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# Commonweal

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## LETTERS

# *Against the new nationalism: an open letter*

Each day more signs point to a tremendous shift in American conservatism away from the prior consensus and toward the new nationalism of Donald Trump. This is evident not only in the recent National Conservatism Conference held in July in Washington, D.C., but also in the manifesto signed by a number of Christians who appear eager to embrace nationalism as compatible with Christian faith. Without impugning specific individuals, as fellow Christian intellectuals, theologians, pastors, and educators, we respond to this rapprochement with sadness, but also with a clear and firm *No*. We are Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant; Republicans, Democrats, and independents. Despite our denominational and political differences, we are united by the conviction that there are certain political solidarities that are anathema to our shared Christian faith.

In the 1930s many serious Christian thinkers in Germany believed they could manage an alliance with emergent illiberal nationalism. Prominent theologians like Paul Althaus and Friedrich Gogarten believed that the National Socialist movement offered a new opportunity to strengthen social order and cohesion around Christian identity. But some Christians immediately resisted, most visibly in the Barmen Declaration of 1934, which rejected the compromises of "German" Christianity and its heinous distortions of the Gospel.

Our situation in 2019 is surely different, but American Christians now face a moment whose deadly violence has brought such analogies to mind. Again we watch as demagogues demonize vulnerable minorities as infesting vermin or invading forces who weaken the nation and must be removed. Again we watch as fellow Christians weigh whether to fuse their faith with nationalist and ethno-nationalist politics in order to strengthen their cultural footing. Again ethnic majorities confuse their political bloc with Christianity itself. In this chaotic time Christian leaders of all stripes must help the church discern the boundaries of legitimate political alliances. This is especially true in the face of a rising racism in America, where non-whites are the targets of abominable acts of violence like the mass shooting in El Paso.

To be clear, nationalism is not the same as patriotism. Nationalism forges political belonging out of religious, ethnic, and racial identities, loyalties intended to precede and supersede law. Patriotism, by contrast, is love of the laws and loyalty to them over leader or party. Such nationalism is not only politically dangerous but reflects profound theological errors that threaten the integrity of Christian faith. It damages the love of neighbor and betrays Christ.

1. We reject the pretensions of nationalism to usurp our highest loyalties. National identity has no bearing on the debts of love we owe other sons and daughters of God. Created in the image and likeness of God, all human beings are our neighbors regardless of citizenship status.

2. We reject nationalism's tendency to homogenize and narrow the church to a single *ethnos*. The church cannot be itself unless filled with disciples "from all nations" (*panta ta ethné*, Matthew 28:19). Cities, states, and nations have borders; the church never does. If the church is not ethnically plural, it is not the church, which requires a diversity of tongues out of obedience to the Lord.

3. We reject the xenophobia and racism of many forms of ethno-nationalism, explicit and implicit, as grave sins against God the Creator. Violence done against the bodies of marginalized people is violence done against the body of Christ. Indifference to the suffering of orphans, refugees, and prisoners is indifference to Jesus Christ and his cross. White supremacist ideology is the work of the anti-Christ.

4. We reject nationalism's claim that the stranger, refugee, and migrant are enemies of the people. Where nationalism fears the stranger as a threat to political community, the church welcomes the stranger as necessary for full communion with God. Jesus Christ identifies himself with the poor, imprisoned foreigner in need of hospitality. "For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me" (Matthew 25:41-43).

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## LETTERS

5. We reject the nationalist's inclination to despair when unable to monopolize power and dominate opponents. When Christians change from majority to minority status in a given country, they should not contort their witness in order to stay in power. The church remains the church even as a political minority, even when unable to influence the government or when facing persecution.

In charity and in hope, we urge our fellow Christians to repudiate the temptations and the falsehoods of nationalism. The politics of xenophobia, even when dressed up in high-minded social critique, can only be pursued in contradiction of the Gospel. A true culture of life welcomes the stranger, embraces the orphan, and binds the wounds of all who are our neighbors—all who lie lifeless on the road, as the pious walk silently past.

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**Correction:** In our September 2019 issue, we published an extract from *Last Letters: The Prison Correspondence, 1944–1945* (New York Review Books) titled "Standing in the Light." We failed to credit Shelley Frisch, the translator of the letters. We regret the omission.

# Francis and the Spirit of Fraternity

The extraordinary images of Francis's trip to the African nations of Mozambique, Mauritius, and Madagascar last month illustrate the popularity of this pope in a part of the world that will be vital to the future of the Catholic Church. Throngs of people pressed around him, hoping to receive a blessing or catch a glimpse of him up close, as children sang to welcome his arrival. The scene in Madagascar was especially striking: the Vatican estimates that a million people gathered for Mass outside the capital city, Antananarivo, many of them having camped overnight in a field to secure their place.

"It is a visit that touches many themes close to his heart," Francis's adviser Antonio Spadaro, SJ, said as the trip began. The pope's choice of these three nations itself underscored his special concern for poverty, climate change, and migration, and what he did while visiting them exemplified his persistent calls to go to "the peripheries." In Mozambique, he visited with HIV/AIDS patients and praised the country's recent ceasefire agreement that put a stop to its civil war. In Mauritius, he lauded the way the country sustains its rich religious diversity. And in Madagascar, he visited the Akamasoa development project, built near the site of a former garbage dump, to pray for the many people who live there and labor at a nearby quarry.

But the words of Francis's homily at the Mass in Antananarivo, about the struggle to follow Jesus, were no less striking than these images. They had an unmistakable edge. "The new life the Lord holds out to us seems troubling and scandalously unjust to those who think that entry into the kingdom of heaven can be limited or reduced only to bonds of blood or membership in a particular group, clan or particular culture," he said. Francis urged those gathered to take on the work of solidarity, to fight exploitation, never to be indifferent to the suffering of others. That so many are so poor is not a part of God's plan, he said, railing against the idolatry of "power, career, money and of the search for human glory." He reminded listeners that "Jesus calls us to die to our self-centeredness, our individualism and our pride," which allows "the spirit of fraternity to triumph, a spirit in which everyone can feel loved because they are understood, accepted and appreciated in his or her dignity."

These words were overshadowed, however, by remarks Francis made on the papal plane at the beginning and end of his journey. As he left Rome, he quipped that it was "an honor that the Americans attacked me," a seeming reference to the well-funded conservative Catholics in the United States who have opposed much of his papacy. (An aide quickly walked back the comments.) And on his return flight to the Vatican, he speculated about the role that such an ideological approach to the faith might have in fomenting schism—which he prays doesn't happen, but also doesn't fear.

It was appropriate for Francis to address this situation forthrightly. For years, conservative Catholics in the United States have attacked and belittled the pope, comparing him to Donald Trump, calling Francis the "chief plotter" in an effort to undermine church teaching, and resisting nearly every priority he's set for his papacy, from fighting the climate crisis to caring for migrants and refugees to at least exploring how best to minister to divorced and remarried Catholics. More recently, Cardinal Raymond Burke indulged speculation that the conclave that elected Francis might not have been valid, suggesting that there "certainly are the indications" this was possible, even if he wasn't sure "concrete proofs" existed. And Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, a hero to the American anti-Francis faction, recommended a delirious book about the Masonic infiltration of the church—seeming to link this supposed subversion to both Vatican II and the current pope. There are, of course, legitimate criticisms to be made of Francis, and loyal dissent should not be dismissed out of hand. But the conspiracy-mongering in which many of the pope's most outspoken opponents indulge seems increasingly delusional and dangerous. It serves only to foment even greater division in the church.

In any case, the pope's remarks about schism should not be allowed to obscure the far more important message that emerged from his trip to Africa. That message was: Humble yourself. Seek the face of Jesus in the poor and the suffering. Give up your quest for power and wealth. Turn from your sin while there is still time and let God's grace create in you a spirit of meekness, generosity, and love. Only a church that lives out these virtues, looking always to the risen Lord, will experience genuine unity.

## Migrants in Limbo

Four years ago, the Mediterranean migration crisis was at its peak. People were fleeing civil war in Syria and violence, poverty, and the effects of climate change in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa. In their efforts to find refuge in the countries of Europe, many were dying—including thousands who drowned attempting to make the perilous sea crossing in overcrowded vessels operated by smugglers.

Since then both the number of people trying to reach the continent and the number of deaths has declined. But that's due in large part to the agreements that the European Union struck with countries through which migrants often cross—like Turkey, Libya, and Niger, which have effectively taken on the job of stemming the flow to Europe. In other words, the crisis has not so much ended as been outsourced, while in the process heightening the dangers and abuses to which migrants are exposed.

The EU's arrangement with Libya stands as the most illustrative example. Since 2017, Italy has been training the Libyan Coast Guard on how to prevent migrants from attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea. It has also funded the construction and maintenance of migrant-detention centers in the country. From the EU's point of view, the arrangement has been successful: departures from Libya to Europe have declined by 87 percent.

But consider it from the perspective of those who find themselves detained there. Libya not only has one of the world's worst records on human rights—it is also in the middle of a civil war. Reports have emerged of African migrants being sold by smugglers into manual labor or sexual slavery. Many are held for ransom until their families pay for their release; if families can't or won't pay, migrants are killed or abandoned. Those held in detention centers run by the Libyan government—a number estimated at 5,600—fare little better. They're confined to cramped and unsanitary spaces, deprived of food, and regularly suffer torture, beatings, and sexual violence at the hands of guards. Some are pressed into manual labor inside the camps, while others are sold into slavery outside them. The plight of detainees went largely unnoticed until earlier this year, when General Khalifa Haftar's army conducted airstrikes on detention facilities, killing dozens.

The EU insists that it is doing all it can to protect migrants and fairly evaluate the asylum claims of those waiting in limbo. And in response to international outcry after the airstrikes, it is expected to make another deal, this time with Rwanda, to accept migrants evacuated from Libya—though only a mere five hundred. They're expected to be transferred as they await resettlement in Europe or, more likely, deportation to their countries of origin. But, as in Libya, Turkey, and Niger, migrants can expect no guarantee of safety; by the EU's own admission, Rwanda also has a record of serious human-rights abuses. As Judith Sunderland of Human Rights Watch put it, "There's not much hope then that the exact same process in Rwanda would lead to dramatically different outcomes."

Human-rights activists have called on the EU to change its approach entirely, to stop outsourcing the care of the displaced to underequipped and dangerous countries. The same demand could be made of the United States, Australia, and other wealthy nations enacting similar policies. Better still would be a truly international reckoning with the fact that mass migration is only likely to increase thanks to factors like climate change and food insecurity. People don't want to flee their homes unless they have to, and then they need somewhere to go.

*—Regina Munch*

## "We're CEOs, and We Care"

Should we welcome gestures by CEOs of the Business Roundtable to soften their allegiance to the ideology of Milton Friedman? Corporations have long abided by Friedman's famous declaration that "the one and only" social responsibility of business is to maximize profits. Now, after decades of unapologetically exclusive focus on the bottom line, executives at two hundred of America's largest companies believe it's time to consider other "stakeholders" as well, like their employees, their communities—why, even society at large.

If, as Mitt Romney once insisted, corporations are people, then it stands to reason that they wish to be liked, just as actual people do. CEOs have no doubt picked up on the distrust with which the public views their companies, and the new mission statement released by the Roundtable in August seems to acknowledge the zeitgeist. Its signatories pledged to "invest in our employees," to "compensate them fairly," and to provide "important benefits." They promised to "foster inclusion, dignity, and respect." They vowed to "protect the environment by embracing sustainable practices across our businesses." They confirmed that they "respect the people in our communities." The idea of revising

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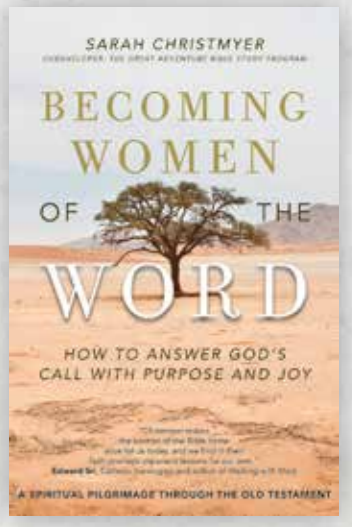


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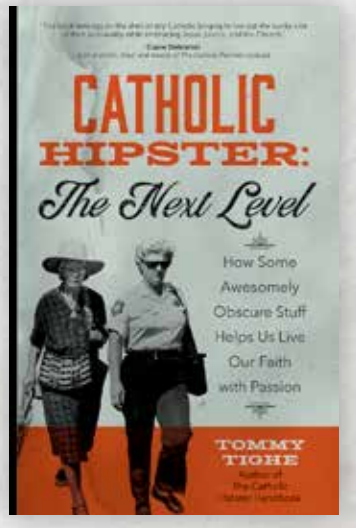


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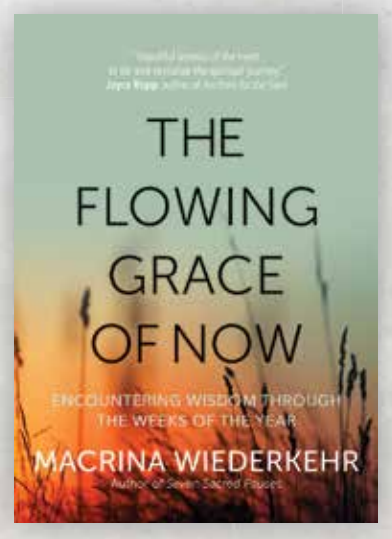


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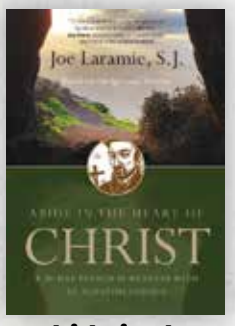


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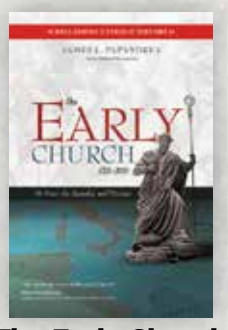


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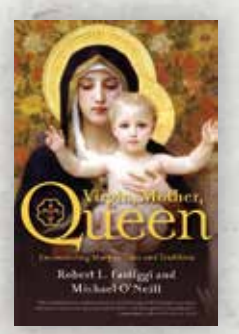


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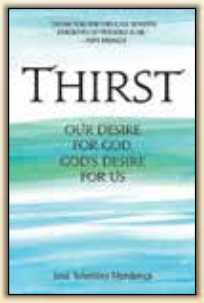


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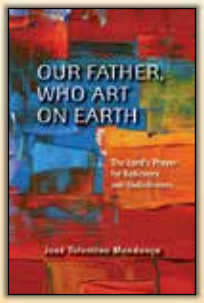


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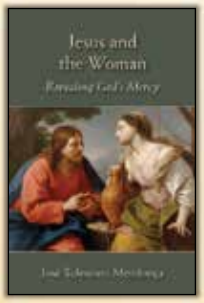


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the statement came from Roundtable president Jamie Dimon, chairman and CEO of JPMorgan Chase, the nation's largest bank. The man tapped to draft it—presumably for posterity—was Alex Gorsky, chief executive of Johnson & Johnson, who later admitted in an interview that "there were times when I felt like Thomas Jefferson."

Some of the truths that executives now profess to hold might very well be self-evident. Who, for instance, could take serious issue with their proclamation that "Americans deserve an economy that allows each person to succeed through hard work and creativity and to lead a life of meaning and dignity"? But the canon is thick with cautionary reminders about words without works. Just what will companies do to "invest in employees" and "foster inclusion"? Will they address the scandal of executive compensation (the one hundred highest-paid CEOs make 254 times the salary of workers receiving the median pay at their companies)? Will they show respect for the people in their communities by, say, not inundating them with opioids, contaminating their groundwater, or plundering their personal data? How does the new corporate benevolence square with the push for Donald Trump's 2017 tax plan, which slashed corporate rates but over time will lead to higher taxes for many middle-class American households?

"I don't believe what they're saying for a moment," Bernie Sanders said of the Roundtable statement, likely speaking for millions. "If they were sincere, they would talk about raising the minimum wage in this country to a living wage, and the need for the rich and powerful to pay their fair share of taxes." Elizabeth Warren demanded that business leaders "start following through on their words by paying workers more instead of spending billions on stock buybacks." Those statements may seem merely to echo Sanders and Warren's campaign messaging, but such skepticism is warranted. Until business leaders turn a collection of blandly worded pledges into meaningful and measurable action—don't take *that* to the bank—the statement should be seen for the public-relations ploy that it is. Likewise, free-marketers needn't worry about executive apostasy: the statement retains clear, familiar language on committing to the creation of "long-term value for shareholders." In the bullet list of promises, it sits conclusively, and no doubt reassuringly to Wall Street, right there on the bottom line.

*—Dominic Preziosi*

# The Vocation of Citizenship

I confess I do on occasion watch MSNBC. Mostly I'll catch a few minutes of "MTP Daily" with host Chuck Todd, which airs at 5 p.m. Because the political news is usually depressing, I'll switch back and forth between that and ESPN. I'm a Red Sox fan, so that soon becomes depressing as well.

On the Friday of Labor Day weekend, Todd's panel of experts included AP political reporter Juana Summers, former Democratic adviser Doug Thornell, and American Enterprise Institute Vice President Danielle Pletka. The panel was there to discuss the "latest absurdity coming from the White House," as well as the race for the Democratic presidential nomination.

The exchange of views was cordial, and there was little to surprise anyone who follows politics closely. Todd asked if the age of the Democratic candidates who are now leading in the polls was a problem. All three—Joe Biden, Elizabeth Warren, and Bernie Sanders—are in their seventies, as is Trump. Todd wondered if Biden's gaffe-prone performances, which some have interpreted as evidence of cognitive decline, might deter voters. The consensus was that voters know Biden, and tend to give him a pass when it comes to malapropisms. Given Trump's own verbal incoherence, choosing between Biden and Trump on that basis would appear to be a wash, Todd observed. We could then be faced with the prospect of deciding "which candidate is losing it slowest," Todd joked.

Some of the subsequent discussion concerned how exhausting it is for journalists to cover the Trump presidency. Trump seems to be running the White House like a reality-TV series, springing surprises and outrages every day. It was agreed that most Trump voters have already discounted his petulant behavior and bizarre statements. The panel also agreed that most Americans infrequently pay attention to politics, and usually only when bread-and-butter issues are at stake. "We're the ones paying attention," Pletka wryly observed. The concern about Trump is "a very Washington-centric view," she insisted. Todd confessed he is "jealous of those who don't have to pay attention."

It is, of course, a bromide to observe that most people pay little attention to politics. They have, or so the conventional wisdom goes, much better things to devote their precious time and limited energy to. Besides, politics is all too often as corrupt as it is frustrating. There is some truth to such sentiments, but the cultivation of cynicism about politics and government is also a political strategy designed to undermine democracy. That dynamic is at work in so-called populist political movements across the globe. After all, one of the reasons Trump was elected in the first place was because too many Americans failed to pay attention to who he really was and what he was clearly capable of. Yes, we have obligations to family and community, and we must toil to keep a roof over our heads. But we also have obligations as citizens, and one of our most important duties is to *pay attention* to what our elected officials are up to. There should be nothing "Washington-centric" about time spent participating in the various tasks of self-government, the first of which is to stay relatively well informed. Citizenship is a much neglected, but essential vocation, and it is one we all share.

*—Paul Baumann*

PAUL MOSES

# Cuccinelli Pulls Up the Ladder

The Trump administration's immigration hardliners seem to be suffering from amnesia.

Ken Cuccinelli

Ken Cuccinelli was not the first federal official to rewrite Emma Lazarus's famous poem about the Statue of Liberty when he told an NPR interviewer that it should say, "Give me your tired and your poor who will stand on their own two feet and will not become a public charge." Sixty-one years earlier, the junior senator from Massachusetts criticized restrictive immigration laws by writing that they amounted to: "Give me your tired, your poor…as long as they are from northern Europe, are not too tired or too poor or slightly ill, never stole a loaf of bread, never joined in any questionable organization, and can document their activities for the past few years."

The arc from pro-immigrant John F. Kennedy in 1958 to Ken Cuccinelli in 2019 follows the changing attitudes among white Catholics descended from the poverty-stricken masses of yesteryear. Kennedy epitomizes those whose family history prompts a welcome; his vision helped inspire the 1965 law that reopened the golden door after decades of restriction. Cuccinelli, acting director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, is an emblem for those who draw the opposite lesson from their ancestors' stories. Asked who will be welcome in America on his watch, he told NPR's Rachel Martin, "All immigrants who can stand on their own two feet, be self-sufficient, pull themselves up by their bootstraps—again, as in the American tradition. My Italian-Irish heritage looks back at that. Most people in America look back at that."

But the heroic struggle of Cuccinelli's ancestors and millions of others to overcome discrimination doesn't give their descendants a right to reinvent the nativist obstacles of the past. And yet Cuccinelli, a former Virginia attorney general, is building his career as a hardliner on immigration.

Shipping records available on Ancestry.com show that Cuccinelli's great-grandfather, Domenico Cucciniello, arrived from Avellino in the Campania region of southern Italy in 1901 with just $8.75 to his name. (Thanks to Jennifer Mendelsohn of #resistancegenealogy for tracking down documentation that would otherwise have eluded me due to a digitizing error.)

Under federal law, each immigrant was asked if he or she had $30. This was an early effort to draw a financial line at the border; falling below $30 could lead to an immigrant's detention while a board inquired into whether he was a "likely public charge." Domenico Cucciniello was not detained, however.

As acting director of USCIS, Ken Cuccinelli has redefined existing law, effective October 15, to put much more weight on the income of a citizenship applicant. It's not the only criterion, but he has shifted the burden from the immigrant's sponsor to the immigrant's own income, which is expected to be 125 percent of the federal poverty level, a figure that increases with each dependent. Since Cuccinelli's great-grandfather was a laborer with no formal schooling and a wife and nine children to support, he would have fared poorly by today's standards.

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Working as a freight handler for the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad on the Jersey City waterfront, practically in the Statue of Liberty's shadow, Domenico Cucciniello no doubt faced bitterness from workers of other ethnicities due to management's use of Italian strikebreakers in 1882 and 1887. In 1901, U.S. immigration commissioner Terence Powderly, former leader of the Knights of Labor, was still stung by the failed 1882 strike. He openly preferred British, German, and Scandinavian immigrants to southern Italians, whom he believed to be unfit to be American citizens. Like Ken Cuccinelli, Powderly was constantly proposing new immigration restrictions; both labeled immigrants "invaders."

