A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

Commonweal

MAY 17, 2019

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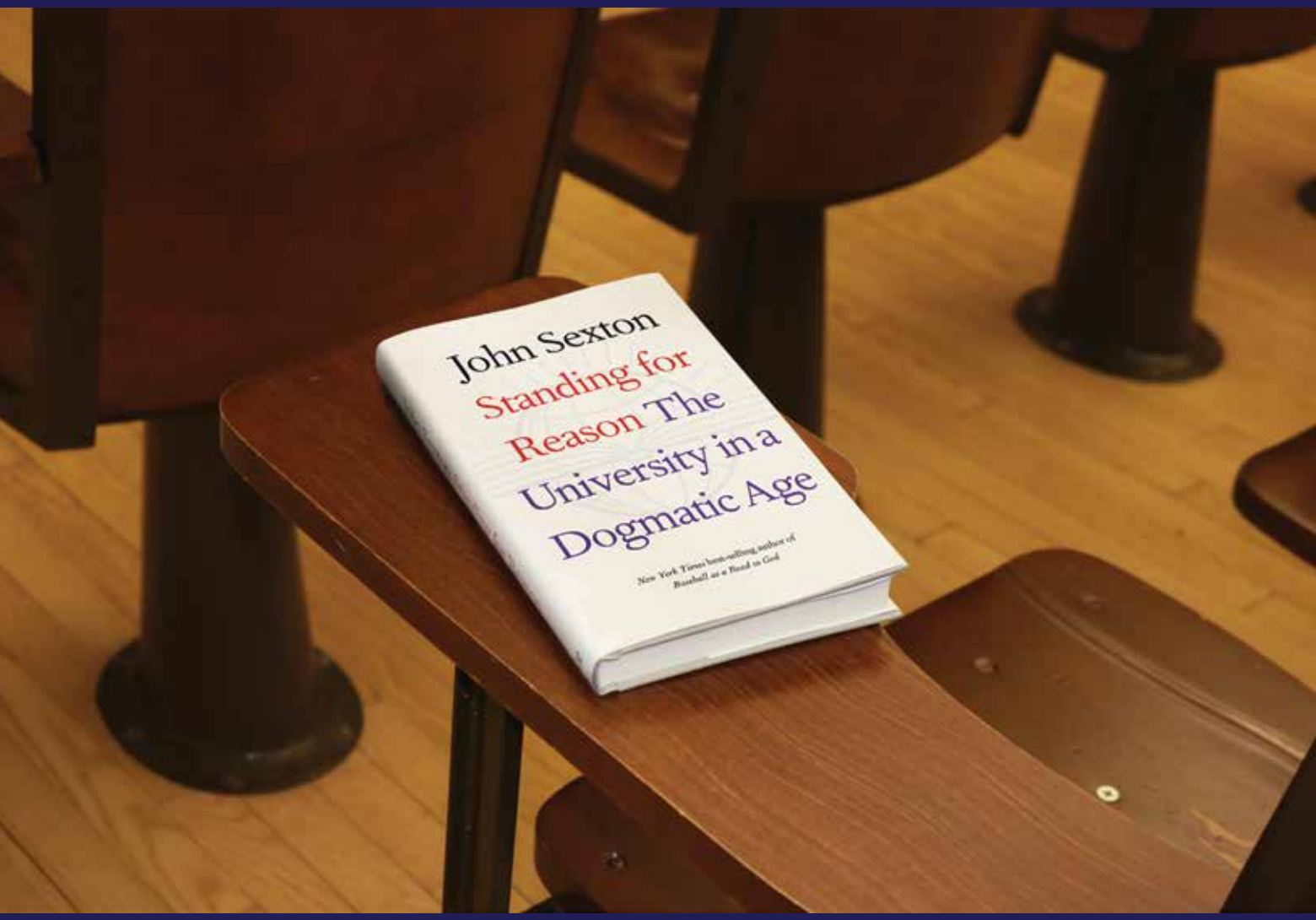

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LETTERS

The decline of the West, taxing the rich

THE GOSPEL BEYOND THE WEST

In his article "A World without the West" (March 22), Andrew Bacevich points to the radical change in the geopolitical order that has been taking place for some time now. Among the features of this change that he mentions are "multipolarity, an Eastward shift of economic and military power, the growing irrelevance of Europe—these plus a precipitous decline in America's global standing." He is to be commended for his perceptiveness and sober realism.

The decline of the West was first announced in recent times by Oswald Spengler in his two-volume work published almost a hundred years ago. *Commonweal* does not centrally deal with the philosophy and theology of history, but there are at least two important aspects of that phenomenon that should concern it as a liberal Catholic journal.

The first is the field of global Christianity. As is well known by now, Europe is a post-Christian continent and the growth of Christianity has stalled in the United States. The spread of Christianity is occurring now in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and we are witnessing new cultural and theological expressions associated with this spread, from various forms of liberation theology to varieties of Pentecostal Christianity. They give rise to articulations that are quite different from the discourse that usually appears in these pages, which, as Bacevich points out, remains sadly stuck both in the past and in a "Western" paradigm.

A second aspect worth heeding is in the areas of religious pluralism and the theology of religions, areas that deal with the encounter of Christianity with non-Christian traditions. These areas bring multiculturalism within the North American context and deal as well with the encounter of different religions and cultures that is a marked feature of the post–World War II religious and social scene. "Whose religion is Christianity?" the late Lamin Sanneh of Yale asked in his exposition of "the Gospel beyond the West." The answer comes in the guise of post-European and post-Western forms of Christian expression that are revolutionizing Christian thought.

Many divinity schools and departments of religious studies in the United States have registered these changes in their courses and curricula. It would serve *Commonweal* well to pay attention to these changes also. If it does not, it risks the danger of parochialism, insensitivity to cultural and historical change.

JOSEPH PRABHU
Professor Emeritus of Philosophy
California State University, Los Angeles

SHAVE AND A HAIRCUT…

Thank you to Charles R. Morris for his column "Time for a Wealth Tax" (April 12). He's absolutely right that Senator Warren's proposed wealth tax is a good idea. However, it may be a little timid. Back in 1981 the 99 percent owned 75 percent of all personal wealth. (Those who crave details will find plenty in the "People's Dividend" petition at Change.org.) Today the 99 percent's share has declined to 60 percent, due to globalization, automation, and the preferential taxation of the owners of financial assets. Warren's proposed wealth tax would generate about $200 billion a year. To get back to 75 percent would take giving the 1 percent an annual haircut sufficient to hold their current share of wealth constant and let the rest of us catch up, about $1.5 to $2 trillion a year. Distributing the haircut's proceeds to everyone in the United States would give every person about $4,500 to $6,000 a year. That might help create a consensus in favor of passing whatever tax laws or constitutional amendments would be necessary to get back to 75 percent.

TOM CLARKSON
Vienna, Va.

The Sri Lankan Martyrs

On the morning of Easter Sunday, April 21, a man walked into St. Anthony's Shrine in the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo, and detonated a bomb during Mass, killing at least fifty people. At almost exactly the same moment twenty miles away, another suicide bomber killed over a hundred worshippers at a church in the predominantly Catholic city of Negombo. Twenty minutes later, a third terrorist, prevented from entering a Protestant church in Batticaloa, blew himself up outside the building, killing twenty-five people, including both churchgoers and passersby. In the next few hours terrorists would also strike three Sri Lankan hotels that cater to foreign tourists. By the time it was over, the wave of coordinated bombings had killed more than 250 people and injured hundreds more, making it one of the deadliest attacks since 9/11. The suicide bombers were all members of a small local Islamist group called the National Thowheed Jama'ath, but authorities believe they were working with the Islamic State, which has taken responsibility for the attacks.

Were it not for egregious failures on the part of Sri Lanka's security forces, it might all have been prevented. Indian officials had warned the Sri Lankan police in early April that local jihadists were planning a major operation targeting Christian churches, but the warning never made it to Sri Lanka's prime minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe. The entire government seemed to be caught off guard. Sri Lanka is used to dealing with mob attacks by Sinhalese Buddhists against religious minorities—including both Muslims and Christians—or bombings orchestrated by Tamil-speaking rebels (mostly Hindus). But this was different. Until recently, there had been little conflict between the Muslim and Christian communities, which together make up less than 20 percent of the population.

Still, surprising as the Easter attacks may have been to Sri Lanka's leaders, they fit all too well into two alarming patterns of the past decade. The first is regional. South Asia has lately become a hotbed of Islamic extremism. Bangladesh has in recent years been wracked by jihadist attacks. According the *Economist*, the Maldives sent a greater portion of its population as recruits to ISIS than any other country in the world. We have to stop assuming that Islamist terrorists are all Arabs.

The second pattern is worldwide. Easter attacks on Christians in Nigeria killed more than forty people this year; in 2012 a car bombing in that country, widely attributed to the Boko Haram (otherwise known as the Islamic State in West Africa), killed dozens of worshipers at an Easter service. On Palm Sunday 2017, members of an Islamic State brigade bombed two Coptic churches in Egypt. The year before that, a suicide bomber attacked Christians celebrating Easter at a park in Lahore, Pakistan. The list is long and the cases so similar that they all tend to get confused in the Western public's memory. But it's worth trying to keep count, lest this series of carefully orchestrated Holy Week massacres be reduced to a random set of isolated disasters. The timing of these attacks was not trivial. Nor was it only tactical—a matter of waiting for the day when many churches are at their fullest in order to do as much harm as possible. The timing was also symbolic, calculated to produce maximum outrage. The Easter attacks in Sri Lanka may have been intended as revenge for the mass shootings at mosques in New Zealand the month before, but their larger aim was to open a new front in a sectarian war between Muslims and non-Muslims.

In the United States, where some Christians have been too quick to claim martyrdom when faced with any sign of disapproval or inconvenience, it can be easy to forget that in many other parts of the world—in the Middle East and South Asia, in China and much of Africa—Christians really are a persecuted minority, now more than ever. We can acknowledge this, and respond to it, without yielding to the temptation of retribution or taking credit for our coreligionists' heroic courage. It may be that the best cure for the persecution complex of Christians here is closer attention to what real persecution looks like elsewhere.

As for the rest of us—comfortable, wised-up Western Christians *not* inclined to pose as martyrs—we tend to like our stories of martyrdom the way we like our miracles: as ancient and remote as possible, softened in the mists of legend. But the age of miracles is not past, and neither, alas, is the age of martyrdom. For now, it appears at a safe distance, but that's not an excuse to ignore it. The least we can do is mourn and remember. If Christians are truly members of one Body, as we say we are, then events like the one in Sri Lanka ought to hurt. We must not be so embarrassed by martyrdom as an anachronism that we fail to lament it as a continuing reality. ■

Austen Ivereigh

Evangelization First

HOW A NEW VATICAN CONSTITUTION WILL EMBODY NEW PRIORITIES

The long-expected new constitution mapping out the future shape of the Vatican bureaucracy could be published as soon as the end of June, but its most notable features have been made public in an extensive report in a Spanish Catholic weekly out this Saturday.

According to the report in *Vida Nueva* seen in advance by *Commonweal*, the key shift in *Praedicate evangelium* ("Preach the Gospel") is to put evangelization not only at the heart of the church's mission, but also at the heart of the Vatican itself. All the official church's other activities will flow from—and be subordinate to—evangelization.

A new "super-dicastery" for evangelization will take precedence over all other congregations, relegating the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). The CDF has traditionally been known as "La Suprema" because almost everything that the Vatican put out had to be ratified by it, and because of the assumption that Rome's essential role was the clarification of doctrine. This is why the CDF appears first on the list of Vatican congregations in the existing apostolic constitution, *Pastor bonus*, published by Saint John Paul II in 1988. In *Praedicate evangelium*, this place is reserved for the evangelization dicastery.

"Pope Francis always underlines that the church is missionary. So it makes sense for us to have put the Dicastery for Evangelization in first place, and not Doctrine of the Faith," explains Cardinal Óscar Rodríguez Maradiaga, who presides over the kitchen cabinet of cardinal advisers, or "C9," which has overseen the new constitution.

The new dicastery significantly merges two existing bodies: the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, traditionally concerned with new mission territories, and the Council for the New Evangelization, created by Benedict XVI in 2010 to deal with the specific challenges of re-evangelizing de-Christianized Western cultures. The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (2013), Pope Francis's response to a synod on the new evangelization, abolished that distinction in practice. Taking its cues from the 2007 Latin-American bishops' pastoral document drawn up at Aparecida, Brazil, the exhortation presented the church as essentially missionary everywhere. The forces of secularization and globalization have led to a new crisis in the transmission of the faith throughout the whole world.

The new evangelization dicastery embeds an understanding that all territories are now "mission areas," and that the church is per se missionary. Unable to rely on the support of law and culture, the church's credibility in a context of pluralism relies primarily on its capacity to offer an encounter with the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

As Cardinal Oswald Gracias tells *Vida Nueva*: "The key point in the new apostolic constitution is that the mission of the church is evangelization. It [the constitution] puts it [evangelization] in the center of the church and of everything that the curia does." In other words, *Praedicate evangelium* follows *Evangelii gaudium* in seeing the church's primary task as offering the kerygma, or the Good News of Jesus Christ's saving love. This "kerygmatic" proclamation must be backed by mercy visible in concrete action, which explains why the constitution envisages turning the office of the almoner into a new dicastery for the Charity of the Pope. "After evangelization must come charity," Cardinal Rodríguez says.

The other gear shift embedded in the new constitution is ecclesiological. As promised by the C9, *Praedicate evangelium* overturns the idea of the Roman curia as little more than a bureaucracy passing on orders from the head office. It takes seriously the Second Vatican Council's idea of the universal church being governed by the College of Bishops, with and under the pope. *Praedicate evangelium* places the departments of the curia at the service of the entire college of bishops, not just the pope, and makes clear that the pastor of a local church is on the same hierarchical level as the prefect of a Vatican body. "As successors of the apostles, the bishops are not in an ecclesiological position below those who work in the Roman curia," Cardinal Rodríguez points out.

This reform reflects the broad thrust of the new constitution, which seeks to instill an attitude of service in the Vatican. Rather than an instrument used by the pope to oversee and control bishops, the curia's role is to assist both them and the successor of Saint Peter.

Another change envisaged in the new constitution will affect the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, created by Pope Francis at the end of 2014 at the urging of C9 member Cardinal Sean O'Malley. The idea is to give the commission legal standing within the curia, so that the Vatican departments will be accountable to it, but at the same time preserve the independence on which its credibility depends, according to Cardinal Gracias, the archbishop of Bombay. "We to have to look for a balance between credibility and effectiveness," he told *Vida Nueva*, without giving further details of how this hybrid will work in practice.

As expected, the new constitution will abolish the traditional distinction between bodies with executive powers (congregations) and those that are purely advisory (pontifical councils), so that all will be known in the future by their generic name of dicasteries. In principle all dicasteries could

CNS PHOTO / PAUL HARING

be headed either by a lay man or lay woman, although Pope Francis has made clear on other occasions that clerics must continue to head dicasteries that have legal oversight over other clerics, such as the current congregations for clergy and for bishops. Only the Dicastery for Communication currently has a lay man as its prefect.

The constitution also envisages the further merging of existing bodies to reduce the number of dicasteries. It specifically mentions the fusion of the Congregations for Catholic Education and for Culture. Such mergers will reduce overlapping functions and the numbers employed in the curia, although Francis has made clear that employees will serve out their contracts or keep working until their retirements.

There will also be changes in the way the church deals with its finances. The Secretariat for the Economy—whose prefect until July 2017 was former C9 member Cardinal George Pell, currently serving a six-year term in an Australian prison for sexual abuse—is likely to be downgraded. Gracias says that the C9, currently reduced (following the departures of Pell and two others) to C6, will be revisiting financial reform after the constitution is promulgated. It will also review the roles of women and lay people.

The new constitution embeds the many existing changes under Francis, and helps explain those changes within an overall narrative. The "downgrading" of the CDF in the new constitution reflects the new role that has developed for the congregation over the past six years: no longer a policeman ensuring "orthodoxy," under its new prefect, Cardinal Ladaria, its doctrine section has instead offered theological reflection on the pope's teaching and a resource for commissions such as the one exploring women deacons.

The finalized draft of the constitution has been sent to Vatican dicasteries and bishops' conferences with requests for feedback and suggestions to be returned by the end of May. Because the draft is itself the fruit of extensive consultation, Gracias does not envisage major changes. During June, the suggestions will be reviewed and incorporated and the final version approved at the C6 meeting that will take place between June 25 and June 27. If all goes smoothly, *Praedicate evangelium* could be promulgated on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul on June 29.

The endless delays, it turns out, were intentional. "The pope wanted a long process in which ideas could take off without leaving people behind," Gracias said. That process is unlikely to stop with the publication of the constitution. Rodríguez speculates that Francis could call a synod of bishops to consider the implications of the constitution for local churches, allowing *Praedicate evangelium* to become a reference point, "inspiring boldness at a time of a crisis in credibility." ■

Austen Ivereigh *is the pope's biographer. His new book* Wounded Shepherd: Pope Francis and the Struggle to Reform the Catholic Church *will be published next fall by Henry Holt.*

Rita Ferrone

Don't Blame the Patriarchy

WHAT THE 'WOMEN CHURCH WORLD' RESIGNATIONS REALLY MEAN

I've never been much enamored of the idea of a "women's supplement" to *L'Osservatore Romano*. What does that say about the main publication? That it's a men's newspaper—and intends to stay that way?

In 2012, out of a desire to promote women, Pope Benedict XVI asked the newspaper's then-editor Giovanni Maria Vian to make room for Lucetta Scaraffia, a historian and self-identified feminist, to write about women's issues at *L'Osservatore Romano*. With Vian's blessing, she went on to develop the monthly supplement, *Donne Chiesa Mondo* (Women Church World), which is now distributed in Italian, Spanish, and French (with English online only) and has a print circulation of about 12,000.

