant hopes that his dreams might find fertile soil and take root in these United States. But the hopes of the immigrant are considerably more ambitious. The immigrant hopes that his very success in realizing his dreams will show to America what is best within it. ■

James L. Fredericks *is an emeritus professor at Loyola Marymount University.*

Paul Lauritzen

Oh the Places We'll Go

Future Humans

Inside the Science of Our Continuing Evolution

Scott Solomon

Yale University Press, $27, 240 pp.

This August, the National Institutes of Health announced that it was considering funding research that involves the creation of human/nonhuman chimeras through the introduction of human pluripotent cells into nonhuman vertebrate embryos. I happened to be teaching about the ethics of human embryonic stem-cell research at the time, and given that the NIH was seeking public comment on this proposed research, I asked my students to write papers commenting on it. Although I provided the class with scientific literature that dispels concerns about this research leading to creatures of the sort found in Greek mythology, my students seemed haunted by what might emerge from the lab of a latter-day Frankenstein. Alas, the cloned monstrosities conjured by my students (and most critics of biotechnology) are matched only by the absurdly utopian visions of transhumanists, who long for a post-human future. Both groups should be required to read Scott Solomon's *Future Humans*.

One problem with both utopian and dystopian visions about the future of humanity is that they can lead us to ignore serious scientific questions about whether humans continue to evolve and, if so, toward what. It is thus a tonic to

Pardis Sabeti

PHOTO BY THATCHER COOK FOR POPTECH FROM CAMDEN, MAINE AND BROOKLYN, NY, USA

find a book like *Future Humans* that takes a sober look at the scientific evidence supporting the claim that humans are continuously evolving and might one day evolve into a different species.

Two sentences from the final chapter of *Future Humans* tell you a lot about this book. "So far," Solomon writes, "our discussion has mostly looked into our relative short-term future—the next thousand generations or so." "What," he continues "are the long-term prospects for our species?" When an author seeks to summarize the likely evolutionary trajectory of humanity and defines the "near-term" of that trajectory as a thousand generations, you know both that the work is ambitious and that you shouldn't expect much in the way of detail about that near-term future, much less about the long-term one.

Nevertheless, Solomon's review of the scientific literature he believes to be most relevant to assessing the likely evolutionary future of humanity is lively and thought-provoking. This literature encompasses a wide range of disciplines, including paleoanthropology, molecular genetics, microbiology, evolutionary psychology, demography, and evolutionary biology. No one scientist can be an expert in all these disciplines, but Solomon's ability to explain complicated science from a variety of fields is impressive.

One technique for engaging a general audience in the details of esoteric science is to describe the scientist behind the science, and Solomon uses this technique to good effect throughout. For example, the book opens with a vivid description of Pardis Sabeti, an academic superstar whose work includes the development of a mathematical model for analyzing gene-sequence data that allows researchers to determine whether natural selection for certain gene variations is recent or ancient. Solomon's account of Sabeti's work is clear, and it is hard not to be interested when you hear her credentials. She was a National Merit Scholar at MIT, a Rhodes scholar at Oxford, and only the third woman ever to graduate from Harvard Medical School *summa cum laude*.

Sabeti's work on the role of malaria as

an agent of natural selection in humans, and her research on Lassa hemorrhagic fever in West Africa led her to a place on the front lines of the Ebola outbreak in May 2014. By August of that year, Sabeti and her colleagues had published the results of their analysis on ninety-nine Ebola genomes her team had collected from seventy-eight different victims. By the time of publication, five of Sabeti's coauthors had died from the virus. Hearing about Sabeti's work on the genetic analysis of malaria, hemorrhagic fever, and Ebola, it is hard to dispute Solomon's claim that infectious diseases have been among the most important influences on our evolutionary history and will likely continue to be so.

Of course, not all the relevant science involves a life-and-death struggle against infectious disease, and Solomon also skillfully walks us through the prosaic work of demographers who have documented natural selection at work in local and isolated communities. For example, Solomon introduces us to the geneticist Emmanuel Milot, who scoured the archives of the Canadian Catholic Church in Quebec City to document natural selection among isolated groups for whom detailed population records were available across several generations. He found the records of one such group in church records for residents of Ile-aux-Coudres, an island off the Saint Lawrence River.