Domenico Cucciniello eventually moved from a Jersey City apartment to a home of his own in nearby Hoboken. His son Dominic—Ken Cuccinelli's grandfather—distinguished himself as an amateur wrestler and boxer, according to a family account Cuccinelli posted on Facebook. Dominic, who made it as far as a fifth-grade education, married Josephine Policastro, whose Italian immigrant father Thomas ran a scrap-iron business. Josephine's mother, the former Maria Ronga, arrived at Ellis Island on November 9, 1903, at age sixteen with three younger siblings and her mother, who had just $5 (the target amount had by then risen to $50). Records show that all five were detained overnight after an inspector determined they were a "likely public charge." But they were released at 11 a.m. the following day after Josephine's twenty-three-year-old brother Vincenzo, who'd arrived a year earlier, sponsored them.

This is so-called "chain migration," which Cuccinelli's new "public charge" rule would hinder: his great-grandmother may well have been turned away if his rule had been in effect in 1903.

Ken Cuccinelli's family saga is a story of second chances that he would not extend. The Lady in the Harbor, the "Mother of Exiles" in Lazarus's poem, is the patroness of second chances: "From her beacon-hand/Glows worldwide welcome."

FR. INCOGNITUS

# Miracle Worker

## What the Virgin of Talpa taught me

*Editors' Note: From 2009 until 2017, Fr. John Baran wrote a regular column for* Commonweal *under the pseudonym "Fr. Nonomen." The column was devoted to Fr. Baran's experiences as the pastor of a parish in suburban Connecticut—to trends he welcomed or lamented; to pastoral experiments that worked well, or less well; to the changing spiritual needs of American Catholics, and to the needs that didn't change. When Fr. Baran died last year, we decided that, after a decent interval, we should ask a priest serving in a very different kind of parish to continue the column. This is the first of a short series of columns by Fr. Incognitus, who has worked in parishes in the Southwestern United States that serve immigrants from Central America, Mexican Americans, and Euro-Americans.*

The call came in the spring of 2006. A group of people from the small town of Toyahua, Zacatecas, Mexico, wanted to use our parish church on a Friday evening to celebrate the arrival of a replica of the Virgin of their pueblo. The priest of the town would be there, as would the town's band. It was just the sort of event that delighted me, so I said yes, thinking a few people would show up.

The church was packed. There are probably more people from Zacatecas living in the United States than in Mexico, and it seemed a good percentage of them came to our church that Friday night. The Virgin, no more than eighteen inches tall, wore a cowboy hat, and the toddler Jesus in her arms was crowned with the tiniest cowboy hat I had ever seen. The music was raucous and heartfelt, the procession to see the Virgin at the front of the church was long, and the people stayed to celebrate and visit.

I was transfixed. After more than twenty years of ministering to Mexican people, I, a European American, realized that my ministry was leaving out much of the devotional life of the people. We Euro-American priests were under the impression that if we focused enough attention on *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, we would meet the devotional needs of the Mexican people. It was true that *la Virgen de Guadalupe* occupies a special place in the hearts of all Mexicans, but that night taught me that Mexican Catholics had room for, and needed, more devotions than we were offering in the United States.

I was transferred to another parish in another state shortly after the event for the Virgin of Toyahua, but before I left, I asked friends of mine to get me a replica of the *Virgen de Zapopan* because I knew that there was a great devotion to her in western Mexico. I was told in no uncertain terms that their family had a devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary of Talpa de Allende and *that* would be the Virgin that I got—or none at all. There was, I discovered, a barely suppressed rivalry between the devotees of a number of these Virgins of western Mexico.

A few weeks later, now living five hundred miles away at my new assignment, I was told to call a phone number in the San Fernando Valley. So I did, and the person on the other end of the line told me I would be able to pick

A girl stands next to statues of Mary, December 11, at a makeshift campsite outside the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe during the annual pilgrimage in her honor in Mexico City. The feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas, is December 12.

CNS / CARLOS JASSO, REUTERS

up the Virgin a few days later. Almost as contraband, she would come disassembled to avoid custom duties and the sister of the priest of Talpa would put her back together. When I arrived at a nondescript apartment complex to pick up the statue, the priest of Talpa was there and he described Our Lady of the Rosary of Talpa de Allende as the most powerful of the Virgins in western Mexico. I left for my new parish with her eighteen inches of spiritual force belted in the back seat of my car.

We built her a strong case so that she could travel safely. We offered to bring her to people's homes for a night of the rosary and prayer. Inevitably we were met with relatives and friends, tamales and *champurrado*. More than once the parking lot of an apartment complex was conscripted and it became the site for an outdoor Mass. One day it rained on the parking lot ferociously and we huddled cheek by jowl in a garage for one of the most memorable Masses I've ever been a part of.

There was a small community centered at a dairy in the far reaches of the metropolitan area of my new parish. The people lived in company housing that reminded me of a small town from the 1950s. Everyone knew each other, and kids roamed the neighborhood freely at all hours. The people were lukewarm Catholics, and two families who had converted to Evangelical Protestantism were proselytizing the others. I was told to bring the statue of the Virgin out there. The Virgin stayed in this neighborhood for a while, and the little community soon became a hotbed of Catholicism. Even the Evangelical families returned to Catholicism.

A few years later I was transferred back to my original assignment, where I had first met up with the little statues of Our Lady. There was no way the people were going to allow the Virgin of Talpa to transfer with me. She continues her work there, and so I had to ask my friends to get me another *Virgen de Talpa*. This one arrived by plane! We soon set to work. Many miracles have been attributed to her as she travels from home to home several months a year. For example, there was the young man going before an immigration judge without much of a case. The judge had probably deported hundreds like him before and, after prayers were said

before this image, the judge let him stay in this country legally. To cap the story off, the young man's lawyer told him, "Whoever you prayed to, keep praying to. I have never seen anything like this."

Having grown up in a post–Vatican II North American church where devotions were downplayed as competition to the preeminence of the liturgy, I wrestle with how to foster and preserve the devotional life of people with a background very different from my own. And I wrestle with how to communicate this vibrant devotional life to parishioners who aren't used to it. I look for ways to bring the best of the Latin American church to the Euro-American church and vice-versa.

Some things work. There are Euro-Americans who will not come to our English Mass unless the mariachi is singing that Sunday. And the madness of Ash Wednesday has become a wonderful occasion for parishioners of every group to mark thousands of black crosses on the foreheads of all comers. I beg our U.S.-born Catholics to come to Candlemas Mass and see the sanctuary paved by the most bewildering variety of statues of Baby Jesus, all sitting up. The Way of the Cross that winds its way through our barrio with a cast of more than a hundred impresses everyone. I watched our police escorts using their cellphones to take picture after picture of the crucifixion of Jesus on a hill overlooking the most traveled freeway of the city. The devotional life of our Mexican and Mexican-American parishioners has an impact.

Maybe all the devotions from south of the border are destined to be bled of their original significance as they are adopted and adapted by Catholics from north of the border. That original significance depended on a different social context. But, for now, I feel very blessed to encounter these portals to a divine reality, these liminal images and activities that come to me from a religious culture only partially my own. And I can't help thinking that they carry a truth that our Euro-American Catholicism is now in danger of forgetting: the heart of faith is in the transformation of physical realities into potent and visceral symbols of God's love. While we might battle the pervading secularism with our minds, we won't conquer it unless we fall in love with a God who comes to us through a variety of images, pilgrimages, songs, prayers, and holy places—in other words, a God who reaches us through such devotions.

**FR. INCOGNITUS** *is a Jesuit who works in pastoral ministry.*

## POETRY

### REPENTANCE

*Sarah Ruden*

Too bad to stay here
Until the snow.
How do the birds live?
Where does the sky go?

Who can afford us?
We'll be let out
For good and all:
Raw paws, bruised snout.

What were we doing?
You wrote a blog.
I bought a toothbrush
For a dog.

How can we claim
Our hearts were riven?
What ledger shows
Our mercy given?

I try to breathe
Air like a stone,
Like dirty water.
We are alone.

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

DAVID CLOUTIER

# The Family-Leave Impasse

What Catholic social teaching can teach both parties

While the United States has had protected family leave since the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was passed in 1993, that protected leave is unpaid. Every other industrialized country has a policy ensuring that parents can have a *paid* break whenever they have a child, and polls suggest widespread support for such a policy. Yet competing paid-family-leave bills introduced in this year's Congress have stalled, continuing almost a decade of legislative impasse.

Few issues so starkly illustrate the failure of two major political parties to understand the proper relationship between solidarity and subsidiarity. Instead, we increasingly have a solidarity-without-subsidiarity party and a subsidiarity-without-solidarity party. Many reports have stressed the difference between the funding mechanisms of the Democratic and Republican bills. The Democratic proposal, called the FAMILY Act, does what one might expect such a bill to do: it funds a benefit for up to twelve weeks of leave through an additional payroll tax. (The Democratic senators running for president have all signed on.) The two Republican bills, the CRADLE Act and the New Parents Act, achieve "revenue neutrality" by offering up to three months of leave in exchange for starting one's Social Security up to six months later. This trade means that, in effect, the benefit costs nothing to the public, since the individual citizen simply time-shifts his or her benefits. According to one story promoting the Republican idea, "workers who are beyond childbearing age, can't have children, or don't want to have children don't unfairly have to pay for those who do."

Ugh. At first glance, this "unfairly" is a clear failure of solidarity. Speaking as someone with no children, I am more than happy to contribute to this benefit for parents, just as we all contribute to public education. Besides, why should burdens be imposed disproportionately on poorer families, those who often work jobs that (unlike those of professors and programmers) make working an extra six months at age sixty-seven much more unattractive? As I was working on this article, a new bipartisan bill was proposed, one that would allow new parents to take an "advance" on their future child tax credits to cover the cost of a leave. But, like the Social Security "advance," the tax-credit advance means that citizens need show no concrete solidarity for others, especially those most in need. Instead, everyone is expected to borrow from their own future.

Nevertheless, there is a kind of logic to these proposals, one that does attend to subsidiarity. This is because they provide an incentive for employers to offer their own paid-family-leave benefit, rather than shift all the cost. A 2015 Department of Labor study showed only 12 percent of employees had access to such a benefit, though that number is increasing rapidly; one 2019 survey showed that 40 percent of employers now offer some paid benefit for family leave. (No doubt this is partly because employers now receive tax credits for offering it, thanks to the 2017 tax bill.) Some will not need the benefit for one reason or another—because they don't have children or because their families are supported more than adequately by one high-earner. So some "cost-sharing" incentive might be reasonable. But the Republican-style deals seem unnecessarily stingy. Surely this benefit is worth spending money on. Perhaps a compromise could be found, involving some degree of subsidiarity while still fulfilling the goal of solidarity. But these bills, by eliminating any hint of solidarity, make the usual statement of the Right: we'll set up a mechanism, but don't expect any help paying for it. For that, you're on your own.

If the funding mechanism were the only issue, one might expect reasonable legislators to find a reasonable compromise. Unfortunately, it's not the only issue. The Democratic version of the legislation expands "paid family leave" to include sixty days of leave annually for any reason of "qualified caregiving" as defined by FMLA—to give care to ailing parents, for example, or to care for oneself. To receive the benefit, one will have to petition a new government agency, the Office of Paid Family and Medical Leave. The Democratic proposal thus amounts to a remarkable expansion of the family-leave benefit. A worker is likely to have only a few children, but may be eligible for "qualified caregiving" any number of times. Expanded to self-care, the benefit would appear to offer up to sixty paid sick days a year—paid by the government rather than one's employer. Who will prevent such a benefit from being abused? For, as the current legislation is written, there is no incentive *not* to avail oneself of this generous benefit. Moreover, we already have a system in which a majority of employers provide paid sick leave to their employees—without the involvement of the government.

The difference between the Democratic and Republican proposals, then, is about much more than who pays. The Republican proposal is penny-pinching, while the Democratic proposal extends

**The Catholic social vision, from *Rerum novarum* onward, has rejected a view of society in which employers and their employees are inescapably at odds.**

the benefit to include situations quite different from parenting an infant. The result of this irreconcilable difference is that people who are most in need of a benefit—poorer working parents and especially poor single women—get no benefit at all.

Catholic social teaching can help us understand, and perhaps correct, the failure of both parties to address this issue. The problem is not that each party fails to balance solidarity and subsidiarity—as if some fifty-fifty compromise could be worked out. Rather, neither party understands the way solidarity and subsidiarity ought to be related to each other. That relation is one of means to ends. Solidarity is meant to govern the *end* of social action, while subsidiarity is the principle that determines the best *means* to that end. As John Paul II puts it in *Centesimus annus*, subsidiarity means that "a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it…always with a view to the common good." Understood in this way, subsidiarity is not just another name for libertarian individualism; rather, it is about the importance of genuine participatory structures for achieving solidarity.

Too often subsidiarity is reduced to questions about the necessary level of government: Should a given issue be dealt with at the state or municipal level, or does it require federal or even global policy? That is certainly one aspect of subsidiarity, but it's not the only one. The importance of not interfering unnecessarily in family life, for example, is no less an application of the principle than the importance of not interfering unnecessarily with local governments. Communities "of a lower order" include all sorts of groups—churches, civic associations, colleges and universities, and businesses—as well as smaller units of government. In effect, subsidiarity rightly understood is an argument that the primary way to build social change and solidarity is from the bottom up, not from the top down. The *imposition* of solidarity is a contradiction in terms.

From this perspective, the argument over the scope and funding of paid family leave should not be between an overly expansive federal benefit and an each-worker-for-herself wage-borrowing program. Instead, we should be asking two questions: What can be done to encourage solidaristic practices of care "on the ground" in existing employer-employee relationships? And what gaps and failures in those practices might require redress "from above"?

The first question is especially important when we consider occasions of caregiving other than parenthood. In contrast to paid family leave, elder care is treated in many different ways in other countries, not least because it deals with many contingent variables. How much time will a worker need to take off? This isn't always clear in advance. Many systems distinguish between short-term and long-term leaves. The current FMLA rules do not. What kind of care will the person on leave be providing? Moral support and companionship or nursing? The complexity of elder care is not an argument against providing paid leave for it, but it might suggest that arrangements for such care require greater flexibility than a one-size-fits-all federal law could provide.

As for what gaps the federal government should try to fill, it might start with those working low-pay, low-skill jobs—these are the workers who most need paid parental leave and are least likely to have it.

Some may argue that expecting employers to do the right thing is naïve. Yet the Catholic social vision, from *Rerum novarum* onward, has rejected a view of society in which employers and their employees are inescapably at odds. If they were, true social solidarity would not be possible, and there could be no genuinely *common* good. All that would be left is what Pope Benedict called "the market-plus-state binary," a struggle between two behemoths that eventually squeezed out all the "quotas of gratuitousness" on which human social life ultimately depends.

In their current approaches to paid family leave, our two major political parties display their failure to understand that solidarity and subsidiarity work in tandem. Democrats try to impose solidarity, while Republicans try to escape it. Republicans confuse subsidiarity with atomistic individualism, while Democrats ignore the appropriate complexity of shaping a civil order in pursuit of genuinely shared goods. It is not that Democrats are the "solidarity party" and Republicans the "subsidiarity party"; each misunderstands not only the other's principle but also the one it pretends to own. The overall result is a lack of action that hurts the most vulnerable. Catholic social teaching might suggest a way out of this impasse, but it would require a fundamental reorientation on the part of both sides of our polarized country.

**DAVID CLOUTIER** *is associate professor of theology at the Catholic University of America, and author of* The Vice of Luxury *(Georgetown University Press).*

NICOLE-ANN LOBO

# The Crackdown in Kashmir

Another casualty to Narendra Modi's Hindu-nationalist agenda

Indian paramilitary troopers stand guard at a closed market in Srinagar, the summer capital of Indian-controlled Kashmir, September 6, 2019.

JAVED DAR / XINHUA / ALAMY LIVE NEWS

Since the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir, a sovereign state high in the Himalayas along the border of Pakistan, has enjoyed special semi-autonomous status under India's constitution. But both nations have long claimed it as their own, which has led to three outright wars in the past seventy years and made it a persistent flashpoint between the nuclear-armed neighbors. In August, India took the provocative step of revoking the constitutional articles protecting the autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir, splitting the state into two "union territories." It's probably the most aggressive assertion of territorial rights the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi could have made, and it's heightened fears that India and Pakistan could once more engage directly in armed conflict.

Yet it wasn't hard to see this coming. Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) campaigned extensively on revoking Kashmir's special status in this year's national elections, couching it as "concern" for the interests of the Kashmiri people. Autonomy, they claimed, discourages investment and stymies economic growth; it prevents citizens from participating fully in Indian democracy; it fosters "corruption and nepotism," as Modi put it, while limiting the ability of women and tribal communities to enjoy full rights under Indian law. Almost anything, in other words, to avoid the real reason, obvious to anyone who's been paying attention: taking control of Kashmir—the only Muslim-majority state in India—is essential to the Hindu-nationalist agenda Modi has championed since coming to office five years ago.

Since the August revocation, India has imposed a military clampdown and strict communications blackout in Kashmir, cutting off phone and internet services and curtailing access to information. The news that has managed to make its way out suggests that protests are widespread. Though there has been only one officially confirmed death related to the protests, grassroots reporting suggests that many others have gone ignored. Political leaders and human-rights activists, along with thousands of ordinary Kashmiris, have been imprisoned. The inability of hospitals and medical specialists to communicate has fostered a health crisis, with more Kashmiris dying from a lack of medical care just in August than in the first seven months of 2019 combined. India, meanwhile, continues to insist that the situation in Kashmir is calm.

Tensions over Kashmir began well before the English partitioned the subcontinent into Pakistan, India, and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). It was one of the more than five hundred "princely states" separate from British India proper but subject to indirect colonial rule. Though governed by a Hindu ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, Jammu and Kashmir had a Muslim majority, and Muslim tribesmen (known as Pathans) had begun to settle there in increasing numbers.

In 1947, the heads of most of the princely states ceded their power to the new central Indian government. Hari Singh, however, initially sought independence. But he also feared that Pakistan would send more Pathans to bolster the region's Muslim majority, which could pose a threat to him and to the Kashmiri Pandits, Brahmin Hindu elites who had long lived in the region. So he instead agreed to sign an "Instrument of Accession" to India, granting it governmental authority over Jammu and Kashmir in exchange for military protection and limited autonomy. Conflict shortly ensued, with Pakistani and Indian troops squaring off in the first war over the region. India sought United Nations intervention, and Kashmir was divided along an uneasy border called the "Line of Control." The line split villages and families and led to a refugee crisis that persists to this day.

The Line of Control was not meant to be permanent. The UN was supposed to call a referendum in which the Kashmiri people could choose their own rule: India, Pakistan, or independence. But the referendum never took place, and so both countries have kept a presence in the region, with both claiming it as their own. Kashmir has become the most militarized part of the world, with hundreds of thousands of troops stationed in the area. There are regular bursts of violence on either side of the border—though the border itself is hard to determine, with no two maps showing it the same.

While the world tends to assess the Kashmir situation in terms of the conflict between India and Pakistan, the Kashmiri people themselves have long been in favor of independence. The desire is as strong now as on the day of partition, if not more so. In fact, for the past twenty years, there has been a separatist revolt against Indian rule, though there seems to be just as little taste for Pakistani control. The Instrument of Accession ceded legislative authority on defense, external affairs, and communications to India, but Kashmir was allowed to have its own flag, and to set its own laws pertaining to citizenship, property ownership, and other matters. This had been enshrined in the Indian Constitution under the now-revoked Articles 370 and 35A. The latter allowed Jammu and Kashmir's legislature to determine who qualified as a "permanent resident," giving it still greater say over matters of property-ownership rights. For example, the locally elected Kashmiri government has for some time prohibited any Indian citizens from outside of Jammu and Kashmir—regardless of religion or ethnicity—from buying property there as a way of preserving Kashmir's unique demographic and cultural characteristics.

The Indian government characterizes Kashmir's separatist movement as a Pakistani-sponsored effort to provoke unrest, if not terrorism. It blamed Pakistan for a February suicide bombing that killed forty Indian troops, but Pakistan denied any responsibility. Meanwhile, last year India and Pakistan were both cited by the UN for human-rights violations in Kashmir, including the use of excessive force, unjust arrests, and extrajudicial murders. India dismissed the findings as propaganda that neglected to take into account the "core problem" of Islamic terrorism.

But the immediate cause of the current crisis is the hard turn to Hindu nationalism that India has taken under Modi. Control over Kashmir would be seen as another step toward fulfillment of the nation's destiny as "Mother India." Previous actions, receiving much less attention, were taken earlier this year in the Indian state of Assam. In January, citizenship was offered to all religious minorities—except Muslims. In April, the BJP promised to adopt a National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, under which anyone lacking documentary proof that immediate family had been living there before 1971 would be expelled from India, regardless of current citizenship status. (Notably, Myanmar used a similar instrument to persecute the Rohingya.) Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and other religious minorities could be protected through the BJP's revival of the Citizenship Amendment Bill, which would allow religious minorities (except Muslims) fleeing persecution to expedite the Indian citizenship process. The Assam registry was published at the end of August; almost two million people who have long resided there were left off the list, leaving them technically stateless, stripped of their civil rights and vulnerable to deportation or arrest. Home Affairs Minister Amit Shah, seen as Modi's right-hand man, has suggested that a similar registry will be implemented nationwide; in the past, he has said that India must rid itself of "infiltrators [who are] eating the country like termites." The immediate fear is that Muslims in Kashmir will suffer the persecution that those in Assam are now vulnerable to.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan has since August pledged to "fight to the end" over Kashmir, while repeatedly claiming that Modi has refused to negotiate. But the last thing Pakistan wants is war with India, which is wealthier and better-armed, and has emerged with the upper hand before. Until now, both the BJP and its liberal opponent, the Indian National Congress, have managed to fend off involvement by the international community, both parties citing terrorism in asserting that Kashmir is an internal Indian issue to be treated as a national-security matter. Still, the rest of the world increasingly sees India's moves in the region for what they are. Modi has long aimed to demonstrate the glory of the world's largest democracy, but in Kashmir as elsewhere, he is confirming its ugliest nationalist urges.

