A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

Commonweal

NOVEMBER 15, 2013

WHERE TESTS FAIL

Jackson Lears on Diane Ravitch & Education Reform

DEATH BEFORE BIRTH
Agnes R. Howard

THE NECESSARY VAGUENESS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY
David Koppelman

CATHOLICS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING
Richard L. Wood, Brad Fulton, Christine Doby

PLUS
THE EDITORS CHAT WITH POPE FRANCIS

$3.95 US/$4.50 CAN

www.commonwealmagazine.org

Founded in 1924
Commonweal

Editor
Paul Baumann

Associate Editors
Grant Gallicho, Matthew Boudway, Mollie Wilson O'Reilly

Print & Digital Production
Tiina Aleman

Digital Editor
Dominic Preziosi

Copy Editor
Susanne Washburn

Digital Media & Marketing
KeriLee Horan

Editorial Assistant
Ellen B. Koneck

Intern
Kaitlin Campbell

Business Manager
James Hannan

Development
Christa A. Kerber

Poetry
Rosemary Deen

Film
Richard Alleva, Rand Richards Cooper

Stage/Media/Television
Celia Wren

Columnists
Lawrence S. Cunningham, E. J. Dionne Jr., Anthony Domestico, John Garvey, Cathleen Kaveny, Jo McGowan, Charles R. Morris, Mollie Wilson O'Reilly, William Pfaff, Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Subscription Information
212-662-4200

Advertising Manager
Regan Pickett
commonwealads@gmail.com
540-349-5736

Publisher
Thomas Baker

Commonweal [ISSN 0010-3330], a review of public affairs, religion, literature, and the arts, is published biweekly, except in April, July, August, and November, when it is published monthly, by Commonweal Foundation, 475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 405, New York, NY 10115. Telephone: (212) 662-4200. E-mail: editors@commonwealmagazine.org. Toll-free: 888-495-6755. Fax: (212) 662-4183. Advertising correspondence should be sent to Regan Pickett. POSTMASTER: send address changes to *Commonweal*, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834-9982.

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Catholic Periodical Index, Book Review Digest, and Book Review Index. Microfilm from Vol. 1, 1924, to current issues available through University Microfilm, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 and on Microfiche from Bell & Howell, Wooster, OH 44691. *Commonweal* articles are also available at many libraries and research facilities on CD-ROM and in electronic databases. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional offices. Single Copy, $3.95. Yearly subscriptions, U.S., $59; Canada, $64; foreign, $69. Special two-year rate: U.S. $89; Canada, $94; foreign, $109. Annual rates for air-mail delivery outside U.S.: Western Hemisphere, $86; Europe, $91; other parts of the world, $101. All Canadian and foreign subscriptions must be paid in U.S. dollars by International Money Order or by check on a U.S. bank.

Cover design: Cecilia Guerrero Rezes

www.commonwealmagazine.org

LETTERS

Gay marriage, anti-Semitism, the Bible

TOUGH LOVE

I was struck by this sentence in John Garvey's column "An Imperfect Union" (October 11): "For most of its history, marriage has been about the melding of families (it's still about this, as married couples often learn after the fact)...not, or not primarily, about romantic feelings."

Garvey seems to presume that the understanding of marriage that makes it possible to permit same-sex marriage is one where marriage is primarily about romantic feelings. As a gay man, now widowed, I find that idea offensive. My married life was not an endless series of gauzy Valentine's Day moments. Nor was that the sort of life we aspired to. Our marriage was making a home; it was being involved in the lives of both our families; it was extending ourselves for other family members and friends in times of need. It was going to couples counseling to work out troubles; it was making sacrifices in career and other facets of life to stay together. It was taking care of one another in sickness, and in the long battle with cancer that claimed my husband's life over a year ago, a battle that we fought together. Our relationship started romantically, but it certainly became something deeper and much, much less romantic.

JIM HOHMAN
Greendell, N.J.

BAD BEGINNINGS

John Connelly's review of David Nirenberg's book *Anti-Judaism* ("Through a Glass Darkly," September 27) left me puzzled. He spends a great deal of time on the meaning and intent of Jesus' words, and less on the meaning and intent of the evangelists' words, which are not necessarily the same. Exegetes point out the importance of context to understand the text. One significant aspect of the context of Jesus' life was the Roman Empire.

The Jewish revolt of 67 C.E., the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 C.E., and the consequential slavery into which Jewish prisoners were forced by the Romans occurred at the time before or during some early Christian writings. Wasn't it a priority of the evangelists to separate themselves as Christian Jews from the "bad Jews" who revolted against Rome? Blaming Rome for the death of Jesus was simply not in their best interests. So the poison of anti-Semitism was in the well from the beginning.

PAUL STUBENBORT
Bensalem, Pa.

CORRECTION

Gary A. Anderson's fine article on Jewish sources of Christian charity contains a geographical error ("The Current of Creation," September 27). He places St. Basil at "Caesarea, the great Roman port just north of modern day Tel Aviv." St. Basil actually lived at Caesarea in Cappadocia, described by Philip Rousseau in his book *Basil of Caesarea* as surrounded by land "sandy and liable in parts to flooding." Having visited both locations, I can attest to the difference between the two: the first faces the sea; the other, a strange rock formation.

(MSGR.) NICHOLAS SCHNEIDER
Clayton, Mo.

BIBLE STUDY

Recalling Karl Barth, Frank Matera ("An Act of Theology," August 16) stresses that it is God's word that judges the reader, not the other way around, that "the text we dare to hold in our hands" is "God's word in human words." But this entails a paradox.

If, as *Dei Verbum* has it, the Bible teaches "firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of

continued on page 4

The next issue of **Commonweal** will be dated December 6, 2013

Commonweal

NOVEMBER 15, 2013 • VOLUME 140 • NUMBER 18

SHORT TAKE

ARTICLES

FILM

UPFRONT

COLUMNISTS

BOOKS

POETRY

THE LAST WORD

our salvation," an obvious question arises: What truth is it that God wanted put into those writings? The question is equally important for a Catholic who accepts the teaching authority of the church and for a reader who relies on *sola scriptura* as a *solus lector*. Accepting Scripture as *norma normans non normata* does not resolve for many readers the tension between the worldviews of Proverbs and of Job. It does not, for most readers, make clear whether Deuteronomy 22:24, as part of the *norma*, is presently normative. In short, the conscientious believer, while accepting the judgment of God's word, must sort out the testimony of the human authors in context. This requires making judgments.

And of course readers *do* make those judgments, whether they are popes, bishops, theologians, or the most ignorant "common readers." It is in making those judgments that the scholars employ the methods mentioned in Matera's article.

His article is thorough and engaging, but the conclusion is too tidy. I am left uneasy because Matera's perspective is that of an expert, mine that of a nonspecialist.

Biblical scholars may understandably take the historical-critical method for granted as an everyday tool or, in Matera's phrase, a lingua franca that has served them well for many years. Despite the "balkanization" of their discipline produced by a profusion of newer methodologies, the historical-critical method remains "an indispensable starting point for a theological reading of the text." But it is only a starting point. In the world of biblical scholars the emphasis must be ongoing from that starting point, and Matera spells out a number of suggestions in that regard.

Among the rest of us, the situation is rather different. Having spent more than twenty years working with parish Bible study groups, I can attest that many otherwise well-informed adult Christians adhere to a fairly fundamentalist reading of the Bible. Moreover, when exposed to works aimed at popularizing the contributions of biblical scholars, all too many find such works disturbing rather than illuminating. If the historical-critical method is an "indispensable starting point" for exegetes, some appreciation of the fruits of that method would also seem to be important for ordinary Christians. Failure to communicate that appreciation may, unfortunately, favor at least implicit acceptance of "interpretations that do not respect the incarnational nature of God's word."

Matera urges exegetes to "return to foundational questions such as revelation and inspiration." Similarly, popularizers might encourage ordinary Christians to consider the meaning of inspiration. Too often the unexamined and implicitly accepted notion is that of God overriding the personalities of the human authors, so that their very humanity, with its inherent limitations, disappears. That makes possible a tidy sort of biblical inerrancy, but it entails suppressing difficulties and forsaking insights.

JULIAN IRIAS
Davis, Calif.

A Chat with Pope Francis

Commonweal presents an unprecedented exclusive: Pope Francis's first interview with a lay Catholic publication. The transcript of the editors' conversation with the pope has been translated from the original Italian into Latin, then English, and then back into Italian, and then discarded and reconstructed from memory.

COMMONWEAL: Your Holiness—

POPE FRANCIS: Please, call me Francis.

CW: This seems like an awfully…informal location for an interview with a pope.

PF: Ah, Roma Termini, I come here to meet the people. [*Aside*] Such a beautiful baby! May I kiss? Also, the number sixty-four bus goes from the train station right to the Vatican. Very convenient, but watch out for pickpockets.

CW: Does the papal staff know you're here?

PF: Eh, they don't need to know everything.

CW: You seem like a hard man to keep up with.

PF: I like to talk with people. I suppose there is always the danger that I may say something I will regret. After all, that is why my predecessors stuck to speeches and carefully orchestrated encounters with the press: to prevent embarrassing gaffes. You can see how well it worked.

CW: You may have heard that there is some consternation among conservatives in the American church about your recent pronouncements, and how different your style is from the previous pope's—

PF: Pope Benedict, yes, he was a wonderful man and everything he did was exactly right.

CW: And yet you're quite different.

PF: I can't help it, I am just so undisciplined, you see. I picked up so many bad habits in my Jesuit days. If only I were less naïve, I would stop myself from talking to disaffected Catholics in such a friendly way. It gets their hopes up, or so I am told.

CW: Some conservatives are worried you'll undermine the teachings of the church by appearing to downplay doctrinal orthodoxy.

PF: It would certainly be a shame to deflect attention from the church's teachings on homosexuality and birth control—just when they were catching on!

CW: There has been some confusion about the accuracy of your reported conversation with the Italian journalist Eugenio Scalfari. Did you really say that "the court is the leprosy of the papacy"?

PF: Was I too mild? I thought I was just saying what everyone was thinking.

CW: It seems unlikely that *everyone* agrees with you.

PF: Maybe not. This is why I have assembled a new group of cardinals to advise me; I'm hoping that they will tell me what people are really thinking. Some say this is dangerous, because my job is to tell people what they *ought* to think. Something about giving in to the dictatorship of relativism. But figures of speech about "dictatorships" don't get very far with me. So I will listen, maybe I will hear something interesting. Maybe a good joke. I do like jokes.

CW: Have you received much resistance to your plans to reform the curia?

PF: Well, there was the time somebody passed me a zucchetto with a note inside. It said "Back off or else," and it was composed of letters cut and pasted from *L'Osservatore Romano*.

CW: Wow, what did you do?

PF: I blessed it and tossed it back. As for the curia, let them complain. There are plenty of parishes in mission territory that need priests.

CW: That's awfully blunt, even for you.

PF: Ah, but this is for *Commonweal*, yes? No one at the Vatican will read it.

CW: Pope Francis…

PF: Please, call me Frank.

CW: Can you say more about your thoughts on women in the church?

PF: Oh, women, women, they are so important. The church herself is a woman, yes? And that is why women are really so much better than men, forgive me if I speak plainly! Without its women the church is like a bumblebee at the post office, as we say in Argentina. We must talk about women very much, in Rome and everywhere. Maybe we should even talk *to* women. That is how important they are.

CW: And the possibility of ordaining women to the priesthood…

PF: Not a chance. Next question.

CW: Have you given any thought to what you might do about the damage from the sex-abuse crisis?

PF: Is that still going on?

CW: In a way, yes.

PF: You know, when bishops come to see me they never bring it up. Surely they would want me to know if it were still a problem. I keep waiting for them to talk about it.

CW: Maybe you should try asking someone else?

PF: Hmm. I might just do that. As we say in Rome, stranger things have happened.

CW: Do they say that in Rome?

PF: They do now. ■

Jo McGowan

Clean Sweep

A REFORM PARTY TAKES ON CORRUPTION IN INDIA

A few nights ago, I met an old friend in a coffee shop in New Delhi. Stephane is a French architect who has lived and worked in India for the past fifteen years. "It's really strange in India right now, don't you find?" he asked me. "I've never seen it like this. All my friends are depressed. No one has any hope. I've never been in a country where people were so oblivious to the concept of a common good, where they are so short-sighted, so ready to cut corners for the sake of an easier, cheaper way to do things."

That week I had been staying at the home of my close friends Deepa and Prashant Bhushan, and the mood there was anything but depressed. In fact, I had never seen the family so optimistic. The Bhushans are a well-known family in India, a family of lawyers. Shanti Bhushan, Prashant's father, was Law Minister during the Janta Party's government in the late 1970s. Earlier, in 1975, he had successfully prosecuted Prime Minister Indira Gandhi for her unfair electoral practices. The courts invalidated her election. Prashant himself is well known for his tireless efforts in public-interest litigation.

Lately he has been involved in the India Against Corruption movement, which has formed the Aam Aadmi (Common Man) Party. This new political party is now fielding candidates in the upcoming Delhi state elections. When the idea of running their own candidates first came up, politically astute observers dismissed the AAP's chances. Now, even the most cynical are saying—in stunned amazement—that the AAP might actually win. The party's own polls put it ahead with 47 percent of the vote—the ruling Congress Party polls only 22 percent and the rival Bhartiya Janta Party is struggling with 33 percent.

In India, where many voters are illiterate or semi-literate, symbols are crucial for ballot recognition. The AAP's symbol is a *jharu*—a traditional broom made of a bundle of twigs. The symbol could not be more appropriate: the party's whole platform is about taking a broom to the murky, cobwebby world of India's political and administrative system. The AAP's *jharu* offers a promise of purposeful action to a public that has been forced to put up silently with years of corruption and dysfunction, now so routine that most people have stopped even mentioning them. People just pay and get on with it, accepting bribery as the price of getting anything accomplished.

For the past two years, the party has tapped into public anger and frustration by encouraging people to protest and organize. Its election campaign has been Obama-like in its strategy, eschewing big money and expensive ad buys in favor of small, hundred-rupee donations and door-to-door canvassing. One of its biggest constituencies is Delhi's auto-rickshaw unions. The AAP platform has an obvious appeal for rickshaw drivers, who are at the mercy of predatory and corrupt police: if they don't pay regular protection money, they may be fined, their licenses seized, and their vehicles impounded. Rickshaw drivers are also roving ambassadors in the city. They are constantly on the move, constantly meeting new people. Their vehicles, draped with AAP banners, are traveling billboards. They even hand out campaign literature to their passengers. This creative approach to campaigning is a hallmark of the AAP's style. Its support among educated youth and the poor is enormous.

The party is also known for its rigid adherence to clean politics. It recently withdrew its support from a candidate who had not revealed the fact that he was involved in several property disputes. The party's leaders—people like Prashant Bhushan and Arvind Kejriwal, who gave up his comfortable job as a government bureaucrat for the party—are well known for being above reproach and dedicated to public service.

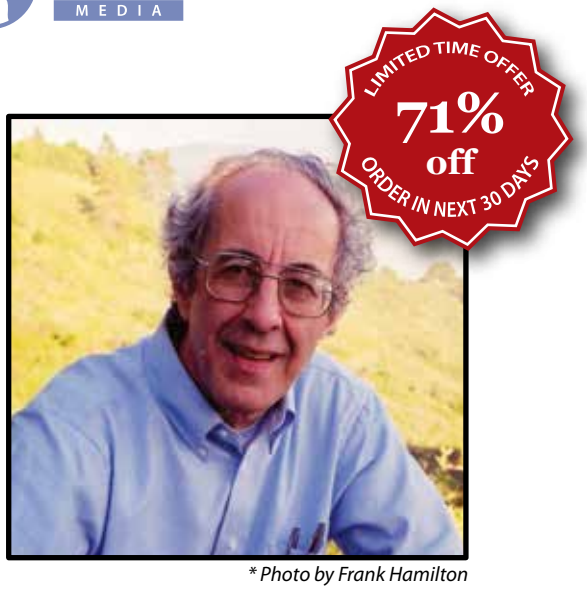
The AAP also benefits from a sad lack of alternatives. The ruling Congress Party is being blamed for an economy in freefall. The rupee is now 60 to a dollar, down from 45 to the dollar this time last year. The Congress Party is also coming under fire for its failure to respond effectively to disasters like the recent floods in the mountain state of Uttarakhand. Finally, the party is widely believed to be implicated in just about every major government scam of the past decade.

The Bhartiya Janta Party is no better. Its standard bearer is the charismatic Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister of Gujarat, where he is believed to have engineered the 2002 massacre of more than a thousand Muslims—including pregnant women whose living fetuses were torn from their bodies and decapitated. When questioned about his role in the riots on national television, he first distanced himself from the events and then said offhandedly: "If we are driving a car…[or] someone else is driving and we're sitting behind, if a puppy comes under the wheel, will it be painful or not? Of course it is."

The one real concern for the AAP is the question of how it will govern if it does win the elections. No one in the party's current leadership has any experience with the day-to-day running of even a small town, let alone the capital of the country.