Scaraffia and her entire editorial board resigned in March in protest over being subjected to "male control" in the form of a new editor who came on board in December 2018 to replace Vian, another experienced journalist by the name of Andrea Monda. Tensions emerged as early as January when Monda had the temerity to come to one of *Donne Chiesa Mondo*'s editorial meetings and make some suggestions. At once, they threatened to quit.

Monda backed off and everyone stayed in place. But then he published some articles by and about women in the main paper, *L'Osservatore Romano*—articles Scaraffia had not previewed or endorsed. I read a few of them; they were well written and showed no markedly different approach to those found in *Donne Chiesa Mondo*. But that was perhaps why they were perceived as a threat.

Having thrown down the gauntlet before the new editor, Scaraffia and her board were being successfully challenged by women who were producing excellent journalism but not on their team; they were no longer the unique female presence at *L'Osservatore Romano*. The last straw came when Scaraffia and company discovered that the main publication was planning to sponsor a conference about women. At that point they "threw in the towel."

When the news broke of the resignation of these women—heralded by an open letter to Pope Francis and an editorial in *Donne Chiesa Mondo*—of course the press was all over it. The story was told by all the major news outlets, with the dark interpretation that the Catholic Church's sexism once again was at work in the incident. The patriarchal institution drives out the one brave feminist who breached the barricades! It was depicted as a fight of women against the all-male institution.

The women whom Monda had engaged on his own to write about women's issues were assumed to be puppets, while the only "independent" female entity was that of Scaraffia and her editorial board. Monda himself was reduced to a cipher in the incident, a "male control figure" rather than an individual with ideas and aspirations worth considering. He is not even a priest, but several publications warned ominously about "clerical control."

The timing of the resignation also added to its explosive quality. *Donne Chiesa Mondo* had recently made a big splash

CNS PHOTO / L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO VIA REUTERS

by running a story about nuns who are abused by priests that was covered around the world. It was perhaps their greatest moment of public attention. It even led to an admission by Pope Francis that such abuse occurs and must be rooted out.

The airing of the scandal was a triumph, but the timing of the subsequent resignations then easily lent itself to a *post-hoc-ergo-propter-hoc* fallacy. The story of the resignations became not only the tale of the lone feminist in the Vatican refusing to knuckle under to men; it also became a story of the brave whistleblowers on the abuse of nuns being punished for telling the truth. In fact, the conflict was already simmering in January, well before the story about the nuns broke in early March.

Through her seven years as editor of *Donne Chiesa Mondo*, Scaraffia has gained considerable recognition and influence. The magazine itself has also garnered praise. She and her hand-picked all-female editorial board have operated autonomously from the rest of the publication. Until last December she also served as an editorial consultant on *L'Osservatore Romano*. She has been a sought-after subject for interviews and widely quoted in the secular press.

Scaraffia's views are not easily pigeon-holed. She is in favor of legalized abortion, but against artificial birth control. She opposes gay marriage and women's ordination, but favors women cardinals. In one recent interview she railed against Pope Francis's abuse summit for planning to issue guidelines for bishops to handle the abuse crisis. (What do they need guidelines for? They ought to know that abuse is wrong.) When Marie Collins resigned in protest from the Vatican commission to protect minors, Scaraffia, surprisingly, did not come to her defense. Instead, she penned an article denouncing the press for covering sex abuse in the church while neglecting it in civic institutions. Most of her tenure has occurred under Pope Francis, but she reports that she is more frequently in touch with Pope Emeritus Benedict.

So, what are we to make of these dramatic resignations? How should we read the conflict that precipitated them? The notion that women at the publication are now being marginalized seems to me quite out of place. They aren't. There are more women than ever writing, and more women's issues being written about than ever before. Funding for *Donne Chiesa Mondo* has not been cut, even as cuts have been made in the budget of the daily paper.

What seems to have happened is that Scaraffia ran up against a new general editor who did not regard her as the unique arbiter and reference point for all things pertaining to women. She preferred to resign rather than to cooperate with him within a larger framework of collegiality.

This is her right and privilege. To cast the question as a titanic struggle against "male control" and for all-female "independence," however, seems to me wrong. There are independent-minded women on both sides of this story. The goal—or so I thought—was the robust inclusion of women in this venerable if rather stuffy Vatican newspaper. It seems to me that this goal is being pursued by the current editor. Ironically, the complaint about "male control" seems to be focused on protecting a separate fiefdom for women, rather than promoting women as equals across the board.

Which brings me back to the idea of a "women's supplement." Monda has said that it will continue, and this may work out fine. (As this issue goes to press, it has been announced that Rita Pinci was named *Donne Chiesa Mondo*'s new "coordinator"; there also will be a revamped editorial board, including three members who had initially resigned in March.) But I wonder if a segregated initiative is really such a good idea over the long run. I would rather see the concerns, expertise, and thoughtfulness that go into the supplement poured into the main publication, and have women's issues established as an integral part of its usual reporting rather than sequestered in a separate publication. Is having a women's issue "on the side" not just another way of saying that men need not pay attention? ■

Rita Ferrone *is the author of several books about liturgy, including* Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium *(Paulist Press). She is a contributing writer to* Commonweal.

THE FAMILY

Bright, upright,
They are
Like flowers in a jar.
Nuzzled by eland at a zoo,
Across a fence ("I'm holding you!"),
The one child cringes, laughs.
The other
Dreamily leans against the mother.
The father watches.

Vessels break,
Rolled through a raucous traffic.
Warm nights wake
To sirens. We forget.
The flowers blacken;
The water yellows, stems turn into bracken.

No thing is God—God lives, though, in delay,
In what this is, today and yesterday.

—Sarah Ruden

Sarah Ruden has published several books, including, most recently, The Face of Water: A Translator on Beauty and Meaning in the Bible *and a new translation of Augustine's* Confessions.

Jo McGowan

Why I Stayed...and Why I'm Leaving

My daughter Moy Moy died suddenly and unexpectedly in July 2018. My first *Commonweal* column—written in 1999 when she was ten years old—was about her. Our pediatrician had told us then that Moy probably only had months left to live. My column was about our anguish and grief; about what we had learned from her brief life and how much we still didn't understand.

Longtime *Commonweal* readers may remember that our pediatrician got it wrong. Moy Moy didn't die. She defied the odds and went on to astonish us, triumphing over severe pneumonias, chronic seizures, and continued regression. Though she had once been mobile, independent, verbal (and very funny), starting at the age of five, she gradually lost all her skills. By the time she was twelve, she had stopped talking completely and used a wheelchair to get around. When she was sixteen, we had a tube implanted in her stomach because she could no longer swallow.

It didn't seem to matter. In 1994, I started a school for her here in India. It grew and grew—from two children to three hundred today. Thousands of families from all over the country have benefited from our services in assessment, diagnostics, training, awareness, and advocacy.

Without speaking a word or lifting a finger, Moy Moy changed the world. She drew people to her in ways we couldn't understand or explain—things happened around her and because of her that one could only call miraculous. Checks arrived just as we had given up hope; exactly the right person showed up with the skills we needed at the very moment we needed them; doors seemed to open and caverns to close as we approached. There was no way to explain any of it.

When she died, I turned instinctively to the church. I had stopped going to Mass in 2009 (pedophilia, the place of women, the anti-gay policies, the lust for power, the corporate values) but with Moy's death, instinct and history took over. I was not myself. Somehow, I believed that the enormity of our loss would be communicated to the priest and that her funeral and burial service would be a source of strength and comfort.

Four hundred people crowded into that church. Perhaps twenty of them were Christians. The rest were Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jain, Parsee, and and Buddhist. Almost all of them spoke only Hindi. The priest, though Indian and fluent, chose to speak only in English. And his opening words were: "Many of you have probably never attended a Catholic Mass. Please do not come up for Communion. It is only for Catholics."

Now, this is standard protocol in India, where non-Catholics often attend services out of respect, curiosity, or social obligation—like a funeral for a friend. And since *prasad* (a sweetmeat) is given to anyone who visits a Hindu temple or Sikh gurdwara, people naturally feel that Communion is the same: meant for everyone.

So I tried not to be too annoyed at the priest's frosty, unwelcoming message. But when he began his sermon, I had to physically restrain myself. "We know she was a deprived child," he said, two sentences in. "We know she was not normal, not like us. And though we can never understand what is in the mind of God when He allows such tragedies, for us her life should be an occasion of thanksgiving to Him, a reminder of how fortunate we are to be healthy and of sound mind."

He went on and on in this vein, bewilderingly unable to read the mood of the audience. Luckily, most in attendance had no idea what he was saying because they didn't understand English. Those who did rejected his premise categorically. Indeed, every single person in the church that day had a completely different take on Moy Moy's life and what we all had lost with her death.

Our daughter Cathleen—improvising instantly the moment the priest sat down—took the pulpit and tried to repair the damage, bringing us back to our collective sense of amazement and gratitude with a riff on "Miracle"—a Seamus Heaney poem about the disabled man in the Gospel whose friends lowered him down to Jesus through a hole in the roof—to convey the power Moy Moy had exerted over "the ones who had known her all along." And in the eulogy which followed, our son Anand described Moy's magical transformative presence in so many lives, inspiring thousands, many of whom had never met her. My husband spoke of the angel in our midst—an angel in the true, ancient sense: a messenger from God. He said what all of us in that congregation believed: "We were lucky beyond belief. Moy Moy constantly reminded us never to dismiss anyone as unable to accomplish the amazing. She saw the light in everyone she met and she encouraged them to use that light to make this world a kinder, more loving place."

The priest, though running the show and in his own territory, was the outlier. Clinging to a conventional, useless understanding of disability (deprived, abnormal, definitely not lucky), all he proved was how out of touch he was.

It's not fair to judge the whole church based on one man's performance, and I don't. I don't even judge him. He is a limited man and not lucky enough to have been touched by a person like Moy. Yet the anguish that I felt at our daughter's funeral, the sense of personal betrayal from an institution

Moy Moy's burial

whose claims of wisdom and compassion I once believed in, reminded me of the anguish the church inflicts in other areas. Because it's all of a piece. Pope Francis responds to the sexual-abuse crisis (created by men) by calling a summit whose participants are almost entirely men. And if it's still a "crisis" seventeen years after the story broke in Boston, it's fair to assume that the people in charge of the institutional church still don't know what they're doing.

We are shocked that in many countries being gay is punishable by death, but we accept the church teaching that gay Catholics are "objectively disordered" and that their love may lead to eternal damnation. We shake our heads over Saudi women not being allowed to get a license, yet we accept that Catholic women may not aspire to the priesthood.

Death is often a teaching moment, a pause in the catalogue of ordinary days that is startling enough to make us look at everything afresh. Moy Moy's death and the insulting, ridiculous homily we sat through at her funeral made it clear to me at last that I had been backing the wrong horse. I had been putting my faith in an institution whose time is up, in rituals that no longer serve any purpose and in hierarchies that have lost credibility.

This institution and many of its rituals grew out of the very things Jesus rejected most stridently; the Gospel accounts repeatedly show him subverting hierarchy and upending the religious pecking order. He lambastes the priests for loving power and authority more than justice and mercy. The people he likes live out on the margins, and while they may not be educated or know the language, their values are clear. The Samaritan drawing water from the well, the leper who said thank you, the bleeding woman who had the faith and the nerve to defy her culture and approach him—these were his people.

I came into the church that day to bury my daughter with "the ones who had known her all along," and I left the church with them still beside me. I believe that Moy Moy remains in our midst and that Jesus is walking along with us. We are all in very good company. ■

Jo McGowan, *a* Commonweal *columnist, writes from Deradoon, India.*

Christopher Schaefer

At Kilometer Zero

WITNESSING THE NOTRE-DAME FIRE

On Monday, April 15, I was meeting with the former head archivist of the *International Herald Tribune* in a café behind the Louvre, not far from Notre-Dame. She was telling me about her efforts to find a home for the newspaper's archives when an unusually large number of sirens interrupted our conversation. We paid the bill and made our way to the Seine one block away. Smoke was coming from the heart of Paris, billowing overhead across the sky and obscuring the sunset. Notre-Dame was on fire.

After saying goodbye I rushed along the river to get a closer look. "No, no, no!" I muttered to myself. "Not Notre-Dame..." I alternated between walking and jogging as I drew closer. At one point the crowd began running toward me. Ash had begun to fall on them. I continued on, pushing through the crowd all the way to Saint Michel, the metro stop in the center of Paris where there is a direct view of the church's façade. I stopped and stood for a long time, just watching.

The sirens continued. Policemen began to yell "*Réculez! Réculez!*" ("Back up! Back up!") No one paid them any heed. Small bits of ash continued to fall on us. At one point, something stung my head. I reached up and ran my hand through my hair; it was ash, still hot. Eventually, the police managed to close the bridge over the Seine and began moving us backward toward the far sidewalk. Sirens and ash and smoke and rows and rows of smartphones raised toward the sky. And there, at the center of it all, a burning church.

I looked behind me to find thousands of people going back as far as the eye could see, their faces shocked and solemn, all trying to make out what damage the fire was doing. No one spoke of anything else. Occasionally, flames leapt into view, but otherwise we had to surmise what we could from the color and thickness of the smoke. Someone behind me remarked that dark smoke meant the roof was still burning, but that white smoke would mean it had been extinguished. I followed the train of smoke over me; it was still quite dark. A little before 8 p.m., a large burst of smoke startled us; later I learned that it was the moment that the spire collapsed. We noted that firemen were walking along the bell towers and speculated that they must be stable enough. Surely, this was a good sign.

In such a moment, it became all too easy to speculate. I wondered if the façade would be destroyed or if the entire building would collapse. Was I witnessing the end of Notre-Dame? Would the art and relics be saved? In my anxiety, I ran my hand through my hair, only to find even more ash. I also took pictures, and tried to post some to Facebook and Twitter. But mostly I continued looking at the church as it burned. I suppose I was hoping for some last moment of inspiration, some final surge of aesthetic brilliance, before it crumbled and disappeared forever. But nothing came, and despite the continuing blaze the towers were still standing. The police kept pushing us back. Smoke continued to waft above us. At some point, I realized that I had a splitting headache. It was almost dark, and I was dejected, overwhelmed by the crowd and conflicted by my participation in the spectacle of it all. So I turned, made my way through the mass of people, and took the metro home.

I have lived in Paris for almost a decade now. Along with tens of millions of others, my first experience of the church was as a tourist, now almost a decade and a half ago. But since then, many other memories have been layered on top of that original encounter. Countless times, I have partaken of that summer ritual of baguette and cheese and wine, a picnic on the quays of the Seine in the shadow of the cathedral's reassuring presence. I remember a date in my first month in Paris which ended in a very long conversation next to the statue of Charlemagne in front of the church. And I remember the memorial service in Notre-Dame in 2011 on the tenth anniversary of the September 11 attacks. In November 2015, the day after the deadliest terrorist attacks in France since World War II, I felt a compulsion to wander over to Notre-Dame in the early morning. As I sat on a bench in front of the church, closed for safety reasons, the only other person who wasn't a police officer or a Chinese tourist struck up a conversation with me. "To kill in the name of God is a rejection of all true religion," he began, shaking his head. He was a Polish priest, like me an adopted son of Paris. For over half an hour we spoke of religion and violence, Poland and America, love and hate—a moment of human connection in a time of barbarism.

The last time I entered Notre-Dame was on November 11, 2018, for a centenary service of the end of World War I run by the British Legion. Flags of every country in the world lined the nave. Dozens of Anglophone pastors and priests entered the church to bagpipe music. Renowned organist Malcolm Archer had composed a musical piece explicitly for the service, and they sang the same *Te Deum* that was sung under that roof a hundred years earlier when the war drew to a close. Toward the end, they sang their national anthem, *God Save the Queen*, followed by the national anthem of the host country, *La Marseillaise*. It was a remarkable moment. I turned my head to take it all in: hundreds of British citizens were belting out a stirring rendition of *La Marseillaise* in the most iconic of French cathedrals. Afterward, a French

CNS PHOTO / BENOIT TESSIER, REUTERS

Catholic woman in attendance observed, "We don't usually sing *La Marseillaise* in church."

If my connection to Notre-Dame is deeper than the average tourist's, then it is deeper still for those who are Parisian by birth, particularly for the Catholics among them. For most Parisians, Notre-Dame is a prominent part of the landscape—the city's center and its fulcrum. Geographically, everything in France turns around the kilometer zero marker in front of the church. And in a city that changes very little, Notre-Dame is the most constant of constants. Whenever you look down upon the city, your eyes alight upon the two islands in the center of the Seine. In the center of the center is Notre-Dame de Paris.

When I finally made it back home after leaving the crowds, I turned on the television. Live footage showed that two hundred firefighters were attempting to tame the flames. Meanwhile talking heads droned on and on, speculating about the source of the spark that destroyed the cathedral's wooden roof and nave or how many billions it would cost to rebuild. Then the politicians arrived on the scene. "We will rebuild Notre-Dame," President Emmanuel Macron promised the world in an otherwise lackluster speech. Later in the evening, a group of Catholics were shown gathered on the Pont-au-change, a bridge behind the cathedral, praying and singing. Many stayed long into the night.

Both believers and non-believers mourned the fire. The French word *patrimoine*, used much more frequently than "patrimony" is in English, helps explain why. The French are educated into a respect for their cultural inheritance and a strict obligation to preserve what has been passed down. The concept is all the more remarkable for the fact that it helps mitigate, if not resolve, a long-standing conflict between

the secular French state and the Catholic Church. It allows adamant atheists and practicing Catholics to both respect Notre-Dame and the very Catholic past that it represents. For the non-believer, the church is a priceless artifact to be preserved for the sake of history, culture, and aesthetics. For the Catholic, the church is a cathedral and the site of centuries of Christian tradition and worship. In either case, a respect for the past leads nearly all French citizens to love and admire Notre-Dame, concealing for the most part powerful sources of societal discord.