**NICOLE-ANN LOBO** *is the Garvey Writing Fellow at* Commonweal.

JOHN RODDEN AND
JOHN P. ROSSI

# From Ireland to Israel, and Beyond

## Why the Irish War of Independence still matters—and is too often forgotten

On St. Patrick's Day 2019, Americans all over the country—and not only the 33 million of direct Irish descent—drank green beer and waved at marching bands, just as they do every year. *'Tis grand to be Irish for a day*. Yet it is unlikely that many of them had any idea that the centennial of Ireland's War of Independence had just occurred. Imagine if Americans abroad were to overlook July 4—let alone a landmark date such as the bicentennial of American independence in 1976 or the upcoming 250th anniversary in 2026. Inconceivable. But that is the scale of the oversight by Irish Americans and the American press, for January 21 and the War of Independence (otherwise known as the Anglo-Irish War) are equivalent in Irish history to July 4 and the American Revolution.

The date passed without a ripple of notice in the United States. No acknowledgment by the American media. No celebrations or commemorative events hosted by civic leaders. No statements from the president or any other prominent public figure, including Irish Americans who often parade their Irish connections (and not just on March 17 alongside St. Paddy's Day marchers). Not from Irish-American political notables such as Joe Biden, Paul Ryan, John Kerry, or Susan Collins. Not from Cardinals Sean O'Malley of Boston or Timothy Dolan of New York. Not even from Bill Clinton, who helped broker the Good Friday Agreement of April 1998, which finally brought peace to the island after three-quarters of a century of bombings and gun smuggling at the northern border.

Unlike the Easter Rising—which was no more than a small, thwarted rebellion in the center of Dublin during the middle of World War I—the War of Independence has never resonated with the Irish-American community. The Rising's centennial in 2016 (commemorated in Ireland in late March, rather than on the actual historical date of April 24) was publicized with a PBS special, numerous headlines in the American press, and widespread acknowledgment in Irish-American circles. Even more widely commemorated was the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising back in 1966, when prominent Irish-American politicians sent greetings to Irish President Éamon de Valera.

Why the discrepancy between the two events? Why does an ill-planned, disorganized, botched insurrection, which was crushed by British troops in a week and scarcely known about outside of Dublin, become a world event? Why has it become the single greatest historical landmark in the Irish political (and even literary) imagination? And why has a nationwide revolution against a tyrannical neighbor that victimized Ireland for eight centuries been forgotten? A year-long war that resulted in independence for 80 percent of the counties seems to have disappeared down the memory hole. One might think it would be the other way around. A wee putsch should be relegated to oblivion and Irish Independence Day should be proudly celebrated. Right?

Strange indeed, but not inexplicable. The twin causes of this paradox are subtle yet compelling. First, the power of emotions—ranging from romantic passion to shame and guilt. Second, the roles of historical contingency and context: events do not occur in isolation. What precedes or follows an event serves either to put it in the spotlight or let it fall into obscurity.

By any objective accounting, the War of Independence, which lasted seventeen months and ended in July 1921, was far more consequential than the Easter Rising. Whereas the short-lived Rising was a humiliating defeat and inspired no imitators abroad, the Anglo-Irish War was the first successful colonial revolt in 140 years—that is, since the American colonists battled their way to freedom from Britain.

Unlike most revolutions, the Irish War of Independence ultimately led to a democracy, not an autocracy ruled by a new gang of tyrants. Most independence movements result in unstable coalition governments or boomerang into bloody counterrevolutions. The examples before and after Ireland are legion, from the Soviet Union in 1918 to the colonial revolts that ended in dictatorship throughout Africa, the Middle East, and Asia (India excepted). By contrast, the Irish soon instituted a genuine democracy. Political logrolling and corruption notwithstanding, the Dáil (Irish Parliament) has governed a nation of free men and women.

The Anglo-Irish War also set the standard for the military strategists and tacticians of future independence movements. For example, Zionist fighters learned much from the Irish Republican Army (sometimes even in direct training sessions) in their campaign to drive the British out of Palestine. So, too, did the Algerians in their revolt against the French in the late 1950s. The legacy of Ireland to the Israelis, Algerians, and other revolutionaries—including the North Vietnamese—is admittedly a violent one. Among the techniques and tactics they adopted were guerrilla campaigns of endurance and attrition, hit-

Two Sinn-Féin members arrested by British troops, Dublin, Ireland, 1920

HERITAGE IMAGE PARTNERSHIP LTD. / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

and-run raids, political assassinations, boycotting businesses, family "blood" reprisals, and random bombings. To their opponents, such practices were sheer terrorism. To their supporters, they were the military tactics of freedom fighters outmanned by an occupation army of the British Empire.

The brutal character of the War of Independence arouses shame and guilt in some Irish, and this is one reason that it has been upstaged by its abortive predecessor, the Easter Rising. Although the Rising was a military fiasco, it was a theatrical triumph of the first order—courtesy of the foolish obtuseness of the British. The Rising has gone down in history as a failure, yes, but a noble failure, a grand and ultimately even heroic misadventure. Aiming to teach the Irish people a lesson, the British executed sixteen leaders (without a trial, except in a single case) and thereby turned a forgettable week of ineptitude into the stuff of tragedy. The Irish rebels were dragged from their jail cells, blindfolded in the prison courtyard, and gunned down by a British firing squad.

That searing image of valiant Irishmen lined up and shot became indelibly imprinted in the national consciousness and served as a potent symbol of eight hundred years of British misrule. Among the martyrs were the dashing, handsome dreamer Pádraic Pearse; the badly wounded socialist visionary James Connolly, unable to walk or even to stand, tied to a chair, helpless and suffering. Even Loyalist supporters of the Crown were appalled—and some of them even became nationalist sympathizers.

Like many great historical tragedies, the Rising was memorialized by a magnificent elegy: "Easter, 1916" by William Butler Yeats. With the shedding of the martyrs' blood, Yeats wrote, "a terrible beauty is born." So the Easter Rising possessed the pity and fear of classical tragedy. It had it all: passion and poetry, terror and beauty. The Rising was baptized in blood by its sequel, thus illustrating how historical contingency and context influence cultural memory. If not for the heartbreaking execution of its leaders, the Rising would likely be no more than a footnote, little remembered except as the prelude to the War of Independence.

All that explains why the Easter Rising is remembered and commemorated today, not just by the Irish, but also by Irish Americans. But what about the War of Independence? Why is it not remembered in the same way? Although the War is acknowledged by the media in Ireland, it is not officially commemorated. (That may one day change if a non-binding resolution in the Irish Senate in 2017 to designate January 21 as Declaration of Independence Day is ever passed into law). Among Irish Americans, the War is blotted out completely. A thought experiment may help us see why.

Imagine that the heroic American Revolution ended inconclusively, with an only partially satisfactory deal with King George III, providing for a "British" North and an "American" South—something like the division between British-governed Protestant Northern Ireland and the Catholic south of the Irish Free State, forerunner of the Republic of Ireland. Next, imagine that this divided America, perhaps separating the thirteen colonies at the Mason-Dixon Line, is so intolerable to some American revolutionaries that they will settle for nothing less than a United America. Imagine this intransigence plunging the country into civil war, not in 1861 but in 1777, with Northerners such as Franklin, Hamilton, John Adams, and Paul Revere pitted against Southerners such as Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Patrick Henry—founding father against founding father.

And what if, after all this bloodshed in a civil war fought to attain, not preserve, the union, the United America remained divided, with the North still governed by the British? In that case, would George Washington still be lionized as hero of the Revolution and father of the nation by northern schoolchildren? Or would he rather be reviled as an architect of appeasement, a traitor to the revolutionary dream of a United America, the double dealer who brought peace at the price of honor and settled for a disunited America? Would Franklin be hailed by southern schoolchildren as the Grand Old Man of the Revolution and the diplomatic genius who won France to our side? Or would he instead be execrated as a hypocrite and ex-Loyalist—an opportunistic Benedict Arnold-in-reverse, a man who spent fifteen years in England cozying up to the Crown only to return to the United States in 1777 and suddenly emerge as a Britain-bashing nationalist and Francophile?

If we can entertain this thought experiment, then we will have some idea how the recent Irish past still burdens the present—and why Ireland's War of Independence will never be celebrated like the American Revolution. The aftermath is just too painful. If Americans were faced with such a sequence of events, would we be likely to celebrate Independence Day with undimmed pride?

While the failure of the Easter Rising itself is redeemed by its tragic aftermath—the rebels' executions—the War of Independence is forever overshadowed by the year-long Irish Civil War that followed almost immediately in its wake. The Anglo-Irish War itself had resulted in a largely triumphant outcome, at least from the standpoint of most of the Irish. But within eleven months, triumph gave way to a confusing conflict between purists in the Irish Republican Army who insisted on an undivided Ireland and the pragmatic nationalists who were willing to accept a divided Ireland. The Anglo-Irish War had witnessed Irishmen of all parties united in their hatred of a common foe. Now the country was embroiled in a family feud, pitting fathers against sons, brothers against brothers. Despite some ugly incidents, the loss of life in the Anglo-Irish War was modest—just fifteen hundred deaths. Though six months shorter, the Civil War claimed four thousand deaths. The gore and atrocities of the Civil War generated divisions in Irish society between radicals and moderates, IRA sympathizers and peace-seeking compromisers. Today, more than two decades after the Good Friday Agreement, those psychic and emotional wounds still haven't healed completely.

**The Anglo-Irish War had witnessed Irishmen of all parties united in their hatred of a common foe. Now the country was embroiled in a family feud.**

Within a generation the Easter Rising and the War of Independence became blurred in the Irish imagination—and above all, in the Irish-American consciousness. The confusion is partly attributable to the fact that few Irish Americans know any Irish history at all. Both of us are Irish historians. Our students, mostly Irish Americans in Philadelphia, usually have had little knowledge and even less interest in Ireland's checkered past. They have a vague notion about the Great Hunger, known colloquially as the potato famine, or have heard about the legend of St. Patrick driving the snakes out of Ireland, and that's about it.

Ireland's War of Independence need not be celebrated, but it should at least be remembered, above all by the Irish-American community. If the Easter Rising was the immortal moment when "the terrible beauty" of modern Ireland was born, the Revolution was the event that put the nation on the rocky path to freedom and unity on which it still trudges a century later.

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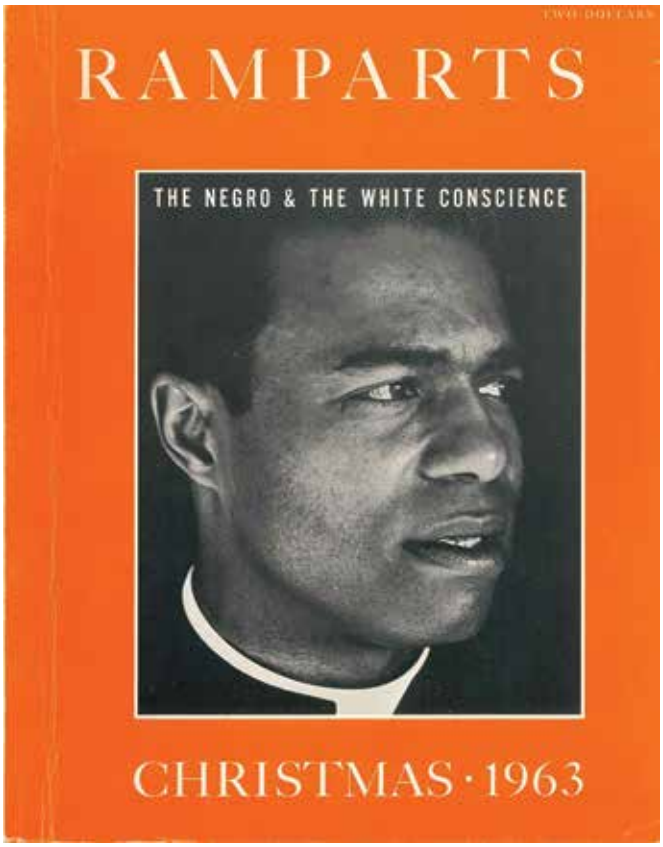
GREGORY K. HILLIS

# A Sign of Contradiction

## Remembering Fr. August Thompson




Earlier this year, on August 10, Fr. August Thompson died at the age of ninety-three. He was a black Catholic priest in the diocese of Alexandria, Louisiana, and one of American Catholicism's most important civil-rights leaders. As a black priest in the South during the height of the civil-rights movement, he experienced searing prejudice from white people, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. Thompson refused to accept this, and specifically challenged the church to be a sign of contradiction in a racist society. He became friends and corresponded with famous American Catholics like John Howard Griffin, another civil-rights activist, and Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk whose writings on racism are too often unknown or ignored. Thompson was a much-loved priest in his own diocese, known for his ready smile and his willingness to pray with and bless anyone, no matter who they were. But that graciousness never stopped him from fighting against the racism that plagued the church he loved—and still afflicts it today.

Thompson was born in 1926 into a poor Catholic family in Baldwin, Louisiana, a small town two hundred miles west of New Orleans. His parents were devout Catholics who said grace before and after meals, and led the children in a family rosary each day. Thompson discerned a calling to the priesthood, and while his white priest was supportive, his own diocese of Lafayette was not. He graduated from seminary in 1957, but his bishop would not accept him as a priest. Bishop Charles Greco of the neighboring diocese of Alexandria did accept him, and he became the first black priest to be ordained there.

While Thompson was grateful to Bishop Greco for being the only Southern bishop willing to ordain him, the two frequently quarrelled, particularly about the treatment of black Catholics in the diocese. In 1963, Thompson gave an extended interview with John Howard Griffin that did not sit well with the bishop. It appeared in that year's Christmas issue of *Ramparts*, a Catholic literary and political review; a striking photo of Thompson, under the headline "The Negro and the White Conscience," takes up nearly the entire cover.

Thompson held nothing back during the interview. His description of what life was like for black Catholics in the South at the time, including black priests, makes for painful, sometimes shocking reading. Unlike their white Catholic counterparts, black Catholics could not attend retreats or days of recollection, both important aspects of Catholic devotional life, due to segregated facilities. Moreover, black Catholics could only attend a white parish if the distance to the closest black parish was considered "inordinate." In one town where there was only one black Catholic and no black parishes, the white parish went so far as to pay someone to drive the black Catholic to a black parish in another town. And even if a white parish allowed black Catholics to join because the distance to "their" parish was too far, they sat in a section segre-

gated from the white parishioners and were allowed to receive the Eucharist only after the white Catholics had done so.

Thompson told Griffin that he was frequently treated as a second-class citizen within his own church, despite being a priest. Some white Catholics refused to call him "Father," and he was often prohibited from attending certain churches for First Communions or confirmations. He was not even allowed to say Mass at many white parishes. And as the only black priest in the diocese, he was rarely invited to events with his fellow priests. He summed up how white Catholics in the Deep South viewed him as a black Catholic priest: "a Negro first, a Negro second and finally a priest."

When asked by Griffin about whether he had spoken to other priests or those in the hierarchy about the treatment of black lay Catholics and black Catholic priests, Thompson simply replied that he had "done [his] share of speaking frankly." Unfortunately, the hierarchy met his concerns with indifference. "It is suggested," Thompson said, "that I do not appreciate the complexities of the problem." And while some bishops spoke out, Thompson explained to Griffin that the response of the church to racism both inside and outside of it was largely silence: "I fear that the silence in some areas is quite loud. Many people think that this silence is a sign that those in authority agree with the situation as it exists."

Thompson refused to acquiesce, to remain silent in the face of such hatred. Moreover, black Catholics were unwilling to put up with prejudice in the church any longer. Thompson's concluding comments on this point are stark:

> There are many Catholics who do not go to Church because the pain of this kind of humiliation is simply unbearable. Think of going to Church, going to Communion, and in order to receive Christ you must wait until every white Catholic has gone to the Communion Table and returned to his seat—knowing that you might well be skipped if you approach the altar while some white person was still there. Think of that encouraging people to receive Communion. Many do, of course, but with a deep sense of sickness, and then resentment that even this great Sacrament should be clouded in indignity for them.

Unless the church took a radically different approach, both speaking out and taking action against racism, Thompson envisioned the small black Catholic population becoming even smaller—a dire possibility that would have consequences for the entire church. "Each day we see more Negroes disillusioned with what they call 'the white man's Christianity,'" he said. "And each day we see more whites disillusioned by the same scandal; let's not forget that."

Bishop Greco tried to stop the publication of the interview, first by legal means and then through canon law. Just months before it was published, he believed he had succeeded; he was livid when that was not the case. While Greco personally favored the integration of schools and parishes, he was reluctant to push for it; he thought the church in Alexandria needed to move slowly toward integration so as not to scandalize white parishioners. Given this fear of scandal, it did not go over well to have one of his own priests speak so openly about racism within his own diocese.

On November 21, shortly after the interview was published, Greco wrote a scathing letter to Fr. Thompson from Rome. His anger is palpable from beginning to end. He tells Thompson that his appraisal of the church "in her relation to the racial problem in the South is exaggerated, distorted and misleading, and constitutes a defamation." The interview amounted to "unjustified slander" against the church, made all the worse by the fact that it was expressed by a priest "consecrated to protect her interest." Greco ended the letter saying that he expected more from someone who wouldn't be who he was apart from the church.

> The Church had done much for you as a Catholic and as a priest, and you owe her all that you are today. But the image of Your Mother the Church which you, her son, have projected to the world is unfair, is a disservice to her and has inflicted a deep wound upon her. We pary [*sic*] God we may be able to heal it.

A copy of this letter exists because Thompson sent it to his friend, Thomas Merton, to ask the famous monk for advice about how he should respond. The letter came as a shock to Thompson, who felt that he was simply speaking the truth about the situation for black Catholics in the South. How could truth be defamation? Moreover, he told Merton that none of what he said should have been a revelation to Greco given the number of times he had spoken to the bishop about these problems.

Thompson did not allow Greco's letter to keep him from continuing to speak out about the church's complicity in racial prejudice. He participated in Catholic and interfaith civil-rights workshops and protests, and commented when he deemed it necessary, as he did in 1967 in the case of Archbishop John Dearden of Detroit. Thompson took offense to something Dearden said in the August 30, 1967, issue of the *National Catholic Reporter* about how the church should respond to racial unrest in his city. Dearden said that the unrest "made it clear that the Catholic Church will have to allocate large amounts of money and personnel to the service of non-Catholics," and that if the church does not do so, "then it will fail to meet her responsibilities."

Thompson wrote a six-page letter to the archbishop taking him to task for these statements. It sounded to Thompson like Dearden wanted to focus the church's resources on non-Catholics when it came to grappling with racial injustice, thereby showing a lack of understanding of the problem of racism *within* the Catholic Church itself.

In the letter, Thompson listed for Dearden all of the ways he, as a black Catholic priest, as well as black lay Catholics, were treated as second-class

Catholics throughout the United States. Many of them were included in his *Ramparts* interview. But he emphasized that black Catholics in his diocese continued to experience prejudice, and he told Dearden that this was not isolated to the South, illustrating this point with an experience he had in the North. Earlier that year, when he went to Minneapolis to give a series of sermons for a parish mission, the priest at this parish called another priest in the diocese to ask if Thompson could come speak to his CCD class. The shocking response he received was, "I don't want any nigger priest talking to my kids." Given the pervasiveness of racism within the church, Thompson asked Dearden what right the Catholic Church had to say anything to non-Catholics about civil rights. "Can we show the non-Catholic that the Negro is integrated in every phase of Catholic life?" he wrote. "I fear if we went out now and tried to show the non-Catholic Negro we are interested in him as a person he might refer us back to what is happening in our own Church and say something like this: 'Baby get your own home straight first.'"

Thompson's interview with John Howard Griffin and his letter to Archbishop Dearden only scratch the surface in telling us about the kind of oppression he experienced throughout his life. In an unpublished journal John Howard Griffin kept from 1964–1966 about Thompson, Griffin describes in detail the threats Thompson faced on a daily basis. Thompson's friends and neighbors had businesses and homes bombed, and Thompson received regular threats against his life. "[Thompson] told me that he had been told the Klan promised to get three Negroes in Ferriday," Griffin writes, "one of whom was 'that nigger priest.'" But throughout it all, Thompson's primary concern was for those under his care. He feared for the lives and well-being of his black parishioners, but also expressed concern for the white racists. In a 1997 interview with John Allen, Thompson talked about his unwillingness to go uninvited to the homes of dying white Catholics for "fear that person would commit an act of hatred on his or her deathbed" and so put their soul in peril because of their racist reaction to his presence. As for his own safety, Thompson told Griffin that he was willing to die if God willed it. "Don't worry so much," he said. "Think how nice it will be if they get me—I can go to Heaven young."

**Thompson talked about his unwillingness to go uninvited to the homes of dying white Catholics for "fear that person would commit an act of hatred on his or her deathbed."**

Throughout his entire priesthood, Thompson devoted himself to the problem of racism in the church and in society, and was a voice for black Catholics locally and nationwide. In addition to founding a rent-subsidy housing project, building local community centers, and serving as a board member for a local black cooperative focused on fostering African-American involvement in agricultural initiatives, Fr. Thompson served on the board of National Black Catholic Clergy.

And he kept speaking out. In a 1972 interview, he complained that, while some progress had been made in the church, it was slow and always forced. "White people ask, 'What do we need to do for you?'" he said. "The question should be, 'What can we do to make the Church more Christian?'" In a 1982 article about the Silver Jubilee of his ordination to the priesthood, Thompson again acknowledged progress, but noted that black Catholics were still not fully included in the life of the Catholic Church. "All we want," he said, "is a chance to be truly Catholic." And in the aforementioned 1997 interview with John Allen, Thompson continued to criticize the church, both for its history of racial prejudice and its continued reluctance to be truly countercultural when it came to race relations: "I really feel for the most part that the church has been a follower instead of a leader."

Fr. Thompson retired from active ministry in 1997, and he spent the last few years of his life suffering from dementia. I had the honor of meeting him in 2018, and while he could no longer remember John Howard Griffin or his interactions with Thomas Merton, his eyes lit up when I asked for a blessing at the end of our conversation. Dementia had not robbed him of his liturgical imagination, and he grabbed my arm tightly with his left hand and firmly placed his right hand on my head. He then gave me the most beautiful blessing I have ever received, a blessing whose words were made all the more meaningful by knowing what he had suffered:

> Heavenly Father, this is your son, in Jesus he is our brother. Fill him with the grace and blessings he needs to do your work, for there is much work he needs and must do. Allow him to feel your love and let him know that I love him too. May Almighty God bless you, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

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# *Two Poems by Salvador Espriu*

*Translated from the Catalan by Andrew Kaufman and Sonia Alland*

## CATALAN

On the wet spring sand
I hold the balance
of an architectural order.