But given its leadership's reputation for honesty and integrity, the public may just be willing to give its candidates a chance to learn on the job. ■

Now You KNOW MEDIA



** Photo by Frank Hamilton*

Learn about the Life and Spirituality of Henri Nouwen with this Course Presented by His Official Biographer

Henri Nouwen (1932–1996) was one of the most popular and influential spiritual thinkers of the twentieth century. Born in the Netherlands, Nouwen was ordained as a Catholic priest and trained as a psychologist. He spent much of his life in America, where he ministered and taught throughout the continent. His profound spiritual works, such as *The Return of the Prodigal Son* and *Life of the Beloved*, develop such compelling concepts as the restless searching of the heart and the agony of being human.

This course is presented by Dr. Michael W. Higgins, the co-author of *Genius Born of Anguish: The Life and Legacy of Henri Nouwen*. Through 12 masterful lectures, available in audio and video formats, you will examine the context of Nouwen's most important works, the evolution of his ideas, and the struggles of his spirit. By exploring his life's passion and challenges, you will come to understand the autobiographic nature of his works.

Henri Nouwen developed a spirituality for the wounded, but within it he also presents us with genuine joy, boundless energy, and ultimately hope. You are invited to meet and come to know Nouwen through this powerful new course.

Offer expires 30 days from issue date

1-800-955-3904

www.NowYouKnowMedia.com/Nouwen

Henri Nouwen: A Spirituality for the Wounded

5-CD or 4-DVD Set presented by

Dr. Michael W. Higgins, Ph.D.,
Co-author of *Genius Born of Anguish: The Life and Legacy of Henri Nouwen*

Lecture Titles

- Who Was This Enigmatic Priest?
- Nouwen Pre-Second Vatican Council
- And Then There Was Anton Boisen
- From the Menninger to Notre Dame
- Dom John Eudes and the Abbey of Genesee
- From Latin America to Harvard
- The Harvard Friends
- Harvard's Kierkegaard; Harvard's van Gogh
- Trosly and Daybreak
- *Cri de Coeur*
- The Gift of the Circus
- The Prodigal and the Call of Death

Henri Nouwen: A Spirituality for the Wounded
12 Lectures (25 minutes/lecture)
+ electronic study guide

SAVE $150

5-CD Set	~~$119.95~~	SALE $35.95
4-DVD Set	~~$209.95~~	SALE $59.95

Coupon Code: A1725

+ $8.95 Shipping & Handling
100% Satisfaction Guarantee

Now You Know Media's mission is to bring you the best Catholic professors and retreat leaders in America. Carefully selected for their scholarship, faithful insight and teaching excellence, our speakers will touch your heart and engage your intellect. Visit our website, NowYouKnowMedia.com, to browse our growing catalog of over 200 courses and retreats available in CD, DVD and MP3 formats.

Now You Know Media, Inc. ● 12115 Parklawn Dr., Unit B
Rockville, MD 20852

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Painting the Jewish Jesus

'CHAGALL: LOVE, WAR, AND EXILE'

Christ and the Artist *by Marc Chagall*

COURTESY THE JEWISH MUSEUM

Jesus is Jewish. Is there a more basic fact about him than that? Nothing has altered our understanding of Jesus more than our relatively recent attention to his Jewishness.

Yet the actual image of a Jewish Jesus hanging on a Cross still gives pause to both Jews and Christians. Marc Chagall, the Russian-born son of a Hasidic family, painted many such images—many more than most have ever seen. More than twenty-five of them have been collected in "Chagall: Love, War, and Exile," at New York's Jewish Museum (through February 4, 2014). Though Chagall first painted the image of Jesus on the Cross as a student in Paris in his 1912 piece *Calvary*, this exhibit focuses on the 1930s and '40s, when Chagall lived in exile, first in France and then the United States.

During the war years, the Crucifixion became a focus of Chagall's work. Standing before them, the viewer encounters a Jesus whose Jewishness is more than merely notional. Chagall places that fact at the center of these works. I've seen some of these paintings before: *White Crucifixion* at the Art Institute of Chicago and *Calvary* at New York's Museum of Modern Art. They seemed like curiosities: Why would a Jewish artist paint the Crucifixion? (When I was young I wondered whether Chagall became a Catholic, like his friend Raïssa Maritain. He did not.)

The sheer number of these paintings and the variety of settings in which Chagall locates the man on the Cross make this new exhibit more than a curiosity; it is an epiphany. Evoking the pogroms of pre-Revolutionary Russia, a crucified Jesus presides over Chagall's native village as it burns. Two panels of a triptych depict Crucifixion scenes amid references to the 1917 Revolution and Russia's resistance to Hitler. In some paintings, Jesus wears a loincloth patterned on the tallit (the Jewish prayer shawl) while a halo circles his head (a Christian symbol). Others have Mary and John at the foot of the Cross. In still others, mythical and mystical figures along with earthly ones float around the crucified Jesus: angels, animals, Torah scholars, bearded rabbis, Madonna and child, Joseph of Arimathea with a ladder, and the artist himself—upside down beside the Cross—all in the vibrant, saturated colors typical of Russian icons. Titles like *The Martyr* and *Christ Carrying the Cross* underline Chagall's appropriation of Christian imagery.

Even more startling, the crucified Jesus dominates scenes from Hebrew Scripture. In one painting, the Jewish people cross the Red Sea under the gaze of a crucified Jesus; Moses, who is carrying the stone tablets, is relegated to the lower right corner of the canvas. If the Christian viewer is disconcerted by such an image, how does a Jewish viewer respond? What did Chagall intend?

While the Crucifixion was for centuries the source of anti-Judaism and Jewish persecution, Chagall saw Jesus as the quintessential Jewish martyr. The Cross represents his own suffering as well as that of the Jewish people. During the war years, as news of the death camps came to the United States, Chagall held out hope that images of the suffering Jesus would evoke a response in Christians. But, as he wrote, "with few exceptions, their hearts are silent."

Chagall acknowledged the transgressive nature of combining images sacred to Jews and Christians. His fellow Jews, especially in the United States, criticized him. But he paid little attention. In words and images, he identified himself with the man on the Cross. In *Christ and the Artist*, he gazes up at the Cross with palette in hand. In another painting he substitutes his first name for the inscription "INRI" at the top of the Cross.

To Christians these beautiful paintings offer a salutary meditation. To some Jews they may remain an affront. The catalog strives to locate Chagall and his work in a specifically Jewish context: "the Crucifixion images were not—or not primarily—an expression of Christian theology," it explains. "For him the Cross was a symbol of persecution and oppression rather than a sign of redemption and hope." And yet, it is also a symbol reminding us that memory, not timeless myth, is at the heart of both Christian and Jewish faith. ■

Agnes R. Howard

Comforting Rachel

HOW CHRISTIANS SHOULD RESPOND TO PRENATAL DEATH

Several years ago I had a miscarriage about five months into pregnancy. My husband and I had brought our two daughters to a routine ultrasound to get a glimpse of their growing sibling-to-be. We were devastated when neither sonographer nor obstetrician could detect a fetal heartbeat. My husband talked to the girls while I waited numbly in the doctor's office for explanation, repair, or the next step. The OB sent us home with a prescription and an appointment for Monday morning in the hospital.

That day was devoted to delivering a dead baby, with most of the accouterments of American hospital birth present: labor-and-delivery ward, beeping electronic monitors, anesthesiologist offering an epidural. It looked and felt, in many respects, just the way our previous live births had, a resemblance to happier occasions that seemed to mock our loss. The hospital nurses were kind, if not quite what was wanted: one absentmindedly put fetal-monitor belts on my belly before the doctor told her to take them off, and another described a Zen garden nearby where I could meditate if I ever wished to "process" it all. The environment of the workaday labor-and-delivery ward made delivering a lost child even harder. Then and after, I sometimes thought a surgery would have been easier: to be unconscious for the removal of the baby, to remember none of it, to have it be as much unlike normal delivery as possible. But at some level what we did felt necessary, as though the process of delivery honored the child. It was the last thing my body could do for the baby, and I was willing to do it. Nurses wrapped up the body of our son and we held him for a moment. My husband and I cried together. We were visited by our priest. With warmth and prayer, he gave care there in the hospital and later at the gravesite, but there was a provisional sense about his gestures, as though he were improvising out of his own kindness rather than acting on long liturgical practice that the church had devised in meeting these crises from time immemorial.

Death before birth brings a profound grief to a family. It blunts hope and forces mothers, in a very immediate, physical way, to confront death. It is a problem of public health, but also a theological problem—"Why does God let this happen?"—and a searing one in the lives of many parents and families.

Christian churches have been strong defenders of the unborn, with Catholics particularly active in opposing abortion and embryo destruction. These positions demonstrate a strong commitment to life before and after birth. But perhaps insufficient care—both in teaching and pastoral settings—has been given to the puzzle of children not aborted who nonetheless die before birth. About twenty percent of pregnancies end in miscarriage (and, given the difficulty of counting early-term loss, the actual rate is higher). Churches that locate life's beginning at conception ought to meet these losses with gravity, both for the benefit of grieving families and for the witness to life it demonstrates. Difficult questions of science and theology stand in the way of easy answers or comfort. Yet the problem is big enough and occurs frequently enough to require more sustained attention. Churches should do a better job of recognizing this as a theological problem and offering liturgical and pastoral support to those affected by it.

Detail of Rachel Weeping *by Charles Willson Peale, 1776*

Christian bioethicists critical of some embryo experimentation are often accused of hypocrisy, on the grounds that failure to mourn miscarriages belies their insistence that the embryo (the product of conception in the first eight weeks) is a person. Michael Sandel contends that "the way we respond to the natural loss of embryos suggests that we do not regard this event as the moral or religious equivalent of the death of infants." Robert George and Christopher Tollefsen take up that argument in their book *Embryo: A Defense of Human Life*. Parents do mourn miscarriages, they argue, but they note that other factors might condition mourning: misinformation about the nature of the embryo, a shorter and different relationship than what might have been had with a child the parents had seen and held, or limited emotional bonding. These possible parental responses do not determine the embryo's status. Further, the authors point out, unsuccessful pregnancies may result from incomplete fertilization or chromosomal defects, so what was lost may not have been a human embryo at all.

These arguments, while reasonable, seem emotionally flat. Of course there are differences in the experience of having one's baby die during delivery and losing a pregnancy when the mother had barely begun to show, but by a prolife logic that names the six-week embryo and the five-month

DEACONESSES
(Pliny X.96)

Remember the two nameless slave-women,
the two deaconesses Pliny had flogged.
Their ruined skin, the flaking of the shackles,

their new blood on the brown crust of earlier ordeals.
How they trembled in the hot, parched chamber,
sobbed and sweated and thirsted and fell, alone.

Talk to us, elder sisters.
Open the hollow centuries
and whisper like the rain,

Tell us your names,
Come, take this small cup
of clear winter water.

Remember us here
alone like you: forgotten
but for the official reports.

—Rob Sulewski

Rob Sulewski is a playwright who teaches writing at the University of Michigan. His recent work has appeared in the Bear River Review *and* Blue Unicorn.

fetus both human children, the losses share common grief. Many churches teach women to value the life inside the womb from its earliest stages, and to view the developing fetus as a child God made, but offer very little in the way of comfort, explanation, or even acknowledgement when that child dies through no act or intent of the parent.

Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Christians all indicate hope that a child who dies before birth has gone to be with God. They offer prayer for hurting families. Yet consolation butts up against other primary points of theology, especially teaching on baptism, since these children did not have access to that sacrament. Christian institutions have an uneven history of figuring out what to do for these children, making sense of their deaths and prospects for salvation. Perhaps most famously, St. Augustine posited that without baptism infants could not go to heaven, though they would be spared the extreme punishments of hell as their guilt consisted only of original sin, not personal sin. Later, medieval theologians indicated that unbaptized babies would spend eternity in *limbus puerorum*, the Limbo of Children, neither heaven nor hell. Doctrines of infant damnation, connoting a harshness people did not want to attribute to God, fell out of favor with many Protestants through the nineteenth century. But in various Christian traditions, uncertainty about the eternal fate of the child has limited the consolation offered to parents.

Before the Second Vatican Council, there was no regular memorial Catholic rite for unbaptized infants, and they were buried in unconsecrated ground (whereas baptized babies were given a Mass of the Angels and a Christian burial). Concern with the problem yielded new pastoral solutions in the years following the council. The 1970 Roman Missal included directions for a funeral for those who had died before birth. And in 2007 the International Theological Commission issued an important report, "The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die without Being Baptized." The reason for the inquiry was itself noteworthy: "In these times, the number of infants who die unbaptized is growing greatly. This is partly because of parents…who are nonpracticing, but it is also partly a consequence of in vitro fertilization and abortion. Given these developments, the question of the destiny of such infants is raised with new urgency." Miscarriages we always had with us, but advanced embryology had made it possible to fully perceive the genetically distinct life that was begun and lost. The question called for rethinking in light of the church's witness to life at a time when prenatal life is often discarded. Upholding the high importance of baptism and choosing an idiom of hope rather than assurance, "The Hope of Salvation" suggests that infants who die without the sacrament might, indeed, be received into heaven rather than hell or limbo. The commission found "serious theological and liturgical grounds for hope that unbaptized infants who die will be saved and enjoy the beatific vision," but added: "We emphasize that these are reasons for prayerful hope, rather than grounds for sure knowledge."

The doctrines at issue touch big questions about sin—original and personal—and the way of salvation, the meaning of baptism, even the character of God. While the report recognizes that parents grieve for babies who die before birth, and though it gives thoughtful consideration to their chances of salvation, it hardly engages the dark night of the soul experienced by those who have a miscarriage or a stillbirth. Again, doctrine is its primary concern, yet as the report itself notes, the pastoral context is pressing: "The notion that infants who die without baptism are deprived of the beatific vision, which has for so long been regarded as the common doctrine of the church, gives rise to numerous pastoral problems, so much so that many pastors of souls have asked for a deeper reflection on the ways of salvation."

One of the painful aspects of losing a baby before its birth, whether to miscarriage or stillbirth, is uncertainty of the meaning of the loss. We might say in general that the death of a child is always painful and sad, parents feel bereaved, and many share their mourning. If prenatal life is

more than just potential, then a miscarriage or a stillbirth is not just something that didn't work out, a nonstarter, something not to be; it is the death of a child before she has had a chance to live. It is a waste. With the loss of a child in the womb, questions come up and stay unanswered at every point. Why did this happen? Was it my fault, a mother might ask, or something I failed to prevent, or did it happen in me but outside my control? Is it a baby or not? If a baby, do I name him, bury him, tell people, mourn in public? This last is not obvious. The loss of a child is worth public sorrow, but if others did not know of the pregnancy in the first place, revealing it after its end can produce a sort of emotional whiplash. Those who did know have to be told, but this is hard, too. As for burial, distressing as it must have been to consign the fruit of one's womb to unconsecrated ground, a woman may get even less than that in a hospital context, when fetal remains sometimes simply disappear unto disposal.

Our culture of choice contributes to this pain and awkwardness. Arguments about abortion go on, but they proceed within a culture that has adapted to the possibility of "choice" where pregnancy is concerned. We have learned a dual vocabulary to approve wanted pregnancies, rejoice with those who talk about feeling babies kick or scheduling ultrasounds or picking names and nursery décor, while at the same time behaving—linguistically if not in all ways—as though abortion did not concern that kind of creature but just the possibility of a baby that was decided against, a proto-baby rather than a real one. This produces agonizing confusion in the case of pregnancy loss. What is the script for response to someone whose pregnancy ends without a living child? Ready words do not exist either for announcement or condolence.

Thus churches meet an aching need when they offer a service, a public place, recognition, and prayers for those who have lost children in the womb. This can take the form of a memorial service at the time of the loss, helping individual families through the sadness. Churches also may hold other services occasionally, to minister to those who have gone through miscarriage or stillbirth and also to hold up this grief in the congregation as a whole. The church I attend, Christ the Redeemer Anglican in Danvers, Massachusetts, holds an annual service called "Rachel Weeping," for all who have lost life in the womb. Participants read Psalm 139 ("You formed me in my inmost being; / you knit me in my mother's womb… / Your eyes saw me unformed; / in your book all are written down; / my days were shaped, before one came to be"). They sing together, though some voices waver audibly in and out. They have a chance if desired to write a note or reflection, to give a name to the child if they have not already done so, to bring along a rose and prayers. The priest later buries the flowers and messages. It is a service that allows important things to be said by the bereaved: I know we lost a baby. Others know we lost a baby. Others mourn with us. God knows we lost a baby, and we trust God receives our babies into His care.