The morning after the fire, I dropped my daughter off at kindergarten. Still overwhelmed, if perhaps slightly more hopeful given the news that more had been preserved than some expected, I headed toward Notre-Dame once again. I made my way around the perimeter, closer to the cathedral than it had been the evening before, weaving my way between thousands of gawkers and dozens of media tents from all over the world. When I stopped at one point along the river, I found myself next to Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, the leader of a small right-wing political party. He was listening as an older man in a beret recounted his memories of Notre-Dame since the first time his grandmother brought him when he was a boy. Their conversation then transitioned toward the shameful lack of investment in maintaining Catholic churches.

There is likely to be a great deal of finger-pointing with regard to the responsibility for this blaze. The Catholic Church no longer officially owns Notre-Dame as it did before the French Revolution, nor is it a Temple of Reason or even a government warehouse as it was directly after the Revolution. Under the current regime, in place since 1905, the state owns Notre-Dame but grants the Catholic Church exclusive rights to use the building along with the responsibilities for maintenance and restoration. Generous donors (including many from the United States) have made some renovations possible. And if the outpouring of support since the fire is any indication, this will continue to be the case. President Macron has also pledged the government's full financial and logistical support, guaranteeing that Notre-Dame will be rebuilt, but further muddying the waters when it comes to ultimate responsibility for the building.

For a few hours on Monday, an illusion of Notre-Dame's permanence quickly gave way to fears of its demise. But it was only partly destroyed. Its exterior still stands; its presence still reassures. The first photos to emerge from the cathedral's interior are beautiful and haunting. There is a temptation to offer pronouncements about the fire's deeper meaning; debates on national identity and responsibility for the blaze began immediately. For now, though, it might be more fitting just to look upon the cathedral once again with renewed gratitude and awe. ■

Christopher Schaefer *has lived in Paris since 2011.*

NEW MOON

after Brigit Pegeen Kelly

I wanted a creature—a bird, perhaps,
or an animal that glides even if it cannot fly,
an ocelot, or a seal, but I got a planet,
maybe because I checked a box beside Creation,
not Creature, and found myself possessing a world.
But not a world, really, or an actual planet,
it turns out, only a moon, and a moon
that has been eaten by a spider, or sawed
in two and left to languish, a closed eye,
a mouth stitched shut, a fossil sand-dollar.

Not a coin I can spend, but a penny worn dark,
a star collapsed. Black ice, a snake's hideout,
a thought erased, not even a hole that I
could dig deeper for water, or wider
for the planting of a tree—a vaccination mark,
an ear hole without an ear,
a pill you'd put on your tongue only
if you had to fight malaria or a plague,
a pebble you would never notice in the river.
But not a world, not a solar system or

a galaxy: a missing button. And yet this charcoal
is what I slip into my pocket, and this is
what I carry with me as my shadow trails
across the golden afternoon.
And I give it a look often, groping for my keys,
and almost leave it in the tip jar in the crowded deli,
until I begin to see how inadequate it is even
as a metal slug, a drop of licorice,

a flake of iron. Because those days come
when I stop carrying it,
and it forgets to sleep and opens
its stone window. It lets forth a light
that does not suit it, the dark margin
hanging back in sullen shyness, easy to make out
beside the increasing scimitar of
dazzling white. Like a porcelain smile,
the foxed illumination waxes
until there's nothing left of my whisper,
my almost-world, but a pregnant completeness,
huge over the lake, dazzling over the city,

a soprano who won't shut up, a glare that
the prism multiplies into every color in the universe,
except the color of the field where fire
has lived, which is the black of first dawn.

—Michael Cadnum

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

Dean Dettloff

May Day Saint

THE RADICAL MINISTRY OF FR. THOMAS HAGERTY

When Fr. Thomas J. Hagerty arrived at Our Lady of Victory Church in Paris, Texas, in 1901, he quickly grew incensed by the treatment of Mexican railroad workers. He had already become a Marxist in seminary, a year after Pope Leo XIII warned against socialism in *Rerum novarum*. Alongside the usual responsibilities of a parish priest, Hagerty began translating German, French, and English socialist materials into Spanish and distributing them to the workers. When the railroad bosses got wind of Hagerty's agitation, they sent him a warning letter. He replied by not exactly turning the other cheek. "Tell the people who sent you here that I have a brace of Colts and can hit a dime at twenty paces," he told the messenger. It wasn't long until he was transferred to the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

Such tales make Haggerty seem like the hero in a Western film (if more Zapata than Spaghetti). But apart from a few short, confoundingly productive years as an activist priest, little is otherwise known about Hagerty's life—neither how he came into this world nor how he left it. He was ordained in 1895, when he was around thirty-three years old. In 1902 he wrote a pamphlet called *Why Physicians Should Be Socialists*, suggesting he may have had medical training, perhaps making him something like Doc Holliday, albeit one who joined the scoundrels instead of the cops. (Whether or not he finally was a white hat or a black hat mostly depends on if you identify with capital or workers.) And Hagerty would become, for a while, one of the most in-demand speakers of the Socialist Party of America—only to leave it to help found the Industrial Workers of the World.

But despite being a significant activist in the turn-of-the-century working-class struggle in the United States, few remember him now. Though newspaper clippings attesting to Hagerty's reach and influence are easy to come by in the

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Industrial Workers of the World demonstration, New York City

digital age, there are no biographies or book-length studies of his life and legacy. Academic historians have mostly ignored him as well, though we do have to thank Robert E. Doherty for an article in the 1962 issue of *Labor History*, which painstakingly stitches together a variety of writings, letters, newspaper articles, and other textual desiderata into the only comprehensive portrait of Hagerty's life I know of. As for his death, where he is buried is a mystery. He likely lies somewhere in a potter's field in Chicago along with other poor and unclaimed people.

Hagerty was an imposing figure, standing over six feet tall. According to perennial Socialist presidential candidate Eugene Debs, "he would command attention anywhere. On the rostrum he is a striking figure, and when aroused is like a wounded lion at bay. He has ready language, logic, wit, sarcasm, and at times they roll like a torrent and thrill the multitude like a bugle call to charge." Debs would know; he had a history with Hagerty. Just a few months after Hagerty arrived at his new parish in New Mexico, where he served as the assistant rector, he left to attend a labor convention in Colorado. There he would share a stage with Debs, debating local clergy on labor issues. The two went on to tour a number of mining sites in the state, trying to drum up support for the American Labor Union (Hagerty would go on to be the editor of *Voice of Labor*, the official publication of the ALU) and the Socialist Party of America. The Archbishop of Santa Fe, Peter Bourgade, did not care for Hagerty's extended absence—nor the politics that occasioned it. So he disowned him. Freed from his pastoral duties, Hagerty became an itinerant preacher for socialism, debating and stumping on behalf of the Socialist Party. By 1903 he was a regular on the political circuit, speaking at rallies before huge crowds.

Charismatic, combative, and silver-tongued, Hagerty earned his fair share of detractors. Conflicts with the Catholic hierarchy made him an easy target for them; accusations that Hagerty left both the priesthood and the church were powerful tools for enemies of the working-class movement. His Catholic credentials, along with those of his comrade, Fr. Thomas McGrady (also a member of the Socialist Party of America), or his Canadian socialist analogue, Fr. Eugene Cullinane, OSP, were important in appealing to the large contingent of Catholic working people who were also hearing from clergy and bishops that sympathy strikes and enforcing the picket line were immoral.

The *Cincinnati Enquirer*, for example, reported that Hagerty voluntarily resigned from the priesthood in 1902, a charge he forcefully denied in a letter to the *International Socialist Review*. "I am as much a priest to-day as I ever was," he wrote. "I have not separated myself from the communion of the Catholic Church; and I hold myself as much a member thereof as the Pope himself." As for the anti-socialist statements of the church, present both in papal encyclicals and American bishops' denouncements of the Socialist Party and labor strikes, Hagerty referred to the "socialist" John Chrysostom, and said that members of the hierarchy exceed their authority when they "oppose a movement whose highest purpose is the industrial liberation of the wage slaves of the world."

A year after the *Cincinnati Enquirer* accusation, Montana's *Butte Miner* claimed that Hagerty was excommunicated. Hagerty again replied with characteristic venom to a crowd in Butte itself, and a few months later he offered $1,000 to anyone who could prove he was no longer a priest, equivalent to well over $25,000 today. There is no evidence anyone ever took him up on the offer.

Hagerty often drew on Catholic imagery in his pamphlets and speeches. Describing the life of an unemployed family man in his pamphlet "Economic Discontent and Its Remedy," he wrote, "The gaunt faces of his children stamp themselves into every fibre of his memory, like the face of the Christ upon Veronica's towel, as their father drags his weary steps along labour's way of the cross day after day in search of work." In the same pamphlet, Hagerty goes on to suggest the conditions of capitalism are enough to dissuade working people from any belief in God. "Too often another Golgotha is encompassed when the faithful wife or the loving child, breaking down under privation, falls an easy prey to some current malady and, mayhap, is buried in a pauper's grave the while the stricken husband or father can only cry out, in that world-old plaint of oppressed humanity, 'Eli, Eli, lama Sabachthani'—My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

He could have added more than just the unemployed family man, recalling scenes like those depicted in Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel *The Jungle*. The condition of working women, too, was a scene of many Golgothas, not least rape and sexual exploitation. Immigrants, especially from China, were routinely used to prevent worker solidarity, and as a source of cheap and disposable labor. Black socialists, including preachers like Rev. George Washington Woodbey, powerfully expressed the continued oppression of black Americans as the United States industrialized—something Hagerty himself utterly failed to recognize, imbibing and reproducing the pervasive whiteness of the labor movement.

Without dismissing such blind spots, Hagerty's contribution to the radicalization of the labor movement remains unique. Despite being one of the Socialist Party's most dedicated and active members, Hagerty became frustrated with the reformist tendencies of what he called "sidewalk socialists" in the party. Eventually his frustrations boiled over. After he hurled a string of insults at party leaders, the chairman of a party meeting broke his gavel—hardly enough to stop Hagerty—and a group of socialists had to forcibly remove the proletarian priest from the stage. Now Hagerty could add major socialist officials to the list of authorities who disowned his radicalism.

Another vehicle for the struggle was needed. Hagerty and a group of radicals met right after the New Year in 1905 to

draw up a manifesto. Naming class struggle as a fundamental and "irrepressible" conflict in society, the manifesto called for a collective movement without party affiliation. Hagerty was credited with writing most of it.

Later that summer, a veritable "Who's Who" of American labor responded to the manifesto and gathered at Brand's Hall in Chicago: Lucy Parsons, a radical organizer whose husband Albert was hanged among the Haymarket martyrs; James Connolly, an Irish worker who returned to Ireland to help organize the Easter Rising of 1916, after which he, too, would be executed; Mother Jones, whose early Catholic faith had put her on the road to radicalism; "Big Bill" Haywood, who fled to a young USSR while out on bail in 1921 and took up an advisory role in Lenin's government; Eugene Debs, arguably the most significant socialist in American history. And, of course, among several other giants of the working class was Fr. Thomas J. Hagerty. Together, they founded the Industrial Workers of the World.

Perhaps Hagerty's most lasting contribution to the American workers' struggle was drafting the preamble to the IWW's constitution, still used, though updated, today. "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common," it begins, a far cry from the "class harmony" advised by *Rerum novarum*. "There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life." He was frustrated by those he derided as "slowcialists," who aimed to create a more just society only through legal means and electoral politics. "Dropping pieces of paper into a hole in a box never did achieve emancipation for the working class, and in my opinion it never will," he once argued. Instead Hagerty dreamed of "One Big Union," a unified struggle of working people to meet the challenge of a unified capitalist class. To illustrate the idea, he drew up a chart, known as "Hagerty's Wheel," showing how unions in diverse industries could be linked by converging on a single point that would help bolster and defend weaker industrial branches. The IWW still uses a version of it.

After 1905, concluding an intense three-year socialist ministry, Fr. Hagerty dropped off the map, no longer contributing to radical publications or stumping for socialism. Doherty calls his role in founding the IWW his "swan song to radicalism." His reasons for abandoning the political scene have never been uncovered. Newspapers from 1905 still refer to him as "Fr. Hagerty," although one *Montana News* article suggests he might have preferred going by "Doctor Hagerty." Maybe it had something to do with the incredible amount of violence suffered by workers and labor leaders, who often lost their lives in conflicts with hired capitalist thugs and police, either in shootouts or assassinations. Maybe government or social persecution proved to be too much. Maybe he simply resigned and threw in the towel, exhausted by the plodding pace of "slowcialism" and internecine conflicts within the workers' movement. Maybe it was a loss of faith, religious and political alike.

Details about the end of Hagerty's life are scant. Doherty reports that Hagerty ended up in Chicago, the site of the Haymarket rebellion, the founding of the IWW, and his first parish assignment at St. Agatha's Church, where he began his career organizing the local community against faulty transit. In 1917, an IWW comrade, Ralph Chaplin, author of the IWW hymn "Solidarity Forever" and later a Catholic convert himself, found Hagerty living under a different name—Ricardo Moreno—teaching Spanish and working as an oculist, apparently not comfortably. Chaplin left Hagerty his coat. In 1920, John Spargo, who butted heads with Hagerty in the Socialist Party, found Hagerty living on skid row, making his living by begging, relying on charity, sleeping at missions, and attending free concerts, libraries, and museums. Hagerty would have been about fifty-eight years old. Spargo said that while Hagerty didn't ask about the movement or other comrades, "he seemed to be a free and happy soul."

Whether Hagerty died a jaded revolutionary or a mutinous mendicant who fully embraced the poor unto death can't be known. Political decisions that have a revolutionary horizon are not based solely in the brute facts of empirical history, however. On the contrary, as Walter Benjamin once emphasized, a critical historian sees the burning pyre of history not like a chemist, interested in the reactions of wood and ash, but like an alchemist, fixated on the mystery of life within the flame, recombining historical matter to produce spiritual materials for something new.

We shouldn't be troubled, then, that Hagerty's story ends on a note of ambiguity. Those of us on the left often want to imagine stalwartly faithful saints, whose lives are unwaveringly committed to the liberation of all people to the very end. We want white hats. But that's the thing about saints. Saints are saintly precisely in their humanity, in their fallibility, in their complexities and ambiguities, in their often imperfect modeling of a life of love. Enduring great personal sacrifice and attesting to the love of God in an economy marked by Golgothas, Hagerty was a saint of the working class if there ever was one.

Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm wrote that May Day "is perhaps the only unquestionable dent made by a secular movement in the Christian or any other official calendar." Maybe. But on May Day, that holy day for socialists where we look to the future while remembering the slain Haymarket anarchists who campaigned for eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, and eight hours for what you will, the memory of saints is as present as on any other holy day. It's a day on which I always say a prayer to Fr. Hagerty—"Catholic as the Pope," a radical among radicals, poor as the very least of these. ■

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Whose Laughter, Which Comedy?

The Politics of Humor

Terry Eagleton

The governing elites of ancient and medieval Europe were not greatly hospitable to humor. From the earliest times, laughter seems to have been a class affair, with a firm distinction enforced between civilized amusement and vulgar cackling. Aristotle insists on the difference between the humor of well-bred and low-bred types in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He assigns an exalted place to wit, ranking it alongside friendship and truthfulness as one of the three social virtues, but the style of wit in question demands refinement and education, as does the deployment of irony. Plato's *Republic* sets its face sternly against holding citizens up to ridicule and is content to abandon comedy largely to slaves and aliens. Mockery can be socially disruptive, and abuse dangerously divisive. The cultivation of laughter among the Guardian class is sternly discouraged, along with images of laughing gods or heroes. St. Paul forbids jesting, or what he terms *eutrapelia*, in his Epistle to the Ephesians. It is likely, however, that Paul has scurrilous buffoonery in mind, rather than the vein of urbane wit of which Aristotle would have approved.

The Russian philosopher and critic Mikhail Bakhtin wrote that "laughter in the Middle Ages remained outside all official spheres of ideology and outside all official strict forms of social relations. Laughter was eliminated from religious cult, from feudal and state ceremonials, etiquette, and from all the genres of high speculation." The oldest monastic rule we know of forbade joking, while the Rule of St. Benedict warns against the provocation of laughter, an impertinence for which St. Columbanus imposed the penalty of fasting. The medieval church's dread of comedy leads to murder and mayhem in Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose*. Aquinas is typically more relaxed about the matter in his *Summa Theologiae*, recommending humor as a form of therapeutic play of words or deeds in which nothing is sought beyond the soul's pleasure. It is necessary, he believes, for the solace of the spirit. Indeed, a reluctance to engage in humor counts in his eyes as a vice. For Christian theology, the pointless delight of a joke reflects the divine act of Creation, which as the original *acte gratuit* was performed simply for its own sake, driven by no necessity and with no functional end in mind. The world was fashioned just for the hell of it. It is more like a work of art than an industrial product.

The churlish suspicion of humor sprang from more than a fear of frivolity. More fundamentally, it reflected a terror of the prospect of a loss of control, not least on a collective scale. It is this that in Plato's view can be the upshot of excessive laughter, a natural bodily function on a level with such equally distasteful discharges as vomiting and excreting. Cicero lays out elaborate rules for jesting and is wary of any spontaneous outburst of the stuff. The plebeian body is perpetually in danger of falling apart, in contrast to the disciplined, suavely groomed, efficiently regulated body of the hygienic patrician. There is also a dangerously democratic quality to laughter, since unlike playing the tuba or performing brain surgery, anybody can do it. One requires no specialized expertise, privileged bloodline, or scrupulously nurtured skill.