In reviewing these records, Milot noticed that in just a few generations—those living between 1800 and 1939—the average age at which women became mothers dropped from twenty-six to twenty-two. Through a painstaking review of the records and a statistical analysis of these data, Milot was able to determine that this shift was unlikely to have been caused by changes in health, cultural practices, or genetic drift. Instead, the best explanation appears to be natural selection.

If using church records as a tool for documenting natural selection would strike many as surprising, it shouldn't. Indeed, it was first suggested by an Italian priest, Antonio Moroni, in 1951 to the population geneticist and member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza, who then used church records to examine how marriages between relatives affected the distribution of particular genes throughout Italy. Using the rich demographic resource of church records, Cavalli-Sforza and Moroni were able to map genetic drift in all of Italy and to provide a model for understanding the genetic effects of drift and inbreeding.

There are numerous stories like those of Sabeti, Milot, and Cavalli-Sforza in *Future Humans*, and learning the science behind the stories makes the book both enjoyable and worthwhile. It is also generally serious and sober, as a book on this topic ought to be. Still, there are points at which Solomon seems unable to resist the sort of flights of fancy that I complained about at the start. The chapter on genetic selection and "sperm wars" strikes me as wildly speculative, and the book ends with an odd discussion about humans colonizing Mars. Strangely, Solomon wonders whether the Mars colonists might not be the new species toward which we are evolving. These aberrations aside, *Future Humans* is well worth reading. ■

Paul Lauritzen *is Professor of Religious Ethics at John Carroll University. His most recent book is* The Ethics of Interrogation.

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Anonymous, MA
Anonymous, WA
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Mary & Howard Andrews, NJ
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Jill & Pierre Auger, MA
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Connie Zukowski, IL

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Anonymous, IL
Anonymous, MN
Anonymous, NY
Anonymous, NY
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& Stephen J. Callahan, DC
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David Clark, NY
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George D. Cody, NJ
Patrick J. Coffey, WI
Lucy M. Cohen, DC
Edward Cole, MI
Kathryn A. & Ronald L. Cole, IN
Charles M. Coleman, MO
Brigid Coleridge, Australia
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William A. Collier, CT
John M. Collins Jr., CA
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Anne Cummings, NJ
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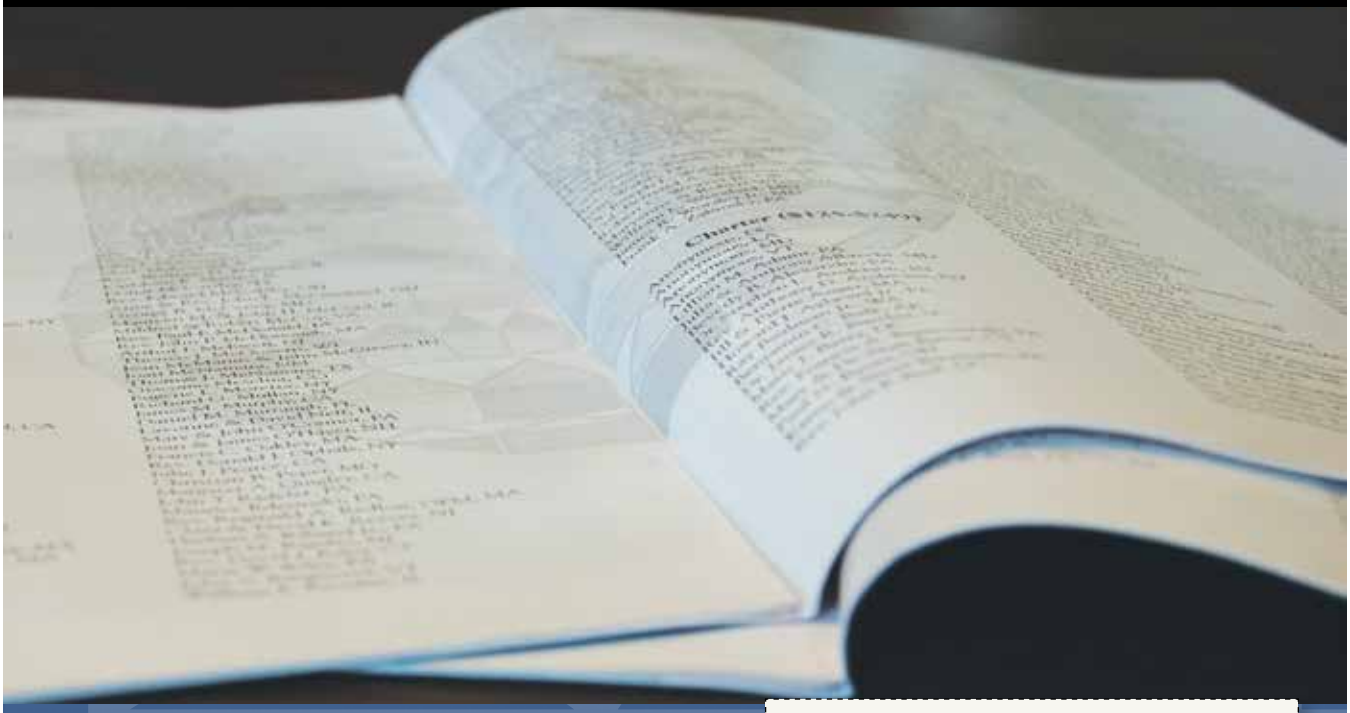