If we hope doctors act to prevent pregnancy loss, addressing risk factors and providing emergency aid and so forth, we should also expect churches to use resources available within the Body of Christ to comfort those so afflicted. Not doing so aggravates the suffering of those who have lost children in the womb and undermines our claims to value and care for prenatal life. Comforting a friend who had miscarried, the theologian L. Serene Jones looked for a way to help her and others bring their sorrow to God. She offers a reflection on the Trinity as a way of making sense of the loss. Considering the pain within God the Father at the death of Jesus, Jones suggests comparison with "the image of the woman who, in the grips of a stillbirth, has death inside her and yet does not die. Consider the power of this as an image for the Trinity. When Christ is crucified, God's own child dies.... And perhaps most wrenching, this is a death that happens deep within God, not outside of God but in the very heart—perhaps the womb—of God."

The image has limits, of course, but speaks powerfully of the experience of miscarriage or stillbirth. Caring for a child in utero and then marking her death before birth can be devastating. Many mothers have done it more than once. Openness to motherhood means wide openness to loss. While it is true that some women become pregnant easily when ready, carry happily to term, deliver without extraordinary peril, and settle into parenting, this is not a default story line. Even setting aside struggles of infertility or of children born with great debility, childbearing is a process with suffering built in. Given rates of miscarriage and stillbirth, even for women in the United States, there is a reasonable likelihood that embarking on childbearing will mean losing a pregnancy. In the early days of amniocentesis, sociologist Barbara Katz Rothman's important study *The Tentative Pregnancy* showed that women tended to view the expected baby as provisional until prenatal testing yielded healthy results. The perils of birth do not have to make each pregnancy "tentative" until it brings forth a healthy newborn. Instead, they might make us more careful and attentive.

Pregnancy is a great work. Being willing to carry around a new person requires commitment, care, love. It can go badly awry. It requires willingness to see things through when things go wrong. It deserves support. Even if the mystery of death in the womb cannot be answered, still, churches insisting on respect for life should care very much when babies die in miscarriage or stillbirth. They should take seriously the call to comfort Rachel, who weeps because her children are no more. What families struggling with miscarriage and stillbirth seek from the church, beyond the hope for lost children and recognition of their death—if not knowledge of why it happened—is healing and blessing. ■

Agnes R. Howard *is assistant professor of history at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts.*

Getting Organized

Catholics & Community Activism

Richard L. Wood, Brad Fulton, Christine Doby

These are days of hope for American Catholics, following years of despair for too many. The new winds blowing through Rome thanks to Pope Francis signal an important opening to renewal, yet the Catholic Church in the United States and elsewhere is struggling to recover an effective voice in public affairs and a semblance of moral authority in the lives of the people in the pews. This struggle occurs in the wake—dare we hope that it *is* the wake?—of the clerical sex-abuse scandals, and amid a deepening sense that young people had mostly just stopped listening. Both hope and despair thus shape the experience of laypeople in their everyday lives; of priests, religious, and lay ministers in their various pastoral works; and of bishops in their episcopal office. All are searching for ways to uncover the "treasure in earthen vessels" that is the church.

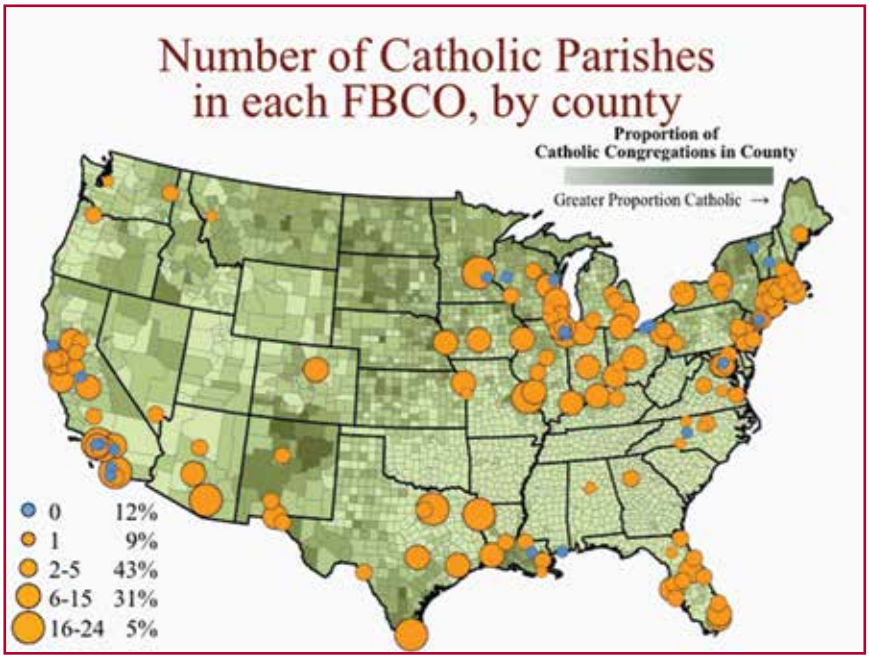
New research conducted by us and by others suggests that part of that treasure lies all around us, in cities and towns throughout the country, in the form of Catholic involvement in faith-based community organizing. Such work has been supported by the bishops and local parishes for decades—and today it offers a critical route for reclaiming Catholicism's public voice and moral authority. Unfortunately, however, the recent institutional environment in Catholicism has led to waning Catholic participation in faith-based organizing, just when American society and American Catholicism need it most.

In our research, we have met many U.S. Catholics whose lives and commitments illustrate the life-changing importance of community organizing. Jesusa Rivera, a leader in the Indiana Organizing Project (IOP), told us that through her work she has formed relationships with many people of different backgrounds—relationships that have enriched her prayer life and her faith, even as her faith and presence influence IOP. "What my church believes, what my pastor teaches, what my parish stands for—all of this must be reflected in our organizing so that I and all Catholics can authentically participate," she says. Rick Carter of Flint, Michigan, had been minimally involved in his parish for years when his pastor asked him to attend a meeting with a community organizing group. That meeting changed Carter's faith life and career. Finding himself drawn into prayer and worship in a new and deeper way, Carter saw how his Catholic values intersected with the values of others, and he found inspiration and hope in the group's prayer and reflection. Gradually he came to believe that faith-based organizing just might be the last, best hope for troubled communities that are "crying out for a moral voice and moral leadership." Carter now works as a full-time professional organizer.

Our research allows us to place these personal stories within the broader experience of individual Catholics around the country and of the church itself. We serve as research director, lead researcher, and a key adviser, respectively, for the Interfaith Funders' State of Organizing study, a major national research project investigating dynamic changes occurring in the grassroots empowerment movement variously termed "faith-based," "broad-based," "congregation-based," or "institution-based" community organizing. The almost two hundred faith-based community organizations (FBCOs) in this country have played key roles in local empowerment for decades, and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) has been one of the most important and consistent sources of funding. In recent years, it has provided about $7.2 million annually to support local leadership development and public engagement with issues consonant with Catholic social teaching.

Our research shows just how crucial Catholic parishes and individuals are to this effort. Catholic institutional sponsorship and individual leadership drive faith-based community organizing even as Catholic social teaching and priorities inform the field itself; a Catholic ethos undergirds the spiritual practices of the movement; and Catholic money has been and remains central to the field. But we also see ways

Richard L. Wood *is associate professor of sociology at the University of New Mexico and founding director of the Southwest Institute on Religion, Culture, and Society.* **Brad Fulton** *is a PhD candidate in sociology at Duke University and was the lead researcher for Interfaith Funders' 2011 State of Organizing study.* **Christine Doby** *is a program officer at the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and serves on the board of Interfaith Funders.* *This article was funded by a gift from Michael Vertin and the late Margaret O'Gara in honor of Jim O'Gara, former editor of* Commonweal.



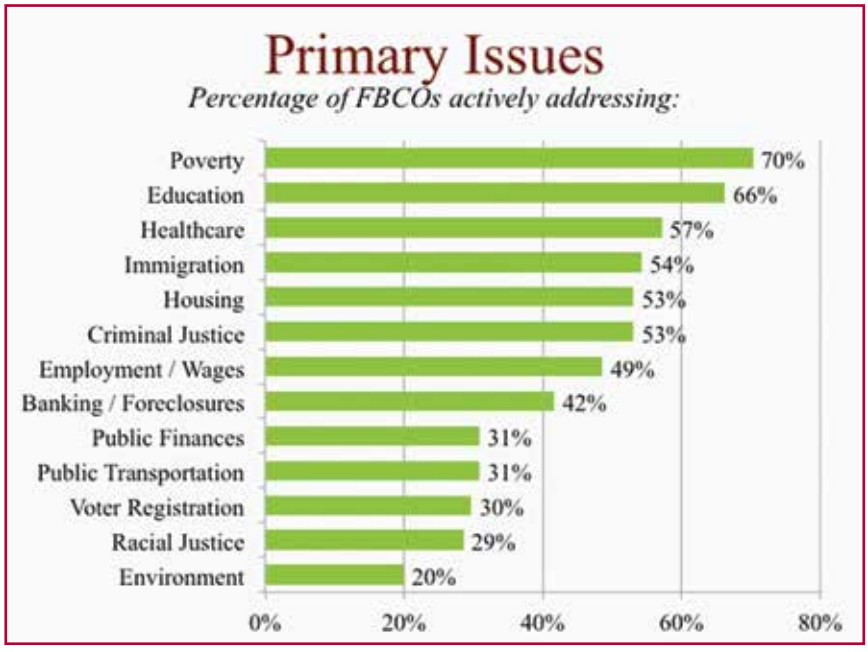
in which the church still fails to embrace Catholic involvement in faith-based organizing—and thus squanders a golden opportunity to reclaim a Catholic voice in the public realm.

Faith-based organizing rests on a foundation of institutions; a total of about 4,500 faith communities, schools, labor unions, neighborhood associations, and other local institutions sponsor this work as members. Of these institutional members, about 3,500 are religious congregations—hence the term "faith-based community organizing." These faith communities—large numbers of Roman Catholic, historic black, and mainline Protestant churches, along with smaller numbers of synagogues, mosques, and Unitarian-Universalist, Evangelical, and Pentecostal churches—constitute the heart of faith-based organizing. Almost 950, or 27 percent, of these are Catholic parishes—an impressive figure, given that only about 5 percent of American congregations are Catholic. The map above shows where these FBCOs are located, and where Catholic involvement is greatest.

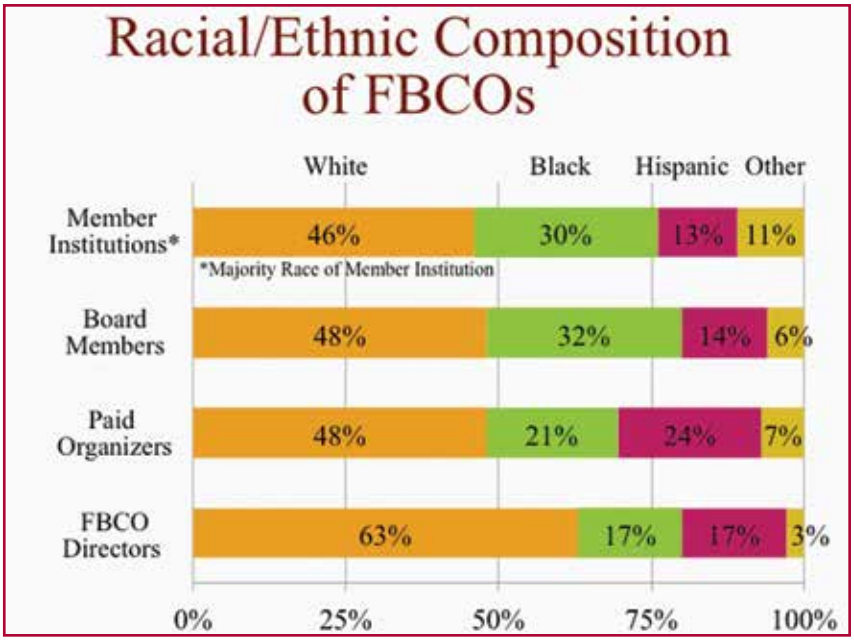
Catholics are heavily represented on the governing boards of these FBCOs. Of the almost 3,200 board members who govern the nearly 200 FBCOs, 1,044 (33 percent) are Catholics, by far the largest contingent of any single religious tradition. These Catholic board members are more likely to be laypeople (79 percent) than clergy; this should be a source of real Catholic pride in light of the Vatican II teachings regarding the responsibility of the laity to provide leadership in the secular world. Catholics also make up by far the largest group of the professional organizers who train others to do organizing work (34 percent) and of the directors and "lead organizers" that head up each FBCO (43 percent).

What does all this mean? It means that if you attend the monthly meeting of your local FBCO, you are very likely to hear lay Catholics articulating the social implications of their faith and discussing specific issue priorities. Rather than waiting for the church's hierarchy to define the public agenda, they are discerning how best to engage politically together, which is exactly what the Second Vatican Council intended—as well as what democratic ideals would seem to require.

FBCOs embody the teaching priorities of the Catholic Church in a variety of ways. The figure below ranks the issues on which these organizations report working. Given their base in low-income communities, these organizations prioritize socioeconomic issues that have been consistent emphases within Catholic social teaching for decades. The groups stress economic issues not for ideological reasons—whether liberal or conservative—but simply because American families face struggles in these areas day in and day out. When the FBCOs work on these issues, they do so via one-to-one meetings with parishioners, neighbors, and friends, and the emphases they bring to bear often reflect Catholic values—for instance, working to ensure that children, poor families, and immi-



IMAGES COURTESY THE AUTHORS



grants have access to the full benefits of health-care reform; or promoting humane immigration reform, foreclosure protection for vulnerable families, and financial reforms that hold Wall Street accountable for practices that hurt Main Street.

FBCOs have been careful to avoid the "red areas" laid down by the bishops. Our data show that almost none of them—and particularly none that receive funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development—work on reproductive rights or same-sex marriage. That is *not* to say that no FBCO leaders care about those issues on one side or the other; but their priorities reflect the social and economic pressures on low- and middle-income families in America today, when rising inequality and stagnant or falling working-class and middle-class wages have made the church's social teaching more obviously important to American families.

Perhaps most impressively, these organizations actually embody the value placed on diversity and racial justice by Catholic teaching since the civil-rights movements. This commitment is reflected in the work for racial justice reported in the figure above (explicitly as work on "racism" and implicitly via "poverty," "criminal justice," and other categories), and even more concretely in the actual diversity of membership within FBCOs, as the figure above shows.

In comparison to the ethnic composition of FBCOs, the U.S. population as a whole is 64 percent white, 13 percent black, 16 percent Hispanic, and 8 percent other. Our nation is rapidly diversifying; current projections suggest that by mid-century America will be a "majority-minority" society, with more than half of Americans identifying as something other than "white." Faith-based organizing thus leads to more civic engagement on the part of growing minorities—and does so while *also engaging* white Americans on these issues, thus creating the coalitions across racial divides that are crucial to winning changes in public policy.

Some FBCOs are based solely in religious congregations, while others include secular institutions such as labor unions or public-school PTAs—thus at least potentially embodying the church's mission to evangelize the wider society. But does the Catholic presence really make a difference in how these groups work? Or do Catholics in faith-based organizing engage solely on secular society's terms?

While the answer varies by location, our on-the-ground experience suggests that Catholics who undertake this work often do so in ways deeply informed by their faith—as illustrated by the lives of Jesusa Rivera, Rick Carter, and other faith-based organizers we spoke with. Indeed, one national FBCO, the Gamaliel Foundation, has recently posted monthly profiles of Catholics whose faith motivates their public work.

But anecdotal evidence goes only so far. In our research we asked whether a Catholic presence matters for the spiritual practices within the field. We found that the larger the share of Catholic parishes involved in a local FBCO, the more often prayer and spiritual reading are incorporated into the organizing work—and the more often participants discuss the organizing work in light of their faith. These are core elements of the Catholic spiritual ethos, and having Catholic involvement infuses them more fully into the work of organizing.

A second way to address the Catholic impact on organizing is through Catholic institutional involvement: Does Catholic institutional sponsorship and funding increase Catholic involvement? Our study found that merely having more Catholic congregations in the local area does *not* do a lot to drive Catholic participation in organizing—perhaps because such involvement depends greatly on the will of local pastors and the tone set by the local bishop. But our study did find that Catholic parish involvement correlates with more Catholic staff in the organizing work. It also found that receiving funds from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development correlates with more Catholic parish involvement. While the causal direction is no doubt complex—more Catholic staff and funding is likely both a cause *and* an effect of more Catholic parish involvement—these data certainly suggest that Catholic sponsorship *does* shape the field of faith-based organizing in practical ways.

Catholic institutional sponsorship matters in other ways as well—ways that speak precisely to some of the fundamental challenges facing American society. One of the unique policies of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development is

a requirement that the governing board of the organization receiving funds must include majority representation from poor people themselves. In keeping with Catholic teaching on subsidiarity and participation, CCHD was founded with the intention of empowering poor communities to advocate for themselves rather than promoting dependence—on government or on "liberal elites" who make their living by claiming to represent the interests of poor people. Our study shows the impact of this policy, which reinforces the field's own commitment to less privileged communities: 58 percent of FBCO board members have household incomes below $50,000 per year. This figure closely approximates the U.S. population as a whole, and though no data on incomes of nonprofit boards appear to exist, we believe low-income governing boards to be quite rare. Good data do show that nonprofit boards generally are 86 percent white, whereas FBCO boards are less than half white on average. Clearly, Catholic commitment to subsidiarity and the participation of people in the political decisions that affect their lives has helped shape the entire field. Some people will portray this commitment as "liberal" for its emphasis on the poor; others will portray it as "conservative" for its resistance to dependency. In fact, it is simply deeply Catholic and democratic.