Comedy poses a threat to sovereign power not only because of its anarchic bent, but because it makes light of such momentous matters as suffering and death, hence diminishing the force of some of the judicial sanctions that governing classes tend to keep up their sleeve. It can foster a devil-may-care insouciance that loosens the grip of authority. Even Erasmus, author of the celebrated *In Praise of Folly*, also penned a treatise on the education of schoolchildren that warns of the perils of laughter. The work admonishes pupils to press their buttocks together when farting to avoid excessive noise, or to mask the unseemly sound with a well-timed cough.

The playwright William Congreve complains in "An Essay Concerning Humor in Comedy" of the sort of comic spectacles that force him to entertain demeaning thoughts about his own nature. He could never look very long upon a monkey, he reflects, without feeling deeply mortified.

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Parodies, mimicries, and aberrations remind one of the alarming fragility of one's norms. In similar spirit, Joseph Addison claims in a piece in *The Spectator* that Laughter is the daughter of Folly, who married Frenzy, the son of Nonsense, whose mother was Falsehood. The eighteenth-century philosopher David Hartley rejects out of hand "low similarities, allusions, contrasts, and coincidences, applied to grave and serious subjects, that occasion the most profuse laughter in persons of light minds; and weakens reverence for sacred things." Too much wit and mirth, he holds, frustrate the search for truth by preventing our minds from perceiving the true nature of things. In similar vein, the Victorian novelist George Meredith looks to humor for "mental richness rather than noisy enormity" and is keen to distinguish refined laughter from the kind of "brutish" comedy that "roll[s] in shouting under the divine protection of the Son of the Wine Jar." Much comedy is low, buffoonish stuff, whereas literature is an elevated affair; so is a comic literature a contradiction in terms? Is a theory of comedy equally oxymoronic? We can measure degrees of refinement, Meredith informs us, by the "ring of the laugh." Fishwives cackle, while statesmen chuckle.

For all his prissiness, Meredith is one of the few theorists of humor before the twentieth century to venture into the realm of gender. A good deal of comedy, he maintains, revolves on the battle of the sexes, and plays a vital role in elevating women from "pretty idiots" to admirable wits. What he sees as the lack of comedy in the East springs in his view from the low status of women in that sector of the globe. Where women have no freedom, he insists, comedy is bound to be absent. There can be no genuine civilization without sexual equality, and "there will never be comedy where civilization is not possible." In the absence of such civility, the comic spirit is "driven to the gutters of grossness to slake its thirst." Where women are reduced to household drudges, the form of comedy tends to be primitive; where they are tolerably independent but uncultivated, the result is melodrama; but where sexual equality thrives, the art of comedy flourishes alongside it.

William Hogarth, The Laughing Audience*, 1733*

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON DC, ALBUM / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The resistance to comedy in the early modern age belongs for the most part to the history of Puritanism. Yet one might argue that Thomas Hobbes's morose theory of humor is as inimical to the thing itself as the most crop-headed scourge of theater and popular festivity. The background to the Hobbesian hypothesis is the violence, antagonism, and partisanship of civil war, along with the emergence in the seventeenth century of the doctrine of possessive individualism. It is into this unlovely vision of men and women as anti-social animals driven largely by power and appetite, solitary, self-interested creatures locked in ferocious mutual contention, that even the apparent innocence of mirth and laughter is drawn.

Something of this somber outlook informs the lacerating, splenetic satire of the early eighteenth-century Tory old guard, of Pope and Swift and their conservative colleagues, with their urge to taunt, deface, ludicrously inflate or hack brutally down to size. Yet the key shift of sensibility in this period is one away from this corrosive satire toward a more cordial worldview. Determined to put the political strife and ideological rancor of the previous century behind it, the prevailing climate in the clubs and coffee houses is one of serenity and affability, a blitheness of spirit that will come in time to characterize the English gentleman. We are witness to the rare phenomenon of humor, or at least good humor, moving close to the center of a dominant ideology. Cheerfulness and congeniality usurp a surly Puritanism. Indeed, an aversion to earnestness will typify the English upper classes all the way to the era of Oscar Wilde, where being earnest in one sense of the word (the term at the time could be a code word for "gay") is to be relished far more than earnestness in its more common meaning. If jesting and raillery are implicitly political for the eighteenth-century clubmen, it is among other things because it is the tight-lipped zealot and sectarian bigot that these apologists for conviviality have in their sights. Good humor, one might claim with only a touch of hyperbole, is a counterblast to revolution.

For the Earl of Shaftesbury, to practice the comic spirit is to be easy, natural, flexible, and tolerant rather than stiff-necked and fanatical. Humor is a splendid palliative for

"superstition and melancholy delusion." Satire, with its coarse belligerence, is a cultural residue of a more abrasive, agonistic world, and is now to be tempered by good humor and an irenic spirit, which spring from the genteel classes' belief in their own inexhaustible benevolence. Men and women are to be seduced rather than censured into virtue, humored rather than harangued. As the historian Keith Thomas remarks, the early eighteenth century is a period when "humor grows kindly and...bizarre quirks of personality are not aberrations calling for satiric attack but amiable eccentricities to be savored and enjoyed." Hegel notes in his *Philosophy of Fine Art* that in modern comedy, imperfections and irregularities are objects of entertainment rather than disdain. For the eighteenth-century Tory satirists, by contrast, aberrations from a common human nature are potentially dangerous anomalies to be whipped back into line, which is not to say that they may not be sources of entertainment as well. One can find such a double optic in the work of Ben Jonson. For a less censorious literary art, by contrast, oddballs are causes of genial amusement, as with *The Spectator*'s Sir Roger de Coverley, Henry Fielding's Parson Adams, or Laurence Sterne's saintly Uncle Toby. Congreve defines humor as "a singular and unavoidable manner of doing, or saying anything peculiar and natural to one man only; by which his speech and actions are distinguished from those of other men."

If humor means the inimitable flavor of a particular personality, then all individuals are humorous, though some are more so, in the sense of more freakish, anomalous or curmudgeonly, than others. And since individuality is to be valued, a peculiarly English indulgence of such foibles ("It takes all kinds to make a world"; "It'd be a funny world if we all thought the same") is beginning to burgeon.

The humor in question, to be sure, is a refined, genteel affair, as these pub clichés are not. Eighteenth-century authors can be quite as reproving of belly laughs as their Puritan predecessors. One should never be heard to laugh, Lord Chesterfield admonishes his son in a letter. It was widely rumored that neither Swift nor Voltaire went in for such uncouthness. Genuine wit provokes a smile rather than a roar, thus testifying to the supremacy of the mind over the servile senses. Humor is a question of the body, while wit is a faculty of the soul. The essayists Joseph Addison and Richard Steele advocate a sober, polite vein of mirth (though sobriety was not otherwise Steele's strongest point). Humor was to be sanitized and gentrified, for fear of clowning and buffoonery.

If the clubs and coffee houses of Addison and Steele constitute a bourgeois public sphere, one in which rank is suspended for a free and equal exchange between gentlemen, carnival, in which much the same suspension of rank occurs, figures in some ways as its plebeian counterpart. As a counterculture that is simultaneously real and ideal, actual yet future-oriented, it represents a utopian domain of freedom, community, equality, and superabundance, in which all status, norms, privileges, and prohibitions are temporarily put on hold. In their place, a free, frank idiom of the streets and marketplaces is unleashed, diminishing the distance between individuals and liberating them from the requirements of decency and etiquette. The barriers of caste, profession, property, and age are overturned. Folly becomes a form of festive wisdom in this cornucopian world. Truth and authority are remolded into a Mardi Gras dummy, a comic monster that the crowd rends to pieces. Laughter becomes a new style of communication, the material sign of a transformed set of social relations. There is, as Mikhail Bakhtin obverves, "the potentiality of a friendly world, of the golden age, of carnival truth. Man returns to himself" (*Rabelais and His World*).

Yet the discourse of carnival is double-edged. If it is in search of a transfigured world of liberty, fellowship, and equality, it mocks, lampoons, and disfigures in order to attain it. Its critical and affirmative functions are thus at one. Popular revelry is a riotously deconstructive force, collapsing hierarchies, travestying sacred truths, deflating exalted doctrines, and mischievously inverting high and low, but this disruptive activity is all in the cause of fun and friendship. This great orgy of iconoclasm is a matter of both violence and comradeship, cursing and praising, slander and festivity. It affirms and denies, buries and resurrects in a single gesture. If there are gargantuan feasts and erotic couplings, there is also an outrageous vein of obloquy, of the kind one finds often enough in Rabelais:

> May St. Anthony sear you with his erysipelatous fire...may Mahomet's disease whirl you in epileptic jitters...may the festers, ulcers and chancres of every purulent pox infect, scathe, mangle and rend you, entering your bumgut as tenuously as mercuralized cow's hair... and may you vanish into an abyss of brimstone and fire, like Sodom and Gomorrah, if you do not believe implicitly what I am about to relate in the present Chronicles.

Rabelaisian cursing is inexhaustibly fertile, exuberant, and inventive. Yet this language is Janus-faced, too, veering from calumny to celebration. As Bakhtin remarks, carnivalesque discourse praises while abusing and abuses while praising. There is no question of superiority in its scoldings, not least since there are no spectators in the sphere of carnival to condescend to its participants. Instead, the whole world, in principle at least, pitches in. It is humanity itself that is on stage, a stage that is coextensive with the auditorium.

"The satirist whose laughter is negative," Bakhtin remarks, "places himself above the object of his mockery," but at carnival time the populace taunt themselves, as subjects and objects of satire in a single body. Carnival degrades and debases, then, but in a way that is hard to distinguish from affirmation. "To degrade," writes Bakhtin, means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception,

pregnancy, and birth. Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerative one.

It is this ambivalently fruitful and denigratory mode to which Bakhtin gives the name of "grotesque realism." "The essence of the grotesque," he writes, "is precisely to present a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life. Negation and destruction (death of the old) are included as an essential phase, inseparable from affirmation, from the birth of something new and better." One recalls that the word "comedy" derives from Comus, an ancient fertility god who signifies perpetual rejuvenation. Carnivalesque comedy is a form of vulgar materialism, one that reroots its subjects in the earth and in doing so allows them to fructify. It signifies "the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract," but only so that its true value may be extracted from this mystical shell. One can lay waste to the world as savagely as one likes, convinced that matter, along with the great body of the populace, is imperishable, and that each act of annihilation is simply the prelude to a new birth. If the earth is a grave, it is also a womb. The immortality of the collective body is reflected in the inviolability of the individual one, as men and women are ritually beaten and buffeted but in cartoon-like fashion remain magically unscathed.

The vigilant reader may detect a certain idealizing strain in Bakhtin's extravagant hymn of praise to the common folk. Carnival would seem a world that has banished tragedy. There is an acceptance of death, to be sure, but only as a springboard to new life. Agony and affliction are not confronted as realities in themselves, in all their terror and intractability. In this sense, the carnivalesque spirit is one of several modes by which death can be disavowed. It is not a question of salvaging value from a pain that remains insistent, but of converting that pain into joy.

There are other reasons to be skeptical of Bakhtin's case. For one thing, we have rather less reason in our own epoch to be persuaded that our species is imperishable. For another thing, carnival may be a fictionalized form of insurrection, but it also provides a safety valve for such subversive energies. In this sense, its closest parallel today is professional sports, the abolition of which would no doubt be the shortest route to bloody revolution. Finally, we may note that Bakhtin's censure of the medieval church ("laughter was eliminated from religious cult") overlooks the carnivalesque features of the Christian Gospel.

Many a commentator has observed that, though Jesus weeps, he does not laugh, a reticence that might seem in line with the Book of Ecclesiastes's grim insistence that "sorrow is better than laughter, for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth"(7:3–4). It is true that the Jesus portrayed by the New Testament is hardly remarkable for his side-splitting sense of fun, having as he did a fair amount to feel glum about. It will be a sign that his kingdom is imminent, however, when we see the poor being filled with good things and the rich sent empty away, a classic carnivalesque inversion. Unlike the reversals and upendings of carnival, this will prove more than a temporary affair. In *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (1966), Enid Welsford records that at vespers on the medieval Feast of Fools, the gospel words "He has put down the mighty from their seat and exalted the lowly" were sung over and over again, as the prelude to a mischievous parody of the Mass. Jesus and his plebeian comrades do no work, are accused of drunkenness and gluttony, roam footloose and propertyless on the margins of the conventional social order, and like the free spirits of carnival take no thought for tomorrow. As a sick joke of a Savior (the notion of a crucified Messiah would have struck the ancient Jews as a moral obscenity), Jesus enters Jerusalem, the stronghold of Roman imperial power, on the back of a donkey, and having been deserted by his comrades will be left to face an ignominious death, one reserved by the Romans for political rebels alone. Yet the folly of the cross proves wiser than the wisdom of the philosophers. The intimidatory power of the Law is overthrown, the meek inherit the earth, the sublime becomes human flesh and blood, the most sacred truths are cast in a plain idiom intended for fishermen and small farmers, and weakness proves the only durable form of strength.

Carnivalesque bathos lies at the core of Christianity, as the awesome question of salvation comes down to the earthly, everyday business of tending the sick and feeding the hungry. Luke's gospel promises that those who weep now, meaning the afflicted and dispossessed, will laugh later—though it also reverses this reversal by warning that those who laugh now, meaning the well-heeled and self-satisfied, will weep later. The profound ease and euphoria of spirit known as divine grace manifests itself among other things in human mercy, friendship, and forgiveness. In the Eucharist as in carnival, flesh and blood become a medium of communion and solidarity between human beings. Yet if the New Testament commends a laid-back life free of anxiety, in which one lives like the lilies of the field and turns one's goods over to the poor, it also portrays its protagonist as wielding a sword, one that enforces an absolute division between those who seek justice and fellowship and those who turn their backs on this ruthlessly uncompromising campaign. Like carnival, the Gospel combines the joy of liberation with a certain violence and intransigence of spirit. Jesus' curses, directed at those respectable religious types who fasten extra burdens on the backs of those already sorely oppressed, are at least as terrifying as Rabelais', if not quite as entertaining. There is also a vein of *comédie noire* in Christianity. God sends his only son to save us from our plight, and how do we show our gratitude? We kill him! It is an appalling display of bad manners. ■

Rand Richards Cooper

Creepy and Creepier

'US' & 'THE BRINK'

Jordan Peele's 2017 smash debut, *Get Out,* was the rare film that manages to be absurd, hilarious, and deadly serious all at once. Like an even bigger hit of that year, *Black Panther*, *Get Out* refracted a racial critique through an unlikely genre. Taking a trope from our national discussion about race—the black body—Peele deployed it literally, placing his guileless black protagonist in the path of predatory whites, encapsulating the peril and outrage of African-American history in a B-level thriller knockoff that piled layers of irony on the notion of "black humor." Like *Get Out*, Peele's new effort, *Us*, explores existence on two levels—the seemingly real world, and a hidden or sunken place below, where an underlying evil resides. Once again it is an evil not beamed in from some other dimension, but born in our own human one, and actualizing dire realities latent in American life. As in his prior film, Peele concocts all this in volatile mixtures of humor and horror.

Us follows the Wilsons, an upper-middle-class family comprising Adelaide (Lupita Nyong'o) and Gabe (Winston Duke), and children Zora (Shahadi Wright Joseph) and Jason (Evan Alex), on a summer weekend at their California vacation home. Sounds like fun, yet all is not well with the Wilsons. The problem is set forth in a prelude flashing back to a night in 1986, when the young Adelaide accompanies her parents to the waterfront amusement park in Santa Cruz. Entering a funhouse over whose door hangs a sign reading "Find Yourself," she sees herself reflected in a distorting hall of mirrors, then bumps up against what seems to be an actual, live doppelgänger. Is this a waking dream, or has something uncanny occurred?

The sequence unsettles via a deft orchestration of creepy elements: the ground-up viewpoint of the child; an approaching thunderstorm; parental disaffection; a haunting whistling of "Itsy Bitsy Spider"; the appearance of a haggard homeless man, holding a sign that reads "Jeremiah 11:11." The result is ominous, and when we jump back ahead to the grown Adelaide, exhibiting wary reluctance to revisit that same amusement park, we share her jitters. The first half-hour of the film, setting up the weirdness to come, is near perfect; Peele makes good use of the Wilsons' bland domestic tranquility and the happy aimlessness of their chatter; nothing important is being said because everything important is about to happen. The pacing prepares for the hinge moment, when Jason looks out the window at night and announces: "Dad, there's a family in our driveway."

There is, indeed. Embodying the mirroring prefigured in the funhouse sequence, the family in the drive (major spoilers coming!) turns out to be a nightmare replication of the Wilsons themselves. Their appearance—standing silent and still as statues—personifies the warning quoted from Jeremiah ("Therefore thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape; and though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them"), and soon enough the eerie visitors launch a brutal home invasion. Adelaide's doppelganger speaks in a croaking, thwarted, and thoroughly evil-sounding voice; the other family doubles merely grunt and howl. At first we believe only the Wilsons are under attack, but it turns out that the malevolent doubles are part of a mass uprising of similar red-clad phantoms—calling themselves "the Tethered"—wreaking bloody havoc across the land, hunting down their human doubles and savagely killing them.