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Unchosen Hardships

Lauren Kosa

It was just after breakfast on Good Friday when I began eyeing the frosted bunny cookie on the kitchen counter. I could swear its googly eyes were peering back at me. "Come on, just a bite," I could almost hear it say.

For all the talk of Catholic guilt, American Catholics get off relatively easy when it comes to fasting. Growing up, I always admired my Jewish friends who fasted on Yom Kippur and Muslim friends who fasted during the whole month of Ramadan. In view of the much more stringent practices of many Jews, Muslims, and Orthodox Christians, I was sure I could at least get through Good Friday with the prescribed fast for American Catholics—one full meal and two smaller meals, with no snacks—and my personal goal of giving up sweets for the day.

I had bought the frosted bunny cookie the day before, in anticipation of Easter. And already, my mind was justifying why I ought to eat it now. I was chasing after my rambunctious toddler. Wasn't there an exception for manual labor? All right, I wasn't exactly wearing a hard hat. But surely my exertion was worth one of the bunny's ear. This is how temptation works. I took a bite. It was delightful.

A priest once reminded me not to judge others, because something easy to you will be difficult for someone else, and vice versa. What's difficult for me is sugar. It calls to me like Bathsheba to David. As I went on with my day, I could have put the cookie up in the cabinet, gone for a walk, anything, but something prevented me. Besides, once the tip of the ear was gone, the next decision was easy. I had to even it out.

Intellectually, I understood fasting. Jesus fasted for forty days in the desert, as Christians have throughout our history. Controlling our appetites brings us closer to God. Fasting should be accompanied by prayer, and prayer can be enhanced by fasting. I knew all this. I just didn't do it.

I learned that day that Catholic guilt can be a rabbit with little eyes staring at you accusingly. You respond in the only way you can. You nibble an arm for dessert in the afternoon. And then the other one an hour later to make it even. And then you feel worse, because—look at the poor thing! By the end of the day, I had put the bunny out of its misery and declared my Lenten fast a failure.

Later that night, my husband and I were awakened by a thud: our toddler had managed to climb out of her crib for the first time. We scrambled to transform her convertible crib to a toddler bed and lost hours finding the tools, doing the repairs so she wouldn't fall again, and soothing her back to sleep.

Since then, I've learned about the difference between active purifications, like fasting, and passive purifications—what God chooses to work in us. If it were left to us, how many would have the strength to choose the hardships we endure? And yet it's often these unchosen hardships that change and strengthen us the most.

As I finally lay down again after we had converted the crib, it occurred to me that although I'd failed at fasting, I could still offer up what was taken from me—sleep. And that got me thinking. It was a revelation to me that even through our failures to make offerings of our own free will, God is always giving us chances to demonstrate joy and acceptance, to be as patient with our lives as he is with us. Even when we fail to keep our resolutions, we can offer up whatever comes to us, and not just during Lent.

Months ago, being awakened for hours in the middle of the night might have left me fuming or wondering how I'd get through the next day. Now, as a more experienced parent, I was able to face it as a matter of course. Maybe God was working something in me after all. The bunny was gone, but I was finally able to drift off with a remarkable sense of peace. A day of Lenten failure had ended with a small revelation. ■

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