A second area in which Catholic teachings matter is that of immigration policy and immigrants' rights. Not long ago, reforming immigration policy was unimaginable, given the hostility to immigrants that pervaded public discourse. But in recent years FBCOs at national, state, and local levels have pressed forward in advocating for immigration reform and the rights of all immigrants within the United States. We believe that Catholic involvement has been crucial in two ways. First, the church has longstanding ethical teachings on this subject; its emphasis on human dignity has consistently led it to argue for immigrant rights. In addition, our data show that Catholic institutions provide the bulk of immigrant participation within the organizing work.

Finally, Catholic involvement in faith-based organizing may help America confront an odd dilemma. We are living in a period in which economic inequality has skyrocketed and millions of families have lost the wherewithal to sustain a dignified life. Yet the national political discourse has failed to address either this inequality or the institutional corruption of economic life that underlies it. Scandalously, some "conservatives" have turned a blind eye to this inequality—or advocated for policies that exacerbate it—even as they speak of protecting the family, while some "progressives" have advocated for other issues while too often ignoring the inequality that drives poor, working-class, and middle-class families to desperation. In this context, it matters greatly that Catholic parishes and CCHD have consistently engaged in and supported work that prioritizes the issues shown in our second chart.

This work, and the kinds of leaders and organizers profiled here, should be the pride of the Catholic Church in the United States today, held up as the moral voice of Ca-

Might not the Catholic Church benefit from directing more attention to its involvement in faith-based organizing—especially in light of the church's eroded position in American life?

tholicism in a time of unprecedented inequality and greed in American life. The Catholic bishops have funded this work for four decades, and can rightly claim moral authority far beyond the bounds of the church for having done so. Equally important, tens of thousands of lay Catholics and their beloved parishes, dozens of religious orders, and thousands of Catholic diocesan priests have participated in faith-based organizing, with many dedicating their ministries to it. Partly as a result, FBCOs have been instrumental in saving homes from foreclosure, winning more humane criminal-justice policies and practices, expanding health care to children and other vulnerable members of society, creating job training and employment opportunities, improving public safety, addressing the needs of the poorest members of our communities, influencing state and federal budgetary decisions, and protecting needed public services.

Yet Catholic sponsorship also means that internal dynamics in the Catholic Church affect the field greatly. And while some unfairly charge that the church has abandoned the fight against poverty, there is no doubt that the sectarian tenor of official Catholic discourse in recent years has de-emphasized the denunciation of poverty and injustice in favor of other issues. Unfortunately this de-emphasis has occurred just as inequality has skyrocketed, and despite the fact that many of the faithful of all stripes ("Vatican II liberals," "traditionalists," and "evangelical Catholics" alike) find the denunciation of poverty and injustice central to Jesus' ministry.

A new report by Faith in Public Life—endorsed by a broad array of Catholic leaders and institutions whose faithful commitment to Jesus and the church is beyond question—highlights how deeply the sectarian tenor has divided the U.S. church. The report states its premise in its opening paragraph, which charges that

> conservative Catholic activists and their ideological allies on the political right have worked to undermine the U.S. Catholic bishops' most successful antipoverty initiative—the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD)…. A small but well-financed network has emerged as a relentless opponent of the bishops' social-justice campaign, which has long been recognized as one of the most influential funders of grassroots community organizing…. Using guilt by association and other tactics from the McCarthy-era playbook, these activists are part of an increasingly aggressive movement of Catholic culture warriors who view themselves as fighting for a smaller, "purer" church.

Warning of "a corrosive and growing impact" on FBCOs and their work, the report asserts that "the stepped-up campaign against CCHD is draining resources from critical social-justice advocacy at a time when more than one in five children live in poverty and income inequality is the most severe it has been since the 1920s." Indeed, our own data show that participation in faith-based organizing by Catholic parishes declined by nearly a fifth over the past decade. Especially hard hit were Hispanic Catholic parishes—the very parishes that probably benefit most from this work. Such parishes made up fully 20 percent of *all* organizing congregations in 1999, but only 6.5 percent of those joining between that year and 2011.

Today Catholic faith-based organizing is largely a light hidden under a bushel basket. It is there, but rarely seen and rarely trumpeted, except by those pastors and lay leaders engaged in it—and by the dedicated bishops who have faithfully led CCHD over the years. Is this low profile simply the result of other concerns taking priority, or is it due to fear of the kind of attacks described above?

Might not the Catholic Church in the United States benefit from directing more attention to its involvement in faith-based organizing—especially in light of the church's eroded position in American life? It is worth recalling Pope Benedict XVI's emphasis on "the institutional path of charity"—which he also called "the political path of charity." "The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them," Benedict wrote in *Caritas in Veritate*. "Every Christian is called to practice this charity, in a manner corresponding to his vocation and according to the degree of influence he wields in the *polis*."

Perhaps Catholic leaders—laypeople, priests, religious, and bishops—can draw new confidence and inspiration from Pope Francis's renewed emphasis on the church's service to the material needs of the poor, and his denunciation of unjust economic structures. Whatever one makes of Francis's recently published interviews, it is clear that the pope views the narrowness of culture-war preoccupations, and the partisanship they entail, as a distraction from the church's broader mission as a light to the nations. In one interview Francis lamented the prominence in the church today of what he called "small-minded rules," and made it quite clear what he was referring to. "We cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage, and the use of contraceptive methods," the pope said. We must also insist on the issues of special concern to Catholic community organizers—and make sure their work isn't hidden under a bushel basket.■

A House Divided

As the Nation Goes, So Goes the Church

Mary Jo Bane

Every four years our presidential elections, depressing though they may be, provide a fascinating view of American society. The 2012 election—blessedly behind us—revealed a starkly polarized America. Before the next round begins, it is worth considering what we as Catholics might do to counter the polarizing trends that threaten our ability to come together and act as one people.

An analysis of the election results by pollster extraordinaire Nate Silver found that in 2012 a large majority of congressional districts (242) were landslide districts—places where Obama got more than 73 percent of the vote or Romney got more than 67 percent (i.e., a difference of more than 20 percentage points from the national average). Only thirty-five were swing districts, in which the vote more or less reflected the overall national vote. The landslide districts, which have been steadily growing in number for two decades, are increasingly homogeneous politically—and their representatives in Congress act accordingly. Elected by firmly partisan constituencies, they see no need to compromise; indeed, they fear primary challenges if they deviate from the party line or work with members of the other party.

This electoral polarization makes it nearly impossible for Congress to do the nation's business, as the recent government shutdown once again demonstrated. We now routinely suffer self-imposed budget and fiscal crises of one sort or another. Budgets are cut or extended stupidly, with little or no reasonable judgment of priorities. Presidential appointments are held up endlessly, leaving the federal government without effective management. Important legislation to deal with a still-faltering economy, a crumbling infrastructure, rampant poverty, and a broken criminal-justice system dies in committee or by filibuster.

Part of this increase in political polarization results from redistricting by state legislatures, which are ever more adept at drawing district maps that assist the dominant party in winning the maximum possible number of congressional seats. But it also reflects increasing polarization and division along other dimensions, most notably income and wealth. It is well documented that economic inequality in the United States is at its highest point since the 1920s. Both wealth and poverty are geographically concentrated: the poor live disproportionately in inner-city neighborhoods and some rural pockets, while the rich live mostly in affluent suburbs. One study found that the proportion of families living in middle-income neighborhoods fell by a third between 1970 and 2007, while that of families living in either very rich or very poor neighborhoods doubled to more than 30 percent.

Another study describes a "great divergence" between those cities and regions with high concentrations of educated workers and those without. The places where highly educated workers live possess higher income and provide enhanced opportunities for children, which boost social divergence over generations. These hubs of educational concentration are increasingly more privileged than the rest of the country, with better health, longer life expectancy, and stronger families. The urban-studies theorist Richard Florida has described the growth of cities and neighborhoods within cities that are home to an increasingly well-educated and affluent "creative class." A politically controversial but factually astute book by Charles Murray, *Coming Apart* (2012), describes the differences between "Belmont," home to the affluent and educated classes, and "Fishtown," home to the poorer and less educated. These two communities diverge in rates of marriage, divorce, unmarried parenthood, employment, obesity, health, and politics. Murray paints a picture of two Americas, one affluent and becoming more so, one poor and stagnating.

Taken together, these studies reveal a deeply divided America in which members of different "tribes" live separately from one another. One tribe is increasingly privileged and able to pass on its privileges to its children through excellent schools, material comfort, and out-of-school activities presided over by two secure parents. The other tribe is increasingly disadvantaged, with poor education leading to poor employment prospects and unstable families, bringing predictable consequences for children. Because the two groups typically live in different neighborhoods and even different cities and regions, they seldom interact, diminishing the sense of a shared American destiny and making it even more difficult to effect policies that might decrease inequality and increase opportunity.

Mary Jo Bane *is on the faculty at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.*

Procession honoring Our Lady of Guadalupe in Wisconsin

Religious affiliation and attendance also separate the tribes. Most Americans describe themselves as religious and attend services at least a few times a year. Religious communities are the most frequent recipients of charitable giving and volunteering; for many Americans they are important sources of friendships and networks. They also guide political values and preferences—not so much via overt politicking in church but rather through the interaction and conversation they promote among fellow believers. How religious communities are structured, what they preach, and what they do are all potentially important in shaping our society.

The biggest change in the American religious landscape over the past few decades has been the growth in the percentage of people—almost 20 percent in the most recent polls—who identify themselves as nonreligious or religiously unaffiliated. In an interesting and somewhat unexpected twist, religious affiliation and attendance have stayed stable or increased slightly among the college educated, while decreasing among the less well educated, the unmarried, and the unemployed. Those who are disconnected and disadvantaged economically and socially have also dropped out of religious life. We know that membership in a congregation brings socioeconomic as well as spiritual benefits: the development of social and leadership skills, the building of networks useful in finding work and easing the strains of family life. To the extent, then, that the disadvantaged and disconnected are leaving or being pushed out of congregational life, the trend may be reinforcing inequality in other dimensions.

Meanwhile, those who *do* go to church tend to go with people like themselves. Martin Luther King famously described eleven o'clock on Sunday morning as "the most segregated hour of Christian America," and that description remains true—economically as well as racially. Catholic parishes historically are geographically based; and to the extent that the general population is sorted geographically by income and education, so too are Catholic parishes. And as Catholics increasingly feel free to shop for a congenial parish, not confining themselves to the church in their neighborhood, anecdotal evidence suggests that they cluster into parishes of the theologically and politically like-minded—into "social-justice parishes" or "prolife parishes." Although Catholics divide almost evenly between Republican and Democratic voters in presidential elections, I suspect that the typical parish does not divide evenly, but instead votes disproportionately for one party or the other. In Catholic parishes, then, as in the general society, income differences, educational differences, lifestyle differences, and political differences reinforce one another.

Yet another trend in American religious life may be at least slightly countering increased inequality and class segregation. Religiously affiliated Americans today are worshipping in larger and somewhat more diverse congregations, and this has led to at least a bit of cross-class interaction. One important study found that the religiously active are more likely than others to have friends of different social classes, and not just because they volunteer in soup kitchens, but because their congregations incorporate economic diversity. Within Catholicism, Latino Catholics make up a large and growing part of the church—35 percent of all Catholics and 60 percent of young Catholics. Latinos bring not only ethnic diversity but also economic, educational, and political diversity to most parishes. Their increasing presence—most parishes include at least some Latinos—provides an opportunity for Catholic parishes to nudge worshipers toward an appreciation of diversity based on personal contact and knowledge.

The societal pattern of increased inequality and polarization poses a challenge to the church, as it does to the larger society. Dysfunctional politics, an inability to invest collectively in education and infrastructure, and the denial of opportunity to a large segment of the population threaten both our economic growth and our international influence. For the church, the challenge is moral as well as practical. Catholicism is rooted in community; in commitment to the common good, to justice, and to the equal dignity of all children of God; in care for God's creation and concern for future generations. From papal encyclicals to Sunday sermons, the church's words proclaim these commitments.

If actions speak louder than words, however, the church's voice is muted. The two most prominent Catholics in Congress, John Boehner and Nancy Pelosi, are hardly models of productive collaboration for justice and peace. A Supreme Court that includes six Catholics seems intent on defending the wealthy and their dominant role in politics. The bishops find it hard to stay out of partisan politics, or to move from their single-minded focus on abortion and gay marriage. In

CNS PHOTO / SAM LUCERO, *THE COMPASS*

the light of Pope Francis's recent remarks, it will be interesting to see if this state of affairs changes.

Change is most likely to occur at the local parish level. A first step might be attempting to understand the ways a local parish reflects both the divisions and the bonds of the larger society. Most parishes contain at least some diversity of income, education, politics, and lifestyle. Pointing out both the diversity and the ways in which a parish is not diverse could be a way of helping parishioners better understand who they are. Diocesan bodies might help by collecting data and drawing portraits of both individual parishes and the diocese as a whole, celebrating the diversity that exists and encouraging more.

A second step might involve identifying, and then trying to change, attitudes and practices that may be pushing out the least advantaged. Parish communities are not always welcoming to those who have children outside marriage, drink too much or use drugs, are unemployed, have criminal records, or look disheveled. But these are likely the people who most need a supportive religious community. Finding ways to welcome and include them in parish life may be a challenge, and parishes may be tempted to feel they are doing enough by volunteering at a soup kitchen in another part of town or hosting AA meetings in the church basement. But real inclusion is the best help for the poor—and the best way to help bridge class divides.

A third step might be finding arenas in which rich and poor, conservatives and liberals within a parish or diocese can work together toward a common goal. Organizing for justice, especially for concrete measures against poverty at the local level, is one such step. As Richard Wood, Brad Fulton, and Christine Doby document in this issue (page 12), Catholics have long been leaders in this effort. If the commitment of Catholic leaders to faith-based organizing for the common good is indeed decreasing, as Wood and his co-authors suggest, that is a trend that Catholics should work to reverse.

Catholics can work together across class and ideological lines on other issues. There is strong disagreement among Catholics, as among Americans in general, about whether abortion should be legal. But there is strong agreement that it should be rare. Prolife and social-justice Catholics should be able to come together around programs and policies that support mothers who choose to keep their babies, and that care for children who are born as well as unborn. Theologically conservative Latinos and liberal social-justice types should be able to come together to promote sensible and humane immigration reform. Other examples at the parish or diocesan level should not be hard to find.

Inequality and polarization are the great contemporary challenges for America. They threaten our economy, our politics, and our character as a free and fair society. We ought to be looking for ways to address these problems wherever we find them. Our Catholic teachings—and our Catholic parishes—are a good place to start. ■

Keep It Vague

The Many Meanings of Religious Freedom

Andrew Koppelman

Most contemporary liberal political philosophers in this country are kindly disposed toward the idea of religious liberty. But ever since the Reagan era they have been anxious about the rise of the Religious Right, and correspondingly eager to contain the influence of religion over politics. Drawn to the notion that the state ought to be neutral with respect to any controversial conception of what constitutes a good life, they have spawned a number of theories that aim to recast what is politically salient about religion in neutral, nonreligious terms, such as "conscience" or "individual autonomy." (A recent example of this effort is Brian Leiter's book *Why Tolerate Religion?*, reviewed in these pages by William A. Galston, May 3, 2013.) Unhappily, this move toward abstraction discards everything that is specifically valuable about religion, even as it threatens to deprive us of the legal and political tools we need to deal with the problems that religious diversity generates.

For many years, the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has been a leading voice for a more historically and ethically grounded approach to the complexities of religious practice in secular society. In his most recent writings, however, Taylor—a Catholic who has written for *Commonweal*—has started to sound a lot like the advocates of neutrality. In an essay titled "Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism," he argues that "all spiritual families must be heard" in the process of social self-determination. And in *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience*, a 2011 book co-authored with Jocelyn Maclure, he writes that the democratic state must "be neutral in relation to the different worldviews and conceptions of the good—secular, spiritual, and religious—with which citizens identify." Anything else, he insists, would make some into "second-class citizens."

These claims can be read two ways. One of these takes them as a call for a negotiated common ground, working from whatever commitments citizens happen to have—religious or otherwise—toward an outcome that will honor all those diverse commitments while adjudicating the inevitable conflicts among them. In present U.S. law, for instance, accommodation is given to ritual peyote use in Native American religious ceremonies but not to recreational use of hallucinogens, and nobody gets permission to use heroin. The other view is that Taylor has joined cause with those theorists who claim that the state ought to be neutral with respect to any conception of the good. Which view of Taylor's thinking is more accurate?