Jordan Peele collaborated in the current iteration of *The Twilight Zone*, and he has acknowledged a 1960 episode of that series, "Mirror Image," as an influence on *Us*. There are other clear influences: *The Shining*; Roman Polanski's *The Tenant,* Michael Haneke's terrifying home-invasion movie, *Funny Games*; and more than a touch of Tarantino, including throwaway comic lines and quotations from other films in the midst of bloodletting. Throw in an M. Night Shyamalan plot twist, season with a hint of the classic 1960s series *The Prisoner* (a secret world underlying ours and run by a cabal of hidden forces), and voilà: what we get is the work of a writer-director who's obviously a film and TV buff. At some of the most fraught moments we sense that Peele is having fun, enjoying himself in the act of making horror, as it were; the pleasure is infectious, as are the chills.

The theme of the doppelgänger has deep roots in literature, and eerie Victorian literature especially: Mary Shelley's Frankenstein; Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde; Poe's story "William Wilson," where a boy is haunted by a doppelganger who can speak only in a whisper; Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, where the double is a portrait that registers the protagonist's inner moral decline. The theme has also intrigued high-art writers like Nabokov; one of his most celebrated and challenging novels, *Pale Fire*, paired a long poem with an even longer (and possibly delusional) commentary on it. The novelistic and cinematic uses of doppelgängers reflect their prevalence in folklore, where they often possess a malicious nature, and have lent themselves to interpretations ranging from omens of ill luck to psychology's division of the conscious and unconscious self. All this suggests a deep hold on our imagination, and at its best *Us* hits with the force of myth.

Lupita Nyong'o in Us

It doesn't remain so forceful. The second half of the film loses its way, partly via such obscurities as a baffling use of the Hands Across America campaign, which appears in scenes of Adelaide's childhood and foreshadows a later image of the Tethered, hundreds of them, standing arm in arm in a daisy-chain extending down the beach and into the ocean, visually suggesting a border wall. Is *Us* about Trump's America and the heartless demand to Build the Wall? Do the doppelgängers represent an indictment of a country where wealth divides its citizens into the vibrantly alive (enjoying the cushy lifestyle of the Wilsons) and the impoverished, a kind of economic walking dead? Is the movie an allegory—and if so, of what? (And what's up with those *rabbits*?)

One grasps at meanings, and Peele's attempt to sort them out involves a good deal of screen-splaining, especially in one scene where Adelaide's double provides a miniature lecture on "the Tethered." All in all, there's a problem with scope and scale; *Us* can't decide whether it should be a small compact thing or a big sprawling epic thing. I kept feeling it should have been an episode, *Twilight-Zone*-style. Rod Serling's original "Mirror Image" depicted a woman waiting for a bus on a lonely night, who keeps catching unnerving glimpses of her doppelgänger and becomes obsessed with the notion that "two parallel worlds that exist side by side, and each of us has a counterpart in this other world." Serling didn't write it for any more than that, a small metaphysical and psychological novelty, and I wish Peele had found a way to keep his own conception similarly deft.

Get Out had the advantage of constantly working on two levels of meaning—as nightmare horror movie, and as trenchant meditation on racism. *Us* relinquishes such sturdy moorings and floats free, becoming—to use a key word from the film itself—a bit untethered.

Alison Klayman's documentary *The Brink* chronicles a year in the life of former Trump guru and Breitbart chief Steve Bannon. The film covers the period from the fall of 2017, with Bannon recently dismissed from his post in the White House, to the 2018 midterm election results, which posed a setback to his nationalist causes.

Shot without talking heads or commentary, *The Brink* is the kind of documentary biopic whose protagonist proceeds in the complacent belief that as long as he's simply himself, the result will be flattering. The film starts with Bannon sitting in a messy room at the D.C. row house known as The Breitbart Embassy, boasting about a 2016 movie he directed. "That was my craziest film," he says to someone offscreen. "What was the title of it again? Was it *Torchbearer*? *The Torchbearers*?" Strange, that a director would not recall the title of his own recent work. What Bannon *does* recall is his impression of his own excellence, and especially with scenes shot at the sites of former Nazi death camps. "My shit in Auschwitz *rocked*," he says with a grin. Oops! So much for letting Bannon be Bannon.

Though no longer working for Trump, Bannon is still doing Trump's work, agitating tirelessly for the "economic nationalism" that he clearly views as the president's legacy—and his own brand. We see him at GOP fundraisers, inveighing against "fake news and fake media" and announcing that "economic nationalism is what binds us together." "Nobody cares about your race, your religion, your gender, your sexual preference," he tells his audience; "you're a citizen of the United States—that's what [Trump] cares about." (Later the right-wing French politician Marine Le Pen makes an address, in French, that uses Bannon's speech line for line.) We see Bannon chortling with assorted Trump acolytes and wannabes; "I was hoping that Trump would sign my belly," gushes one Congressional candidate who was pregnant during her campaign. Stumping for Roy Moore at so-called Patriot Dinners, Bannon complains that "the Bezos-Amazon-*Washington Post* did the hit on Billy Bush...and the hit on Roy." And channeling his former boss's modus operandi, he revels in taunting a female heckler with a smirking gibe—"I want to thank one of my ex-wives for showing up; I thought my lawyer sent that alimony check!"—as the audience roars.

Some critics, including Richard Brody of the *New Yorker*, have argued that *The Brink* inadvertently lionizes Steve Bannon. It is true that the film reveals a man with a functioning sense of humor, comfortable in front of a hostile crowd. "Thanks, Mom," he quips when a lone person applauds in an audience in Toronto, where he is debating David Frum; the audience laughs, and afterward the ex-Goldman

Steve Bannon in The Brink

president John Thornton tells Bannon "they were kind of shocked that you're a nice guy." And Klayman provides an almost amusing portrayal of Bannon as international political mastermind, flying by private jet all over Europe as we see news summaries of the rise of right-wing nationalist parties and leaders in France, Poland, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Hungary—many of whom Bannon consults during the summer of 2018, when he makes a right-wing Grand Tour, in the hope of setting up a populist European foundation to rival George Soros's liberal one.

It is true also that in Bannon one sees traces of an actual political thinker, who raises legitimate questions. "The elites in our country are comfortable with managing our decline," he says in one speech. "Globalization has happened with no concern for social costs or civic society... all for the benefit to [corporate] equity." There is a real issue here, as there is with the question of what might constitute some semblance of national unity in a country as diverse as the United States. But always, with Bannon, these questions stall in the dead-end of an airless pseudo-populism, as the man reveals himself to be little more than an operator and provocateur. On the lecture circuit he refers to the election of Trump as "divine Providence," while taking every chance to champion—and to incite—"the deplorables." The hour-long film he makes for the 2018 midterms, *Trump at War*, showcases Trump in best demagogic form, shouting, "The United States has become a dumping ground for everyone else's problems. They're laughing at us! We're fighting a *war*!" Pressed by a reporter about whether his film is propaganda, Bannon offers a coy smile and muses, "Hmmm, how would Leni Riefenstahl do that scene?"

In September 2018 he goes to Venice to attend the opening of an Errol Morris documentary about him. But with the midterm elections fast approaching, and tactical worries pressing in, Bannon skips the movie and hunkers down in his hotel "war room" instead. There, he spends five days launching phone tirades and plotting strategies, all the while slurping Red Bull and occasionally pausing to glower out the window toward gondolas on the canal below, where vacationing humans are enjoying themselves. Klayman asks him if he's sacrificing his personal life in order to promote Donald Trump as a historical figure and transformational president. "Well, what is a personal life, anyway?" Bannon responds, gruffly. "I've had golf and things like that. But this life is so fulfilling for me, I can't think about other stuff. What else would I be doing?"

Everything he *is* doing seems geared to maximizing his political influence—including, presumably, agreeing to this documentary. "Trump taught me a lesson," Bannon reflects. "There's no bad media. The more the mainstream media gets obsessed with something, it's gonna be your biggest weapon." The critique of *The Brink* leveled by Richard Brody and others holds that the film puts another weapon in Bannon's arsenal. I disagree. Throughout, we see him eagerly aligning himself with some of the world's most unsavory leaders: enthusing over a meeting with Philippine strongman Duterte; commiserating with a visiting Nigel Farage about "the enemy within"; calling Hungary's right-wing president, Viktor Orbán, "one of my heroes." At the personal level, *The Brink* shows us a chronically belligerent man given to profligate hyperbole and an avidly conspiratorial mindset. Are these actual traits, or mere tactics? Certainly Bannon seems happiest when he's darkest. When the *Times* publishes the op-ed written by "a member of the Resistance" inside the Trump Administration, he goes into overdrive. "We've had a coup d'état in the United States," he rambles. "It's a team of people. It's Huntsman, Brian Hook, Dan Coates, Mulvaney—it's a whole pack of them!" Ensconced in his room in Venice, he sits brooding, fomenting, phoning, and fulminating, sporadically releasing steam by belittling his aides ("engage your fucking *brain*!").

"This film is gonna crush me," Bannon says at one point, grinning at the camera. Maybe. Of course, for anyone on my side of things, Bannon hardly needed crushing. As for his—and Trump's—fans, they're more likely to watch the film and say, "He crushed it!" That's what irks progressives like Richard Brody. They seem to want a film that will portray a Bannon so evil, it will separate him from his followers. But if the last four years show anything, it's that this never happens; you're *never* going to win that argument. People see what they want to see, no matter what you show them, and as a result, our political discourse has become almost wholly a matter of preaching to the choir. You can't blame Klayman for that. What *I* see is pretty scary. Some creepy movies succeed by trafficking in every sort of imaginary monster. But Bannon's the real deal. ■

Paul J. Griffiths

No Neutral Ground

Secularism and Cosmopolitanism

Critical Hypotheses on Religion and Politics

Étienne Balibar

Columbia University Press, $28, 288 pp.

There are understandings of the human and nonhuman world that present themselves as true for all, everywhere and at all times, and as desirable for all if only everyone could learn to see things as they are. We call these understandings universalisms. The American experiment is an example: it's founded on texts that make its universalism explicit ("We hold these truths to be self-evident"), and it has, in its better moments, offered citizenship generously ("give me your poor"). Christianity is another example: its central premise is that the triune Lord has done something for everyone by way of incarnation, resurrection, and ascension; and it offers baptism to all, without restriction, as a means of incorporation into and conformity with Jesus, the Lord who has saved everyone. And there are many others: Islam and Buddhism provide clear-enough cases; so does Marxism, and, in some of its varieties, Confucianism.

Universalisms aspire to be, well, universal. They'd like everyone to see their truth and goodness and beauty, and to embrace the institutional forms they take. It would be good, Christians often think, if everyone were baptized. It would be good, Americans often think, if the planet were Americanized. And so on. But all universalisms are also, and necessarily, parochial: each of them has a local origin, and therefore each has local shape and color and flavor. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is parochial in this sense, as are the Declaration of Independence, the Qur'an, and the New Testament. There's no contradiction here: mathematical truths are all arrived at parochially (by Newton, by Einstein, by Wiles), but they may nonetheless be universally and necessarily true. So also, mutatis mutandis, for political and theological universalisms.

That there are rival universalisms is almost as obvious as that there are universalisms. It became clear during the course of the sixteenth century in England, for example, that the claims of Protestant Christianity (clearly a universalism), together with its associated political forms and practices, aren't compatible with the claims, forms, and practices of Catholic Christianity (equally clearly a universalism). It is by now just as clear in, for example, France and America and Saudi Arabia, that the claims, forms, and practices of democratic, rights-based universalisms aren't compatible with those of some forms of Islam. What then?

Recognition of these incompatibilities is a special difficulty for democratic, rights-based universalisms. That's because they aspire, unlike most other universalisms, to provide a political form of life within which inhabitants and advocates of all other universalisms can flourish without being required to abandon or compromise anything constitutive or defining of their own distinctive forms of life. Americanism says that if you're a Christian or a Jew or a Muslim or a Buddhist you can live here, with us, under our regime, as what you are. Our political form of life is supposed to permit your flourishing without compromise. America—and any other democratic, rights-based polity—promises that whatever you bear as you come to us, you may continue to bear, without hindrance or constraint. What we offer you is the freedom to be yourself.

This is a distinctive understanding,

AGENCE OPALE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Étienne Balibar

a distinctive promise. I'm exaggerating it for clarity's sake, but not much. Most universalisms don't make this promise. Christianity certainly doesn't. It asks its converts to leave behind most of what they were and to become a new creation. Christianity, by and large, responds to rival universalisms by asking those who've become Christian to abandon them—or at least permit them to be overwritten, transfigured, and perfected by Jesus. Islam, Buddhism, and, in its own distinctive way, Judaism, all do the same. These are universalisms of supersession: to accept them is necessarily to reject what you were. Not so for American universalism. America's promise is a meta-promise—of a universalism that can accommodate all other universalisms without loss. That promise is the distinctive feature of the political trajectory that runs from the French and American revolutions to the promulgation of the Universal Declaration in 1948. America requires, of course, the rejection of allegiance to all foreign powers (I had to raise my right hand and say that when I was naturalized in 1994), but that's a matter of taxes and wars and territoriality. It isn't, as a matter of principle, a requirement that I should abandon my Christianity.

It's increasingly evident that the American promise, understood in this way, has not been fulfilled and cannot be. That's because American universalism is just like its rivals: parochial in origin and supersessionist in nature, all the way down. To become a citizen of a rights-based democracy, especially one that is inseparable from late capitalism, is also to accept the non-universality of every other universalism you adhere to. To have your Christianity or Islam or Buddhism framed by your Americanism is to make it something else, not any longer, properly speaking, a universalism at all. This is a deep difficulty for the United States and countries that follow its model.

It's this difficulty that Étienne Balibar's book addresses. He, being French, is mostly interested in the French case rather than the American, but the problem in its fundamental structure is the same, and there's much that Americans can learn from what he has to say. Balibar holds academic positions at several universities, French, American, and English, and is best characterized as a philosopher of politics. Of late—the last two decades or so—he's been exercised by the problem I've just outlined, and in this latest book, a collection of essays written between the early years of this century and 2017, it's front and center. The longest and most significant essay in this book, "Saeculum," addresses it directly. What, in this present age, this saeculum, are the rights-based democracies to do about rival universalisms? Are they to take the straightforward route and abandon their aspiration to provide a universal form of political life within which all other universalisms can flourish, acknowledging that they are just one more player on the field—like, say, Wahhabi Islam or Neo-Confucianism? Or can they find a way to keep the promise?

Balibar's method in addressing this question is genealogical. His prose is clotted with references to, expositions of, and self-differentiations from his ancestors: Marx, Foucault, Lacan, Régis Debray, Louis Althusser, Judith Butler, Fredric Jameson, Saba Mahmood, and so on. This can make it difficult to follow his argument. It's too often obscured by parenthetical comments on one or another of the ancestors, and by engagement in exegetical arguments about this or that text. This is a pity, for in fact his argument is straightforward and important, and mostly right. It involves the following elements.

First, there's the acknowledgment that conflicts between the rights-based democracies and the "religious" universalisms such as Islam or Christianity are best understood as religious all the way down on both sides—or as irreligious all the way down. Deploying the term "religious" to identify some of them but not others has no analytic payoff. To take a clear example, in the case of the French controversies over the hijab (illegal in public spaces in France, required by some versions of Islam in France), what we have is "a conflict of religious universalisms concentrated around the singularity of the bodily regime that lies at the core of each of these universalisms." Yes. Or, more directly: there's no important difference between a shari'a-based hijab requirement and a *laïcité*-based hijab ban. They're in direct conflict and held with equal passion on both sides as essential elements of a universalism. We're confused, Balibar thinks, by categorizing some universalisms as religious and others as secular. We'd see more clearly if we said that they're all political, or better yet "cosmopolitical." Balibar affirms here the line of reasoning about the use of the term "religion" in the work of the American anthropologist Talal Asad. And although he doesn't note it, there are trenchant versions of the same line put forward by Catholic thinkers, such as William Cavanaugh.

Balibar is clear that French *laïcité* as an ideology is based upon a clear distinction between the private and public spheres, together with an unambiguous location of the "religious" in the former and the political in the latter. There's a clear American analogue: this separation is one of the important strands in interpretation of the religion clauses of the First Amendment. What this means in practice, more clearly in the French case than in the American, is that when some universalism requires public behavior, it becomes political. And once it's political it's no longer religious, and therefore no longer protected by whatever religious freedoms are promised by the state. Balibar argues that this way of marking the territory is no longer sustainable. It looks like sleight of hand and that's because it is. It amounts to saying that you can have your "religious" universalism so long as it remains cloistered; when it isn't, you can't have it, because it's no longer "religious" but political. And it's the job of the rights-based democracies to specify when you've transgressed in this way, which is tantamount to specifying when you've made a mistake about what properly belongs to your "religious" uni-

versalism. When rights-based democracies do that, they transgress their own claim to broad neutrality on matters internal to the religious universalisms, because they are now ruling on just such matters.

Second, there's Balibar's claim that all politics is now what he calls cosmopolitics. That is, all politics is now about dealing with conflict between and among rival universalisms, including those enshrined in the constitutional self-understandings of the rights-based democracies. I think this is right—especially since the end of the Soviet experiment in 1989. To say that all politics is cosmopolitics, however, is also to say that the political experiment and hope of the Enlightenment is over, and on this point Balibar is less clear than he might be because of his own political leanings. The Enlightenment hope was to make an end-run around cosmopolitical conflicts by offering a political order that could embrace all universalisms. But no such political order is possible. The offer is inflated, confused, and violently corrupt—a key element in what Balibar calls "the economy of generalized violence" within which we all live. We would all do well to remind ourselves often that the principal purveyors of violence of all kinds are nation-states.