Subtle, pious,
resigned under the weight of dogmas,
I fight against
singular thoughts
on the cold rainy roads
of metaphysics.

My broken voice the mirror
of my sorrows, Sundays
and tomorrow will always be the same,
always the same, as the light of April
goes out and I look
to uphold the ancient vaults.

Damunt la sorra molla
suporto l'equilibri
d'un ordre arquitectonic.

Subtil, pietosissim
resignat sota dogmes
combato contra
pensaments singulars
per metafisics
camins de fred i pluja.

Le veu trencada, cristall
del meu dolor, diumenges
am dema sempre igual,
sempre igual, mentre s'apaga
la llum d'abril i miro
de mantenir les voltes.

## THERE WILL BE NO MORE BIRTHS

There will be no more births
of eternal marble waves,
nor flights of angels
rising from imagined empires
Suddenly, sad times are here—
remembered voices
lead me through Sinera's empty houses
to the sentry of dawn, the cypress,
that has seen the fire
of sea and cloud.

No naixera cap marbre
d'eternitzades ones
ni s'alcaran vols d'angels
d'imaginats imperis.
Car es vingut de sobte
de temps dolent, i em porten
veus de records, per buides
estances de Sinera,
fins al guaita de l'albe,
xiprer que sap l'incendi
de mar i d'aguest nuvel.

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**SALVADOR ESPRIU** *(1913–1985), described by Harold Bloom as "deserving of a Nobel prize," published nine books of poetry. His work, largely elegiac and haunted by Franco's conquest of Catalonia and suppression of the Catalan language and culture, remains unavailable in English due largely to the language's obscurity.* **ANDREW KAUFMAN***'s books include the* Cinnamon Bay Sonnets, *winner of the Center for Book Arts manuscript award;* Earth's Ends, *winner of the Pearl Poetry Book Award;* Both Sides of the Niger*; and* The Complete Cinnamon Bay Sonnets. *He is an NEA recipient.* **SONIA ALLAND***'s translations include* The Hermitage *and* The Legend, *both by French writer Marie Bronsard, and* Baghdad Mon Amour *and* Baghdad, Adieu: Poems of Memory and Exile, *both from the French of Salah al Hamdani in collaboration with the author.*

# Sturzo in Exile

**Massimo Faggioli**

*How an Italian priest resisted Fascism and helped reconcile the church with democracy*

There seems to be general agreement that liberal democracy in the Western world is in crisis. We can see this in the range of political upheavals over the past few years, from the 2016 election of Donald Trump and the disconcerting reality of an American president expressing open admiration for authoritarian regimes abroad, to the ongoing chaos over England's Brexit referendum. In American Catholicism, the crisis finds expression in the traditionalist wing of the church. Some traditionalists are now blaming liberal democracy for a host of problems, including the breakdown of institutions, religious disaffiliation, abortion, and indiscriminate sexuality—all traceable to 1960s and '70s liberalism emphasizing diversity and the expansion of individual rights.

But is liberal democracy really so exhausted that there is no choice but to abandon it? The hopeful answer, of course, is no. This is not to minimize the evident challenges. But by fostering a renewed historical appreciation for the role of Catholic theological and doctrinal development in the rise of democracy through the twentieth century, there may be a way to revitalize it. Key to this development was the transatlantic relationship between Europe and America—and between European and American Catholics—following World War I, particularly as it played out in the flight of Catholics from countries gripped by Fascism and Nazism in the 1920s and '30s. A critical voice in this period was a well-traveled Italian priest and prolific writer originally from the Sicilian village of Caltagirone, Luigi Sturzo.

The founder in 1919 of Italy's Partito Popolare, a political exile upon the rise of Mussolini, and author of dozens of books and articles on the links between democracy, internationalism, and peace (including many in *Commonweal* in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s), Sturzo forcefully and often eloquently articulated the case against the various -isms overtaking Europe, in large part through espousing the idea of Catholics as responsible political actors who should be free of official ecclesial oversight and who were not in need of special protection. He proposed a Catholic vision of politics, society, and the economy built on Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum novarum* but sufficient to the task of meeting destructive ideologies head-on. For his efforts he was disavowed by the Vatican, threatened with assassination by Italy's Fascists, and vilified in the United States both by the burgeoning Italian-American population and public figures like xenophobic "radio priest" Charles Coughlin.

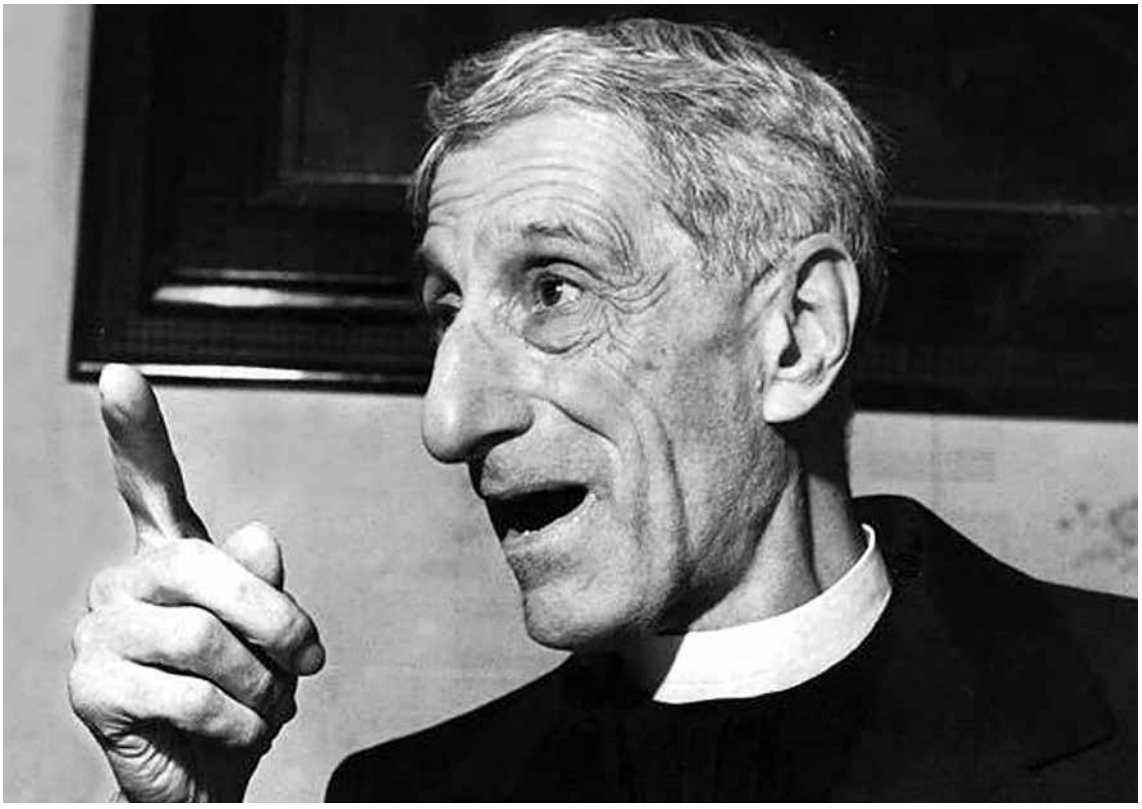
And today? A century after Pope Leo XIII's tacit abolition of the *non expedit* allowed Italian Catholics to become openly active in politics, the diocesan phase of the process for Sturzo's beatification has concluded, with *venerabile* and possible sainthood ahead. It seems an especially good time

Don Luigi Sturzo, the founder of Italy's Partito Popolare and a longtime contributor to *Commonweal*.

to look back at the life and work of Sturzo not only to make sense of the current moment, but also to think about what may yet lie ahead.

Luigi Sturzo was born in 1871, and came of age in an era when Italian Catholics were by papal decree prohibited from taking part in the secular politics of the constitutional monarchy established with the creation of the new Italian kingdom. That changed after World War I with the end of the *non expedit*, an obstacle whose removal seemed to release pent-up demand for participation in political life. Sturzo himself wasted little time, in 1919 founding the Partito Popolare with the aim of encouraging Catholics to become involved in politics. It was only in a 1944 *Commonweal* article that Sturzo revealed the gritty details behind the party's creation, which required approval by the Vatican. He got the go-ahead, but along with it a warning: "[Secretary of State Cardinal Gasparri] repeated to me several times: 'You will never speak in the name of the Church, nor in the name of Catholic Action [the most important organization of lay Catholics, under the control of the hierarchy].... Remember that the responsibility is yours. The Church and Catholic Action will never be implicated in the policies of the party. If you make a mistake, the blame will fall on you."

The blame fell within five years, Sturzo's "mistake" being his early opposition to Fascism. Partito Popolare was an obstacle between the Vatican and Mussolini, blocking direct negotiations between the two and defying a church whose main concern was not the Fascists but the Communists, both in Italy and internationally. In 1923, the Vatican forced Sturzo to step down from leadership of the party; in 1924, amid an assassination campaign waged by Fascists against their political opponents, he fled Italy for London. With Sturzo gone, the Vatican officially disavowed the Partito Popolare and opened direct negotiations with Mussolini, who in a deal with Pius XI forced the eventual disbanding of the party—the first such action by the Fascists and a key step toward the Lateran Treaties of 1929, which in turn helped preempt any possible political cooperation between Catholics and Socialists in Italian politics.



From his relatively safe vantage in London—where he would remain until 1940—Sturzo was able to reflect not only on the rapidly developing political picture, but also on what the future might hold for the international order. He developed connections with the Round Table movement, which at that time was advocating collaboration among dominions of the British Empire as a "commonwealth of nations," and with the Royal Institute of International Affairs, also known as Chatham House. Following the debate over how to imagine a world in which Great Britain could no longer rely on the militarily imposed loyalty of its colonies, he soon published, in English, *The International Community and the Right of War* (1929). Here he articulated his vision of the links between democracy, internationalism, and peace, a vision that found receptive audiences in France and Spain (where translations were quickly published), as well as in the United States. A capsule review in *Foreign Affairs* said the exiled Italian Populist leader was "quite as vigorous in the field of thought as he formerly showed himself in the field of action." It called his treatment of the philosophical question about the necessity of war

> pronouncedly Christian and Catholic.... Don Sturzo finds no difficulty in disposing of the usual arguments advanced in favor of war as an instrument of justice, as a necessary attribute of state power, or as a purely biological factor, and comes to the conclusion that the idea of the necessity of war is a pure illusion.... As the social system changes and the tendency towards international organization replaces the purely national system, the ideas of moral constraint will inevitably prevail over the ideas of force.

The book wasn't translated into Italian until 1954; it was never translated into German, despite multiple attempts.

Italy's entry into the war in June 1940 turned Sturzo's "relatively safe" perch in London into something less so. The British by then were coming to see the Italian exiles in their midst as enemies or possible spies. In September of that year, Sturzo left London for the United States. His belief in "ideas of moral constraint" might still have been a factor in his not being convinced of the need for the United States to enter the war against Fascism and Nazism. Yet he'd also come to America at a time when there remained among certain sectors of the populace something of a fascination with Fascism. This included the emergent (and largely Catholic) Italian-American immigrant community. But it also included the national audiences of public figures like the anti-Semitic, Mussolini-defending Charles Coughlin. There were also Catholic authors like James J. Walsh (*What Civilization Owes to Italy*, 1923) and John Gibbons (*Old Italy and New Mus-*

*soliniland*, 1933), who dedicated their books to the Italian leader. Columbia University historian Carlton J. H. Hayes exalted the Lateran Treaties of 1929, and in a two-part article in *Commonweal* (March 27 and April 3, 1929) talked about the "liberal principles" (*sic*!) of the Concordat signed between Italy and the Fascists on February 11 that year. "*If* Fascism eventually disappears," Hayes wrote, "changes of detail may then be effected in the concordat—changes about education, about property, etc.—but hardly changes in the liberal principles which underlie the present document."

But Sturzo's reluctance to call for war against Fascism was balanced by the writing he had already done to introduce American Catholics to the danger it presented, even prior to the rise of Hitler in 1933. Much of this work appeared in *Commonweal*, including the 1927 essay "The Problem of Italy." Here Sturzo put the Italian situation into historical perspective: "Italy's institutional problem will have to be brought back into the foreground; it will be necessary to face in its entirety the unsolved problem left by the Risorgimento—the problem, that is, of the complete participation of the people in political life." Sturzo's view of Mussolini and Fascism was also clearly different from that of many American Catholics, which he made plain in *Commonweal* a decade later. In "Communism: Fascism" (published in April 1937), Sturzo disabused Catholics of the notion that the Concordat of 1929 had changed the violent nature of Fascism or that it would give the Catholic Church protection:

> At the moment, relations between Fascism and the Vatican are good, partly because the Vatican has sought to avoid further motives of dispute, in view of the very grave ones it has with Hitler's Germany, but given the Fascist spirit of domination, pride and violence, it should be no surprise if the Church were to be subjected to persecution or humiliation.... The real fact is that Fascism paves the way for Communism or for something of the kind, and that Communism paves the way for Fascism or for another regime of the same type.

Two years after the anti-Semitic "racial laws" were passed by the Fascist regime in November 1938, Sturzo wrote about the relationship between Mussolini and Hitler in an article titled "Hitler's Teacher" (January 10, 1941). Then, in "Italy at the Crossroads" (February 21, 1941), Sturzo made clear that there was no easy parting of the ways between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, now allied in the war: "It is painful for an Italian to write such a diagnosis of the situation: but it is what it is, as I have pointed out in the previous article and in this. Fascist Italy will remain with Germany in victory or in defeat: their destinies are bound together."

**Sturzo disabused Catholics of the notion that the Concordat of 1929 had changed the violent nature of Fascism or that it would give the Catholic Church protection.**

World War II had pushed Catholics to see Fascism and Nazism as the only available counterweights to Communism. In 1941, after the Russians and Germans went to war, Sturzo warned in his *Commonweal* article "The Ways of Providence" (November 21, 1941) against the illusion that Nazism and Communism would destroy each other. Nor would the destruction of Communism by Germany usher in the political participation of the people as a solution to economic and social issues. He wrote:

> In one of the beautiful churches in the heart of Paris a preacher was speaking with a good deal of efficacy against communism, demonstrating its descent from liberalism, its relationship to democracy, describing with lurid touches its effect upon the working classes, which had become materialistic and revolutionary. Not to touch upon the question of whether such a sermon be opportune in connection with a liturgical celebration, we observe that the congregation belonged to the world of fashion. This elegant world of the aristocracy and rich bourgeoisie must have felt happy at the thought of indicting the masses as responsible for all the evils threatening the France of Saint Joan of Arc and of Saint Louis.

In his anti-elitism, Sturzo was one of the early proponents of *popolarismo,* the Catholic intellectual force connecting Leo XIII's vision of politics, society, and the economy articulated in the encyclical *Rerum novarum* to the Christian-Democratic parties that forged post–World War II Europe. In the same November 1941 article, he developed *Rerum novarum* further, toward a concept of Catholic political activism characterized by Catholic agency and responsibility, and without ecclesial and clerical protection:

> But how many were the Catholics who fought Christian syndicates as if they were dangerous novelties and who denounced Christian democracy as a heresy? The consequence was that the little done by Catholics at the issuance of *Rerum novarum* could never satisfy the needs of the working classes drawn toward religious apostasy, nor could it offer a sane and adequate remedy for the economic needs brought about by an excessive capitalism.

Sturzo was not about to indulge the anti-democratic, pro-Fascist forces that had permeated Catholicism in the interwar period:

> With reference to the Action Française [the right-wing political movement condemned by Pius XI in 1926] and to Nazism we must add that, either when they were under ban or afterwards, although their principles were

> openly anti-Christian, there never was a lack of Catholic newspapers and journals, writers and speakers, teachers in both men's and women's colleges, who were (and some of them still are) in favor of the Action Française and in favor of Nazism.

During the war, with signs of the eventual defeat of the Axis already emerging in 1943, Sturzo returned to the issue he had worked on since the beginning of his exile: the new international order. In his *Commonweal* essay "The Coming League" (March 5, 1943), Sturzo imagined a new "League of Nations," using the term "United Nations" in the framework of a "new covenant":

> All states may become members of the League; but only those will be admitted which are willing to accept the spirit and the letter of the new covenant.... Every country will have the government it will choose. The League will be interested in seeing to it that the moral, legal and cultural principles for which we are fighting today will be at the basis of the League—political and religious freedom, independence, rights of human personality, justice, protection of the rights of racial, religious and linguistic minorities, ultimate attainment on the part of colonies of their political and economic personality.... To build a new edifice on Christian ethical principles and on the principles of international law is the aim of the war which is being fought by the United Nations.

With the collapse of Italy's Fascist regime in July 1943, Sturzo saw a new page in European history about to be turned, anticipating an opportunity to rejuvenate the mass participation of Catholics in politics: "What a surprise for many in Europe and America when they heard that, as soon as Fascism had fallen, one of the political groups that emerged in the lively manifestations of the end of July and the first days of August, 1943, was that very group called Christian democratic!" Sturzo sought some continuity with the pre-Fascist period—the autonomy of the party of Catholics from the Vatican, for example—but also acknowledged the need to preserve certain changes brought about by Fascism, especially the Lateran Treaties of 1929. His positive assessment of the treaties was evident in a review of the book *Church and State in Fascist Italy*, by D. A. Binchy, that appeared in 1943 in the *Catholic Historical Review*:

> The problem [of] whether, and to what extent, the Lateran Treaty during this first decade served the cause of the Church better than the preceding situation between 1870 and 1922, has today but a speculative interest.... Every practical solution has its failings and weaknesses. But the advantage for Italy, as well as for the world, of having the Roman Question closed and a Pope theoretically claiming a political temporal state, is far superior to all the inconveniences which have arisen or may arise.

Surprisingly, on this particular point, Italian Catholic politicians were able to win over Socialists and Communists at the constitutional convention that led to the new Italian constitution of 1948.

But post-war Italian politics did not have a place for Sturzo. He was marginalized from the new Christian-Democratic party, which would be *the* pivotal player in Italy through the fall of Communism and on up to the ascent of Silvio Berlusconi in the early 1990s. It was not just a generational issue, though the new leaders of the party were younger; it was also the fact that a new political culture had emerged. Democrazia Cristiana relied far less on the leadership of the social and political elites that Sturzo had in mind, and was more open to popular participation. The party was not exclusively oriented toward the Western geopolitical realm—as represented by participation in NATO—and was more open to pacifism, "Thirdworldism," and the Arab states of northern Africa and the Middle East.

Now, a century after the foundation of Partito Popolare and sixty years after the death of its founder, what is the relevance of Sturzo, beyond the ongoing process of his beatification and potential canonization? What can Catholics trying to make sense of the current crisis of democracy take from the life and work of this priest, sociologist, and politician?

Mainly, that in the Catholic experience, there is a need to think and act politically. But such a Catholic engagement requires the church to be more than just "the church." Sturzo envisaged a political presence of Catholics in a political party. The problem is that Catholic or Christian-Democratic parties have disappeared even from those countries where they were the single most important force for the reconstruction of democracy after World War II, with Germany's Christian Democratic Union the only exception. In this sense, Sturzo belongs to the past. Even Pope Francis has distanced himself—in a significant break from his predecessors, dating to Pius XII—from the idea of "Catholic parties."

Yet for politically minded Catholics today,

Sturzo's story provides several other important things to think about. The first is that reflections on the role of Catholics in politics over the past century have in general been characterized by socioeconomic considerations—but in particular by the link between internationalism and peace. Sturzo's most important book of the interwar period was probably *The International Community and the Right of War*, which well before World War II and atomic weaponry suggested the need to outlaw armed conflict, and thus clearly contradicted the traditional Catholic doctrine on war. In developing and going beyond Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum*, the book brought Catholic political thinking into an undeniably new era.

The second important idea is that Sturzo understood the necessity of a political system and culture that could conceive of and deal with an ideological other. Even in his day, Catholicism could not seal itself off politically and ideologically, could not exist in a world unto itself. So for Sturzo, Catholic political action had to be "ecumenical." He saw the need for and value of cooperating with political and cultural forces that were not Catholic—or not even Christian or religious—at both the national and international levels. Sturzo saw the Church as "globally Catholic" *ante litteram*, that is, before a notion like "globally Catholic" really even existed.

The third important idea is that he demonstrated how a faithful and obedient Catholic could respectfully, but clearly, challenge the hierarchical church to let Catholics assume direct responsibility for their political engagement. One result of this was to help bring about the rejection of Fascism in Italy; another, it must be said, was to help bring about autonomy from the institutional church.

As to the institutional church, Sturzo knew its limitations. It might be able to act politically in the broad sense, perhaps even to acknowledge the long-term promise of democratic principles. But he never harbored the illusion that this could substitute for the political engagement of Catholics in their own name, who would thus also take on the responsibilities that come with being granted the agency to act.

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## POETRY

### FIVE QUESTIONS FOR THREE BIRDS

*What is the knocking at the door in the night?*

*…it is the three strange angels*
*Admit them, admit them.*
D. H. Lawrence
"Song of a Man Who Has Come Through"

Mourning dove cooing sorrow
on the fence line, one that sings
like no other, tell me: For whom
are you grieving in my doorway tonight?

And you, cardinal, red cleric of the breeze, homilist
from the swaying trees, what are you preaching?
Strutting through this door cut from evening,
is that hellfire and damnation you're whistling,
or just the redeeming relief of the fall?

Last across the threshold, dear strangely silent
crow—are you someone I'm supposed to know?
Tell me, if you can: In whose handwriting
are all these notes you keep leaving in my empty shoes?