Secularism and Freedom of Conscience usefully distinguishes primary from subordinate principles—"aims" from "operative modes." Equal respect and freedom of conscience are the ends; neutrality, separation of church and state, and accommodation are "essential means toward the realization of properly moral ends." Taylor and Maclure reject "rigid" forms of secularism which, by allowing greater restrictions on free exercise in the name of state neutrality, commit a "fetishism of means." A prime example is France's prohibition of headscarves, a policy that, in the name of secularism, has deepened the country's religious divisions.

The fetishism of means is ubiquitous in discussions of American law as well, and so Taylor and Maclure's intervention is welcome. Their understanding of the law's core aims—nondiscrimination among comprehensive views and the accommodation of individual conscience—will be familiar to students of the First Amendment, where they are labeled "disestablishment of religion" and "free exercise." As Taylor observes elsewhere, there is some tension between these principles. If government must be neutral toward religion, how can religious accommodation be permissible? It is not logically possible for the government both to be neutral between religion and nonreligion and to give religion special protection.

Many liberal political theorists—John Rawls, Joseph Raz, Martha Nussbaum, Christopher Eisgruber, and Lawrence Sager among others—have responded to this dilemma by trying to eliminate the notion of "religion" as any part of the justification for both practices. Like many of these writers, in addressing the free exercise of religion, Taylor and Maclure substitute "conscience" for "religion," arguing that freedom of religion is "a subcategory of freedom of conscience." Conscientious convictions are distinguished by the fact that they

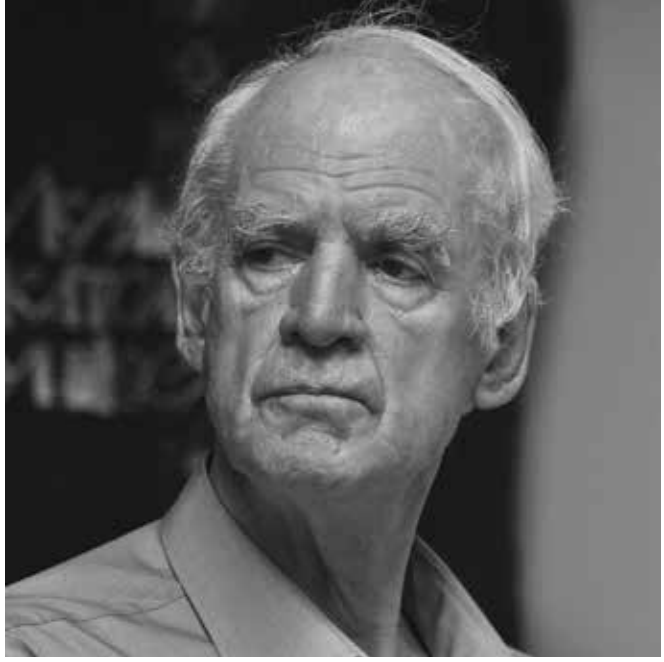
Andrew Koppelman *is the John Paul Stevens Professor of Law and Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University. His most recent book is* Defending American Religious Neutrality *(Harvard University Press).*

"occupy a preponderant role in a person's life." "Core beliefs" are those that "allow people to structure their moral identity and to exercise their faculty of judgment." In this light, "the special legal status of religious beliefs is derived from the role they play in people's moral lives rather than from an assessment of their intrinsic validity." There is no good reason to single out religious in preference to nonreligious "comprehensive" views; what matters is "the intensity of the person's commitment to a given conviction or practice."

Intensity of commitment makes for a slippery hook on which to hang a theory of legal accommodation. Religion, after all, does not hold the same place in the lives of all religious people. A given individual may have no particular commitment to his religion at all—until, say, a crisis in middle age. If commitment is what matters, then what basis exists for protecting spiritual exploration by the merely curious; and what about proselytizing, which necessarily targets the uncommitted? Yet Taylor and Maclure go further, declaring that "it is not enough for the petitioner simply to affirm that he sincerely believes that a given conviction must be translated into action in a particular way; he must also explain why that conviction or value is intimately linked to his moral integrity and in what way he is attempting to respect it or to live up to it." Given the difficulty even traditional religious claimants have in offering a persuasive account of how their theological views fit together, this seems like a recipe for punishing the inarticulate.

A second basis of accommodation, according to Taylor and Maclure—one whose relation to the first is not clear—is fairness. The trouble they see is that "certain public norms applying to all citizens are not neutral or impartial from a cultural or religious point of view." For example, public holidays in Canada tend to be Christian in origin, ignoring Jewish or Muslim holidays. Accommodation is thus necessary "to reestablish equity within the terms of social cooperation." "It is because certain laws or rules are not neutral," Taylor and Maclure argue, "that accommodations are sometimes justified." This reasoning will justify some religious accommodations, holidays being the obvious case. But not all mainstream laws reflect a religious background in the way our calendars reflect Christian holidays. Requiring members of the military not to wear hats (which burdens Orthodox Jews and Sikhs) or criminalizing the use of peyote (which burdens some Native Americans) reflects no particular religious view. (Both burdens were lifted by Congress after the Supreme Court refused to mandate accommodation.)

Of course, a legislature with a majority of Jews and Sikhs, or of Native Americans, would not have enacted those laws in the first place. But it is hard to turn this observation into a principle that does not entail anarchy. What would that principle be? That no law is valid unless it could have been enacted by a legislature dominated by the minority religion? Such a principle would give dispositive weight to the preferences of dissenters, whether or not the beliefs it privileged were "core." Whenever a law is enacted, it reflects



Charles Taylor

a normative orientation, one that won't be shared by everyone (or else no law would have been necessary).

And then there is the problem of disestablishment. Critics worry that state endorsement of religious symbols turns some people into second-class citizens. Yet the rejection of all such symbols would be a radical move, given that most states in the world support some religions more than others. Taylor and Maclure do not propose dismantling all such symbols, such as the cross on Mount Royal in Montreal. Instead, they envision a state neutrality that is consistent with accepting "practices and symbols that have a heritage value rather than a regulatory function." Such a "heritage" symbol merely attests to history, they argue, and "is thus compatible with secularism," since "it is a reminder of the past rather than a sign of religious identification on the part of a public institution." But this is a hard distinction to sustain. Even if a symbol genuinely is part of a nation's "heritage," that doesn't make it nonreligious. Indeed, its significance as heritage is part of the problem. The Mount Royal cross identifies Canada with Christianity.

The Supreme Court has taken a different approach, in effect adopting a "grandfathering" rule by which old forms of "ceremonial deism," such as "In God We Trust" on the currency and the reference to God in the Pledge of Allegiance, are deemed constitutionally permissible but newer ones are not. This may be a sensible compromise—this far, but no further—yet it clearly allows for the accommodation of religious symbols with religious meaning, and there is no point pretending otherwise. The United States has done a pretty good job of addressing religious diversity. But it has not dispensed with "religion" as a legally significant category.

It appears that Canada can't do without religion as a category, either. Its Supreme Court has held that religious freedom protects even heretics: an accommodation claim need not be "in conformity with the position of religious officials." But in its 1994 ruling defending the right of orthodox Jews to decorate condo balconies with *sukkahs*—cedar-

MAKHANETS

branch structures commemorating the difficult conditions Jews faced after fleeing Egypt—the Court went on to say: "It is the religious or spiritual essence of an action, not any mandatory or perceived-as-mandatory nature of its observance, that attracts protection." Taylor and Maclure claim that the criterion employed by the Court was not merely sincerity, arguing that the inclusion of other values within traditional categories such as religion "contributes nothing toward helping us distinguish them from personal preferences." But that is not what the Court said. It specifically referred to an action's "religious or spiritual essence" as the reason for protecting it. Taylor and Maclure enlist the Supreme Court of Canada as an ally, not noticing that the Court is playing a game very different from theirs.

The attempt to reduce religious liberty to a few principles has an abstract quality unusual for Taylor. His other work is far more context-sensitive. *Sources of the Self* (1989) depicted European liberalism as a distinctive set of moral aspirations that emerged out of a specific cultural context. *A Secular Age* (2007) traced the roots of modern secularism to Christian alienation from religious forms that were considered oppressive, thus helping to explain the militant idealism of many contemporary atheists. These and other historicizing analyses suggested the possibility of many modernities, many liberalisms—and many morally attractive secularisms. In Taylor's vision, any society's solution to the problem of religious diversity will result from context-specific negotiation. His 1992 essay "The Politics of Recognition" argued that "a society can be organized around a definition of the good life, without this being seen as a depreciation of those who do not personally share this definition," and that such a society can be liberal if it respects fundamental liberties.

American religious neutrality is not neutrality toward all conceptions of the good. It proceeds from the premise that government may not take a position on contested religious questions—but that the state *is* permitted to favor religion-in-general. The American tradition of state neutrality treats religion as a good, not only at the level of practice, but also at the level of justification; it is based on the premise that religion can be corrupted, and its value compromised, if the state is permitted to manipulate it. That's the answer to the free exercise/establishment dilemma: religion's goodness can only be acknowledged at an exceedingly abstract level. (I elaborate this point in my book *Defending American Religious Neutrality*).

The practice of religious accommodation is not and cannot be a deduction from first principles. Under the recent state and federal Religious Freedom Restoration Acts, those who seek accommodation of their religious claims are entitled to individual review by a judge, and the question of whether those claims are trumped by sufficiently pressing state interests in any specific case is a matter of judgment. There are some rules: "The First Amendment...gives no one the right to insist that in pursuit of their own [religious] interests others must conform their conduct to his own religious necessities." But mostly the work must be done—often it is done—by the judges' sympathetic perception of what is at stake.

We can take a general lesson from our exploration of "conscience" as an unsuccessful substitute for "religion" in secularism's effort to accommodate religious liberty. Even if we find a single morally attractive factor that justifies some religious-liberty claims, that factor won't do as a general basis for *all* such claims. No single factor for singling out religion can succeed. Any invocation of any factor X—such as conscience—as a justification will logically entail substituting X for religion as a basis for special treatment, making "religion" disappear as a category of analysis. This substitution will be unsatisfactory because it will inevitably narrow what practices can be accommodated. There are many different versions of X on offer. Conscience is only one; commentators have also proposed individual autonomy, psychologically urgent needs, and many more. The same point applies to all of them. Any X will be an imperfect substitute for religion; and a theory of religious freedom that focuses on that X will not be able to say why religion, rather than X, should be the object of solicitude.

There are two ways around this difficulty. One is to say that these are not ends that the state can aim at directly, and that religion is a good proxy for them. This justifies some imprecision in the law. We want to give licenses to "safe drivers," for example, but since safe drivers are not directly detectable, we use instead the somewhat commensurate category of "those who have passed a driving test." But this proxy rationale doesn't work for at least some of the substitutes for religion that are on offer—since the state *can* aim directly at accommodating conscience, say, or autonomy. So the other solution is to say that religion is an adequate proxy for multiple goods, some of which are not ones that can directly be aimed at. Each of those goods is, at least, more likely to be salient in religious than in nonreligious contexts. The fact that there is so much contestation among religions as to which of these goods is most salient is itself a reason for the state to remain vague about which of the goods associated with religion is most important. Because "religion" captures multiple goods, aiming at any one of them will be underinclusive. That is enough to justify singling out religion.

In sum, the answer to the problem of plurality is not to dispense with the category of religion, but rather to keep that category vague. And in fact this is how the United States has addressed the problem, becoming ever vaguer—productively so—over time. It's a theoretically untidy solution, but it works. Charles Taylor was once more tolerant of theoretical untidiness than he is now. His move toward abstraction has obvious rhetorical advantages, but they come at a cost in reduced clarity about how to reach the very goals he would urge upon us. ■

Reform of the Reform

How Not to Fix Our Schools

Jackson Lears

Like journalists praising war from the safety of their keyboards, economists celebrate the insecurities of entrepreneurship from a comfortable distance. The prototype was the Harvard economist Joseph Schumpeter. In the bucolic solitude of his Connecticut estate, he coined the term "creative destruction" to refer to the role of entrepreneurial innovation in capitalist development: the inevitable mass firings and factory closings that accompanied the adoption of labor-saving technology. Schumpeter was not the first to notice capitalism's destructive impact—critics from Marx to Heidegger had done so before him—but he was the first to call it "creative."

This adjective accounts for the phrase's ubiquity at our current historical moment. Everyone wants to be creative, especially our destroyers. Free-market ideologues celebrate the freewheeling entrepreneur and dismiss any concern about the social ravages of unregulated capital. Worried about the catastrophic impact of plant closings? It can't be helped—protracted joblessness, ruined families, and abandoned communities are the necessary price of progress. Capital must be free to flow where the investment opportunities are; any constraints on it obstruct the creative entrepreneurship that drags us, despite our doubts, into a better future.

"Creative destruction" is often awkwardly allied with techno-determinism—the belief that "technology" is reshaping our society and there is nothing human beings can do about it. Hence the headline in *InformationWeek* reporting the takeover of the *Washington Post* by Amazon.com's CEO, Jeff Bezos: "Creative Destruction of Internet Age: Unstoppable." Somehow this bleak vision is conveyed in a rhetoric of dizzying personal possibilities. It remains to be seen how creative anyone can be in a world where fundamental changes are engineered by (allegedly) impersonal forces. The entrepreneurial notion of creativity is confined to half a dozen techno-visionaries (such as Bezos and Steve Jobs) and defined in narrowly monetary terms, while the destruction that so often accompanies it is wide, deep, and real. "Creative destruction" is the perfect euphemism for our neo-liberal moment. Schumpeter must be smiling, somewhere.

Schumpeter's most influential American apostle is Clayton Christensen, a management theorist at the Harvard Business School. Like any good theorist he has reformulated the master's message, challenging Schumpeter's prediction that entrepreneurial innovation would be bureaucratically organized in corporations. "What happened in Japan is exactly what Schumpeter envisioned," said Christensen. "But here, folks just leave—they pick up venture capital on the way out, and they start new disruptive corporations." This is a characteristic Americanization of a European thinker. Note the pseudo-populist description of investors withdrawing capital—"folks just leave"—and the further turn given the euphemism: "destruction" becomes the schoolboyish "disruption."

Policymakers and business gurus have endowed the word "disruption" with almost fetishlike power in recent years. And Christensen himself has pioneered the application of "disruption theory" to social institutions outside the market: government agencies, public-health organizations, schools. The Americanization and expansion of Schumpeter's concept—the transformation of creative destruction in the economic sphere to creative disruption everywhere—is another symptom of our most serious social malady: the hollowing out of the public sphere, the reduction of non-market institutions to market-driven "profit centers," the monetization of everything.

Reign of Error
The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools
Diane Ravitch
Alfred A. Knopf, $27.95, 352 pp.

Jackson Lears *is the Board of Governors Professor of History at Rutgers University and the editor in chief of the* Raritan Quarterly Review. *His books include* No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880–1920 *(1981),* Something for Nothing: Luck in America *(2003), and* Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920 *(2009).*

Nowhere is this sickness more apparent than in the world of education, where "reformers" like Michelle Rhee and Joel Klein have promoted privatization in the guise of the pursuit of excellence. The consequences have been disruption that is anything but creative.

The most clear-headed and influential critic of privatization is Diane Ravitch, who has earned a reputation as an independent thinker. Refusing to embrace the formulas of left and right, she attacks politically correct speech codes as intelligently as she criticizes the free-market faith in competition. She has also been willing to change her mind in public: at one time an advocate of standardized testing, she is now a skeptic. And this skepticism animates her broader critique in *Reign of Error*, a book that dispels the clouds of reform rhetoric to reveal the destructiveness of the privatization agenda.

Since the days of Horace Mann in the 1840s, school reformers have deployed a morally charged rhetoric of apocalypse and utopia, repeatedly resorting to the jeremiad form: We are in crisis, they say, and only our schools can save us. What we are to be saved from varies from one decade to another—restive factory workers in Mann's era; strange new immigrants in the early 1900s; the Russians, the Japanese, the Chinese, or whoever the rival of the moment may be in more recent years. Whatever their immediate concern, school reformers have tended to put all their hope in institutions that can never operate independently of the constraints imposed by the surrounding social order. When the schools fail to transform the society, as they inevitably do, disappointment and anger lead eventually to more demands for educational transformation.

Nineteenth-century school reformers aimed to promote citizenship; twenty-first-century reformers want to empower entrepreneurship. The conquest of educational discourse by market models is nearly complete.

What's left out of these debates is as important as what's left in. Complaining about failing schools is a way of avoiding the structural issues of systemic poverty, inequality, and racial segregation. Celebrating better schools as a panacea is a way of not mentioning unmentionable policies that might challenge existing power arrangements. Never have these ideological exclusions been clearer than in our contemporary neoliberal moment.