Third, there's Balibar's suggestion that, in spite of all this, there is a way to preserve some essential elements of Enlightenment aspiration. Not, now, as a mere ideological commitment—if it's that, then its primary instrument will be the blunt instruments of political power and executive force, as is evident at the moment. Rather, Balibar hopes for a new cosmopolitanism and a new political rhetoric to go with it. This cosmopolitanism will have the world as its political horizon, and it will mean a drastic reduction in the importance of the capitalist nation-states that are still, for us, the principal political units. It will require, too, a new political rhetoric, a "civic articulation" as Balibar likes to call it, that will extend secularism's horizon spatially as well as temporally—not, that is, the saeculum as this present age only, but also the saeculum as the entirety of this planet. Balibar thinks this is the only way through the political impasse and planetary ecological crisis we find ourselves in.

This is utopian, of course. Balibar acknowledges both the unlikelihood that any such renewed cosmopolitanism will move or convince most people and the inevitability of violent conflicts among the universalisms we live with. But he still holds out hope for a rhetoric and a politics that is areligious—that is, neither a sacralized secularism nor a resurgent monotheism—and that can serve as a mediator for or catalyst of new forms of politics. Balibar sometimes describes his position as a "skepticism to the second power," which is about right. No self-evident truths for him, no high-toned appeals to what every rational person ought to assent to. Instead, there's something—we don't know what exactly and we can't know because, if we could, it wouldn't be the thing we need—that will save us and that we will all, eventually, see that we need. Balibar is therefore still an Enlightenment thinker, even if a chastened one. He sees our problems clearly and diagnoses them with vigor, but he provides only the mistiest of abstractions as a way forward. The substantive hopes of Enlightenment political theory have been thinned to almost nothing. In the phrase that Balibar prefers, borrowed from Fredric Jameson, there is only the aspiration for a vanishing mediator.

If you don't want to derive your politics from a religion of substance, whether one that stems from Jesus Christ, or the Prophet, or John Locke, or Jean-Jacques Rousseau, or Thomas Jefferson, or John Rawls, or Gautama Shakyamuni, then this is what you're left with. It's not nothing, but it isn't enough to stem the bloodtide that Balibar anticipates. He'd agree. Those who want to hold on to some attenuated vestige of Enlightenment political hope, will have, if Balibar is right, to brace themselves and look forward to a peace far in the future with much bloodshed on the way there. One could call it an eschatological peace.

But perhaps there's another way. If the nation-state in its current form is indeed a violently and incoherently sacralized bearer of meanings that it can't sustain, then perhaps the nation-state is the problem. In that case, simply thematizing its incoherence or revising its secularism by means of a "skepticism to the second power" is unlikely to be enough. But perhaps a deeper localism than Balibar would entertain (Catalonia for the Catalans, Scotland for the Scots, Texas for the Texans, Tamil Nadu for the Tamils, and so on), combined with a strong commitment to something like his cosmopolitanism (a strengthened United Nations, World Health Organization, and so on), is possible. Then, universalisms might find a polis without having to emasculate themselves in the service of Leviathan; human longings for a homeplace might be satisfied; and the planetary horrors of climate change and other devastations wrought by late capitalism might be addressed in the only way they can be, which is globally. And isn't that line of thought the Catholic doctrine of subsidiarity, robustly construed? It, too, is utopian, but it may have more bite and heft than what Balibar offers.

I live now in the mountains of western North Carolina. There, I often see a bumper sticker that says, "I love my country but I fear my government." That's a slogan from the right. In urban America, it's not uncommon to see a bumper sticker that says, "He's not my president." That's a slogan from the left. The sentiment, however, is the same, and in both cases it's a version of what Balibar offers in sophisticated, convoluted, deep-genealogical prose: the nation-state has become a religion that's collapsing under the weight of its contradictions. It may be time to consider alternatives. ■

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Paul Baumann

Relentless Interrogator

Nobody's Looking at You

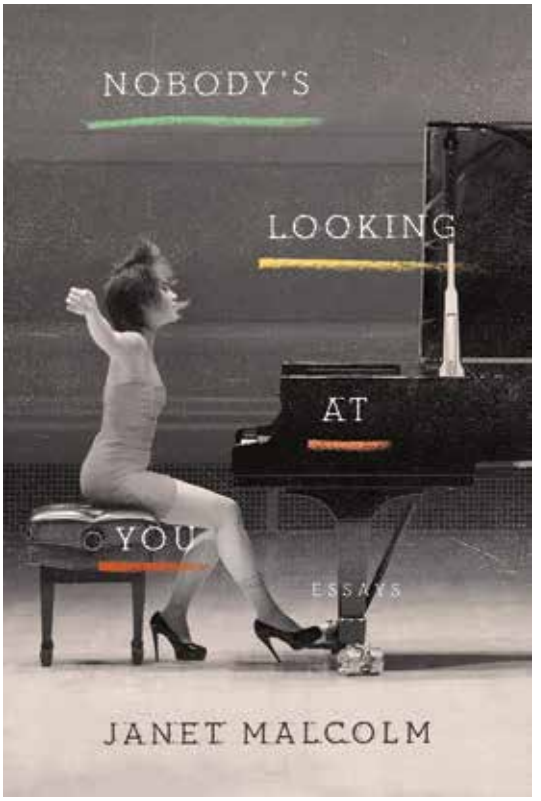
Essays

Janet Malcolm

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $27, 304 pp.

Janet Malcolm, a frequent contributor to the *New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books*, is perhaps best known for her much-contested judgment on the unavoidable duplicity of journalists. Describing how the nonfiction author Joe McGinniss befriended and then betrayed Jeffrey MacDonald, a doctor convicted of murdering his pregnant wife and two young children, Malcolm declared: "Every journalist who is not too stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible. He is a kind of confidence man, preying on people's vanity, ignorance, or loneliness." Malcolm argued that this provocation was not a condemnation of journalism, but a goad for its practitioners to "feel some compunction about the exploitative character of the journalist-subject relationship."

As those sentences make clear, Malcolm is rarely less than a fierce presence on the page, a relentless interrogator (or is it prosecutor?) of the people and subjects she writes about so well. Her new collection of essays, *Nobody's Looking at You*, is eclectic: it includes long profiles, reportage, analysis, and book reviews. Among those profiled is Eileen Fisher, the founder of the popular and expensive women's clothing line. The title of Malcolm's book is provided by the stern advice concerning pride that Fisher received from her Catholic mother growing up. It was a lesson in humility that fundamentally shaped Fisher's diffident personality and self-effacing management style. In the essay "Performance Artist," Malcolm spends a good deal of time with a very different but equally celebrated woman, the brilliant young pianist Yuja Wang. Wang's flamboyant, short, and skintight outfits, "accompanied in all cases by four-inch-high stiletto heels," have helped to make her a sensation on the classical-concert circuit. The pianist comes across as playful, even endearingly innocent, as well as confident and professionally ambitious. In short, someone determined to have people look at her. The story of Manhattan's Argosy Bookshop, a family business now run by the three elderly daughters of the shop's founder, Louis Cohen, is another study of personality and craft. The sisters' father had miraculously managed to hold on to the store, which sells old and antique books as well as maps and prints, while other small businesses around him fell victim to skyrocketing Manhattan real-estate prices. Anyone who loves books and bookstores will be captivated by Malcolm's description of the sights, sounds, smells, and charms of the Argosy. "The work of the bookshop is indeed agreeable work," she writes. "You could even say that it isn't real work. It has none of the monotony and difficulty and anxiety of work. The cartons of books are like boxes of chocolates. Each book a treat to be savored."



There are a few less successful pieces in this otherwise strong collection. Malcolm's usually winning enthusiasm for the idiosyncratic and esoteric doesn't quite come off in her profile of George Jellinek, the host of *The Vocal Scene*, a classical music program that ran for many years on New York's classical-music radio station, WQXR. Jellinek, a Hungarian refugee whose parents were murdered in the Holocaust, led an extraordinary life: fleeing Europe, landing in Cuba, fighting against the Germans with the U.S. Army, and waiting tables in the Catskills before ending up in radio programming. Malcolm herself comes from a Czech refugee family, and she is particularly engaged when writing about New York's Central European immigrant community. Her parents made a point of mastering English. "The pride that my father and his fellow émigrés took in their ability to stroll through the language as if it were a field of wildflowers from which they could gather choice specimens—of stale standard expressions and faded slang—is touchingly evoked in Jellinek's radio commentaries," Malcolm notes.

Malcolm herself is quite at home in that field of wildflowers, and she's a ruthless pruner of stale and faded language. But she doesn't communicate the pleasure she derived from Jellinek's radio program nearly as well as she conveys the enchantment of the Argosy Bookshop, though it's possible readers with a deeper knowledge and appreciation of classical music may find Jellinek a more engaging personality than I did.

In some ways the most surprising essay in *Nobody's Looking at You* is "The Storyteller," a profile of MSNBC's popular political commentator Rachel Maddow. Like millions of other liberals, Malcolm seems utterly smitten by Maddow. "Lucid and enthralling," even "exhilarating," is how Malcolm describes the TV host's narrative skills. It is Maddow's performance of the news as a kind of theater that fascinates Malcolm and garners her admiration. "By reducing the story to its mythic fundamentals, Maddow creates the illusion of completeness that novels and short stories create," Malcolm writes. "We feel that this is *the* story as we listen to and watch her." Others might complain that Maddow can't *stop* reducing the stories to their "mythic fundamentals." Perhaps Maddow is an acquired taste. Her storytelling skills seem labored to me. She is certainly honest, fair-minded, and modest (the daughter of another "very Catholic" mother), but she can also be pedantic and cloyingly theatrical. Malcolm does offer some light criticism of Maddow, but otherwise brings little of her iconoclastic and skeptical temperament to the task at hand.

A 2006 *New Yorker* piece on Supreme Court confirmation hearings, "The Art of Testifying," is a return to form. John Roberts's skillful self-presentation is

> ...like watching one of the radiantly wholesome heroes that Jimmy Stewart, Joel McCrea, and Henry Fonda rendered so incisively in the films of Capra, Lubitsch, and Sturges. They don't make men like that anymore. But Roberts had all their anachronistic attributes: the grace, charm, and humor of a special American sort in which decency and kindness are heavily implicated, and from which sexuality is entirely absent.

One might say this quip is itself "heavily implicated," a classic Malcolm deprecation. Roberts's "invincible pleasantness," "armor of charm," and "unsettling language of avoidance" were some of the talents that enabled him to survive the theater of his confirmation hearings virtually unruffled. With a similar feel for the drama of the hearings, Malcolm casts Sen. Dianne Feinstein as "a thirties-movie character in her own right, with her Mary Astor loveliness, and air of just having arrived with a lot of suitcases." Not many people write with such wit, nor would many have the nerve to describe the presidents of NOW, Planned Parenthood, the Fund for the Feminist Majority, and the executive director of NARAL as "the furies."

In this collection, Malcolm has very smart things to say about Tolstoy, literary translation, the poet Ted Hughes, and even the reason we tend to use exclamation marks when writing emails! Her remembrance of the revered *New Yorker* writer Joseph Mitchell is admiring and affectionate but never fawning. Mitchell's creation of composite characters in his journalism broke one of the cardinal rules of the trade, but Malcolm is not willing to indict him for the crime. "This is not because we are more virtuous than Mitchell," she writes about nonfiction writers who follow the rules. "It is because we are less gifted than Mitchell.... Reporters don't invent because they don't know how to."

This collection's most recent essay, which appeared last year in the *New York Review of Books*, is a review of the republication of Norman Podhoretz's much-disparaged 1967 memoir, *Making It*. Podhoretz, the former editor of *Commentary*, was a prominent literary and cultural critic and an outspoken liberal in his twenties and thirties before joining the neoconservative migration to the right. In her surprisingly positive reassessment of *Making It,* Malcolm quotes novelist, critic, and former *Commonweal* book editor Wilfrid Sheed's infamous review as typical of the misguided consensus regarding Podhoretz's "literary sins." Sheed clearly found *Making It* obnoxious, writing that it was a "book of no literary distinction whatever." But Malcolm is not quite accurate in leaving the impression that Sheed's objections were principally about the quality of Podhoretz's writing. To be sure, it was a wickedly dismissive review, but Sheed's complaints were about Podhoretz's "vanity," his "fairly infantile version of success," and how he "absolutely insists on

sharing his vices." It was Podhoretz's myopia, his blinding "lack of social observation," that made the book "flat and unevocative, for want of other actors."

Malcolm approaches the book in her typically fearless way, trying not to "muddy the waters" by allowing its initial reception and Podhoretz's subsequent politics to influence her judgment. Fair enough. She is impressed with the author's candor and the quality of the writing. I have not read the book. Perhaps Sheed was wrong about the literary merits of *Making It*, but he was undeniably prescient when it came to the character and sensibility of its author, who is now a Trump supporter. "That a man with such an Ayn-Rand-and-water program should call himself a man of the left is symptomatic of the fifties and sixties," Sheed wrote. *Making It* unwittingly exposed Podhoretz's "tastes [as] moving steadily to individual profit, and winding up somewhere to the right of Horatio Alger."

Reading Janet Malcolm is always a pleasure and a challenge. She'll make you think twice about people and things you thought you were sure about—people like Norman Podhoretz. When you finish *Nobody's Looking at You*, get a copy of *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*, Malcolm's astonishing examination of the difficulties of writing biography and establishing the facts of anyone's life. There she warns that writing biography and nonfiction journalism is like trying to clean up the house of a hoarder: you are often in the dark, and there is always the danger you will discard what is important only to retain the inconsequential. Lives are inherently messy, complicated, and contradictory. "The goal is to make a space where a few ideas and images and feelings may be so arranged that a reader will want to linger awhile among them, rather than to flee," Malcolm explains. Few writers are as good at making us linger, while at the same time cautioning us about the inherent limitations and deceptions of storytelling. ■

Paul Baumann *is* Commonweal*'s senior writer.*

Valerie Sayers

From Data to Wisdom

The Source of Self-Regard

Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations

Toni Morrison

Knopf, $28.95, 368 pp.

Toni Morrison is a towering figure in contemporary letters, as her 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature attests, but she also belongs to a peculiar subset of literary writers, that tiny group whose daring narrative experiments become runaway commercial successes despite (or perhaps, counterintuitively, because of) their demands on the reader. Morrison's reach is international but her impact in the United States is profound, and little wonder. She probes America's cultural wounds, especially the lacerations from our brutal racial history, to remind us what critical attention they need.

Morrison's critical writing has had a substantial impact, too. If it is difficult to find an English major who was not inspired to undertake further literary study by *Beloved*, that wrenching ghost story of an enslaved woman driven to murder, it is just as difficult to find a scholar of American literature who does not cite the impact of Morrison's critical study *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, which offers startling insights into the ways major American writers have unconsciously utilized a shadowy Africanist presence to explore their own identities. Indeed, no other critical work has had a greater impact on my own teaching and thinking about American literary history, just as no recent novel has excited me more than Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008), a visionary exploration of parallel forms of enslavement in seventeenth-century Virginia. Because her critical mind is as original as her literary vision, it is a special joy to find in Morrison's new collection of essays so many pieces grappling with her own fiction. Her critical auto-analysis is as rigorous as her analyses of others' fiction, though she invariably apologizes about turning to one of her own novels as exhibit A.

Toni Morrison

PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE

(She needn't, of course, but the gesture is graceful.) In any case, most of these pieces move beyond her own experience of literary construction and, like her novels, beyond her own time and geography.

The collection is divided in two. Part one is "The Foreigner's Home" (subdivided into a "Black Matter(s)" section); part two is called "God's Language." The first considers how our culture views and treats the migrant, the dispossessed, the prisoner, the victim of racialized hatred and violence; the second deals with the language fiction writers choose to imagine the stories of other lives. There is, naturally, significant overlap between the two: the latter's focus on language that addresses religious belief and springs from religious tradition is anticipated by the former's concern about a bias against religious content in serious art. The questions Morrison asks herself in the "God's Language" section ("Is it possible to write religion-inflected prose narrative that does not rest its case entirely or mainly on biblical language?") are inextricably linked to her assertion of her own "fidelity to the milieu out of which I wrote and in which my ancestors actually lived." The placement of the "Black Matter(s)" section in the center of the collection is entirely apt.

The title essay, "The Source of Self-Regard," is a meditation on *Beloved* and its use of historical sources, exploring the process of moving from "data to information to knowledge to wisdom." Morrison's description of her progression—from researching theoretical and narrative studies of slavery, to transforming that material from historical fact to an act of moral imagination—will doubtless become a staple of the classroom. Originally delivered years ago at a Portland lecture series, it's good to see it included here. It may well inspire generations of young writers to research widely but wisely, to consider all elements of storytelling as fully informed moral choices.

These essays are not light or witty pronouncements; they are not humorless but they are utterly serious and often productively provocative as they challenge a reader into examinations of literary conscience. Morrison's style is, for the most part, stately, not so much ornate as complex, not so much stentorian as insistent, authoritative, often fierce. She has a vast set of literary references at hand, her ease discussing the history of American narrative matched by her intimate knowledge of European and African texts across time: in one six-page stretch exploring form, she elegantly connects Wharton and James to Faulkner, Ellison, and Baldwin; Umberto Eco to Peter Høeg to William Gass; Toni Cade Bambara to Salman Rushdie, Ben Okri, and Leslie Marmon Silko. I am delighted (though not surprised) to know that she considers Gerard Manley Hopkins and Jean Toomer important influences.

It is sometimes bracing to move through these essays and recognize an earlier passage. "It is possible to wonder if we have progressed psychologically, intellectually, emotionally no further than 1492, when Spain cleaned itself of Jews, to 2004, when Sudan blocks food and medicine and remains content to watch the slow starvation of its people," Morrison states, in nearly identical formulations: first in 2004, addressing Amnesty International in Edinburgh, then in 2010, introducing Toby Lewis at the ArtTable Award ceremony in New York. Art and politics—to say nothing of the concept of moral stasis—are thus linked across centuries and across a decade. Nonetheless, the piling up of such repetitions can be frustrating; while anyone who lectures publicly will recognize the need to recycle definitions and ideas that have already been meticulously articulated, the doublings and triplings here will probably be of more interest to Morrison scholars than to most readers. For a volume of selected, not collected, essays, some pruning was in order.