***—Vernon Fowlkes Jr.***

**VERNON FOWLKES JR.***'s poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals, among them* The Southern Review, Negative Capability, Birmingham Arts Journal, Elk River Review, The Texas Observer, Ampersand Review, *and* Willow Springs. *His poetry collection,* The Sound of Falling, *was published by Negative Capability Press in 2013.*

# When the Laity Led

**Eileen Markey**

*In Nicaragua, revolutionary hope has given way to resentment and resignation. Can the popular church reclaim its role as the country's conscience?*

A protest against the Nicaraguan government in Managua, June 30, 2018

On July 19, 1979, masses of the Nicaraguan people marched victorious into Managua, having toppled the regime of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, a dictator who had enjoyed the support of the United States. Since coming to power in 1936, the Somoza family had treated Nicaragua as a personal bursary, their government operating on the principles of a criminal syndicate. The cramped dungeons of Tiscapa, right beneath the presidential residence, were filled with political prisoners, subject to rape and beatings. In the mid-1970s, a special anti-terrorism squad patrolled the poorer barrios, snatching young activists. It shackled their hands behind their backs and tossed them down a high Managua hillside to their deaths. But after years of organizing, followed by two years of fighting, the Nicaraguan people were finally rid of the Somoza dynasty. Standing in the plaza between the National Palace and the Catedral de Santiago, whose wide aisles and embracing side chapels had provided shelter when students fled the brutality of Somoza's police in the early years of protest, they declared the birth of a new nation.

The setting wasn't incidental. Throughout Latin America the architecture and infrastructure of the Catholic Church has reflected its tight affiliation to state power since the days of Cortés and the Doctrine of Discovery. In Latin America the Catholic Church, landowners, and the military worked together for four hundred years to establish and maintain a system that occasionally shifted in detail but never in principle. A tiny elite held power. A pervasive military defended it. An acquiescent church sanctified it, promising the people succor for their suffering—but only after they died. All through these centuries, rebellions flared and were extinguished by this triumvirate. Somoza's father, Anastasio Somoza García, declared the Virgin Mary patron of the nation in 1950; the church hosted a Eucharistic congress in celebration. When the Maryknoll sisters arrived in Nicaragua in 1946 to establish a school and a health clinic in a remote mining town, they met first with the Somoza family to ask for its permission. The superior of the sisters' mission promised to stay out of politics. She said they'd be no trouble. (To their credit, they later proved to be a tremendous amount of trouble.) When Anastasio Somoza Debayle was installed as president in 1967, the Catholic bishops were all on board.

But by the time those jubilant crowds gathered in between the palace and the cathedral, much of the Nicaraguan church had changed sides. In little more than a decade, many of the laity and lower clergy had gone from understanding themselves as guardians of the established order to becoming keepers of the conscience of the revolution. Among those marching into the center of Managua for mass demonstrations were cadres of Catholic faithful, trained and radicalized by Catholic social teachings; members of base Christian communities that modeled themselves on the early church; nuns who'd served as medics to rebels; priests who'd written manifestos articulating a Christian response to tyranny. The

CNS PHOTO / OSWALDO RIVAS, REUTERS

Sandinista revolution couldn't have happened without the Catholic Church. But this church was very different from the one that had propped up landowners and helped keep down the masses for centuries. This one was led from below, diffuse, democratic, and notably female. Forty years later, after so many compounding tragedies and movements that now smell like spoilt milk, it is difficult for us to appreciate the incandescent hope that animated that triumph over dictatorship.

The Christian side of the movement had emerged from market women and subsistence farmers, Catholics who'd studied the Bible and found in it a story of their own liberation, both eternal and temporal. Contrary to the expedient tale they'd long been told, their suffering was not ordained by God. A reading of the gospels and the church's social teachings, informed by dialogue steeped in their own experience of poverty, state repression, torture, and injustice, led hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans to conclude that their faith required more of them than waiting patiently for the compensations of the world to come. It required them to participate in their own liberation in *this* world, to actively build the kingdom of God. By 1977 even the country's bishops had been converted. That year they issued a letter that emphasized the duty of all Christians to be engaged in the political and social questions of the nation.

When it finally came, the July 1979 uprising carried a distinctly arrival-in-Jerusalem feel. During the last days of the insurrection, the faithful read the book of Revelation while bombs fell. The time was coming, they told themselves. A new order was being born.

After Somoza fled, the small Christian communities, called base communities, threw themselves into the work of establishing a new country. Church for many became dedication to the revolution. Fernando Cardenal, SJ, became minister of education in the new government and launched a highly successful literacy initiative that sent young people into the countryside to teach adults who'd never been in school how to read. His brother, Fr. Ernesto Cardenal, an acolyte of Thomas Merton and a poet, became minister of culture. Maryknoll Fr. Miguel d'Escoto was foreign minister, representing the fledgling government internationally. Fr. Edgard Parrales was ambassador to the Organization of American States. But don't let this list of clergymen mislead you. The church was the laity. They supported the revolution because they were its parent.

That was all forty long years ago. The arrival-in-Jerusalem atmosphere soon gave way to a Gethsemane feeling, to a sense of betrayal and increasing disappointment. In the decades since the revolution, the broad, bottom-up, truly popular revolution has congealed into the person of one decidedly compromised man: Daniel Ortega. Revolt against him and his wife, Rosario Murillo, emerged in April 2018 like some dented echo of the 1970s. Singing in the streets. Youth and poor people marching. Once again, a brutal regime filled Tiscapa with political prisoners, and government troops quashed protests with billy clubs, tear gas, and bullets. On April 18, police and military raided the Jesuit University of Central America and arbitrarily arrested scores of students. At a protest on April 21, students fled into the new Metropolitan Cathedral, sheltering

in its wide aisles and side chapels from the very government their parents had struggled to birth. Now the roles of the popular church and the hierarchy were reversed: the bishops supported the protestors unequivocally, while the church of the base Christian communities and many of the laity was divided. When, in the early seventies, protestors sought shelter from Somoza's guards in churches, the bishops described it as a "desecration." Last year Managua Auxiliary Bishop Silvio José Báez told protesters, "I want to thank you in the name of the church, because you are our country's moral reserve." But other parts of the church remain loyal to the Ortega government, their access to power and prestige making them as acquiescent as the conquistador bishops once were.

The marches and street protests of the past year were consciously referential. The kids sang the folk songs of their parents and grandparents, and spoke of the unity of the people. Their demands were hard to argue against, and they cultivated the same language of love and moral purity as their forebears. But among the opposition were forces that had been working to dismantle the revolution from the moment it emerged. The U.S.-trained Contra soldiers who'd buried their weapons in 1990 spoke darkly of reactivating. The moneyed Somoza allies who'd fled in 1979 to South Florida—that sunny redoubt of Latin American revanchists—were only too ready to marshal their influence against Ortega. This occasioned a "Through the Looking-Glass" atmosphere, a certain moral dizziness, amplified by social media, doctored videos, allegations, and counter-allegations. What side were defenders of human rights supposed to be on this time? To many observers, it wasn't clear. There were rifts in the robust U.S. solidarity movement: recriminations, allegations of naïveté and counter-allegations of stoogedom.

It's hard to know, reading U.S. media, precisely which end is up. I wrote a book centered on the role Christians played in the Nicaraguan revolution. When I dived into the microfilm to read contemporary U.S. press accounts of the 1970s after interviewing central actors in the revolution and reading diaries and letters of those who lived through the era, I learned that the story that gets told here is remarkably different from the one that gets told in the barrios of Managua. There's always another side or two to the story. That said, surely we know tyranny when we see it.

The proximate cause of the 2018 protests was a proposed cut to social-security payments, goaded by the International Monetary Fund. But by mid-April, indigenous and environmental activists had been rallying for weeks over the government's failure to contain a fire in a wildlife conservation area on the nation's Atlantic Coast. These protestors believed that Ortega's Sandinista government was intentionally permitting the refuge to burn as part of a plan to make the land available for foreign investors and for a Chinese-built canal meant to rival the one in Panama. (The charge was not implausible: Nicaragua was rapidly deforested in the 2000s in order to create grazing land for Venezuelan cattle.) Small farmers on the Atlantic coast had been complaining for years about their land being taken for the canal—and about receiving little or no compensation for it.

On May 27 of last year, masked men the Jesuits believed to be government soldiers attacked the University of Central America in Managua, firing a mortar toward campus security guards. José Alberto "Chepe" Idiáquez, SJ, the rector of UCA, condemned that attack as an act of intimidation. Then on May 30, Nicaragua's Mother's Day, a protest march commemorating those who had been killed since the start of the unrest in April was violently disrupted. As protestors passed UCA, they heard gunshots. In a confused scramble, they fled the police, surging onto the campus after Idiáquez ordered the gates opened. For the next several hours groups of protestors hunkered down on campus. By the end of the day, sixteen protestors were dead and two hundred injured. The summer of 2018 wore on in barricades and skirmishes in Managua and other cities.

These have continued sporadically into 2019, though they are now much reduced in scale. On September 9 of this year, approximately twenty UCA students held a protest on campus, decrying the government's withdrawal of its usual public funding to the university. Hundreds of heavily armed police surrounded the campus. "The UCA is a goal or a target for the government because our students are protesting on different days," Idíaquez explained in a phone interview. Worse than the intimidation in the city is what Idíaquez believes is a steady campaign of assassination in rural areas, where he says one or two campesino leaders of the opposition to Ortega are killed each day, a hollowing out of resistance. "This government is willing to continue in power even if we become a cemetery," he said.

The Nicaraguan bishops' conference has condemned the repression and violence and is expected to issue a new pastoral letter in mid-September. The Jesuits have been at the forefront of opposition and many priests and nuns see themselves in the familiar role of accompanying those oppressed by a brutal government. "There exists a strong persecution against the Catholic Church. I am not saying against the bishops, but against the whole church," Idíaquez said.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights visited Nicaragua in May 2018 and issued a report the next month condemning the Ortega government for arbitrary police actions against protestors, denial of medical treatment, reliance on paramilitary groups separate from the Nicaraguan security services, and the cruel and degrading treatment of prisoners, including torture. In October 2018, Amnesty International issued a report called "Instilling Terror: From Lethal Force to Persecution in Nicaragua," condemning the torture and indefinite detention of more than five hundred political prisoners. The International Press Association issued two warnings about press freedom in the country. By fall the streets of Managua were heavily patrolled, students entering the National Autonomous University were routinely searched, protest was banned, and, incredibly, the Nicaraguan flag,

which the protestors had cannily adopted as their emblem, was outlawed.

According to Amnesty International and the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights' Special Monitoring Mechanism for Nicaragua, today the number of dead stands at more than three hundred, including twenty police officers the government says were killed by protestors. More than a hundred people are still imprisoned, and 83,000 are in exile, mostly in neighboring Costa Rica. Bishop Báez left for Rome in late April 2019, amid increasing threats against his life, and has yet to return, though he still issues statements on social media. Ortega's denunciations of the Jesuits as coup-mongers and Svengalis were another uncanny historical echo, conjuring memories of the 1989 assassination of the Jesuits and Elba and Celina Ramos at the University of Central America in El Salvador.

Soon after becoming rector of the Managua UCA in 2014, Idíaquez recognized that the Ortega government was trying to control discourse in the university. "I would invite people to speak about the canal, about the land seizures, and it was prohibited to do that. I wanted to invite people to think, but Murillo and Ortega would say through their allies that this is an act against them."

Idíaquez is not surprised by the corruption and brutality of the Ortega regime and feels no sorrow in resisting it. He never supported the revolution. "I was very critical of the revolution. I saw many things that were not right. To me this is not a surprise that it went like this," he said. He is dismissive of the Catholics who supported the revolution, saying they were part of a manipulation of religion—and attributes the continued support for Ortega in some quarters to bribery and manipulation.

Beginning in May 2018, Catholic bishops and Jesuits presented themselves as mediators, eager to convene a national dialogue between the government and protestors. But at the same time, the church hierarchy condemned the Ortega government and encouraged the opposition. Their efforts at dialogue did not get very far, and Ortega, who appeared weakened in the summer of 2018, now shows no signs of leaving office. He declared the national dialogue effort "complete" months ago.

When Somoza adopted similarly fierce anti-dissent laws in 1974 after a spectacular and embarrassing Sandinista raid on a cabinet member's Christmas party, the restrictions had the effect of radicalizing the population. Martial law created militants. This time the crackdown has been more successful. The Nicaraguan opposition seems broken, disillusioned, and fearful. Ortega appears to believe he can now afford magnanimous gestures. In June his government released scores of political prisoners and announced an amnesty for anyone accused of a crime during last year's protests. Members of the opposition welcomed this news, but they also knew it was a sign that the government no longer regarded them as a threat. And the amnesty meant there would be no accountability for crimes, torture, and murders committed by the security forces.

The protests that began in April 2018 were the boiling-over of years of discontent with the Ortega regime. Many of the president's close allies and one-time comrades withdrew their support for him and the leadership of the Sandinista party as early as the 1990s, calling out the government's financial corruption, increasing authoritarianism, and personal enrichment at the expense of the nation's poor. Fernando Cardenal, SJ—who in 1984 accepted the Vatican's suspension of his priesthood rather than renounce his role in the Sandinista Party and his post as minister of education—left the Sandinistas in 1995, saying he could not in good conscience remain a member of a party he believed was abandoning the ideals of 1979. His brother Ernesto also renounced Ortega and the cronyism of the party. But not everyone agreed with them. Fr. Miguel d'Escoto, a frequent face of the Sandinista movement in the United States, remained loyal both to the party and to Ortega. Like the Cardenal brothers, d'Escoto was stripped of his priestly faculties by Pope John Paul II when he refused to abandon his political office in the 1980s. (Pope Francis restored them shortly before d'Escoto's death in 2017.) As Ortega gathered more and more power to himself and grew more venal, d'Escoto was honored and promoted as a symbol of the revolution's days of radical hope and possibility. But by then, d'Escoto was deeply compromised, a tool of a regime whose conscience he could have pricked—but didn't.

Elements of the institutional church offered tentative support for the new Sandinista government in its first years, but that support was soon withdrawn. The hierarchy, already wary of a government of self-described Marxists, were cowed and then reorganized by the aggressive Cold War–maneuvering of Pope John Paul II, who saw little distinction between the Sandinistas and the Soviet Union. It was during this period that the Nicaraguan church effectively split, and it's remained split ever since. A priest who has been intimately involved with base Christian communities and other rural Catholic groups since before the revolution told me that the conflict of the past year has ruptured decades-long friendships formed in shared struggle and deep idealism. Assemblies that hung together during the Contra War, who worked beside each other to protect the coffee harvest in those lean years, who hosted tens of thousands of sympathetic U.S. church visitors—part of a strategic and highly effective propaganda campaign—are now silent and divided. On one side are those who believe Ortega has degenerated into just another dictator, like the Somozas; on the other are those who believe that opposition to Ortega can only help the old forces of oppression.

While U.S. news coverage is largely focused on opposition to the government—including glowing profiles of the brave, armed freedom fighters massed in Costa Rica that could have been published in 1983—there remain many government loyalists in Managua and elsewhere. For them, U.S. sympathy for the opposition only confirms that the revolt was a coup attempt organized by Washington. This is hardly a farfetched belief, given U.S. involvement in the region. His-

torians disagree about whether FDR was referring to the older Somoza or to Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic when he said, "He's a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch." What is clear is that the United States has backed—and sometimes even trained—many SOBs in Latin America. In 2009, the United States helped overthrow a government unfriendly to U.S. energy interests in Honduras. Elliott Abrams, the neocon bad penny of U.S. foreign policy who was convicted for his role in the conspiracy to sell weapons to Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran in order to raise funds for the Contras, is now a special envoy to the region. (The elaborate subterfuge of the Iran Contra Affair was necessary because Congress had explicitly prohibited funding to the Contras as early as 1982, in response to the viciousness of the Contras' assaults on the Nicaraguan people.) One can forgive weary Nicaraguans their well-earned skepticism of U.S. interests.

Students from the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua shout slogans as they arrive at the Metropolitan Cathedral in Managua.

The Nicaraguan revolution was many things. To many U.S. Catholics it was understood as a revolution animated by liberation theology. To the Latin American left it was the continuation of the Cuban Revolution, a Marxist victory over a client-state regime that enriched itself on the misery of its people. To U.S. conservatives and anti-Communists, it was second in a line of dominoes much closer than Southeast Asia, their alarm leading to a decade of Faustian support for the far more vicious war in El Salvador. To casual admirers and romantics, it was the revolution of photogenic and luxuriantly mustachioed rebels, the poetry of Rubén Darío and the music of the Clash. It propelled a hundred dissertations and a network of solidarity organizations in the United States, many Catholic and Jesuit-affiliated.

But the heady days of the revolution have been followed by a long hangover, as supporters and sympathizers of the Sandinistas have witnessed the betrayal of the movement by some of its leaders, including Daniel Ortega himself. It's true that the Sandinista movement was fed and propelled to success by many Catholics and adherents of liberation theology. But Ortega himself did not emerge from that wing of the movement. He was a Leninist and an atheist. And most members of the Sandinista elite who had been formed in base Christian communities peeled off from the Ortega regime many years ago, when it began showing dictatorial tendencies, operating more like a club than a movement for justice. At around the same time Ortega began cooperating with the neoliberal economic order, seeking international investment. Prison for dissidents, green lights for capital: this was supposed to be the formula for right-wing autocrats like Pinochet, not revolutionaries like Ortega. But power has a strange way of distorting ideology.

In 1998, Ortega's stepdaughter, Zoilamérica Narváez, whom he'd raised from infancy, brought criminal charges against him, accusing him of years of sexual abuse and rape. She claimed Ortega had begun sexually molesting her in 1978, when she was eleven. Beginning when she was fifteen, she claims, he raped her frequently, sometimes pulling her into hotel closets on overseas trips because he feared his hotel rooms were bugged by the CIA. Narváez says Ortega told her it was her revolutionary duty to allow him to have sex with her. She says he told her he needed her sacrifice to keep his head clear for the great work to which he was called. The alleged abuse continued into adulthood and after she married. She brought charges in the Nicaraguan court system, but Ortega's position at the time in the National Assembly gave him immunity from prosecution and the legislature never revoked that immunity. Narváez brought her case to the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights in 1999 but eventually withdrew it, according to the records of the commission. Her accusations against Ortega were never adjudicated.

In its allegation of a twisted abuse of trusted authority and the sacralizing of sexual violation, Narváez's story is painfully familiar: it sounds like a clergy sex-abuse case. The haste to discredit Narváez on the part of the party faithful reminds one of how too many Catholics responded to the first wave of accusations about clerical abuse. Loyalists to the party dismissed her allegations as a set-up by politi-

CNS PHOTO / OSWALDO RIVAS, REUTERS

cal enemies who were said to be manipulating a troubled young woman. Siding with her husband against her daughter, Rosario Murillo has steadily exerted more influence and control over what remains of the Sandinista movement.

Meanwhile, as many of its old allies abandoned the Sandinista party—and formed a variety of alternative movements left and right—the institutional church grew closer to the sclerotic strongman. In 2006 Bishop Miguel Obando y Bravo, by then retired but still wielding tremendous influence because he was a cardinal, became something of a private chaplain to Ortega and Murillo. That year Ortega, having been out of office for sixteen years, ran an election campaign based on a dramatic public embrace of Catholicism. Ortega and Murillo, who had been together for decades and had six children, were married in a Catholic ceremony, with Bishop Obando officiating. Back in office, Ortega consolidated his support with the Catholic hierarchy by banning abortion in all cases. (It had previously been restricted but legal in certain cases.) Bishop Obando had been very critical of the Sandinista government back when it had legions of idealistic adherents. He was sometimes called the Contra bishop for his closeness to the counter-insurgency army made up of Somoza's former National Police and trained by the United States at bases in Honduras. He had traveled to Washington D.C. to lobby Congress for U.S. intervention in Nicaragua. And he had zealously preached against the Sandinistas in the electoral campaign of 1990, which the Sandinistas lost. So his sudden embrace of a diminished and compromised Ortega struck many as grubby—another case in a long history of episcopal opportunism or evidence of some monumental blackmail. Whatever the reason, it was effective.

Hope has died many times after the revolution and appeared to recede again as last year's protests flickered and faded. Because the revolution had been so bottom-up and broad, its embodiment in a single man is a tragedy. The revolution of 1979 was never just Daniel Ortega; it was never even just the Sandinista Front for National Liberation. It was 100,000 Nicaraguans claiming a mantle of idealism and refusing to accept the way things had always been. Nicaragua has held the imagination of so many U.S. Catholics not just because of its image as a country of poet rebels, or even because it promised a new kind of society, with increased literacy, improved public health, and the emancipation of women—a nation that would disregard the demands of the Global North and go its own way. It held our imagination because it seemed to offer a new kind of church, one not oriented to the preservation of wealth and privilege but to justice and honest, intimate community.

That we now say "the church" is resisting Ortega, when we mean that the bishops and the head of a university are resisting him, is a sad thing. It misses the point of what happened in the Nicaraguan church forty years ago. The laity led. It was they who developed a new—but also very old—way of being church. Their work made possible first the overthrow of a dictator and then the establishment of a new country. Now parts of that popular church are playing it safe, binding themselves so close to temporal power that they cannot see its glaring failures. It isn't only willful blindness, though, that keeps them from acknowledging Ortega's failures; it's also resentment against their old enemies, many of whom deserve that resentment. The popular church could advocate for a true return to the values that animated so many in 1979 and that today's young dissidents have taken up: an economy that serves the poor, human rights, dignified work, not only free elections, but a consultative democracy, where the people have a say in the decisions that will affect them. The institutional church could be the conscience of this opposition, making sure it isn't hijacked by the Organization of American States, the U.S. government, or the old enemies of the revolution. Both the institutional and the popular church need to reclaim their role as the conscience of Nicaragua, not speaking for any party or falling behind dubious allies, but nurturing the hope that drove them into that open plaza between church and state forty years ago.



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# ‘Why Call it Progress?’

**Austen Ivereigh**

*Pope Francis’s radical critique of the way we live now*

Though Francis might look like a raving revolutionary to the captains of capitalism, and though some of his critics within the church have accused him of importing socialism and radical environmentalism into Catholic social teaching, the current pope has in fact pushed out from a path firmly forged by his predecessors.

Saint John Paul II called for an “ecological conversion” of the church through “concrete programs and initiatives,” and Benedict XVI did just that, installing a thousand solar panels on the roof of the Vatican’s audience hall and a hybrid engine in one of the popemobiles. But Benedict’s greatest achievement was to engage theologically with the rising ecological awareness. Noting in *Caritas in veritate* how nature expressed “a design of love and truth,” a “grammar” that “sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation,” he observed that the logic of gift underpinning the moral intuition behind ecology was incompatible with the ethic of sovereign autonomy.