Since the early 1980s, when a report titled *A Nation at Risk* warned that the United States was not educating "the labor force of the twentieth century," reformers have displayed an increasingly relentless insistence on evaluating education entirely in terms of its economic utility. Education, they assume, is a product like any other in the marketplace: schools can deliver it efficiently or not, and students or their parents (if the students are too young) get to decide whether the school is meeting their needs—that is, whether it's providing them with marketable skills. President Obama's proposal to require universities to publish the average incomes of their graduates—so students and their parents can make an informed consumer choice—is a characteristic example of this mentality. Nineteenth-century school reformers aimed to promote citizenship; twenty-first-century reformers want to empower entrepreneurship. The conquest of educational discourse by market models is nearly complete.

In reasserting the claims of public education, Ravitch is swimming against a strong current of conventional wisdom. Privatization is a bipartisan cause, though the word itself is rarely mentioned. George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind program and Obama's Race to the Top, along with most of the mainstream media, have embraced the corporate reformers' worldview in all its bullet-point banality. This view depends on a series of assertions, from general assumptions to specific recommendations. Here are the key points: Education at all levels is about training students how to succeed in a globalized economy; declining test scores and graduation rates demonstrate that schools are failing our children; poverty is just an excuse for failing schools, and great teachers by themselves can counteract its effects; teachers unions protect mediocre teachers through outdated policies like tenure; standardized tests (sold by various companies in the education-industrial complex) should be used to evaluate teachers as well as students, and teachers whose students' scores fail to rise should be fired; a nationwide network of privately run (but publicly funded) charter schools should be encouraged as an alternative to public schools. This last is another arena of consumer choice for beleaguered parents oppressed by the "public-school monopoly." What could be more American than that?

In education as in other areas of American life, privatization constitutes a powerful agenda, supported by billions of private (and increasingly public) dollars. Ravitch challenges it at every point. She begins by reminding us of what the corporate reformers don't talk about: the catastrophic impact of budget cuts, child poverty, racial segregation, bloated budgets for testing, increased class size, scripted curricula, teachers' loss of professional autonomy, the absence of special-needs children and nonnative English speakers from charter schools, and the diversion of public funds to pay dividends to charter-school investors. As in health care and the prison system, what is called privatization is really a euphemism for crony capitalism—plutocrats supping at the public trough.

But Ravitch knows that in order to take on the privatizers, argument alone is not enough. She first has to challenge them on their own ground: numbers. So she starts out with a necessary but narrow case. She refutes the privatizers'

first premise, that statistics show schools in decline, by citing a no-stakes federal test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress—the kind of test you can't prepare for and one that involves neither punishment nor reward for your performance. NAEP scores are at an all-time high for white, black, Hispanic, and Asian students. High-school graduation rates and college admissions are also at an all-time high. All this is worth mentioning, as a counterweight to the privatizers' hysteria, though it doesn't really address the meaning of a high-school diploma in an era when kids can get into college without knowing how to put a sentence together or what the Bill of Rights is. Graduation rates and college admissions are simply inadequate as measures of educational quality.

To be sure, statistics can sometimes confirm the consequences of long-term economic trends. Ravitch observes that the racial achievement gap has narrowed since the 1970s, while the income achievement gap has widened. This is hardly a surprising outcome, given the rising economic inequality of the past several decades, but it is useful in calling attention to what goes on outside the classroom—an area largely ignored by reformers.

Diane Ravitch

Ravitch is on her firmest ground when she begins to push beyond the numbers. Addressing the performance of U.S. students on international tests, an obsessive concern of reformers, Ravitch at first notes that our scores have been improving, and that in tests that measure independent thinking (one wonders how), the home team blows everybody else off the charts. According to the education critic Keith Baker, whom Ravitch quotes, the best traditions in American education involve "ambition, inquisitiveness, independence, and perhaps most important, the absence of a fixation on testing and test scores." So why copy the "rote systems" of China and Japan—especially when there is simply no association between test scores and the economic success of a nation?

Nor is there any relation between college-graduation rates and national economic health. Ravitch takes dead aim at the reformers' mindless chant of "college for all"—which exaggerates the cash value of a college degree while reducing its personal meaning to a mere meal ticket. Obsessive college boosterism doesn't provide the right sort of encouragement for discouraged students, who are not going to college anyway. Meanwhile, despite reformers' handwringing, the U.S. college graduation rate has increased steadily since 1980 across all ethnicities. The current rate of 41 percent puts the United States alongside France and well above Germany's 26 percent. But Germany has prospered because, as Ravitch writes, "it has taken care not to outsource its major industries to low-wage nations." The Germans have preserved strong unions, master-apprentice training, and a solid manufacturing base. The United States, meanwhile, has shut down its shop classes and turned to preparing students for a world where everyone will hold a college degree, wear a white collar, and stare at a screen. Some will stare more creatively—that is, profitably—and rise in the world. This is the future according to Bill Gates, himself a college dropout, and the other billionaires backing school reform, the technocratic fantasy that powers the "college for all" creed. The reformers' belief that "our economy will suffer unless we have the highest college graduation rate in the world," Ravitch concludes, is simply not borne out by any available evidence.

By challenging the reformers' economistic case for college, Ravitch raises real questions about the utilitarian assumptions underlying the reform agenda. Policymakers have oversold the economic benefits of a college education "and lost sight of the value of education for personal, civic, aesthetic, and social purposes." Mild words, but Ravitch's understatement makes a better case for the humanities—at all levels—than many windier books have done. There are, she writes, "other ways of thinking about higher education" than the market-utilitarian way.

Going to a college or university is about more than acquiring job skills. It is a time to study different subjects and fields in depth; to explore one's interests and to give full range to one's curiosity about ideas; to study under the tutelage of scholars who have devoted their lives to their field. It is a time to develop one's intellectual and cultural life. It is a time to gain the political, historical, and economic understanding that was not contained in high school textbooks, to explore issues that were once thought settled, to acquire and exercise the critical perspective that prepares people to become actively involved in civic life and democratic politics. All these may be familiar ideas but they bear repeating, especially in Ravitch's unpretentious prose.

Much of *Reign of Error* is devoted to setting up reformers' myths and then knocking them down with statistical and historical evidence. The formula is a little repetitive, but it gets the job done. Sometimes it's risibly easy, as in the myth that "poverty is an excuse for ineffective teaching and failing schools"—which Ravitch buries in a mountain of studies, all

DIANERAVITCH.COM

THE MOTH

There is one now,
on the screen door,
his chalky wings a blur,
wanting in, wanting in.
A neighbor arrives,
headlights and the thump of a car door.
The voices slip through the geometry of lights
thrown down by front windows and a few words
break through more clearly than others,
as we smell the hint of a cigarette.

This warm weather begins at dawn,
and lasts long after sundown.
We fought against it,
sitting beside the air conditioner all day,
but now we have this quiet vigil,
nothing more to be done.

Everything is open,
the windows, the front door
with its screened darkness.
When a dog passes
we hear the tinkle of its collar tags.

Above the old orange tree in the garden
the silhouette of the mountain rises up and then the stars
and the satellites take over. The tiny points that move
look exactly like the ones that don't,
silence followed by silence.

The moth climbs, flies in place,
and climbs yet more.
We sit quiet, and the house around us
is still, and of all the living things he
is the most urgent, restlessly on his way
with the earth toward morning.

—Michael Cadnum

Michael Cadnum lives in Albany, California. His thirty-fifth book, the novel Seize the Storm*, will be published in 2012 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.*

showing that "poverty is highly correlated with low academic achievement." Who could have doubted this, except right-wing ideologues? The mere fact that the argument has to be made is testimony to how far we have strayed from the assumptions guiding mid-century social-welfare policy, and how deeply our political culture has been saturated in the assumptions of free-market fundamentalism.

Many of the reform myths focus on the need to make teachers as frightened of losing their jobs as most other Americans are. A *Newsweek* cover showed a classroom blackboard with the repeated chalk message "We must fire bad teachers." Michelle Rhee, in the fawning film documentary *Waiting for "Superman,"* seemed to derive an almost erotic charge from the prospect of firing a teacher on camera. The flip side of this fetish is the notion that test scores reveal the "value added" by the teacher to a child's performance: according to the statistician William Sanders, three effective teachers in a row could close the achievement gap. Rhee and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have repeated that formula endlessly. The value-added concept overlooks parents and the rest of the child's world outside the classroom; it also rests on a fundamental category mistake. "Value-added" works as a measure of agricultural productivity but not of children's intellectual growth. As Ravitch observes, "Children are not crops. They are not empty vessels waiting to be filled by a teacher." Value-added assessment of teachers based on standardized test scores is bad science—inaccurate, unstable, unreliable. It also penalizes teachers with the most difficult assignments: children with cognitive disabilities or behavioral problems and children for whom English is a second language.

According to Ravitch, reformers simply do not understand teachers because they cannot imagine anyone doing anything without a financial incentive. So they constantly try to promote merit-pay schemes, overlooking abundant historical evidence that merit pay neither motivates teachers nor improves student performance. Reformers' "belief in the magical power of money is unbounded," Ravitch writes. "Their belief in the importance of evidence is not." So it doesn't matter to them that there is no evidence that schools improve when tenure and seniority are abolished. Unionized teachers are no bar to high student achievement (as in New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Connecticut) or to low achievement (as in the District of Columbia and other high-poverty urban districts). The lowest achievement is in the South, where there are no unions. As for tenure, it is simply due process applied to questions of firing, and is rooted in the necessity of protecting academic freedom in the classroom. Without tenure, says Ravitch, teachers would be subject to firing for assigning *Huckleberry Finn* or *Harry Potter.* Abolishing it is a prescription for banality.

The jewel in the reform movement's tiara is supposedly the charter school—an umbrella term covering an array of choices: for-profit and nonprofit, chain-store style or locally owned, online or brick-and-mortar. Amid the variety, the

dominant drift in charter-school organization is toward the corporate chain model. Whatever their structure, charter schools provide tax-supported alternatives to (allegedly) failing public schools. Despite the fanfare surrounding them, their success has been mixed. "Charter schools run the gamut from excellent to awful and are, on average, no more innovative or successful than public schools," Ravitch writes. Whether they represent a good use of public funds remains an open question. Ravitch provides grounds for skepticism.

Many charter schools are perfect embodiments of crony capitalism: privately run, publicly funded. Charter schools claim to be public when getting money from the state, and claim to be private when being sued by fired teachers or threatened with an audit by the state comptroller. Most charter schools are exempt from state laws requiring competitive bids. This can lead to embarrassing revelations: a nonprofit charter chain called Great Hearts, under contract with the state of Arizona, purchased $1 million worth of textbooks from a company owned by a member of the state charter board. One begins to suspect that the public-private distinction is merely a convenient fiction meant to serve ideological needs. Certainly the charter school movement has been heavily funded by reactionary lobbyists. The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)—the group behind the right-wing takeover of statehouses in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ohio—has also promoted the Next Generation Charter Schools Act in many state legislatures. This act allows governors to appoint a board to authorize charter schools and override local school boards. It is the Walmartization of American education, Ravitch warns, with the same hollowing-out effect on local communities. Corporate charter schools are putting Catholic schools out of business and draining money from public schools. As Ravitch asks, "If charter schools are not more successful on average than the public schools they replace, what is accomplished by demolishing public education?" The answer, of course, is the enrichment of investors and the advancement of the privatization agenda.

The profit motive has been especially egregious in the promotion of online charter schools. As Ravitch shows, two key groups came together in the late 1990s—policymakers who were willing to sacrifice "imagination, joy, and disciplined inquiry" in the classroom to achieve the elusive goal of cost savings, and entrepreneurs who saw business opportunity in declining funding for schools—to create an emerging market for online instruction. Key players included the Gates, Broad, and Walton Family Foundations, which touted something called "the ten elements of high-quality digital learning." ALEC was a big promoter too, along with such companies as Pearson, Houghton Mifflin, Harcourt, Apex Learning, and McGraw Hill, which all stood to benefit. The project was all about winning market share through connivance

with government, persuading states to require students to take at least one online course and to authorize virtual charter schools. Promoters made dizzying promises of high achievement. Expectations soared. But it turned out that Secretary of Education Bill Bennett had been right in 1999 when he said that there was "no good evidence that most uses of computers significantly improve learning." Students in online charter schools and classes have performed far below students in conventional classes. That did not prevent Pennsylvania from approving four more cyber-charters in 2012. Nor has it stopped the state of Ohio from paying cyber schools $6,000 per pupil—the same amount public schools receive. Since the cost of salaries, facilities, and transportation are low-to-nonexistent at cyber-schools, these schools reap huge profits. This is why their promoters lobbied the Ohio legislature so hard. The online-charter-school movement, like the reform movement as a whole, is all about the money.

Still, that is not the full story, as Ravitch knows. When she responds to the inevitable question "What is to be done?" she does not directly address the broader cultural attitudes that got us in this mess: the superstitious reverence for high-tech entrepreneurship, the techno-determinism that assumes we must allow technology to shape our future for us, the market-utilitarian indifference to anything that can't be valued in dollars. But she challenges them implicitly, through her intelligent, humane policy recommendations.

To redeem the possibilities of democratic public education, she writes, we must address poverty and racial segregation, provide good prenatal care for every pregnant woman, make high-quality early-childhood education available to all children, and provide the medical and social services poor kids need to keep up with their more privileged peers—health clinics, summer programs, etc. We are back in the Great Society, and it is not such a bad place. But Ravitch is also sensitive to what goes on inside the classroom. She wants a full, balanced curriculum at every school—arts, science, history, literature, civics, geography, foreign languages, math, physical education. A modest proposal, one might think, except that No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top have reduced the curriculum to mere test prep in all but the most affluent school districts. Tests should be used to diagnose trends and difficulties; the best ones, in Ravitch's view, are the no-stakes tests like the NAEP. Tests are not scientific instruments, she insists, quoting a test grader who says a test is like "a scientific experiment in which everything is a variable." The only qualification for employment as a standardized test grader is "a willingness to throw independent thinking out the window and follow the absurd and ever-changing guidelines set by the test-scoring companies." The testing mania arises from the false assumption that high test scores lead to better jobs. The tests' emphasis on one right answer is antagonistic to true learning, to the development of independent thought.

We need a re-orientation of educational policy, not only away from the fixation on testing but away from the market model in general. We might start by banning for-profit charters and charter chains, recognizing, in Ravitch's words, that "the primary goal of a for-profit organization is to maximize profit, not to produce great education." Underlying that recognition is another: that public education is a public responsibility, not a consumer good. In education as in so many other areas of contemporary discourse, what claims to be cutting-edge and market-driven is often a reversion to earlier modes of business thought. "The current obsession with data and data-based decision making is not twenty-first century thinking," Ravitch writes. In fact, this obsession resembles nothing so much as the mechanistic numerology of early twentieth-century management thinkers like Frederick Winslow Taylor.

Business buzzwords, never precise to begin with, can become a blunt, destructive instrument in hands of education reformers. "Creative disruption," for example, may or may not be an appropriate entrepreneurial strategy, but it is an altogether inappropriate approach to education, which proceeds (especially in the early years) by slow, deliberate increments. As Ravitch observes: "'Creative disruption' is certainly disruptive, but it is not creative. It is not what children and adolescents need. It sacrifices social and human values that are more important to children and to society than consumerism, competition, and choice." What those values may be is a matter of democratic debate. But we can be sure they include efforts to sustain community, encourage informed citizenship, and nurture zest for inquiry—the commitments Ravitch's own career embodies. We are in her debt for reminding us that they still matter.

The attempt to create a system of mass public education has always been bedeviled by anti-intellectual conformism, half-baked theories, and a distrust of superior achievement and idiosyncrasy. One can understand why frustrated parents might respond to the reformers' rhetoric of excellence. Sometimes the reformers even deliver what they promise—for example, when charter schools offer brighter and more fortunate students a refuge from the pull toward mediocrity inherent in batch-processing. But charter schools are no panacea, especially for poorer students; and neither is standardized testing, the other main arrow in the reformers' quiver. As Ravitch shows, the focus on quantifiable standards and market models exacerbates more problems than it solves. At bottom the reformers' aim is uncreative destruction: the hollowing out of the commons, where public education once occupied an honored place. However intractable the difficulties of the public schools, we would do well to remember that they are the difficulties of the larger society as well. The privatization project—scapegoating public schools, starving them of resources, and depriving their teachers of professional dignity—is a dangerous business. As Otis Redding said, you don't miss your water till your well runs dry. ■

Rand Richards Cooper

Weightless

'GRAVITY'

I can't recall a film released to more unanimous critical joy than *Gravity*, Alfonso Cuarón's taut chronicle of a space mission gone disastrously awry. Garnering an out-of-this-world 100 percent rating from the review clearinghouse rottentomatoes.com, the film has won ecstatic accolades from critics ranging from A. O. Scott ("It rewrites the rules of cinema as we know them") to Richard Corliss ("*Gravity* shows us the glory of cinema's future…. Cuarón is a movie visionary of the highest order.")