That complaint is carping of the lowest order. This is a crucial collection for any Toni Morrison devotee, but also for any reader intrigued by how novelists use the other parts of their brains. Morrison is not simply a narrative spellbinder who believes that writing is "awe and reverence and mystery and magic," though that would be enough for any writer's lifetime. As it happens, she is also a thundering prophet for our time. ■

Valerie Sayers *is the William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of English at the University of Notre Dame and the author of six novels, including* The Powers.

Paul Lakeland

College as Department Store

The Splintering of the American Mind

Identity Politics, Inequality, and Community on Today's College Campuses

William Egginton

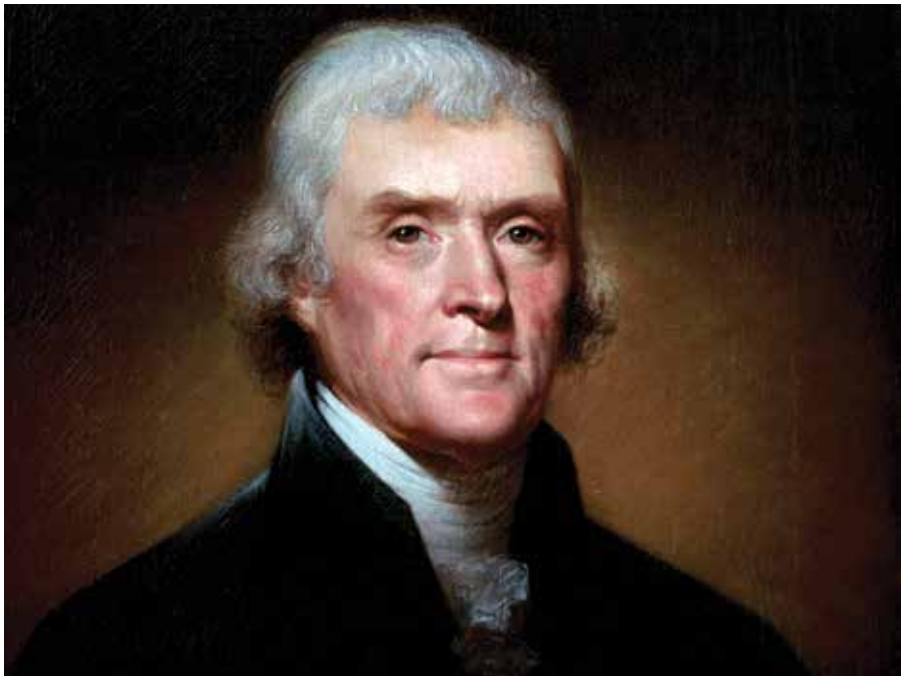
Bloomsbury, $28, 272 pp.

Those of us who work in higher education are accustomed to conservative thinkers painting us as the spoiled brats of the culture wars. At the other end of the political spectrum, radical students in elite institutions have sought to shout down even progressive academics when their demands are not being met. One comfort this brings is that when you are being challenged from both ends for different reasons, well, you must be doing something right. But William Egginton provides another and more solid comfort in his new book. Egginton, director of the Alexander Grass Humanities Institute at Johns Hopkins University, has impeccable credentials as a liberal professor but writes here with deliberate intent to stake out a centrist position. Higher education, he argues, has benefited enormously from identity politics because it has made the voices of previously silent or silenced groups much more audible. We are the better for the critiques of the establishment that have come from feminists and people of color, and also for the subdivisions within each of these groups. Sure, some of the more extreme voices have sometimes led us to faintly ridiculous extremes, the kinds of things that conservative journals like *First Things* and the *New Criterion* rejoice in excoriating. But on the whole the benefits that have accrued from the multiplicity of different voices have led to a saner and healthier academic and, indeed, national culture.

The problem for higher education today is not that identity politics is a part of academic culture, but that the healthy recognition of difference (to which we are indebted) has come at the price of inattention to the opposite good: the strengthening of the bonds of community that education in general, and the liberal arts in particular, have always existed to foster. The principal reason for this imbalance between the legitimacy of concern for the individual and attention to the common good, thinks Egginton, is the excessive individualism that has come to bedevil American public life. And this itself is a product of the neoliberalism of the market economy, which has affected those institutions that should stand at a critical distance from all ideologies. "Our universities," he writes, "have become like department stores." The pursuit of truth has been abandoned in favor of "branding, competition, and marketing themselves to a well-researched brew of the wealthiest and most academically stellar students." Egginton may have to change his tune just a little in light of Michael Bloomberg's recent gift of $1.8 billion to Johns Hopkins solely to support student aid: but until many other institutions are similarly graced, higher education in general will continue to reinforce the huge gap between the rich and the poor.

Egginton's plea is only the latest in a long line of texts bemoaning the condition of American education. Many are from the right, like Heather Mac Donald's *The Diversity Delusion* or Michael Rectenwald's *Springtime for Snowflakes*. On the left there is Holden Thorp and Buck Goldstein's *Our Higher Calling* or Robert Putnam's more sociological analysis *Our Kids*. Though he is largely focused on universities, Egginton echoes Putnam's distinctively liberal argument: that all this malaise begins at the earliest stages of education, where the dramatic differences of quality and opportunity between geographic areas or racial groups simply mean, in Egginton's phrase, that inequality "is baked into the system."

The solution to the crisis in education has to come from a reawakening on the part of progressive educators to the importance of community. Personal freedom without community responsibility only leads to the tyranny of authoritarian systems or the neoliberal market economy over the individual,



Rembrandt Peale's presidential portrait of Thomas Jefferson, 1800

who has neither power nor protection against them. What we need, he thinks, is a return to Thomas Jefferson's insight that the best defense against the drift of power toward tyranny is "to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large." Jefferson recognized that education gave people the skills to distinguish truth from falsehood so that they would be able to counter the ambitions of the powerful. Jefferson's Virginia Bill 79, which sought to provide public education, was sadly defeated: but the idea he promoted, and the dangers of abandoning that idea, are as fresh to Egginton as they were to Jefferson.

Egginton focuses on elite private institutions. But to what degree does his critique extend to smaller schools, and in particular to church-related institutions like the many Catholic colleges and universities throughout the country? A neoliberal culture affects all civil society, and in particular the minds and mores of those of traditional undergraduate age, who increasingly look upon their four years of college education from a consumerist perspective. I have little doubt that smaller schools would be only too ready to pick up big dollars from the corporate world, money that now flies into the coffers of the Harvards and Stanfords. Still, it is possible that precisely because small schools are not going to be the beneficiaries of this kind of soul-killing aid, they may be better placed to resist the splintering about which Egginton writes so persuasively.

Catholic schools in particular have the advantage of mission statements that stress the importance of the common good, and historic identities that stress the enduring value of community. Personhood rather than individualism, concern for the common good that prioritizes the needs of the poor over mere utilitarianism, and a commitment to the principle of subsidiarity together can put up staunch resistance to the neoliberal juggernaut, before which every person is simply a consumer. The twenty-eight Jesuit schools in the United States, for example, all prefer the word "formation" to "education"; they are inheritors of a tradition of extensive liberal-arts core curricula; and they like to stress that the *paideia* of the schools is care of the whole person (*cura personalis)* in the service of seeking *magis*—of going the extra mile in the search for moral and intellectual excellence. But there is little doubt that Alisdair MacIntyre's warning in these pages ("The End of Education," October 20, 2006) is real: the challenge and promise of American Catholic universities may very well not succeed. For much the same reasons as Egginton catalogues, MacIntyre believes that the liberal arts are in danger and that the leaders of the major Catholic universities "are for the most part hell-bent on imitating their prestigious secular counterparts." If Harvard and Johns Hopkins or Georgetown and Notre Dame are in such a pickle, can the rest of us be far behind?

There is a solution, however. When the call is made to return to the values of community in order to overcome the social inequality that excessive individualism results in, it translates into a *re*call to the importance of *under*graduate teaching. However enchanting arcane research and increasing academic specialization might be, it is not going to help preserve democracy in a truly free society. Egginton provokes us to the recognition that it is in an educational *community* that the values that promote the truly human will be nurtured. I do not know if he would go as far as Mark C. Taylor did in a 2009 *New York Times* op-ed, where he calls for the end of the university as we know it: abolishing permanent departments, transforming the traditional dissertation, imposing mandatory retirement, and abolishing tenure. But they would be at one in their belief that collaboration within the community of scholars is a sine qua non not only for a healthy university, but for a more alert and unified world. And where Taylor was simply being provocative, Egginton initiates an important and constructive inquiry into the contribution of our universities to the future of our society. ■

Paul Lakeland *teaches at Fairfield University and is the current president of the Catholic Theological Society of America.*

HATE IS AN ECHO

The politics of hate is a hollow echo
Inside an empty seed of imagination.
Stunted ancient bitterness descending

Twisting and banging
At the backdoor of death.
A midnight branch of pain

Olive leaves disguised by the darkness
Unenlightened desperate reason
Offering little hope to all mankind.

— M. L. Liebler

M. L. Liebler is a Detroit-based poet, university professor, and literary-arts activist. His newest books are I Want to Be Once *and* Heaven Is Detroit: Essays in Detroit Music from Jazz to Hip Hop, *winner of the 2018 PEN Oakland-Josephine Miles Literary Award.*

Nicholas Haggerty

The Generalist

Simon Leys
Navigator between Worlds
Philippe Paquet
Translated by Julie Rose
La Trobe University Press, $59.99, 692 pp.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the definition of a public intellectual underwent a gradual but profound change, as generalists gave way to academic specialists. Sinology makes for the perfect case study of this transition. From its origins in the Jesuit missions until the mid-twentieth century, sinology favored breadth over depth; it presumed that an individual scholar could take the whole of Chinese civilization—including its language, art, and history—as his or her subject. This romantic way of approaching the study of China came to an end during the Cold War as sinology, at least in the United States, was fully assimilated into the academic field of China studies. Within this field, there were major disagreements on the proper relationship between scholarship and American foreign policy—but there was, at least, fundamental agreement about what kind of research and books counted as genuine scholarship. As the study of China was professionalized, those who did not specialize were generally looked down upon as dilettantes.

Pierre Ryckmans was one of the last holdouts against this shift. In his biography of Ryckmans, now available in English translation, Philippe Paquet traces an archetypal hero's journey. Ryckmans's father was a publisher; his uncles were Belgian colonial governors, professors, and priests, and his family hoped he would follow in one of these paths. But Ryckmans wanted to travel, and he wanted to write. When he was twenty, he went to China as part of a delegation of young Belgians. While there, he got to meet and speak with Zhou Enlai, the first Premier of the People's Republic of China. He returned from this trip with a passion for China and a sympathy for Maoism. The former would last for the rest of his life; the latter would not. Having finished his studies in art history back in Belgium, he enrolled at National Taiwan Normal University, where he studied under exiled leaders of the Chinese intellectual world. From there he moved to Singapore and then to Hong Kong, researching and teaching art history in relative obscurity.

That changed in 1971 with the publication of *The Chairman's New Clothes*, in which Ryckmans exposed the violent factional struggles of the Cultural Revolution. The book shook the French-speaking literary world, where Maoist illusions were still very much in vogue. The political stakes were so high that Ryckmans thought it wise to adopt a pen name, Simon Leys. He would go on to become the cultural attaché for the Belgian embassy in China, publishing numerous books in both English and French, and getting into public scrapes with Roland Barthes and Edward Said, among others. But Leys had other interests, other talents, and over time his work as a literary critic, essayist, and all-around man of letters overshadowed his reputation as a polemicist and academic.

Portrait of Pierre Ryckmans (Simon Leys) by Mathew Lynn, 2010

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Despite the triumphal arch of Paquet's narrative, Leys is still not as well known as one might expect. His attacks on Said and Barthes did not leave a mark, and the Maoist intellectuals he vanquished in public controversies (notably Michelle Loi and Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi) are now mostly forgotten. Few now remember the debates that first brought Leys to public attention in France and Belgium. Paquet does his best to depict these as high drama, but one gets the sense that Leys himself regarded them as tedious distractions from his real work. In any case, he was not concerned with parlaying controversy into celebrity. He slyly invoked the words of Jacques Chardonne: "Any truly good book will always find three thousand readers, no more, no less."

The man that emerges from Paquet's biography is more complex

than the legend; if his journey was in some ways heroic, Leys was not a conventional hero. His greatness was thrust upon him, and he often seemed to dodge it. During the Cultural Revolution, while he was still living in Hong Kong, Ryckmans was invited to a meeting at the Intercontinental Hotel in Kowloon. At the time, he had a young family to provide for on a meager teacher's salary. For extra income he was writing reports on the Cultural Revolution for the Belgian consulate that would form the basis of *The Chairman's New Clothes.* The meeting was set up by a friend from the Yale-in-China organization to encourage Ryckmans to work for the CIA, and the offer included control of his own brief, encompassing intelligence and operations. He was told "money would not be a problem." Ryckmans declined the offer, explaining that "to successfully conduct such missions, you needed to be rock solid, intelligent and honest: any person who had those qualities could only naturally reject such a proposition."

The episode is characteristic in a number of ways. It shows Ryckmans's wit, his wariness of political entanglements, and above all his allergy to crass ambition. He knew that comfort and conventional success often came at the expense of intellectual independence. Because of his disposition, not to speak of his honor, this was not a price he was willing to pay. This story—along with Paquet's revelation that Leys was "greatly outraged" by the Vietnam War and sympathetic to the Vietnamese Communists—demonstrates that Leys was not the crypto-rightwinger some suspect, and others wish, he was.

Leys's political writings excluded him from an academic post in Paris. After his brief sojourn as a cultural attaché at the Belgian embassy, he spent the rest of his life as a quiet academic in Canberra, Australia. Quiet but productive. If he was opposed to careerism, he was ambitious enough in his own way. He followed another of Chardonne's precepts: "Only shoot at big game." Ambition was evident in his choice of translation projects, from the *Analects* of Confucius to writings by the father of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun. Leys also liked to cite a line by Arthur Koestler: "A writer's ambition should be to trade a hundred contemporary readers for ten readers in ten years, and for one reader in a hundred years."

Mortality was the flipside of Leys's fascination with monumentality, and death was a recurring theme of his writing. He concluded his Boyer Lectures of 1996, "Aspects of Culture," by reflecting on dying as both a returning home and a going abroad. The final essay in *The Hall of Uselessness*, a collection published a few years before his death, is titled "Memento Mori." His one novel, a tragicomedy in which Napoleon returns from exile only to perish in anonymity, is titled *The Death of Napoleon.*

But no one who has read Leys's work would describe it as morbid. It is attentive to beauty (Chinese calligraphy was a lifelong interest), to moments of grace, and, most importantly, to the power of the imagination. That power could be dangerous of course, as in the case of the self-deluding Western Maoists against whom Leys positioned himself as a sober truth-teller. But in one of his best essays, Leys praises Don Quixote precisely for his "refusal to adjust the hugeness of his desire to the smallness of reality." Leys himself struck a delicate balance between hope and resignation. He tried to live without illusions, but he also knew that reality is often larger and more mysterious than it looks to the naked eye. ■

Nicholas Haggerty *is a writer who works in Hartford, Connecticut, public schools.*

*

There are no splinters though this door
is still making room for the sea
to come inside—even without water

these walls become sails, their corners
opening as if this pillow
is reaching out where two should be

—more ships! armadas half canvas
half behind each window shade
where someone is crying from lips

that never dry, sweat when turning a knob
hollowing it out the way you dead
let each other in—one by one

learning to rise to the surface
as walls and underneath
unfolding your arms for more wood.

—Simon Perchik

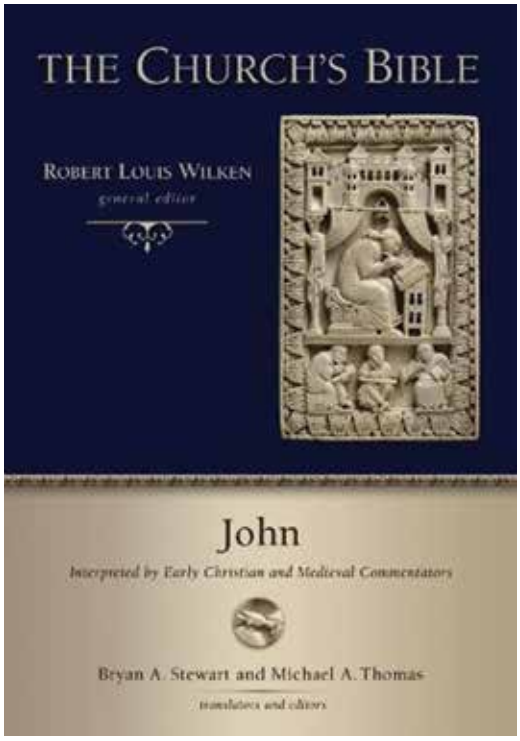
Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in Partisan Review, Forge, Poetry, Osiris, *the* New Yorker, *and elsewhere. His most recent collection is* The Gibson Poems *(Cholla Needles, 2019).*

Religion Booknotes

Luke Timothy Johnson

John
Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators
translated and edited by Bryan A. Stewart and Michael A. Thomas
Eerdmans, $65.00, 684 pp.

Robert Louis Wilken is widely and deservedly recognized as a leading advocate for patristic theology and its pertinence for contemporary Christian thought (see his *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God*, 2003). He is the general editor of this impressive series of patristic and medieval reflections on each of the biblical books. In addition to this volume on John, books on the Song of Songs, Isaiah, Matthew, Romans, and 1 Corinthians have also appeared in print. The Gospel of John offers a good opportunity for assessing the series, since this most "spiritual" gospel was, together with Matthew, the most attractive to ancient interpreters, and received the most and closest attention from them.