In a series of addresses, Benedict observed how insisting on respect for the given order of the natural world sat oddly with the contemporary attitude toward sexuality and human life. Permissive laws that upheld a woman’s “choice” assumed that choice alone could specify what was good without reference to transcendent criteria, such as the sacred value of life. Yet when mining corporations pouring toxic waste into rivers claimed it was a necessary price to pay for jobs and consumer goods, progressives were appalled. If creation were merely raw material without intrinsic value, subject only to cost-benefit analysis, then these choices were justified; but if humanity and creation were governed by a logic of gift, in which the right response to creation—whether human or natural—was respect, why did the same thinking not apply in both cases? Benedict called for the development of a “human” ecology to supplement a “natural” one, as a way of connecting with contemporary sensibilities.

Benedict’s arguments were compelling and clear, but they were aimed more at challenging ecologists than converting Catholics. In the hands of the culture warriors, “human ecology” became simply another stick to beat up liberals in rows over gay marriage or abortion laws. Yet the more that prolife, pro-family groups, especially in the United States, appealed to “human ecology,” the more exposed was their own lack of commitment to natural ecology. Many saw no contradiction in arguing against abortion and gay marriage while defending a free-market model of unrestrained consumption, the right to carry guns, and the death penalty.

Francis gently challenged this schizophrenia at a Vatican conference on male-female com-

Pope Francis at the Pentecost Mass in St. Peter's Square, June 9, 2019.

CNS PHOTO / YARA NARDI, REUTERS

plementarity in September 2014, organized by prominent American conservatives, including Professor Robert George of Princeton University. The conference was an astute bid to respond to the deconstruction of marriage and sexuality by highlighting the ecological basis of conjugality: how maleness and femaleness run through all cultures and faiths, as well as the natural world. (Jonathan Lord Sacks, the former chief rabbi to the United Kingdom, offered an account of marriage that began with what he claimed was the first-ever act of copulation—by prehistoric Scottish fish.) To loud applause, Francis described how the collapse of family and marriage under pressure from a "throwaway culture" advanced under "the flag of freedom" had caused "spiritual and material devastation to countless human beings, especially the poorest and most vulnerable." But he went on to point out that this was "an ecological crisis; for social environments, like natural environments, need protection." Equating the two environments was a subtle but clear shift, and the applause was more muted.

Francis needed, for the sake of the church's credibility, to challenge American conservative double standards, but his main aim was to take ecology where science couldn't: into the realm of the sacred. Science could pinpoint the "is" but not the "ought"; it could inform, but not move to act. It could shout and sound the alarm, but it could not ask people to care about what they did not love.

This was a point made by climate scientists themselves. One of the great oceanographers of modern times, Walter Munk, remarked in a Vatican conference in 2014 that global warming could only be overcome by "a miracle of love and unselfishness." Media stories of endangered minorities and species appealed to classically liberal moral concerns but often left religious people unmoved. A Stanford University study published a few months before *Laudato si'* came out showed that a message centered on purity and protecting God's creation from desecration would resonate deeply with religious sensibilities, moving people both to accept the evidence and to act on it.

That meant providing a new narrative that transcended liberal ecology, one that could take the polarity of respect for nature on the one hand and

respect for human uniqueness on the other and create a new synthesis beyond the dialectically opposed ideologies of biocentrism and anthropocentrism. *Laudato si'* called this new thinking "integral ecology" because it offered a unified moral narrative. Humankind was called to be a custodian of creation, rather than its arrogant overlord; human beings were interconnected with, and biologically dependent upon, our fellow species. All of us were God's creatures. Thus *Laudato si'* would be the first authoritative Catholic document to teach, unequivocally and emphatically, the intrinsic goodness of nonhuman animals, making animal welfare a prolife issue.

Integral ecology also enabled Francis to position the global church at the heart of a drive to respect the divinely gifted design of love and truth in every "environment." Whether in the natural world, the family, or urban spaces, integral ecology offered a lens with which to judge the misuse of human autonomy and the idolatry of power. It was a challenge both to prolife, pro-family conservatives to respect the integrity of the natural world, and to environmental campaigners to safeguard the institutions and laws that protect human life and family. In this sense, *Laudato si'* has been key to Francis's evangelization call. The purpose of the church in the contemporary world is not to dominate but to serve, to reveal a loving Creator who cares deeply about His creation.

*Laudato si'* wasn't addressed only to the bishops and faithful, or even—as some encyclicals have been—to all "people of goodwill," but to everyone on the planet. The pope was inviting every human being to join in a new great task of collaboration with their Creator and with each other, one that was about "ecology" in the original Greek sense of *oikos*, meaning "home." At the church of San Damiano in Assisi, Jesus appeared to St. Francis to ask him to repair His church. Now a pope named after St. Francis was asking humanity to repair God's world.

According to Pablo Canziani, an Argentine atmospheric physicist who studies climate change, Francis's genius was to discern the moment when science and religion were reaching out to each other, ready for a partnership that could enable new ways of seeing among the mass of citizens of the world, and so halt the hurtling train of consumption and destruction. That new lens starts with the anguished realization that something vital has been lost and leads to a conviction that things have to be done differently to get it back. The old-fashioned word for this is "conversion."

Understanding what got lost and when is crucial to the backstory of *Laudato si'*. Nature was once something sacred, to be respected and cooperated with. But then came the triumph of science and industry on the backs of a population explosion and economic activity allied to the raw power of *techne*. "We went from one extreme to the other without finding the midpoint," Canziani explains in his office in Buenos Aires, "and now we're on a path of destruction." That loss is the theme of Romano Guardini's extraordinary texts, *The End of the Modern World* (1956) and its accompanying essay, *Power and Responsibility* (1961), which took as their subject what the German theologian saw as the central question of the age: the mindset of power shaped by technocracy.

In a 1989 lecture at the Colegio del Salvador in Buenos Aires on the need for a new political anthropology, Bergoglio quoted the books, describing Guardini as "the prophet of postmodernity" for identifying how the rapid development of technology over two hundred years, accelerated by globalization, had brought humanity to a fork in the road of history. Guardini's thesis was key not just to the narrative of *Laudato si'*, which regularly quotes *The End of the Modern World*, but also to how Francis saw the encyclical's purpose: to help humanity grasp that the choice was annihilation or conversion.

The German theologian's account centers on the radical sundering of Creator and created. Where premoderns saw nature as an expression of the divine, and saw themselves as an organic part of nature, now people asserted themselves *over* nature in search of their well-being. As the world ceased to be God's creation, it could be possessed and plundered with new know-how. Guardini saw a paradox in the autonomous rationality that underpinned this shift: that man's bid for power would render him ever more subject to a power not his own. Such a power would increasingly enslave humankind by tempting it with limitless possibility, like the forbidden fruit offered by the serpent in Eden.

Guardini foresaw that power itself would become increasingly depersonalized, emptying itself of moral sensibility, of empathy and compassion. Man had come to believe the lie that he, not God, was the author of his own creation, and over time his freedom would be undone, ironically, by his autonomy. Foreseeing that humanity "will be free to further his lordship of creation, carrying it even to its last consequences," Guardini observed that this mastery would be open to him because he

**Whether in the natural world, the family, or urban spaces, integral ecology offered a lens with which to judge the misuse of human autonomy and the idolatry of power.**

"has permitted himself utter freedom: the freedom to determine his own goals, to dissolve the immediate reality of things, to employ its elements for the execution of his own ends." Increasingly, he would do these things "without any consideration for what had been thought inviolate or untouchable in nature." The effect would be to sunder the very bonds that held people together.

Rejecting the optimism of the postwar world, Guardini predicted with remarkable clarity that the forces that led to Auschwitz and the Gulag would accelerate as family, tribe, church, and nation continued to fall apart. The era of the totalitarian state would give way to the totalitarianism of economic and corporate power: with the dissolution of the bonds holding people together in families, institutions, and nations, humanity would be increasingly destabilized and dominated by the forces of technology and finance. Guardini saw at the end of the road what the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman would memorably call "the liquid society," and even named its symptoms: a time of mass migrations, social breakdown, and the collapse of grand narratives, in which fluidity takes over from stability as the new norm of human existence. It is to this world—ours now—that Francis in *Laudato si'* has offered the church's first comprehensive response.

Francis agrees with Guardini that the real drama of postmodernity turns not on technology per se but on the mindset of power that flourishes in a technocratic age. In the Incarnation, Guardini observed, God had revealed true power, which is the power of service, in which freedom is subject to and constrained by the essence of things and the limits of human nature. Jesus' unmasking of the false power of domination and violence was the triumph of the Cross, his kenosis, which Guardini calls "supreme power converted into humility."

Hence the hidden hope of *Laudato si'*: the alternative modernity it points to, as, with greater ecological awareness, humanity awakens to the false promises of technocracy and consumerism. Francis trusts that the very technocracy laying waste to the Christian legacy will also awaken Christians from their slumber. As love disappeared from the face of the public world, Guardini foresaw, it would throw into relief "the courage of the heart born from the immediacy of the love of God as it was made known in Christ."

This revelation would be accelerated and assisted by secularization. As the unbeliever learned to live honestly without religion, the church, unshackled from law and culture, would be better able to contradict the surrounding ethos. The authentic Christian witness—concrete and close, authentic and "organic"—would contrast ever more with the temptation "to erect a culture on rational and technical foundations alone." The drama of Western postmodernity would unfurl in the ever starker contrast between the technocratic paradigm on the one hand and a renewed Christianity on the other. Either humanity would be saved by integrating and subordinating the new power of the *techne*, or it would surrender to that power and perish.

Guardini closed with an intriguing intuition: that as people become ever more governed by forces they cannot control, they would turn to a "great man." His imagined leader—whether in the world of politics or religion, he does not say—understands "how to subordinate power to the true meaning of human life and works." Free from the modern dogma of progress, comfortable with technology but not in thrall to it, and thus capable of establishing an authority that respects human dignity and creating a social order in which "God is acknowledged as the living norm and point of reference for all existence," the great man (or woman) needed for our time, he concluded, would be able to grasp "Christianity's inmost secret: humility."

Is Francis that "great man"? In his mass of inauguration on the Feast of Saint Joseph, March 19, 2013, the new pope's homily was precisely on this topic of authentic power as service, a power of nurture that can midwife a new social order.

It was a social order in which government had an important role, checking the forces of technocracy and protecting the various environments, human and biological, urban and rural, that are necessary for human flourishing. Just as Jacques Maritain's "integral humanism" in the 1940s offered a postwar Catholic vision of a European democracy open to God, in contrast to the prevailing liberal individualism and socialist collectivism, Francis's "integral ecology" offers a vision of social and economic organization underpinned by the gift logic of the Christian tradition as an alternative to the dominant technocracy. It is integral because it respects the organic links of existence. In speaking of the "environment," Francis wrote in *Laudato si'* that "what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it." He went on:

> Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are

part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behavior patterns, and the ways it grasps reality. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions that consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis that is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.

A reinvigoration of the very purpose of statecraft was called for. Government could no longer be reduced to an ineffectual referee overseeing a Darwinian struggle of rivals, but must act to foster many "ecologies" in the face of the technocratic tide. That meant, for example, protecting the value and vocation of work by containing the power of corporations and creating jobs through small-scale businesses and producers; fostering the values and identity of peoples and cultures and their ancestral lands; bolstering urban spaces where communities can flourish; as well as ensuring decent housing, good public transport, clean air, and the integration of rundown urban areas.

In chapter five of *Laudato si'* Francis asked: If increased production and consumption lead to a deterioration in the quality of life of the poor and the degradation of the environment, why call it progress? If a company swells its profits at the expense of future resources or the health of the environment, should we consider this growth a success? Creativity was needed, along with an openness to new possibilities, to consider ways of investing that created jobs, made energy more efficient, and reduced consumption in the rich world to allow poorer places to develop. "We know how unsustainable is the behavior of those who constantly consume and destroy," he argued, "while others are not yet able to live in a way worthy of their human dignity."

The idea that decreased growth in rich parts of the world was necessary to allow poorer places to prosper went directly against the core dogma of trickle-down economics. Popes had long been skeptical of that dogma. As Francis pointed out in *Evangelii gaudium*, rather than the money trickling down, the glass of wealth usually just gets bigger. But *Laudato si'* did not enter into the complex question of wealth creation. Its role was to acknowledge the reality that the very poor were staying poor while the rich got richer and to call for it to be addressed. But for many on the Catholic right in America, even that was intolerable.

Pope Francis celebrating Mass in Tacloban, Philippines, during Tropical Storm Mekkhala, January 2015.

CNS PHOTO / PAUL HARING

Yet the evidence was clear: the shift in wealth from labor to capital, along with the stagnation of wages and spiraling corporate profits, the increase in inequality and the growing exclusion of the poor, showed that globalization had gone wrong. Coordinated global policies were needed that started from the planet as a whole. Developing countries were owed a great debt, the pope said in *Laudato si'*, because the countries where the most important reserves of the biosphere are found were fueling the development of richer countries at the cost of the former's present and future. Hence wealthy countries should pay their "ecological debt" to poor countries "by significantly limiting their consumption of nonrenewable energy and by assisting poorer countries to support policies and programs of sustainable development." Francis described the planet as a single "homeland" that called for "one world, with a common plan." For the economist Jeffrey Sachs, this was the most important phrase in a document he praises as "magnificent" and "breathtaking."

After listing all the areas in which not just

cooperation but "a global consensus" would be necessary, Francis called for a "true world political authority" capable of enforcing international agreements. The idea—greeted with derision in some quarters—was based on a longstanding principle of Catholic social teaching mooted by John XXIII and endorsed by Benedict XVI in *Caritas in veritate* in precisely the words Francis used. That principle was "subsidiarity"—namely, that governance should be at a level appropriate to the task. Usually this was a call for higher authorities to devolve down, but it could equally signal the need for new oversight bodies. It had long been axiomatic to the Vatican that only global rules implemented by transnational authorities were capable of meeting border-blind challenges, not just to police drug trafficking, tax evasion, and terrorism, but to coordinate policies of common human concern such as migration and the environment.

"Politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy," Francis declared as a general principle, adding that it was time to reject what he called "a magical conception of the market, which would suggest that problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals."

In the final chapter of the encyclical, Francis urged his readers to accept "that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it." He went on to earn a standing ovation from religious and ethically committed people everywhere when he added: "We have had enough of immorality and the mockery of ethics, goodness, faith and honesty. It is time to acknowledge that lighthearted superficiality has done us no good." Both the planet and the poor had suffered from an egocentric culture of self-gratification. "The mindset that leaves no room for sincere concern for the environment is the same mindset that lacks concern for the inclusion of the most vulnerable members of society," Francis wrote. The lack of concern was creating a state of lawlessness. Where the state failed to take responsibility, business groups or organized-crime syndicates stepped into the vacuum. Corporations concerned only with financial gain and a politics concerned merely with retaining or increasing power would fail to rescue humanity from the abyss it faced. Francis warned that "politics and the economy tend to blame each other when it comes to poverty and environmental degradation." That was no longer good enough.

Having argued in *Laudato si'* that a lack of agreement on curbing global warming was a failure of technocratic politics, Francis invited the world's leaders to prove politics could raise its game. *Laudato si'* was the first papal document ever to be released with a view to influencing a specific political event: the weeklong meeting in early December 2015 of 190 world leaders in Paris.

It was known as COP21 because it was the twenty-first yearly session of the "Conference of the Parties" to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Efforts to meet that convention's goals through global agreements had thus far stumbled, and the opportunity for action was fading fast. *Laudato si'* had put presidents and prime ministers on notice: humanity could not tolerate nations putting their own interests before the global common good. "Those who will have to suffer the consequences of what we are trying to hide," Francis warned, "will not forget this failure of conscience and responsibility."

He repeated this now-or-never, do-or-die message in one-on-one meetings with world leaders over the following months, as well as in a series of high-profile interventions on his trips. In addresses in Latin America, before the U.S. Congress, at the world headquarters of the United Nations, and finally in a speech at the UN's African base in Nairobi, Kenya, days before the summit opened, he held political leaders' feet to the fire, urging them, in effect, to examine their consciences before the tribune of history.

Failure to reach agreement would be "catastrophic," he said in Nairobi, where he called for a new global energy system that made "little or no" use of carbon. He asked the world's leaders to deliver a threefold agreement that would lessen the impact of global warming, fight poverty, and ensure respect for human dignity. The presidents of the world's five continental associations of Catholic bishops meanwhile backed his call for "an enforceable agreement that protects our common home and all its inhabitants." Ecclesiologically, this was the first glimpse of a future of regional patriarchates.

By then the church's base was being mobilized by an unprecedented startup network of hundreds of organizations in the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM), formed at the end of 2014 by Tomás Insua, a young Argentine studying climate-change policy at Harvard's Kennedy School. While working for Google Buenos Aires, Insua used to spend weekends in church projects among the poor. His ecological conversion came after the

tech giant sent him to its office in Singapore, from where he traveled with his wife to the Philippines. There they saw the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan, which had slammed into the islands in Tacloban in late 2013, killing more than six thousand people and displacing 4.1 million. "It opened my eyes wide," he told me, "to see that climate change is about social justice."

Studying climate policy at Harvard the following year, Insua was thrilled at the news of the pope's forthcoming encyclical but dismayed to find that secular green groups and other faiths and denominations were far more excited about it than were the Catholics. Of the 1,500-odd organizations taking part in the global climate march in New York in September 2014, just two or three had anything to do with the Catholic Church, while on campus, he found the Protestants and Hindus far more engaged than his coreligionists. After meeting with Canziani in Buenos Aires that fall, Insua put together a network to leverage global parish-level pressure for a deal in Paris a year later.

The GCCM launched in January 2015 with the backing of the archbishop of Manila, Cardinal "Chito" Tagle, who presented Francis with the network's foundational statement as the pope arrived in the Filipino capital from Colombo, Sri Lanka. The cornerstone of the papal trip, which would set a new record for the largest-ever gathering—more than six million people at the closing Mass in Manila—was a visit to the typhoon-devastated area that had so moved Insua. Francis braved a tropical storm to reach Tacloban, cutting short his trip to avoid the worst of the weather from a new hurricane that tore down scaffolding at his Mass venue, killing a pilgrim. In the howling wind and rain he met the typhoon victims, whose pain, he said in a homily, had silenced his heart.

He made no mention of climate change, but he hardly needed to. The angry winds spoke for him. For a country averaging twenty-two typhoons a year, a future of more high-intensity storms from a warming planet was an appalling prospect. Ever since "What is happening to our beautiful land?"—the Filipino bishops' 1988 cri de coeur quoted in both *Evangelii gaudium* and *Laudato si'*—the church in the world's fourth-largest Catholic country had been at the forefront of the call to action on climate change. Now the Filipino bishops led the mobilization for the GCCM-organized global petition, which, by the time Insua presented it to President François Hollande in December, had gathered close to a million signatures.

A few weeks earlier, the global climate march had again taken place across the world. This time around 40,000 of the 800,000 taking part were Catholics mobilized by the church. The GCCM petition, along with Francis's pressure on COP21, were key to producing the Paris Agreement—particularly the more ambitious target of limiting the increase in global temperature in this century to 1.5 degrees Celsius, to be achieved mainly by polluting nations pledging to pull away from fossil fuels.

**Stories circulated of Francis making urgent phone calls to break eleventh-hour deadlocks, urging whatever was needed—boldness, flexibility, or generosity—for the sake of the Paris Agreement.**

On the night of December 8, 2015, as the world's leaders in Paris haggled, a three-hour slideshow of stunning photos of the natural world was projected onto St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. It was the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. It was also the opening of the Jubilee of Mercy, a year called by Francis to celebrate God's loving embrace of His creation. As yawning lions and electric-blue fish slid over the venerable façade, the square filled with the squawking and clatter of birds and insects. There could be no doubt, now, where the Catholic Church stood on the great issue of the age.

Like a windhover, *Laudato si'* circled above the climate summit. Al Gore, the former vice president and Nobel Prize–winning activist, said later that the encyclical had been crucial in leading the world to commit to addressing the climate crisis ahead of the Paris Agreement. Lord Nicholas Stern, the World Bank economist, said it was "quite extraordinary in changing the weight of the argument." Stories circulated of Francis making

urgent phone calls to break eleventh-hour deadlocks, urging whatever was needed—boldness, flexibility, or generosity—for the sake of the agreement. The pope had a "huge role to play" in the world coming together in Paris, says Jeffrey Sachs, who was stunned by how many country delegations mentioned the encyclical in Paris. The Philippine delegation in particular used the GCCM petition to help raise the ambition in Paris, persuading Catholic-majority nations that what had been seen as an unfeasible target the year before, the Holy See–backed target of 1.5 degrees, was now the benchmark. According to Tony Annett, a climate-change specialist who worked with Sachs at Columbia University's Earth Institute, "The common wisdom is that, without *Laudato si'*, it is far from sure that the Paris agreement would have been signed."

It wasn't just the activists and the experts who were impressed. *Laudato si'* was by a long shot the most widely read papal document in history. Four years after its publication it remains the most quoted encyclical ever. Far outside the Catholic fold, people were blown away by its tone, at once tender and caustic, apocalyptic and hopeful, and by the way that it doesn't just give a reading of the situation but spells out concrete actions, something unprecedented in the history of papal social teaching. According to Sachs, "it's a papal encyclical, but it's also a document you can teach in a sciences graduate course, in a public-policy course, in a theology course, in a moral philosophy course, in a diplomacy course—and every one would meet the standards of rigor. It is a most remarkable document, and an essential document for our time."

Its impact on the church has been mixed so far—especially in the United States. A Yale University study a month before the Paris meeting showed a significant increase in the number of American Catholics who recognized global warming, and a Georgetown University poll revealed that Catholics were now more likely to be concerned about climate change than any other U.S. Christian group. There have been new shoots of activity across the U.S. church: talks in parishes and schools that led to "green teams," religious orders disinvesting in fossil fuels, and solar panels replacing tiles on the roofs of diocesan buildings.

But while the organizers of the Yale study later said Francis had had a "significant impact on public opinion" on climate change during and after his September 2015 visit, six months afterward it was not clear how much more likely Catholics were than other Americans to buy fewer presents, let alone recycle, compost, carpool, switch off lights or the air-conditioning. Such acts, *Laudato si'* had urged in its final chapter, were capable of changing the world, for "they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread." It wasn't just the Americans who were slow to change their habits. In February 2019, the pope told moral theologians that it was rare, in the sacrament of reconciliation, to hear someone confess to an act of violence against nature and creation. "We do not yet have awareness of this sin," he told them. "It is your task to do this."