Cuarón is a protean young director of the will-try-anything kind. I was not a big fan of his 2001 breakthrough movie *Y Tu Mamá También*, a Mexican road-film-cum-love-triangle-melodrama, and I skipped *Prisoner of Azkaban*, his 2004 contribution to the Harry Potter saga. But I greatly admired *Children of Men*, his 2006 dystopian sci-fi thriller, which conjured an unexpected hope for redemption from a panorama of unremitting bleakness. As for *Gravity*, I will assert a mildly dissenting note of ambivalence. I found the film intensely involving as I watched it in the theater—flinch-provoking shards of space debris shooting forth at me via the magic of 3-D. But this is not a movie that lingers with you and makes you think about it later on. It's extremely gripping without being particularly interesting.

I'm guessing this is due to the discrepancy between the visual power of the film and its serviceable-at-best writing. It is one thing for a script to be intentionally underwritten in order to bring home the vast loneliness of space; "I love the silence," the mission's doctor-researcher, Dr. Ryan Stone (Sandra Bullock), answers when her commanding officer, Matt Kowalsky (George Clooney), asks what she will miss when the mission ends. But to be *poorly* written is another thing. The story contains annoying improbabilities. Halfway through the film, as the two astronauts confront a life-threatening emergency, and Matt asks Ryan whether she is married, we wonder: Is it plausible that the two could spend months in training together, plus a week in space, and know nothing about each other's lives? Also, how likely is it that NASA's extensive psychological profiling would result in its sending into space a woman sunk in grief at the loss of a child and clinically depressed?

Worse is a creeping strain of sentimentality. Clooney's character is presented as the kind of stoical, self-sacrificing, manly hero that Americans these days are supposed to worship. His imperviousness to fear is so complete that he continues to wisecrack even as space junk from an exploded satellite rains death down on the team; later—spoiler alert!—sacrificing his life to save Bullock's (the two are tied to a tether strong enough to hold only one), he drifts away toward a hideously lonely death in space, while continuing to instruct her calmly, via headset, on how to get back into the space capsule and pilot it; facing death, he cares only about saving and comforting her.

Such a caricature of heroism not only strains credulity, but does our own humanity a disservice by creating an impossible standard. Bullock's Dr. Stone, on the other hand, is all helpless vulnerability and pain. Toward the end, a backstory about the death of her four-year-old daughter is sprung on us as a way to explain her lassitude in the face of death, leading to a would-be inspirational scene in which she rediscovers the will to live by speaking aloud to "my little angel" in heaven.

As these tearjerker banalities and bromides play out, on the visual side *Gravity* compensates with a display of nearly overwhelming beauty and power. This is a tribute to the genius of the young Mexican cinematographer Em-

WARNER BROS. PICTURES

Sandra Bullock & George Clooney in Gravity

manuel Lubezki. Lubezki provided the eyes for Terrence Malick in creating the eccentric magnificence of *Tree of Life*. In *Children of Men*, working with Cuarón, he fashioned a future that was a bleak amalgam of *The Terminator*, *Escape from New York*, and *Mad Max*, installing ruin, poison, violence, and degradation at the molecular level of the film. And in *Gravity*, his first wholly CGI effort, he pulls off another virtuoso performance. A visual constant in the film is the looming, gorgeous, and, well, unearthly presence of earth, its geographies luminously visible yet made strange by our seeing them at unaccustomed angles. Like the astronauts themselves we are awed by the sublime phenomenon of sunrise, as the sun creeps around the edge of the globe yet again, its blinding burst of radiance alternating with the nighttime illuminations of human civilization—lights that are like fireflies in the sparsely populated zones, and lava-like rivers of orange in the crowded ones.

These visual seductions strike a powerful emotional balance in the film, capturing an aloneness that is in turns terrifying and serene. Of course, we know from the transcripts of real space flights that such poeticized perspectives have generally not been the province of the detail-oriented, mission-driven, military-and-engineering types we have sent into space. (Neil Armstrong memorized his one line of poetry and *still* got it wrong!) But they are inevitably part of our romance of space, and this film delivers that *romance* with full rapture. A recurring visual motif shows Earth reflected on the glass visor of Clooney's astronaut helmet, with Clooney staring up in awe.

In a quirky and fascinating way, *Gravity* constitutes a ninety-minute lesson in Newtonian motion, laying out the eternal truths of velocity, acceleration, force, and inertia and showing us how insecurely we really understand them. The absence of gravity in space creates a kind of motional laboratory where all objects inalterably follow whatever impulse is imparted to them, whether by a collision, a tug on a space tether, or a firing jet on Clooney's jetpack. (The sole exception is Bullock's hair, which somehow stays flat on her head at all times.) The results are visually beguiling: teardrops float toward us through the ether; licks of fire from a flaming panel control break off and also float, like glimmering droplets of burning oil. When Clooney manages to attach an untethered Bullock to himself via twenty-five feet of cord, and then fires his jetpack, the action doesn't simply pull her toward him, but also pulls him backward toward her. Actions and opposite reactions—remember? This is the most physics-y movie you will see short of a documentary on the Higgs-Boson supercollider. (By the way—reviewer's confession!—I almost never go to the 3-D version of a movie. This is one case where it is definitely worth doing so.)

It is a canny and crucial aspect of this film that until the final scene, we never see Earth except from four hundred miles above it. The astronauts' communications are limited to a few transmissions received from Houston (inevitably Ed Harris, in an uncredited voice-only role) before disaster happens. Cut off, we are left floating and isolated as the characters themselves—taken away from Earth and allowed to see it only at this eerie remove. A fundamental estrangement shapes the experience of watching *Gravity*, making for extremes of serenity and anxiety.

The juxtaposition of several modes of claustrophobia—we are trapped with a tiny two-person cast, themselves trapped in space suits and space capsules—and the sublime vastness of space proves a powerful visual and psychological dynamic. It is fair to say that this film doesn't really have a single idea arrow in its quiver; it is a mirror image of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, with its avid reaching for portentous meanings. *Gravity* doesn't have much on its mind. But it looks fabulous. Maybe Cuarón should have boldly let his film ride on his photographer's magical images and dispensed with the dialogue altogether. Now that would *really* rewrite the rules of cinema! ■

Dominic Preziosi

A Bold Piece

Someone
Alice McDermott
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $25, 232 pp.

Alice McDermott doesn't do trendy. Verbal pyrotechnics aren't part of her arsenal; making pronouncements on the way we live now isn't her aim. There's no head-spinning riffing on the classics, modern or otherwise, no stoking of dystopian anxieties. There may be eating, praying, and loving, but only to suggest the redemptive qualities of the quotidian, not as a prescription for happiness.

What McDermott does is immediacy. In clear, purposeful prose she examines the near at hand—marriage, family, parish, neighborhood—bringing readers in close to share in her discoveries. She draws both from what seems the deeply personal as well as from the collective, mainly postwar Irish-American-Catholic experience to document what changes and—perhaps as telling—what doesn't over the course of the generations. As John Keane in McDermott's novel *After This* thinks to himself when looking out over the ocean: "As it was before me, and as it will be long after I'm gone."

That book made skillful use of a roving third-person point of view to light on multiple characters, sometimes within a single sentence, making readers almost uncomfortably a part of the Keane family circle. In *Someone*, her newest novel, McDermott uses a different approach to achieve a similar effect, presenting the first-person narrator-protagonist Marie Commeford as she contemplates her seven or so decades on earth. The result is a compelling accounting of a life that begins in Depression-era Brooklyn and winds its way to the late-twentieth-century suburbs, the inherent subjectivity of its telling bringing the reader still closer to the heart of things.

Like someone with a box of old photos, Marie lingers over some moments longer than others, recalling, interpreting, going back and forth over time and seeing what she will. Seeing, in fact, is a big part of *Someone*, right from its opening pages, when we first learn of the eye problems that will afflict Marie for years to come and affect the direction her life takes. Her first, ill-fated romance, for instance, is instigated by a neighborhood boy with one leg shorter than the other, who sees in Marie a partner in impairment. ("Blind you," he tells her, "gimpy me.") Yet when he is with her, his eyes dart to whoever is walking by or coming into the room—behavior she despises but is too scared to call him on, lest she lose him, which she does anyway. Years later, it still sticks with her, to the point where she wields it as a cautionary tale for her own children: Don't trust anyone who refuses to see *you*.

What does Marie herself see? A dot-

Alice McDermott

ing father whose fondness for a quick nip at the neighborhood speakeasy soon reveals itself to be alcoholism. A brother whose devotion and ability to lose himself in prayer and poetry prove insufficient to sustain his priestly vocation or emotional stability. Infirmity and impediment all around, in the form not only of her inattentive boyfriend but also of the blind man down the street and the mentally disabled girl several buildings over. Plus death—her father, the young woman next door who falls down the stairs, a friend's mother who dies in childbirth, and all of the deceased of the parish who eventually make their way to Fagin's funeral home, where Marie gets her first job.

It's in this section that Marie—until now "the little pagan" who feels nothing when she prays and "the bold piece" who defies her mother at nearly every turn—becomes something else: "the consoling angel." As Fagin the undertaker explains to her, she's needed to remind the survivors "of life. Life again, which is also the hope of the resurrection." A young woman now prettily attired in new dresses from Abraham & Straus to greet and comfort the mourners as she guides them to and from the bier, Marie is, significantly, forced to rely less on the glasses she has worn for so long. And not surprisingly, Fagin's is where she begins to see things she hasn't necessarily been able to notice before—like the way the polite and meandering conversation of the nuns and elderly ladies harbors eddies of gossip, or how that cruel first boyfriend cups a remembrance card and tries not to cry at the wake of a beloved neighbor.

Though Marie darts back and forth across memories as she considers her life, it's certain moments of her childhood that McDermott renders with special clarity. With deceptive simplicity she captures what a child experiences when feeling the sudden unseen slap from an angry parent or the scalding water of a filled tub; the self-conscious discomfort of praying without feeling prayerful; the confusion, disquiet, and fear that attend encounters with adults in unexpected states of drunkenness and depression or in unexpected places like a darkened stairwell. All of which speaks to the openness of a child's consciousness, the gaze that takes in everything, with those images ineradicably imprinting themselves on, and continually reshaping, what the adult will come to understand as "memory."

There are many moments that stand out in *Someone*—as when the young Marie (still a bold piece at this stage) not only stubbornly refuses to follow her mother's recipe for soda bread but proceeds to sabotage it, and when the adult Marie comes around to realizing why she will marry the man she does: "There would be his willingness to bestow upon me the power to reassure him. He would trust me with his happiness."

That man is Tom, who in fact does entrust his happiness to Marie, after having perhaps experienced an awakening of his faith while held by the Germans as a prisoner of war. While he was there, he explains, he would recall the Gospel story of the blind man being made to see. "I thought about how the guy's just sitting there, not asking, not wearing himself out with asking, and bingo, Jesus cures him. Just because he feels sorry for the guy. I don't know. It was a good thing to remember, over there. That you don't necessarily have to ask. Or even believe. It gave me hope." The desire for such hope pervades these pages, with the comforting yet not definitively reassuring answer of "someone" coming whenever a character asks *Who will love me?* or *Who will be there when I wake up in the dark?* or *Who will know when I fall?*

Writing in September in the *New York Times*, Leah Hager Cohen noted in McDermott a "certain lack of authorial self-aggrandizement." Let's be thankful for that, but, more important, let's also credit McDermott for an unfailing honesty in applying her skills to what matters—what has, and what always will. ■

Dominic Preziosi *is* Commonweal's *digital editor.*

Nathan Schneider

Missing Revolutions

Growing Up Absurd

Paul Goodman
New York Review Books, $17.95, 312 pp.

Nearly everything that Paul Goodman complained about in *Growing Up Absurd*—his influential critique of 1950s America, originally published in 1960 and recently reissued by New York Review Books—is now worse. Rather than being trapped in dull jobs as company men, many people now have trouble finding any kind of decent work. Rather than merely feeling alienated from our natural environment, it is now clear that we're damaging that environment irreparably. Schools are still inadequate, but now many of them have armed police at the doors. And today's young misfits are subjected not just to discipline and derision, but also to brain-altering medication. A country that in the late 1950s was a superpower still on the rise (notwithstanding some postwar malaise) now appears to be a sinking ship determined to go down shooting. Instead of what Goodman called the "world-wide demented enterprise" of the Cold War, the country now wages open-ended robot battles on ever more fronts.

Goodman wrote *Growing Up Absurd* on an assignment to explain the "juvenile delinquency" manifested variously in the Beats, the bums, the existentialists, and the hipsters of his time. He placed the blame not on the youth themselves, nor even on their parents exactly, but on the society that surrounded them and which they were meant to inherit. The problem was what Goodman called the "missing revolutions" in modern life: great American promises such as democracy, opportunity, and the pursuit of happiness were not being kept, despite lip service to the contrary. The aspiring junior executive suffered the consequences of this failure as much as Jack Kerouac did, whether he knew it or not. "Important problems," Goodman wrote, were "treated as nonexistent."

Important problems of men, that is. Women are nudged aside before the end of the introduction, which notoriously explains that "a girl does not have to, she is not expected to 'make something' of herself. Her career does not have to be self-justifying, for she will have children, which is absolutely self-justifying, like any other natural or creative act." So women are largely immune from the trouble of "growing up absurd." Nonwhite Americans, though not ignored, are also peripheral here.

Paul Goodman

Goodman presents his argument as both radical and traditionalist, calling for certain shifts in social priorities in order to restore "right proportion" in the midst of progress. "We must painfully perfect the revolutionary modern tradition we have," he writes. This task turns out to involve policy suggestions large and small, some of which would later get a more detailed treatment in *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals*. He also thought we ought to invest a lot more money on education. But what mattered most to Goodman were the areas of life that cannot be quantified, much less monetized, to suit modern organizational life. As he put it, "Few great men could pass Personnel."

His policy proposals, then, are not his main point; their purpose is to free the imagination from the constraints that industrial society imposes. Goodman calls his readers to lift up their eyes toward aspirations such as patriotism, vocation, and honor. These are the content of the faith he confesses. Of space travel, he writes: "This adventure makes life worth the trouble again." But note that "again": even his futurism is nostalgic. He is always calling the reader to recover something that has been lost—a world in which work was meaningful, for instance, or one in which there was still room for the "man of letters."

Growing Up Absurd was rejected by the publishing house that first commissioned it, only to be picked up by Jason Epstein at Random House. It could have done with more editing. Goodman's prose sets out to dazzle with its iconoclastic attitude and the striking phrases that clothe the author's not-always-consistent arguments. He quotes from his previous books at great length. Throughout he tries to reconcile his claim to be an anarchist with his conservative instincts, a tension borne out in his life as well as on the page: he was a married family man who was also promiscuously bisexual, a Jew who opposed World War II.

Among the other "mansplainers" of Goodman's time—to borrow a term from the feminist blogosphere—one could be forgiven for preferring Ivan Illich, who presented his similarly adventuresome anarcho-conservative proposals with considerably more rigor and coherence; or James Baldwin, who as a black man in exile came by his prophetic tone more honestly. "Allen Ginsberg and I once pointed out to Stokely Carmichael how we were niggers," Goodman recalled in a memoir-ish essay, refer-

ring to a 1967 BBC broadcast, "but he blandly put us down by saying that we could always conceal our disposition and pass." Carmichael was right.

Goodman's ability to "pass" was never better demonstrated than at what was perhaps his finest hour. In the week of the massive 1967 antiwar march on Washington, he was invited to speak to an association of arms dealers and generals in the State Department auditorium. Goodman arranged for a few dozen protesters to be picketing outside, while, inside, he denounced the captains of the war machine to their faces. He criticized the organizers for not inviting any speakers under the age of thirty—the age group that would have to live in the world the arms dealers and generals were threatening to destroy. But though Goodman had become a kind of guru during the earlier stages of the student movements in the 1960s, it became clear to him by the end of the decade that the young protesters were failing to act the way he thought they should. Part of the trouble was their embrace of identity politics, like Black Power and feminism. From his point of view, such groups were a distraction from the main event.

This book is above all a thing of its time and place (and gender and race). Goodman did sometimes recognize that the average white man's plight under capitalism was related to his relationship to a social order that excluded too many people, but for the most part *Growing Up Absurd* keeps the marginalized on the margins. It remains for the leaders of present and future social movements to recognize more fully than Goodman did that the problems of the most vulnerable among us are the problems of us all, and that many comfortable insiders are bound to feel alienated in a society that treats so many people like outsiders. ■

Nathan Schneider *is the author of* God in Proof: The Story of a Search from the Ancients to the Internet *and* Thank You, Anarchy: Notes from the Occupy Apocalypse, *both published by University of California Press.*

Marc O. DeGirolami

Legalese

Reading Law

The Interpretation of Legal Texts

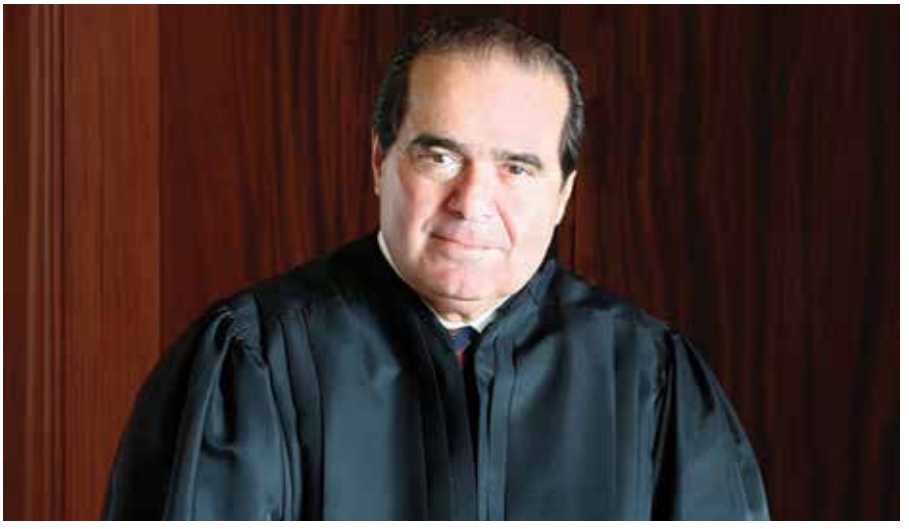
Antonin Scalia & Bryan A. Garner

Thompson/West, $39.96, 608 pp.