John: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators is crafted to provide modern readers easy and rewarding access to the ancient authors. After a short essay by Wilken, "Interpreting the New Testament," Bryan Stewart follows with an "Introduction to John" that clears the way for the subsequent reading of unfamiliar authors on Trinitarian and Christological considerations, sacramental theology, figural readings, John and the unity of Scripture, John and the Synoptics, and moral applications.

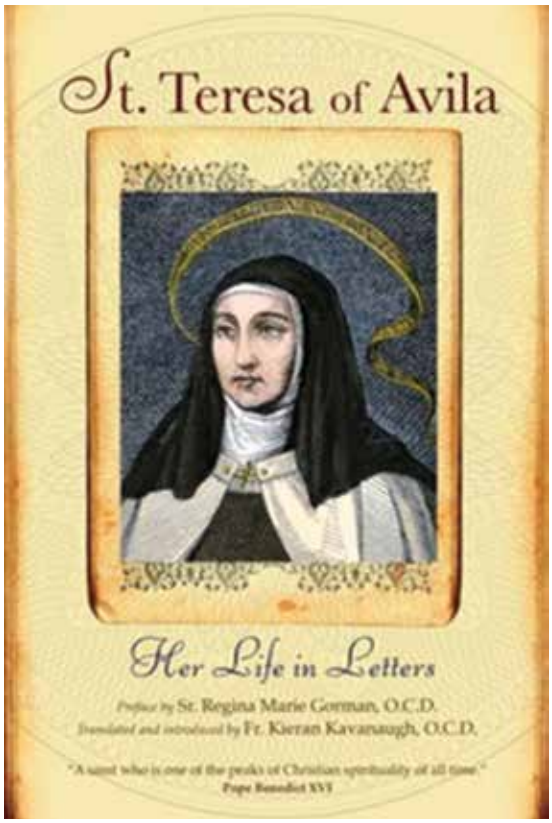
Next comes a selection of "prefaces" to John's Gospel from various ancient writers, which offer the type of introductions—concerning the author and circumstances of the writing—that are found in standard contemporary treatments. The balance of the book is a chapter-by-chapter collection of interpretations of John. Those familiar with such anthologies will be surprised (and pleased) by three things: first, the selections are substantial and sometimes quite lengthy; second, the range of authors is wide, extending from Origen (185–254) to John Scotus Eriugena (815–877) to John Cassian (360–435) to Romanos the Melodist (490–566); third, selections are drawn not only from commentaries—where little of the juice of ancient interpretation is found—but also from homilies, theological writings, and even poetry. The volume concludes with notes on each selection, a biographical sketch of each contributor, and full indices.

Our patristic and medieval ancestors in the faith scarcely require my recommendation. But this volume makes a strong case that, far from being only of antiquarian interest, those whose lives were profoundly and pervasively shaped by Scripture (in a manner none of us today can claim) and whose faithful witness to the One whose Spirit was at work in all of Scripture, have everything to teach us about both Scripture and the faith. Kudos to Eerdmans for investing in such an expensive—and so constructive—an enterprise.

St. Teresa of Avila
Her Life in Letters
Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD
Ave Maria Press, $22.00, 352 pp.

If proof were required that mystical prayer can cohabit with tough practicality and wry humor, these letters of Teresa of Jesus (1515–1582) contain more than enough evidence to make the case. Canonized forty years after her death by Pope Gregory XV in 1622, Teresa was declared a doctor of the church by Pope Paul VI in 1970. Her works on prayer, above all, *The Way of Perfection* and *The Interior Castle*, continue to be read with great profit by those seeking a deeper life of prayer. But the other side of Teresa—the founder of communities, the defender of her movement of reform, the woman who suffered from both physical ailments and powerful human opposition—appears vividly in the letters she wrote, often late at night and sometimes, when especially weak, through dictation.

This collection of one hundred letters (offered in the Christian Classics Series from Notre Dame) is an abridgement of a two-volume edition containing all 342 extant letters and the fragments



of eighty-seven others (2001, 2007), also translated by Kavanaugh. They are arranged chronologically, written from when Teresa was in her forties through the last month of her life. The last, written shortly before her death, is filled with advice for the prioress of one of her communities. We hear her, then, at the height of her struggles to secure the physical and spiritual foundations of the Discalced Carmelites.

As she writes to her relatives, confessors, associates, various clerics, and patrons from the nobility, we grasp how very "this-worldly" her efforts necessarily were: acquiring land and buildings for her nuns, gaining financial support, supporting her colleague John of the Cross, appealing for help to King Philip II, discerning which young women with substantial dowries seeking entry to her financially strapped communities actually had religious vocations—all these occupy her attention. At moments, we can almost feel her frustration and longing to be free of such distractions, not least because of the vagaries of the postal system. At the same time, Teresa shows flashes of sardonic humor, a directness in expressing her views of people, and a charming appreciation for gifts of fish, fresh fruit, and sweets.

Each letter in this edition is generously annotated, so that Teresa's sometimes oblique references are made more clear. Particularly helpful is a comprehensive appendix that provides biographical sketches of all her correspondents. With the assistance of these, the collection offers insight not only into Teresa's mind and heart, but also into the complexities of ecclesial life in sixteenth-century Spain. So vibrantly alive does she appear in these letters, more than five hundred years since her death, that we're led to consider just what a powerhouse of the Spirit she must have been in the flesh.

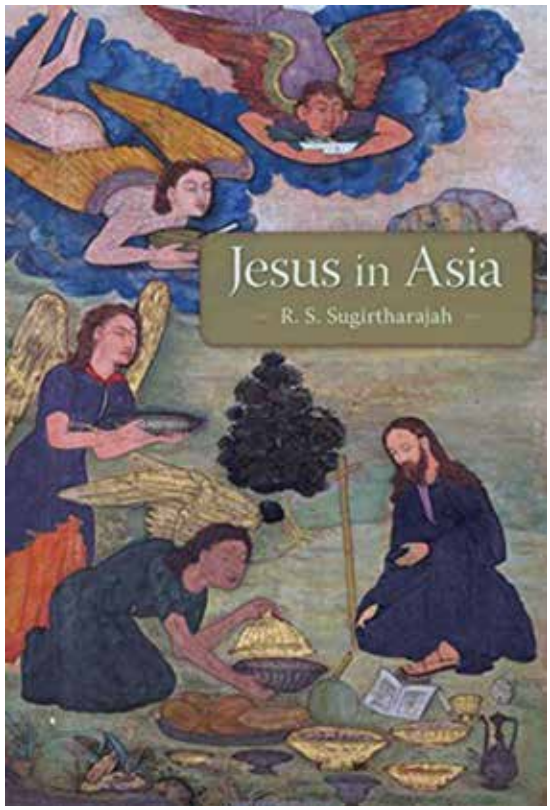
Jesus in Asia

R. S. Sugirtharajah
Harvard University Press, $29.95, 320 pp.

Coming to grips with the human Jesus was a challenge not only to Enlightenment-era Europeans, but also to Asian intellectuals who needed to make sense of the religious figure championed by Western colonial powers. R. S. Sugirtharajah is emeritus professor of hermeneutics at the University of Birmingham and is well known as a proponent and practitioner of post-colonial studies, one of the dominant scholarly approaches in the humanities, not least in religion. The Eastern encounter with the Western Messiah is naturally a textbook case for examining the complexities of cultural collision.

Although Sugirtharajah spends a chapter on earlier periods, his main focus is on Asian writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who responded to the political hegemony of Western powers and the missionary incursions of Christians. He notes the great difference between the evangelization of Europe and Asia; while colonialism drove the political and economic dynamics of conquered territories of Asia, Christian missionaries confronted ancient and profound religious traditions that were more than capable of holding their own both intellectually and spiritually.

In texts known as "the Jesus Sutras" from the seventh century and in a monument dating from the eighth, we have evidence of Chinese Christians assimilating Jesus into their own syncretic religious framework: "Jesus emerges as the embodiment of a mixture of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism," Sugirtharajah notes. In contrast, a 1602 work by Jesuit Jerome Xavier called *Mirror of*



Holiness follows Portuguese colonization and the establishment of the Mughal empire in northern India, and, while emphasizing the connections between the gospels and the Qur'an, advances a very Catholic, Counter-Reformation version of Jesus.

Sugirtharajah's detailed examination of subsequent Asian treatments of Jesus reveals a startling variety among them. Some converts to Christianity sought to define Jesus as a Jina or Guru (see Manilal Parekh [1885–1967] or Francis Kingsbury [1873–1981]). Others used a half-baked version of Jesus to construct their own messianic fantasies, as in the case of the Chinese Hong Xiuquan (1814–1864), leader of the Taiping Rebellion, who considered himself Jesus' "divine younger brother." In India, with its ancient Vedantic tradition, others resisted claims made for Jesus. The charge by certain European scholars that Christ was simply a myth was taken up by the Hindus Chandra Varma (*Christ a Myth*, 1903), and Dhirendranath Chowdhury (*In Search of Jesus Christ*, 1927). The Sri Lankan Ponnambalam Ramanathan (1851–1930) and the Indian Hindu Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1885–1975) argued for the superiority of the Vedantic tradition by interpreting the worth of Jesus in terms of his "growth" toward that form of spirituality.

In Korea, the Christian New Testament scholar Ahn Byung-Mu (1922–1996)—an erstwhile disciple of German New Testament theologian Rudolf Bultmann—found in the historical Jesus the basis for Minjung theology, which emphasizes, in the fashion of liberation theology, the plight of the oppressed. And in Japan, the novelist Shūsaku Endō (1923–1996) displayed a career-long fascination with Jesus as a "maternal messiah" who was strong precisely through his weakness (see also *A Life of Jesus*, 1973).

Sugirtharajah has admirably filled a gap that most readers, including scholars specializing in the study of Jesus, are not even aware of. And if his own post-colonial proclivities sometimes seem intrusive, especially in his editorial comments on the respective authors, his treatment of the subject matter more than makes up for these minor transgressions.

At Play in the Lions' Den
A Biography and Memoir of Daniel Berrigan

Jim Forest

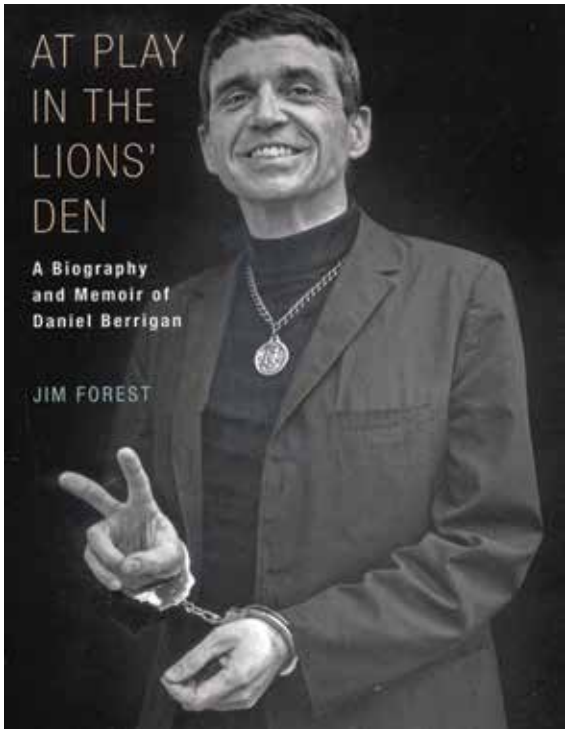
Orbis Press, $30, 352 pp.

When Daniel Berrigan died in 2016 at the age of ninety-four, many of us recalled him mainly as the "radical priest" of the 1960s and '70s, when he and his brother Philip gained notoriety for protesting war and nuclear arms and for burning draft cards as part of the Catonsville Nine. Berrigan was fortunate, however, to have had a much younger companion and colleague in Jim Forest, co-founder of the Catholic Peace Fellowship, who is able to provide a fuller portrait of a man who must surely be included among Christ's true disciples and prophets of the twentieth century alongside his role models and mentors, Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton. Forest gifts readers with a positive but truly candid picture of the Jesuit with whom he protested for peace.

We are reminded of what we ought not to have forgotten (or what we ignored): that Berrigan was first of all a gifted and prolific writer. His first volume of verse in 1957 won the Lamont Poetry Award, and he would go on to publish fourteen more volumes of poetry before his death. But there were also more than forty other books, including the kind of commentary on contemporary issues that we associate with the later Thomas Merton, as well as nine biblical commentaries that emphasize, as we might expect, the prophetic dimensions of Scripture.

We learn that Berrigan traveled widely, and in his peripatetic career taught at twelve different seminaries, colleges, and universities. We learn of the importance of his loving yet at times tense relationship with his younger brother Philip, as well as of his mutually admiring friendship with Vietnamese monk and poet Thich Nhat Hanh. We learn how, when imprisoned at Danbury, he almost died from an allergic reaction to medication. We learn as well of the range of his social commitments, all of which he personally pursued: civil rights, peace in the Middle East and Ireland, the right to life in the face of abortion, and ministry for those with AIDS. And we learn that, to the very end, he combined a life in community with fellow Jesuits with a willingness to put his frail body on the line; he was last arrested at a protest at the age of ninety.

Forest's combination biography-and-memoir—his own participation and correspondence with Berrigan is a major part of the story—includes many photographs, as well as copious and pertinent quotations from Berrigan. It succeeds wonderfully in telling the story of a complex man who, for all his fame, was and remains too little known. ■



The Mildred Mysteries

Jon Volkmer

I've kept my father's rosary in the top drawer of my desk since his funeral sixteen years ago. I've taken it out, held it, stared at the tiny wooden cross with the hollow back containing a tiny glass vial, inscribed "LOURDES PAT. PEND." But only this time did I notice that it was broken—or rather, that it had been broken and repaired. How had I failed to notice the odd bead sticking out sideways from the middle of the last decade, attached only at one end? A count revealed the rosary five beads short of whole. The last two decades were fused; sometime in the rosary's life, one Our Father and four Hail Marys had gone missing.

On this occasion, I'd taken it out to wrap as a gift for my brother Chris. We seven siblings, the four sons and three daughters of Ron and Mildred, were about to gather in Dallas for twin celebrations: Michael, at seventy-nine, was marking fifty years as a priest of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood, while Chris—the youngest, at sixty—was to be ordained a deacon. We hail from rural Nebraska, but live hundreds or thousands of miles from each other. When we come together, it is a great joy, with food and drink, pictures and stories of kids and grandkids, and endless games of bridge.

The time seemed right to pass on the rosary. Close examination of the beads shows bespoke wiring, with tiny contrived anchors, and a whisper of thread. Seeing these repairs, I had an immediate vision of my father. He is sixty-nine, with a score of years still to live. He hunches over a card table in the basement, squinting through his bifocals, still embarrassed about the sound the lost beads had made bouncing this way and that on the church pew. He wields needle-nose pliers with unwonted delicacy. His life's work had been on a bigger scale—building grain elevators, maneuvering boxcars, scooping rotted corn from rain-ruined bins. Dad's work made him a handy improviser.

I imagine him finishing his project, reaching over to turn off the lamp, and spotting that one bead he'd overlooked, sitting at the edge of the table. He stares at it for a second and cusses a little. He doesn't want to take the rosary apart again, but to discard the bead would be wrong and, worse, wasteful. The result is a quick-fix compromise: the bead is included, but it is not part of the ring. A dangler. I will call it the Dad Bead. When I picture him praying the rosary, it is a communal event, an indistinct murmur of old people before the lights are turned on for 8 a.m. Mass. Without thinking, he lets his thumb linger on the odd bead during the prayers not accounted for, as he waits for the congregation to catch up. I doubt that the missing beads ever tripped him up.

Or perhaps the dangler is the Mom Bead. My mother Mildred did not live to see man set foot on the moon, or her eldest son become a priest. Maybe it was during those darkened early morning rosaries of the half-century following her death that our father, that brusque and guarded man, would allow himself the space

to think on her, to miss her, to mourn her, while his speech was knotted safely inside this circle of prayers.

To pray the rosary is to engage in a sustained contemplation of mystery. After all these years, the memory of our mother is remote to us, her children, especially to me and Chris, who did not even get to be teenagers with her. All of us have been allotted more time than she had. With our ages spanning sixty to eighty, we now face our own mortality. So here, in honor of Mom, inspired by Dad's handiwork, is a version of an ancient rite. The Mildred Mysteries, to be prayed on a broken and mended rosary.

The First Mystery: Humility. We pray ten Hail Marys to remind us to take strength in normality, to cherish the quotidian, to give thanks for surviving times of dry fields, little food.

The Second Mystery: Humor. Ten happy Hail Marys to contemplate the grace in making each other grin. Oh, Mildred, daughter of Irish affability, teach us to laugh. Oh, Ron, son of adversity, teach us—in that odd phrase of yours—to let the hide go with the tallow.

The Third Mystery: Learning. Ten Hail Marys to contemplate the mystery of contemplation itself. Embrace the book, figure out the problem, fear not the Other.

The Fourth Mystery: Acceptance. Nine Hail Marys on coming to terms with sorrows and regrets. Pause on number ten, half-attached, the Mom Bead. We are all broken and mended, but we are graced with joy. Making this turn, we are left with six Hail Marys to dwell in gratitude for all that we are, for all that has been given to us, for the gift of each other.

Recite closing prayer of your choice. Put rosary away. Go out to live in humility and gratitude, amen. ■

Jon Volkmer'*s books include a postmodern travel memoir, a collection of poems about grain elevators, and a young adult biography of Roberto Clemente. He teaches literature and creative writing at Ursinus College.*

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