Yet it is now clear where the church stands. The decision by President Donald Trump in June 2017 to withdraw from the Paris Agreement was described as "deeply troubling" by the U.S. bishops, whose call for the U.S. government to recommit to combat climate change quickly gained the support of close to eight hundred major Catholic institutions, including dozens of dioceses, hundreds of parishes and religious communities. Worldwide, more than fifty major Catholic organizations, including banks with more than $7.5 billion on their books, have stepped away from dirty energy. And the church played a key role at the December 2018 COP24 summit in Katowice in holding world leaders' feet to the fire.

Francis, too, has kept up the pressure, speaking out on the blight of plastics in the seas and convening a major meeting at the Vatican of oil-company executives and investors, telling them that the world has to switch to clean energy if it is to avoid catastrophe. "Civilization requires energy," he warned them, "but energy use must not destroy civilization."

On April 16, 2019, Francis met a pigtailed Swedish teenager with Asperger Syndrome in St. Peter's Square. The sixteen-year-old Greta Thunberg, inspiration of climate protest strikes across the world, had become the conscience of a new generation demanding from adults that they act. The old pope was beaming, and had just one message to her: "Go on, go on, continue," he told her. Thunberg was overjoyed. "Thank you for standing up for the climate, for speaking the truth," she told him. "It means a lot."

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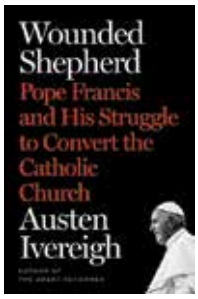


**WOUNDED SHEPHERD**

Pope Francis and His Struggle to Convert the Catholic Church

AUSTEN IVEREIGH

Henry Holt & Co., $14.99, 352 pp.

*An interview with David W. Tracy*

# In Praise of Fragments

**Kenneth L. Woodward**

*Father David W. Tracy, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, is an internationally known and esteemed scholar and teacher. He has lectured at fifty-five colleges and universities in the United States and around the world, including the University of Edinburgh, where he delivered the prestigious Gifford Lectures in 2000. Tracy is widely regarded as one of the most creative and influential theologians of the past half-century. Now eighty years old and Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago, where he taught for thirty-eight years, Tracy is the author of four books and some two hundred essays. In addition to his doctorate in sacred theology from the Gregorian University in Rome, he has fourteen honorary degrees and has served on the editorial boards of eight scholarly publications. In 1982 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, one of the few Catholic priests to be so honored.*

*This fall the University of Chicago Press will publish two volumes of essays by Tracy, the first new books of his to appear in twenty-five years. Earlier this year he lectured at universities in Vienna and Zagreb—another sign that his health, never terribly robust, has returned. And so has his scholarly production. It seemed a good time, then, to call on Tracy and catch up on his thinking, and on the progress of what he calls "the big book."*

*Upon entering his roomy apartment in Hyde Park, which David shares with his brother, Alan, the first thing that strikes a visitor's eye is a paint-flecked, somewhat injured fourteenth-century wooden French Madonna with Child adorning the vestibule table. The rooms beyond are wide and warm, the furniture mostly of the comfortably stuffed sort that welcomes a reader—or a dozer. Like the late John Updike, Tracy uses a different desk or patch of dining-room table for each lecture, essay, book, or other project he is working on. As for reading, he routinely does that until four in the morning. The next day begins five hours later.*

**KENNETH L. WOODWARD:** David, the University of Chicago Press is about to publish two books by you, the first, they say, in twenty-five years. Both are collections of essays, some of them written as recently as last year. To quote a line from Yeats, "Speech after long silence; it is right." Volume One is titled *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time*. Why fragments, and what is the existential situation of our time that you're referring to?

**DAVID TRACY:** "Fragments" is a category I developed some years ago. It was started as a major category by the German Romantics in the late eighteenth century. And of course it eventually became very popular with the literary modernists and even more with the postmodern writers who typically write in fragmentary ways. I defend it as a way to break totalities, to fragment all totality systems and open them to infinity, which has become a major category for my work. In my opinion, all our traditions are in fragments. People like T. S. Eliot and others thought that was unfortunate—his famous line is "these fragments I have shored against my ruins." I don't think of fragments in that way. Sometimes,

Photo of David Tracy by Alan Thomas

of course, fragmentation can be negative. But in fact, the traditions—in philosophy, theology, the arts—have *always* been in fragments.

**KW:** For example?

**DT:** Well, no one uses the entire Bible. No one uses all of Greek philosophy. Given our temperament, or needs, or our culture's needs, we all choose particular fragments of the great traditions that we think are exceptionally valuable right now. And therefore I find fragments a very valuable category that helps people, especially in theology, to understand that one can be cognizant of and faithful to the fundamental Christian tradition, but also to realize it's not really possible to do the entire tradition. I believe it would take about seven or eight lifetimes to do the whole of Christian tradition—even just the theological part of it.

**KW:** What do you mean "do" the whole tradition?

**DT:** To really absorb, appropriate, and articulate the whole tradition. But that's not necessary.

**KW:** It sounds to me that this approach is, in some sense, the form fitting the content.

**DT:** It is. You're right.

**KW:** In *After Virtue,* Alasdair MacIntyre lamented, like Eliot, the fact that all we have available now are fragments of previous moral traditions that turn up in classrooms like potshards that archeologists cannot make cohere. Clearly, MacIntyre is not fond of fragments.

**DT:** I like MacIntyre's work very much. I think he is one of the best living Christian thinkers. But he himself is not doing the *whole* tradition. He even says [in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*] that there are too many Thomists. He's doing those aspects of Thomism that he finds particularly valuable for our own problems now. And that's what I think everyone does whether they realize it or not. So by emphasizing, as I do, and developing the notion of fragments, I think I'm giving people a new way to look at our traditions, and it's a liberating way. It's not to shore up our ruin, it's to undo the ruin and find new resources.

For example, I've done work on reception theory and the four gospels. For first-century Christians, Matthew was the most important gospel, because it's the gospel that tells a new community how to be a community, how to have new laws. It's the most Jewish of the gospels. Luke-Acts is the gospel that appeals especially to Christians today concerned with social justice, in another way to Pentecostals focused on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and in yet a third way to ordinary, everyday Christians. It tells one how to live a sensible Christian life. Mark, which used to be thought the simplest of the gospels, is in fact now considered by many postmodern thinkers the most fragmentary of the gospels.

**KW:** How so?

**DT:** It's the gospel that doesn't quite end. It's the gospel that has a radical interruption in the middle with the apocalyptic passages in Chapter 24. And unlike Luke, where Jesus is a prophet people basically understand, especially the disciples, in Mark the disciples don't seem to understand anything. He's understood by the poor, by the marginal, and by the demons. It's an amazing gospel. And John remains the great gospel of philosophers, theologians, and mystics. As Augustine rightly said, John is the gospel of love. For him, for Thomas, Eckhart, Schleiermacher, Hegel, [Karl] Rahner, [Bernard] Lonergan, John's the preferred gospel.

All this means is that we're fortunate as Christians to have four gospels. Actually, you should add Paul as the fifth, because he's so influential. And each of them is in a sense a fragment of the wider New Testament. And within each of them, there are certain fragments. I had to invent a neologism, which I regret, to say certain fragments become "frag-events." They become events that break totality, negate totality, fragment it, and open us to—

**KW:** What's wrong with totality?

**DT:** Totality closes. It won't allow the openness and the dynamism that I think is demanded of any great tradition. It tries to close it. Here I draw on modern systems theory where systems are understood as open. "Systems" does not mean what it used to mean in Whitehead's distinction between an assemblage, which is just a collection, and a system, which is a closed totality. That is not an ideal today, certainly not for me. The ideal is of course the whole, but the whole not as a totality but as infinite, dynamic, open.

**KW:** We've mentioned T. S. Eliot. As a critic he regularly invoked "the tradition," but as a poet you could say he wrote in fragments, which initially made him so hard to understand.

**DT:** Yes, Eliot famously wrote *The Waste Land* in pure fragments. It's perhaps the most fragmentary poem of the twentieth century. But even the *Quartets* are fragments, and not only Christian fragments, but Buddhist fragments (the pool in the first *Quartet*), Neoplatonist fragments, Aristotelian fragments, Hindu fragments. And unlike in *The Waste Land*, in the *Quartets*, Eliot was, in my opinion, able to provide the kind of systematic expression of the fragments. One of the most beautiful things in the *Quartets* is in the third *Quartet*, where he speaks of the "unattended moment, the moment in and out of time"—in other words, "fragments":

The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply

That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts.
These are only hints and guesses,
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.

I've never read a better *fragmentary* expression of the heart of Christianity, the Incarnation.

**KW:** Turning to the second part of your first-volume title, what do you mean by "The Existential Situation of Our Time"?

**DT:** For philosophers and theologians, I think, it's nihilism. The sense that there is no meaning. The sense of the absurdity and meaninglessness of life. Even if it's not brought to a theoretical level, when people live without religion, in my judgment, they eventually end up leading a nihilistic life, sometimes without knowing it. That's the intellectual situation.

The more important existential situation, I think, remains the massive global suffering that human beings face—both as whole cultures and groups and of course as individuals. Christian salvation, after all, is fundamentally about responding to the profound sense of transience—that *we* are transient, and everything we own or love is transient, including our cultures, and our traditions. And of course death, and facing death, which remains a great existential issue for every human being. I call these kinds of issues "limit" questions, limit experiences, limit situations. These ultimate questions that any thoughtful human being eventually asks. And *that* is our existential situation.

**KW:** Your second volume of essays deals with great thinkers from Augustine, Luther, and Erasmus to moderns like Rahner, your mentor Lonergan, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, Iris Murdoch, and Simone Weil. How do these essays relate to the big book, the magnum opus you've been working on?

**DT:** Well, I was reluctant to publish these essays but my editor and a couple of good friends basically prodded me forward and to my surprise it turned out to *help* the bigger book I've been working on, because instead of having to give a whole chapter on, say, Augustine, who's so central to my thinking, I can say "read these essays" in a footnote and then summarize it, and the same with all the other major figures.

**KW:** For a long time now, the quip on the street has been that the reason the "big book" you've been working on hasn't yet appeared is because every time you pick up a new book to read you rethink your project.

**DT:** Not *every* book, no. I thought about publishing the Gifford Lectures I gave in 1999 and 2000 as a book. I ended those lectures with two ideas that I still have in the "big book" I am working on. The first is the idea of the Incomprehensible God, especially as we find it in Dionysius the Areopagite and that whole tradition of negative or apophatic theology. The second is the notion of the Hidden God, especially as we find it in the profoundly Christian work of Luther, where God discloses God's self through contradictions—life through death, wisdom through folly, strength through weakness. And these in turn are enriched by Christianity's apocalyptic tradition.

**KW:** Apocalyptic?

**DT:** Yes, I don't think you can understand the New Testament, and therefore Christianity, without its strong apocalyptic tradition. And not just apocalyptic texts like Paul's Epistle to the Thessalonians, Matthew 24, almost the whole of Mark, and especially the *tremendum et fascinans* power of the Book of Revelation. The whole Christian Bible ends with that plaintive cry, "Come, Lord Jesus." Without its apocalyptic dimension, properly deliteralized of course, Christianity would settle down into a religion that has lost its sense of the *not yet*, and the existential sense that the Second Coming, like our own death, could happen at any time.

**KW:** Why didn't you publish those lectures as a book?

**DT:** I felt I still needed something to initiate the discussion, something that I would call philosophical theology. Something that would allow others besides Christian believers to enter into the discussion of God, especially of the Incomprehensible God or the Hidden God.

**KW:** And that something was…

**DT:** About ten years ago I hit upon the notion of the infinite. It's a notion, after all, in mathematics and physics and cosmology. And therefore it opens the discussion of God to those areas, which I've always loved, especially mathematics. The big book will provide an expansive understanding of the infinite, because I've now had all these years to trace through the history of the understanding of the infinite in philosophy and theology.

For example, Plato and Aristotle would not call the ultimate reality infinite because it's formless. God must be perfection, and for perfection you need form. So for Plato it became the form of the good beyond being, for Aristotle the unmoved mover. Plotinus is the first major philosopher to speak of the infinite as ultimate reality, along with the one and the good. And then you can trace through history why some do and some do not. To my knowledge, Gregory of Nyssa is the first major Christian theologian to say the infinite is the first primary name of God, and from that all the other names—being, the good, et cetera—come.

**KW:** So can we still expect three separate volumes on God, Christ, and the Spirit?

**DT:** Two, I think—most of it is already written. What I'm trying to do now is move from the category of the infinite, explaining it both in its relationship to space, time, and number, to the *absolute* infinite—a distinction Aristotle already had—which of course is God. And then, I try to show how the philosophical notion of the infinite can move, through Revelation, to the notion of infinite being, intelligence, and love—the Trinity. It's a difficult argument to make but that's the structure of it.

**KW:** So you rethought the whole project?

**DT:** I did, yes. Because you know, once you hit on a major idea, in this case the infinite, you have to rethink the whole project.

**KW:** Tell me about your experience of three years in a Buddhist-Christian dialogue. What kind of Buddhists were they?

**DT:** Mainly Japanese—Zen and Pure Land. There were one or two Theravāda Buddhists, plus some Westerners, especially from California. It was organized by John Cobb and Masao Abe, who had been raised Pure Land but became Zen. So the dialogue ceased to be serene when the Zen and Pure Land Buddhists argued with each other. It was almost like the old Protestant-Catholic debates that are now, happily, mostly gone. The Christians were representing our own theologies, not any church, and trying really to be challenged by the Buddhists.

We were all abstract types, we philosophical theologians. We wanted to discuss immediately God versus Emptiness as the names for ultimate reality. Abe and Cobb said, "No, you can't discuss that till the third year." The first year we discussed "What's the problem with human beings?" So the Buddhists discussed "What is primal ignorance, Avidyā?" The Christians discussed "What is sin, as a basic orientation?" The second year was "What's the response to this problem?" The Buddhists, of course, discussed "What is enlightenment?" The Christians—I gave one of the papers—discussed "What is redemption or salvation?" Only in the third year were we allowed to discuss what we all wanted to. But they were right to make us wait until we did those anthropological issues, before discussing Emptiness and/or God.

**KW:** What did you learn?

**DT:** At the end of the third year, everyone was to say what they thought they had learned. I said that one of the things I learned most, as a Westerner and as Christian theologian, was how to understand why someone would call ultimate reality "emptiness," or "radical impersonality." Furthermore, we all admitted—and this is the great importance of interreligious dialogue—that we also learned more about our own religion. Another thing I noticed: the Buddhists, unlike myself and the other Christians, had a way of incorporating their meditative practices into their metaphysics. I didn't know how to do that, but they helped me out, and now I'm better at it.

**KW:** You have long maintained that the Christian theologian addresses three publics—the academy, the church, and the wider public of the intellectually curious. But as I listen to you I am thinking: throughout the second half of the twentieth century there was a large general audience, including many *Newsweek* readers, for articles on theology. But today books on religion, not to mention theology, are rarely given notice in the *New York Times* Sunday Book Review or the *New York Review of Books*, or any other serious secular-review media. So how does the theologian address a public that doesn't seem to be paying any attention?

**DT:** The day of, say, Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, when theology was at the heart of a good deal of public discussion is, alas, over. Even the Catholic world of Vatican II, when Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan, Hans Küng, Edward Schillebeeckx, Johann Baptist Metz, and Gustavo Gutiérrez were all widely read and discussed, has faded. I must say I regret that.

**KW:** Don't we all.

**DT:** Part of what I'm trying to do with the notion of fragment in relation to all the religious traditions, not only the Christian, is to alert people that they have fragments they're not aware of that are real resources for their lives and for their thinking. And the notion of God as infinite allows a public discussion of the category "the infinite," which people *can* get interested in. You know, there's so much public interest in science, less so in mathematics, but science is also mathematical. And I hope there could be enough interest in that category to allow it to build into what I'm trying to do by answering the question "Why *name* God for the 'infinite'—rather than, say, the void, or the open, or being, or the good?"

**KW:** How would you describe yourself as a theologian?

**DT:** I would describe myself as a Christian theologian with the Catholic center of gravity. I am clearly Catholic, and at the same time I have tried to be not just ecumenical, which is maybe too easy a word, but to genuinely learn from the many Protestant traditions, and the Greek and Russian Orthodox traditions.

**KW:** What would you say to someone who asked: "David Tracy, do you believe that Christ is the one way of salvation?"

**DT:** For myself, Christ is the *decisive* way. And Jesus of Naz-

*I don't see a difficulty in affirming the other religions. But I do see a difficulty in just saying, as I think many now do, "Well, they're all the same. It's all just different ways up the same mountain." That's much too easy.*

areth is the unsubstitutable person who is the Christ, and Jesus Christ is God and man. Now, does that mean you can't honor other religious traditions? Certainly not. Because if you believe that Jesus Christ is the decisive manifestation of God, you have to honor that and ask others to honor it as what Christianity is about, which I think it is. So when you enter interreligious conversation, the dialogues that I spoke about as so important, I don't myself think that one should immediately say "pluralism." I'm pluralist on many things, but on that I think it's much more subtle, nuanced, and difficult. If you hold as traditional, Chalcedonian Christianity does, and I do, the centrality of Jesus Christ, it's more like *inclusive* Christianity. You're open to the other traditions, and in some way, Christ includes, welcomes. I don't believe in exclusivist Christianity.

**KW:** Exclusivist?

**DT:** "Exclusivist" usually means that only Christianity has a way of salvation and revelation. I don't think that's true. It has been for me the decisive, definitive way, but there are other ways. It's not the case that Jews and Muslims and Buddhists do not have a way either of salvation in monotheistic traditions, or of enlightenment in the more mystically inclined religions like Buddhism and Daoism. I believe that the Daoists and Buddhists *are* enlightened. And with enlightenment comes compassion, very much like Christians with salvation, which also includes enlightenment. I don't see a difficulty in affirming the other religions. But I do see a difficulty in just saying, as I think many now do, "Well, they're all the same. It's all just different ways up the same mountain." That's much too easy, much too simple. Especially if we take Christianity seriously in its central understanding of the decisive, unsubstitutable role of Jesus Christ.

**KW:** In the years since you wrote *The Analogical Imagination*, many Catholic writers and thinkers have come to equate the analogical imagination with the Catholic imagination. Should they?

**DT:** I don't.

**KW:** It probably goes back to your friend Andrew Greeley.

**DT:** He was a wonderful man, but on that, we always disagreed. The Catholic imagination is *an* analogical imagination, but it's not the only one. Liberal Protestantism, as distinct from Karl Barth Protestantism, is analogical. And so is a good deal of Anglican theology.

**KW:** This raises a question for me. Is there such a thing as the Protestant imagination or sensibility?

**DT:** Theologically, it's the sensibility derived from a notion of the complete sovereignty of God and one where Providence becomes Predestination. And for many Calvinists now, especially among Southern Baptists, it becomes *double* Predestination. That God not only predestined some to be saved, but also predestined others to be condemned. I personally find that theologically repulsive, to be honest.

**KW:** But you do run across it?

**DT:** Oh yes. It's even in the very late Augustine, we have to admit. It's certainly there in Calvin. Less so in Luther, but it's there. Karl Barth did a great thing within Protestant theology by challenging that, to the fury of many of his fellow Calvinists. He challenged it by making Christ the Predestined one, and therefore everything was to be understood Christo-centrically. That broke this unfortunate notion of double Predestination. To me, it's always interesting; when a belief system becomes weak or even goes away, the sensibility often lasts. And in the Calvinist sensibility, Predestination was replaced in artists like Melville and Hawthorne by something more like fate, Stoic fate.

**KW:** How about the influence of the Protestant sense of sin?

**DT:** Oh yes, a profound influence. The great distinction between classical Reformation theology and classical Catholic theology is that classical Catholic theology—including my own—is always based on the understanding

*I think, or at least I hope, that my generation is the last to speak of Christian theology only in terms of **one** of the great Christian traditions.*

of the relationship between nature and grace. Aquinas has a maxim that I think most Catholic thinkers believe—certainly I do: "Grace does not destroy nature but perfects it." The Reformation, from Luther to Calvin up to Karl Barth, does not hold to that. They believe in sin-grace. Or more accurately, it's grace-nature-grace versus grace-sin-grace. Because, as Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky rightly see, you cannot understand what Christians mean by sin unless you understand what they mean by grace. By sin, they don't mean individual moral faults. They mean a whole orientation that is twisted, or as Luther brilliantly said, "The self is always turned in upon itself." You can't escape. That's what sin is. It's like the Buddhist notion of Avidyā, of primal ignorance. It doesn't mean "If you could think a little more clearly, you'd be all right." No, there's a primal ignorance. It means there's this *primal* problem of human beings—that, to put it in my New York way, we're all damaged goods.

Now, how damaged are we is the question. I'm with people like Aquinas and other Catholics, but not the late Augustine. The early Augustine, yes, who came up with the valuable thought "We are wounded," both in intellect and will. But we're not totally corrupt, totally damaged, like Luther and Calvin tended to think. If you deal with the Protestants' sin-grace paradigm as the central paradigm for understanding human beings, it's very different than if you deal with nature-grace as the paradigm. I believe that grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it.

**KW:** We've been talking about literature here, and there are some things about David Tracy that most folks don't know—that you have taught Shakespeare, you've taught other literature, you've taught history. Not many theologians do this. Not many theologians are capable of doing it. I understand your pointing, as you do in *The Analogical Imagination*, to literature and other art forms when you developed the idea of "the classic." But what does the experience of teaching Shakespeare's plays, or periods of history (rather than hermeneutics, say) bring to your work as a theologian?

**DT:** Maybe I can put it this way. The University of Chicago is an unusual university. And one of its unusual characteristics, which I came to love, is that besides the usual departments and schools like the Divinity School, it also has these degree-granting committees, where certain professors from different disciplines are invited to be together. I belonged to two of them.

The first, now defunct, was called the Committee on the Analysis of Ideas and Methods. It was founded by what was known as the Chicago Aristotelians—Richard McKeon, Wayne Booth, and others—and it really was wonderful. That was a great education, continuing the classical education I received in my youth.

**KW:** Where did you get that classical education?

**DT:** At the junior seminary in New York. Latin, Greek, philosophy, theology. There were so many priests then, unlike now, and many were well educated at top universities here and abroad.