Justice Antonin Scalia has built one of the most important jurisprudential legacies in American law. He is best known as a formidable proponent of textualism and originalism. Textualists focus on the meaning of words and eschew more abstract inquiries about the law's purposes. Originalists attempt to discern the original meaning of a legal document—most frequently the Constitution. Scalia has never been a favorite of the legal professoriate, but it is no surprise that law students and lawyers often find his distinctive approach to legal interpretation lucid and challenging. It is a mark of his pioneering influence and keen intellect that originalism and fidelity to text have become a staple of the Supreme Court's interpretive methodology, a subject of expansive scholarly study, and an approach that resonates in the popular imagination.

The influence of Justice Scalia's jurisprudence, however, exceeds the defense of it offered in *Reading Law: The Interpretation of Legal Texts*. One may believe that close attention to text is an important feature of legal interpretation without also insisting that it is *exclusively* important. There is little in this book that will persuade someone with these views to abandon them. Readers wishing for a sophisticated scholarly defense of textualism should look to other treatments—the writing of Scalia's former law clerk, John Manning, for example, as well as some of Scalia's own earlier scholarship.

But *Reading Law* is not really about these issues. It was not written for me or for other academics, and I am glad it wasn't. It was written for law students and the lawyers and judges that they will become. Some of the most interesting studies of law approach it as a distinctive tradition. And like many traditions, law has its own language, which informs and suffuses the thought of those who think and speak through it. If the language of the law is not preserved—if it decays through lack of use, disregard, or skeptical dismissal as just so much transcendental nonsense—then the tradition of law dies as well. Those who dismiss the distinctive language of law—with its formal intricacies and ancient artifices—often say that the



Justice Antonin Scalia

more we strip down and simplify legal language, the more transparent, honest, just, and fair the law will become.

The authors of *Reading Law* press a different point: it is the traditional and communal language of law that renders the meaning of legal instruments clear and allows the law to perform its beneficent functions. "When it is widely understood in the legal community that, for example, a word used repeatedly in a document will have the same meaning throughout, and that a change in terminology suggests a change in meaning, you can expect those who prepare legal documents to draft accordingly." The core aim of the book is to retrieve and systematize one of the law's most important and enduring linguistic traditions—the canons of textual interpretation. The canons are not rules as much as rules of thumb, presumptions about the meaning of legal texts. Skill in legal interpretation involves the capacity to discern when a canon should, and should not, yield to countervailing considerations.

In the early twentieth century, the canons came in for criticism by scholars who believed them to be conceptually empty and practically useless—a trompe l'oeil that rendered the real workings of law opaque. For every canon, Karl Llewellyn once wrote, one can locate a contradicting counter-canon—for every thrust, a parry. This demonstration was thought to be a clever deflation of the forms and formalisms of law: what was needed was some "realism" about how judges actually decided cases. But the canons represent their own type of realism about law: not the realism of the academic, with his aspirations to achieve through law the justice that lies beyond law, but the realism of the common lawyer and judge, who understand that law cannot have substance without form. Constitutions, statutes, regulations, contracts, deeds, and wills—these are all, at bottom, conventional legal forms, and their proper interpretation demands immersion in (and perhaps even a bit of affection for) the traditional language of law.

The most illuminating and useful

section of the book explores the "contextual canons," and especially the one that says the text of any legal instrument must be construed as a whole. Many canons derive from this overarching idea: the canon against "surplusage" (interpretations that render words superfluous should be avoided); the canon in favor of consistent terminological usage (which grounds a fascinating tradition of intratextual constitutional interpretation); and the *noscitur a sociis* canon (a word is to be understood by the words with which it is associated). The canon of *ejusdem generis* is particularly interesting: it states that a general term following an enumeration of two or more items includes only the same general class of items. For example, "dogs, cats, horses, cattle, and other animals" might well include pigs or chickens, might not include alligators or elephants, would probably exclude amoebae and viperfish, and would definitely exclude palm trees and ashtrays. Determining what makes the list and what doesn't depends on the interpreter's understanding of common usage—that is to say, common legal usage as manifested within a mature linguistic tradition. One might think that this set of contextualist canons indicates that the canons themselves can be reduced to a search for a highly abstract intention of the legislators (sometimes called "legislative intent" or "purpose"). But the authors make an elegant case that this would be an abuse of the canons. It would divert the interpreter's attention away from the law as a linguistic tradition and toward matters that lie beyond law. The assumption—intuitive, though contestable—is that law's justice may be achieved only by working within the limits of law's linguistic forms; and a judge hell-bent on achieving the justice beyond law is apt to run right over and past the narrow but vital domain of law itself.

The last portion of the book—the "exposures"—is more pugnacious than the others and seems intended, together with the introduction, as an apology for textualism. Justice Scalia's familiar resistance to reliance on legislative history as a tool of statutory interpretation makes a dutiful appearance. But this is not the best part of the book. For example, "the false notion that the spirit of a statute should prevail over its letter" is extended to constitutional law and invoked to castigate the ruling in *Roe v. Wade*: "It should not require high-running emotions among the public to encourage judges to follow the letter of the law." Judges, the authors write in the next exposure, should not aim at "doing justice" when they interpret text, but should limit themselves to discerning "what a text means." The problem with these statements is not that they are mistaken; it is that they are incomplete. There are much better-developed defenses and critiques of these positions in other work that this book does not address. This is not a book that carefully engages the current debates in constitutional interpretation, and it would have done better to avoid them altogether.

Its strengths lie elsewhere. *Reading Law* is, as the authors put it, a normative treatise that introduces the language of law to an audience for whom it is largely alien while offering a refresher course for attorneys and judges who have forgotten (or who never really learned) their canons. Like all treatises, the point is not to read through from front to back, and I cannot recommend marching through the book's 414 pages (that's before the appendices). No one who isn't looking for it will much miss the "Scope-of-Subparts Canon" explaining the relationship of subparts to parts, or the "Punctuation Canon," which warns against "hostility to punctuation" and whose examples include various obscure nineteenth-century precedents involving the use of semicolons. But lawyers faced with interpretive problems will find in *Reading Law* a pathway to a set of linguistic precepts that structure and enrich the tradition of American law. That is a worthy contribution. ■

Marc O. DeGirolami *is associate professor of law and associate director of the Center for Law and Religion at St. John's University School of Law.*

Selina O'Grady

A Mossy Graveyard

Our Church

A Personal History of the Church of England

Roger Scruton

Atlantic Books, $32.95, 224 pp.

According to Roger Scruton, religion has been an embarrassment to the English since the seventeenth century—one of the topics, like sex, that you just don't discuss. Ever since fervent Protestants left England to set up their city on a hill in America, England—exhausted by the religious conflicts of the Civil War—has settled for peace rather than ardent belief. The difference in religious fervor between the two countries never ceases to amaze both the British and Americans. Anglicanism has molded and reflected a people who are slightly embarrassed and skeptical about religion, and for whom religion is more a social matter than a relationship with God. The English, who "know in their hearts that faith is in large part a human invention," prefer compromise to zeal, and want the transcendent only in small doses.

In addition to being England's foremost conservative philosopher, Scruton is organist at his local Anglican church. His "thoughts at one remove from faith," Scruton rightly puts himself in the noble line of skeptical Englishmen from the seventeenth-century political philosopher Thomas Hobbes and the eighteenth-century essayist Joseph Addison to George Orwell and Philip Larkin, perhaps the greatest poet of religious nostalgia, and "for whom this strange form of holiness [Anglicanism] has been the best that can be done in the matter of religion."

Ever since Henry VIII declared himself supreme head of the Church of England for dynastic reasons rather than out of any reformist zeal, the church has been more a sociopolitical institution than a religious one. In the settlement of 1688–89 following the Civil War, the English were quite happy to see their national church sacrifice conviction for peace. The Anglican Church was to be the keeper of civil order rather than the guardian of a narrow faith. It accommodated nonpapal Catholics and Protestants (as the worldwide Anglican Communion still does today), while more fervent believers, whether Catholic or Protestant, were permitted to practice their own faiths independently. As David Hume noted approvingly, the English "are now settled into the most cool indifference with regard to religious matters that is to be found in any nation of the world."

Critics of the Church of England condemn it for being too worldly and too committed to shoring up the political and social status quo. But Scruton turns what many consider to be the vices of establishment on their head. Yes, the nineteenth-century church (as depicted in Trollope's brilliant novels *The Warden* and *Barchester Towers*) was a career path and welfare service for the elite. Yet that church was also the home of Christian social reformers and antislavery campaigners. In Scruton's view, the glories of the established church far outweigh its weaknesses. What he loves and values is precisely the church's role in forging the social fabric of England, the way it has both reflected and helped to create a nation, a people, and a culture. One of the pleasures of this book is Scruton's wonderfully succinct, knowledgeable, and illuminating guide to that broader culture (Scruton has specialized in aesthetics throughout his career). He celebrates the profound influence of the church on the nation's music, from plainsong, through the great Victorian hymn writers, to Ralph Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten. He traces the church's formative role in the lives and work of painters, architects, and writers. Bunyan, Milton, Blake, Auden and countless others owed an immeasurable debt to the King James Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, whose words, in Scruton's view, capture the very soul of the Church of England.

For Scruton the church is England, an England he knew and loved in his

SIMON BURCHELL

All Saints Church in Boughton Aluph in Kent, England

youth and that he believes is dying. *Our Church* is very much an elegy for that lost world. But of course, as the book's subtitle makes clear, Scruton's is a personal history. His vision of the church, for example, is not one even his own father would accept. As a teenager the author, much against the wishes of his father, who was an atheist and a socialist, began secretly visiting his local parish church. Scruton père saw the church as part of the apparatus of class oppression. For his son, however, it came to represent a cherished rural and conservative social order, one that united the people in pride and love of country. That England finds its quintessence in the rural village church where Anglo Saxons, medievals, seventeenth-century Puritan iconoclasts, and nineteenth-century gothic revivalists have all left a legacy in stone. The village church, with its monuments to the local gentry, as well as to the ordinary men who gave their lives in two world wars, connects believers and unbelievers alike to a shared past. The village church is, for Scruton, "an immortal projection of England in a realm beyond space and time."

To what extent the church ever spoke for the nation as a whole is, of course, open to question. As an organ of the state, it was inevitably part of an often unjust social and economic order. It long neglected the urban poor, and scrambled to catch up with the welfare efforts of the Methodists and other Nonconformist denominations in the nineteenth century. Scruton's conservatism perhaps makes him too forgiving of the faults inherent in an established church. In a similar fashion, he mischievously celebrates the Church of England for the way in which it caters to the spiritually unambitious, those who want their relationship with God to be gotten with the minimum of effort. But this seems self-defeating. As the sociologist Raymond Stark has pointed out, churches that demand little commitment and few sacrifices reap little loyalty or sacrifice in return.

Now, of course, "our national church," as Scruton calls it, speaks for a dwindling minority. And this, he acknowledges, exposes the fundamental weakness of establishment. A strictly national church depends for its credibility on there being a cohesive sense of social identity and morality. Yet much to Scruton's dismay, religious and ethnic pluralism has brought about a "new ideology of nondiscrimination" that no longer privileges Christianity and the culture it produced.

Though the Church of England may be dying, there will always be those who love and defend it. Even the passionate atheist Christopher Hitchens acknowledged that he was still moved by the English village church. Its smell and muffled silence still evoke a longing for the transcendent, a nostalgia for a mythical English past, a feeling of awe toward a tumultuous history made present again in stone, monuments, war memorials, and faded banners, and a poignant sense of belonging to that national history, tarnished though it now may be. "A serious house on serious earth it is, / In whose blent air all our compulsions meet, / Are recognized, and robed as destinies," was how Philip Larkin famously put it. That is the church Scruton dreams of behind the organist's curtain while playing to an ever-dwindling congregation. ■

Selina O'Grady *is the author of* And Man Created God: A History of the World at the Time of Jesus *(St Martin's Press).*

Shanghaied

Liam Callanan

It's late Saturday night in Shanghai. I'm in town for thirty-six hours as part of a whirlwind tour of China. A friend of a friend connected me to my tour guide, the briefcase-bearing David, a university student who plays right tackle for his school's American-style football team. He's earnest and his English is fine, but he has seemed utterly mystified by my questions. What should I see first? Exactly what part of the city are we in? Now, over drinks, the truth comes out: He's never been a tour guide before; he's doing this as a favor. He smiles weakly.

His friend Alice, the best discovery of the day so far, all opinions and eye-rolling, suddenly interrupts to ask, "Are you religious?"

As was the case with most of the crowded streets we wandered today, I'm unsure where this will lead, but it turns out to be a practical matter. The next day is Sunday, and they have heard Americans like church.

So I confess. Yes, I am religious—Catholic. That doesn't register, so smartphones are consulted, translation occurs, nodding ensues: *Catholic*. I'd consulted my own phone earlier to research Mass times, but when I searched the web for "Catholic, Shanghai," the first thing that came up was a London *Telegraph* article, "Shanghai's Catholic Church in Disarray." I learned that longtime Shanghai bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian died in April, and his apparent successor, newly minted auxiliary bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin, has been under house arrest since his episcopal ordination. Ma had used that high-profile occasion to renounce the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, the entirely state-controlled version of the Catholic Church in China.

Bishop Jin, on the other hand, had worked with the Patriotic Association for many years. It was a pragmatic decision—he'd spent eighteen years in prison and reform camps. But since his release, with the Communist Party's—I'll just use the word—blessing, Jin had grown the diocese to one hundred forty parishes, including the one I was planning on going to the next morning, the oldest Catholic Church in Shanghai, St. Francis Xavier, founded in 1853 by Spanish Jesuits.

I tell David and Alice that I am a bit nervous about going, given what I'd read. Disarray? House arrest? Reform camps? Alice is confused, so I Google up the *Telegraph* article on my phone and hand it to her. (Actually, I used the Chinese search engine Baidu. Google has refused to censor its searches in China, and so that website often timed out, or routed—after a delay of several seconds during which you could almost hear a Chinese censor whistling and drumming his fingers—to a Google server in Hong Kong. And when I tried to research St. Francis Xavier parish using Bing, I was greeted with a note: "Due to legal obligations imposed by Chinese laws and regulations, we have removed specific results for these search terms.")

Alice is sure the article is untrue. She is entering a social sciences PhD program at an Ivy League university in the fall, to study, she says, what makes Japanese people so inherently evil. I ask if she really believes that. Alice asks if the *Telegraph* is a reputable paper. Editorially conservative, I say, but yes, of the London papers—

"*London* papers," she says. "You believe *London* papers?"

The next day I took a cab to St. Francis Xavier, or Dongjiadu, a beautiful and spare white copy of the Chiesa del Gesù, the Jesuits' mother church in Rome. I'd read about China's parallel Catholic churches—the "underground church" of believers and clergy who refuse to have anything to do with the Patriotic Association; the "open church" of those who cooperate. It's simple, and not. Some bishops are on good terms with both Rome and Beijing. St. Francis gave no outward sign of its allegiance. The chauffeurs and beggars lingering outside were just chauffeurs and beggars, right, not surveillance? (I played it safe and paid the beggars.)

Inside, only a hundred or so filled the pews, but they seemed to represent every continent. The Mass was in English. The priest was Chinese. The sound system was balky. Every now and then, a man marched up a side aisle and waved his arm. Maybe he was an usher. Maybe he was something else. *Speak more softly*, he seemed to say, or, *Stop*.

No one, least of all the priest, paid him any attention. ■

Liam Callanan *is the author of the novels* The Cloud Atlas *and* All Saints. *He has just finished his term as chair of the English Department at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee.*

PHOTO: PETER POTROWL: ST. FRANCIS XAVIER CHURCH IN SHANGHAI

Now available for the iPad

- Single issues or annual subscriptions
- Enhanced multimedia content

Available on the App Store

Visit commonwealmagazine.org/digital for all our digital options.