**KW:** And the other Committee at Chicago?

**DT:** Even more interesting—it was the Committee on Social Thought. [The late sociologist] Robert Bellah, who was a member, called it a "*Salon des Refusés*"—from the Impressionist painters who were not allowed into the major exhibition, but had their own. And it was sort of an odd cast of characters from different disciplines. Leszek Kołakowski, Saul Bellow, Allan Bloom, Wendy Doniger. The discussions of student essays were really wonderful. Everyone there had their opinions—we had several Straussians, for example—but no one pushed their opinions when discussing student essays. I can remember them to this day—for example, discussions of Thucydides. They were just exceptionally good, as were the few students admitted to the program.

**KW:** Did you teach any courses through the Committee on Social Thought?

**DT:** Yes, one of my courses would be for the Committee.

And for fifteen years it was with my wonderful friend and mentor, the brilliant classicist David Grene, a translator of many of the Greek tragedies and of Herodotus. We taught the Greek tragedies, and some of Plato's dialogues, and Shakespeare, and Hopkins, and Donne. Another member was the wonderful poet Mark Strand, a former poet laureate of the United States. He and I taught a course on Emily Dickinson one year and one on Wallace Stevens another year. It was a great joy to see how a poet thinks, how a poet reads. He was a successor, in my opinion, to Wallace Stevens, who was such a great poet.

**KW:** As I recall, Stevens provided the title for one of your books: *Blessed Rage for Order*.

**DT:** Indeed. But you know what Mark would *not* do? He would not do my favorite poet, Yeats. And he had a good reason. He said, "I can't do Yeats. He would influence me too much." And I think that's true of theologians too. I've always been nervous doing certain theologians, like Meister Eckhart, afraid they would influence me too much. Like now, I'm finally writing about Eckhart and I think he's just incredible.

**KW:** As I recall, the Divinity School also encouraged team teaching.

**DT:** Yes, most of my courses were in the Divinity School, where I taught theology and philosophy of religion. I taught for many years with Paul Ricœur on hermeneutics and theology. He was writing his book on metaphor when I was writing mine on the analogical imagination. Metaphor and analogy go well together. And then Martin Marty and I did two or three years together teaching the major American religious thinkers. No one else in this country knows every Christian religion the way Marty knows them. He reads all these newspapers every community puts out—amazing. Teaching with him all those years was an education. I didn't know American religious history. And now I think I do.

**KW:** Over the course of your career, what theological tasks do you think have been essentially accomplished? And what remains to be done?

**DT:** Two things that I can think of, at least at the moment. The first is, I think, or at least I hope, that my generation is the last to speak of Christian theology only in terms of *one* of the great Christian traditions. I got a really good understanding of the Catholic tradition in my four years at the Gregorian University [in Rome]. Only later, after I came to the then-Protestant divinity school of the University of Chicago, did I learn a good deal of the Protestant tradition, and in the last eight or ten years, of the Orthodox tradition.

Secondly, I think, we're in a new world where, I hope, the old divisions of conservative and liberal mean less and less and less. Now what they need to do is converse more with one another and work together. For example, here at the University of Chicago one of my best friends is Jean-Luc Marion, who is the head of *Communio*, and I was on *Concilium*. And we joke that we're a two-person intra-Catholic ecumenical movement, because we're such good friends and we discuss our differences.

**KW:** Tasks to do?

**DT:** One thing is to expand really learning as much as one can of other religious traditions. The Christian medievals—Aquinas, Eckhart, all of them—were much more engaged with, and willing to learn from, the Jewish, especially Maimonides, and the Islamic, especially Avicenna, traditions. The medievals were quite remarkable in that way. And that's what we should be doing.

**KW:** There were also some medievals who managed to produce some magnificent art, like Chartres and Notre Dame Cathedral.

**DT:** Yes! One of the things theologians miss—many theologians, alas—is that in some periods, it's the great artists of the tradition who present the best theology. For example, the theology that Michelangelo expresses, in his Last Judgment frescos in the Sistine Chapel, as well as in his unfinished sculptures, is great theology—much greater than the official theologians of his period like Cajetan, who was a very good commentator on Thomas. A very bright man, but he wasn't Michelangelo. Similarly, Rembrandt expresses the genius of Calvinism on the sovereignty of God and the troubled character of human beings, especially in his wonderful self-portraits, better than did the Calvinists' official Synod of Dort that met in the same period.

**KW:** Where would you put Dante?

**DT:** Dante—he's incomparable. I think the most beautiful thing in Christianity I've ever read is the last line of *La Divina Comedia*: *"L'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle."* Love which moves the sun and all the stars. That's an extraordinary theological statement. That to me is the heart of Christianity.

**KW:** After the big book, have you thought of writing more?

**DT:** Maybe Mary. You know, I only recently realized I've never written anything on Mary.

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

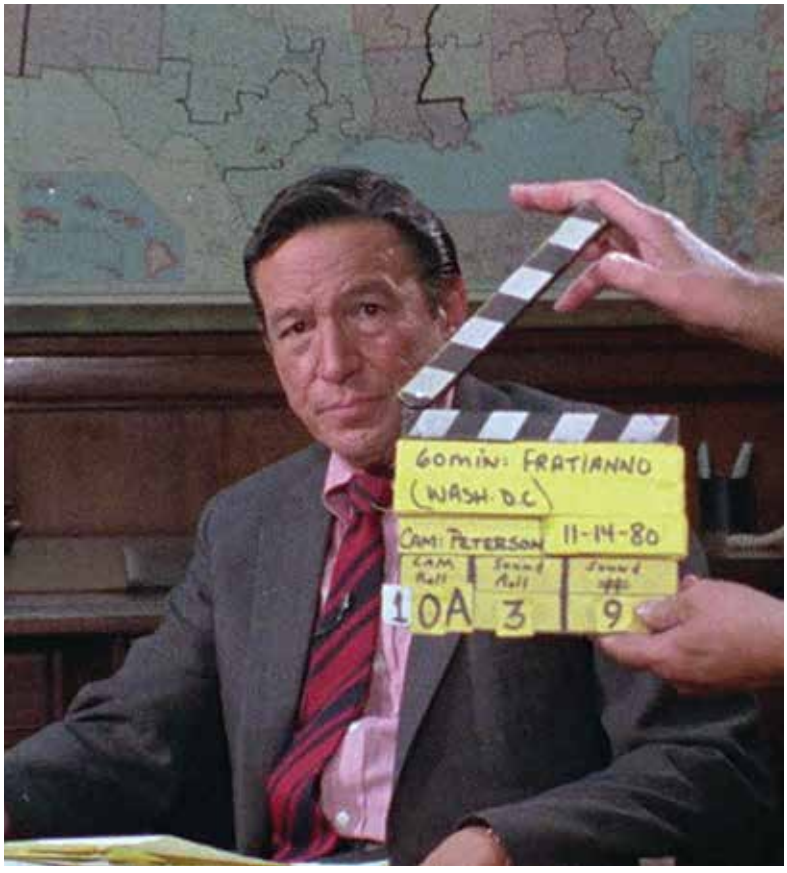
RAND RICHARDS COOPER

# From Muckraking to Clickbait

## 'Mike Wallace Is Here'

Could there be a more timely documentary about journalism, in our era of fake news, warring cable-news shows, and a president who routinely reviles the press as "the enemy of the people," than one chronicling the rise of *60 Minutes* and its star Mike Wallace?

Israeli director Avi Belkin reaches back to a time—it seems so long ago—when citizens not only trusted individual journalists, but invested the profession with a kind of collective public faith. Bolstered by the political drama of Watergate, journalists enjoyed an extended moment of high repute. We know the road from there: the rise of the internet and social media; mass attrition in the newspaper industry; increasing corporate pressure on the bottom line; the attenuation both of news cycles and consumer attention span; the toxic discourse of talk radio; steadily shrinking room for the very idea of mid-twentieth century journalistic objectivity; fiery partisanship and the emergence of advocacy journalism, and of the journalist herself as ideological gladiator.




COURTESY OF MAGNOLIA PICTURES

Wallace was right there in the middle of all of this—both an avatar of change and a significant contributor to it. Though his career began in radio, it achieved its fulfillment via television; it seems fair to say that his journalistic skills were actuated by, and never separable from, the medium and moment of TV performance. A journalist who loved the camera, master of the gracious-seeming overture followed by the sudden knife thrust, Wallace pursued his subjects with a greedy and gleeful mercilessness. He became the emblematic *60 Minutes* persona: relentless when it came to politics, endearingly naïve and at times ham-fisted in profiling artists, fawning when interviewing celebrities. In these attributes he held up a mirror to Americans themselves.

Belkin begins near the end (Wallace died in 2012 at ninety-three), with a late-career interview with Bill O'Reilly in which Wallace tut-tuts over clips of O'Reilly berating guests on his Fox show. "That's not an interview, that's a lecture," Wallace scolds. "You're not a journalist—you're an op-ed columnist." O'Reilly responds by sketching the argument for partisan journalism. "You have to engage nowadays, you have to challenge, you have to be provocative," he tells Wallace. And then—noting that *Playboy* magazine called him "the most feared interviewer since Mike Wallace"—O'Reilly offers a backhanded compliment. "You're the driving force behind my career," he says. "I always tell people, 'You got a problem with me? Blame Mike Wallace. He's responsible.'"

It's an adroit place to start, placing Wallace squarely in the lineage of today's raucous slugfests. O'Reilly is wrong, at least where manners are concerned; Wallace would never have yelled at an interviewee to "Shut *up*!" as O'Reilly frequently did. And yet the fundamental impulse is the same—to provoke, to annoy, to embarrass, and finally to destroy. Though his manner was polite, Wallace was out for the kill, and his avid instinct for blood in the water is what made him so feared. "How would you like it done to you?" he is asked, in a mid-career interview,

about his shark-like MO. "I wouldn't like it," he admits; and sure enough, when the tables are turned, and Wallace is asked how many times he has been married (answer: four), he bristles: "What possible relevance does that have?"

Following this extended preface, Belkin takes us back to the young Wallace, chronicling his early background in radio, then the motley array of chores he did in the dawning era of TV: game shows, live dramas, cigarette ads. In 1956 he hosted a WABD Channel 5 New York City program, *Night Beat*, on which he promised viewers "a direct, undiluted, unrehearsed, uncensored interview," adding, "my role is that of a reporter." The word "role" is significant. As his *60 Minutes* colleague Lesley Stahl points out in another interview (Wallace must be the most-interviewed interviewer of all time), Wallace began not in journalism, but in "show biz." "You're an *actor*," Stahl says, as he winces.

*Night Beat* interviews resembled police interrogations: dark room, bright lights, cigarette smoke, forceful questioning. The questions were blunt, often rude, and won Wallace the nickname "Mike Malice." *Night Beat* was followed by *The Mike Wallace Interview*, an ABC effort that cemented his name as a household word—we see Jack Benny joking about not going on the show, cackling, "He'll tear you to *shreds*!"—and was canceled amid controversies and lawsuits. Its demise sent Wallace back to hawking products on air. It's amusing to see this future scourge of the corrupt holding up a tube of "Revlon's new Lanolite Lipstick" and smiling gamely; the documentary reminds us of TV's roots in advertising, and pinpoints the essential Wallace not as an actor, really, but a pitchman.

Vowing to stop doing commercials and become "a serious reporter," Wallace in 1963 took a job with CBS News, joining a newsroom ruled by Cronkite, Sevareid, and Murrow (Wallace recalls his reception as "less than cordial"). Jumping into the middle of a fractious decade, he reported on political conventions, the civil-rights movement, urban riots, and Vietnam, which turned him from a hawk into a doubter and finally a dissenter. Interviewing Paul Meadlo, a soldier who participated in the My Lai massacre, he asks, "How do you shoot babies?" and Meadlo replies, with chilling casualness, "It's just one a' them things." In another clip, Wallace reviews the events of 1968—the war, the riots, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy—and summons bewilderment and despair. "What kind of country is the United States?" he asks. "What curious strain of violence is there in the American people?"

In 1968, CBS News producer Don Hewitt came up with the idea for a news magazine that would showcase Wallace doing his *Night Beat* style of interview. *60 Minutes* debuted that year, with Wallace and Harry Reasoner co-hosting. It stumbled along, with low ratings, until Watergate; the scandal transformed it, providing a rich cast of malefactors—Liddy, Colson, Haldeman, Ehrlichman—for Wallace to prosecute. One memorable episode shows Wallace listing a broadside of charges as Ehrlichman sits grimly, sweat overspreading his whole face. "Is there a question in there somewhere?" Ehrlichman finally asks. It is riveting television.

Belkin chronicles the show's expansion into what were essentially sting operations, uncovering kickbacks, scams, cover-ups, child sex rings and other malfeasances, frequently catching crooks red-handed, on air. Its popularity boomed, and Wallace became a celebrity. He provided the face for a sustained effort against the cigarette industry, whose flacks and hacks, rotely denying the cancer connection, made fine villains while allowing the show to buff its public-interest credentials (though the network cautiously withheld its story on tobacco-industry whistleblower Jeffrey Wigand, as Wallace fumed behind the scenes).

With time, the methods of *60 Minutes,* and the celebrity journalism it pro-

moted, sparked a backlash. Its own success threatened to drown it in a news glut, as news magazines proliferated and shaded more and more into talk shows. Belkin draws a clear line from Wallace to the Geraldo Riveras and Maury Poviches who followed. There was also the 1982 lawsuit by General William Westmoreland, who after a documentary on Vietnamese troop strength during the war charged CBS and Wallace with "a scurrilous attack on my personal integrity," calling the newsman "a disgrace to American journalism."

For those who grew up on *60 Minutes*, *Mike Wallace Is Here* serves up a greatest-hits of memorable interviews. There's Barbra Streisand, on how fear motivates her ("It's the energy behind doing your best work"); an elderly Eleanor Roosevelt ("Mrs. Roosevelt," Wallace says in a polite tone, "I think you will agree that a good many people hated your husband"); Marilyn Monroe, penetratingly reflective about the costs of celebrity; Malcolm X, who, asked how much daily danger he faces, smiles and answers, "I probably am a dead man already." Grilling President Richard Nixon about his lack of charisma, Wallace elicits the classic, self-pitying response: "Some public men are destined to be loved, and others are destined to be disliked." In Tehran, during the Iranian hostage crisis, he begins an interview with Khomeini by quoting Anwar Sadat calling the ayatollah "a lunatic," sparking gasps among Khomeini's retainers. But my favorite is an interview with the chain-smoking Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci. Wallace asks Fallaci if being a journalist makes her feel powerful, and she laughs, spewing cigarette smoke dismissively. "Oh no!", she says. "We are like dogs. Bow wow wow! Maybe someone listens."

Fallaci calls herself a historian, refusing to back down when Wallace challenges her. "A journalist is a historian who writes history in the moment that it happens," she insists. "And it is the damn best way to write history." Wallace may have challenged her for the sake of a lively exchange, but he surely agreed. Indeed, his whole career seems to have been designed to place him in that live, history-recording moment. Throughout, Wallace insists that his aggressive approach to his subjects represented more than mere pleasure in confrontation. "Don't confuse anger or hostility," he says in an interview with Larry King, "with an insistence on getting to the bottom line, on getting facts."

It's a crucial message for an era such as ours, when political life grows ever more raucous, the web allows for the propagation of viral conspiracy theories, and the efficacy and very existence of facts comes under daily assault. This documentary shows Wallace contributing both good and ill to the evolution of American journalism. What Bill O'Reilly failed to grasp is the difference between muckraking journalism—a practice with a long and gloried tradition—and today's buzz-oriented, clicks-and-eyes-driven entertainment journalism. Belkin makes clear that Wallace contributed a great deal to blurring that line, but that ultimately he remained a real journalist. His sense of mission could be grandiose. Thus we see the young host on the set of *Night Beat*, warning his viewers about how authoritarian governments crack down on journalists: "A nation's press," he intones, "is a good yardstick of a nation's health."

How is our health right now? The prognosis would not seem bright. A deft segue in the film cuts from Spiro Agnew in 1969, lambasting the liberal press for "a distorted view of America," to candidate Trump at a 2016 rally, pointing out and deriding "the fake news media—look at them back there!" Though Wallace didn't live to see the rise of Trump, he viewed our era darkly. *Are things in America getting better or getting worse?* he was asked toward the end of his life. "Oh, worse," he said, without hesitation. "Definitely getting worse."

**RAND RICHARDS COOPER** *is a contributing editor to* Commonweal.

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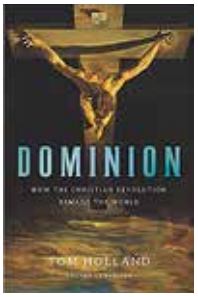
# Inescapable Influence

COSTICA BRADATAN

"It is the incomplete revolutions which are remembered; the fate of those who triumph is to be taken for granted," writes Tom Holland in his new book, *Dominion*. Illustrations of this pithy observation aren't hard to find. Just a couple of years ago we celebrated the centenary of the October Revolution, which turned out to be not only incomplete but, in the long run, a spectacular failure. One might even venture to say that the noisier the remembrance, the more dubious the event being remembered. Yet who doesn't love a good failure once in a while? Be that as it may, Holland's book is not about failed or incomplete revolutions, but about one that has succeeded, reshaping the world in a decisive, if sometimes unassuming, manner.

Indeed, the "Christian revolution" has proved so successful in remaking the West that, two millennia on, it has become virtually impossible to separate Christianity from Western civilization. Whether we like it or not, we in the West inhabit a world that remains structured by Christian assumptions and informed by Christian ideas. Political and civic institutions, legal systems, codes of behavior, artistic tastes, practices of everyday life—they all, in one way or another, visibly or invisibly, bear the mark of Christ. The Christian revolution has been so complete, observes Holland, that two thousand years after his birth, it is no longer necessary to believe "that he rose from the dead to be stamped by the formidable—indeed the inescapable—influence of Christianity." However secular one's lifestyle might be, to live in today's West is "to live in a society still utterly saturated by Christian concepts and assumptions." And that's the case not only with the Christians living there; it is "no less true for Jews and Muslims than it is for Catholics and Protestants," writes Holland.

Leonardo da Vinci, *Salvator Mundi*, c. 1500




**DOMINION**

How the Christian Revolution Remade the World

TOM HOLLAND

Basic Books, $32, 624 pp.

Ironically, the Christian revolution has been so successful that even to criticize or oppose Christianity has required borrowing some of its tools. One of the accomplishments of Holland's book is to show not just that some of the most anti-Christian, or even overtly atheist figures, from Voltaire to Marx to Nietzsche, were philosophically dependent on the position they attacked, but also that some of their objections and criticisms had already been formulated in Christian circles at one point or another. Fierce freethinkers though they were, they were not completely free from using concepts, ideas, and arguments that originated in the Christian camp. The charges that Voltaire brought against Christianity, for example—that it produced bigots and spread superstitions, or that the Bible was full of contradictions—were not exactly his invention. As Holland observes, such accusations "had been honed, over the course of two centuries and more, by pious Christians." You could tell Voltaire learned something from the Jesuits with whom he studied in his youth.

But it wasn't only in their negative

approaches that the West's progressive figures borrowed from Christianity even as they eviscerated it. When they formulated programs and put together various proposals for the betterment of their fellow humans, they helped themselves just as liberally from the religion they rejected. Holland skillfully demonstrates how some of the more emblematic moments in the modern West were informed, though not always obviously, by Christian ideas. For all its anticlerical notes, such was the case with the Enlightenment, for instance. Voltaire's "dream of a brotherhood of man" often felt like a reheating of similar visions we find in St. Paul. Just as Paul had proclaimed that "there was neither Jew nor Greek in Jesus Christ, so—in a future blessed with full enlightenment—was there destined to be neither Jew nor Christian nor Muslim." The deliverance of humanity from darkness, on which the philosophes would gleefully swear, was something that generations of Christian educators and reformers knew a thing or two about. These visionaries had been "counting down the hours to an upheaval in the affairs of the earth" that would deliver it from darkness. "The night is nearly over; the day is almost here."

"That's fine," I seem to hear a skeptical reader saying. "This may work in the case of the Enlightenment, but you are not going to say that Marxism or Communism, for example, also had Christian roots, are you?" That's precisely one of the subtler points Holland is making in *Dominion*. In the foundational texts of Christianity there are places where a fundamental solidarity with the poor and the hungry, the powerless and downtrodden, is formulated. Jesus himself called these people "brothers," and identified with them unreservedly ("Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me"), whereas for those at the other end of the power spectrum, he had a different message ("Woe to you who are rich!"). And the first generations of Christians understood quite well what Christ had meant: "We have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world," writes Paul (1 Corinthians 4:13). Importantly, such a social vision is not just a peripheral feature of Christianity, or something added later by charitable souls, but stems from the central doctrine of Christianity: the Incarnation. As Holland puts it, "by making himself nothing, by taking on the very nature of a slave," Christ had "plumbed the depths to which only the lowest, the poorest, the most persecuted and abused of mortals were confined." In early Christian communities, all were "brothers" and "sisters," everything was held in common, and power was deliberately shunned—a radical response to the radicalism of Christ's own message. Various forms of what would later be called "socialism" or "communism," recurrent throughout Christian history (from the Taborites to the Münster Anabaptists to countless other fringe groups) took those early communities as a good model to follow.

By the time Karl Marx entered the scene, then, Christianity already had a long and colorful history of toying with the communist idea. Coming from a solid rabbinical environment as he did, Marx didn't fail to recognize a great Jewish teacher when he saw one, even when that teacher had ended up inspiring another religion altogether. Even the terminology used by Marx "to construct his model of class struggle—'exploitation,' 'enslavement,' 'avarice'—owed less to the chill formulations of economists than to something far older: the claims to divine inspiration of the biblical prophets." Marx's famous formulation "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" looks to Holland like a cheeky act of plagiarism from the Acts of the Apostles: "Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to everyone as he had needed."

The influence of Christianity can be found in the most unexpected of places sometimes. Take human rights. One would think that they belong firmly in the secular sphere: What are they, the

common assumption goes, if not the invention of modern secular jurists, the daily bread of our godless lawyers? Nothing very Christian about it. And yet it was a Catholic figure, Bartolomé de las Casas, who—horrified by the devastation that the first European colonists brought about in the New World, of which he had firsthand knowledge—came up with the notion of *derechos humanos*, at the time as bold an idea as it was farseeing. He argued for the rights and dignity of the natives on the basis of the humanity they shared with the colonists: "All the peoples of the world are humans, and there is only one definition of all humans and of each one, and that is that they are rational."

Holland is too self-aware and sophisticated an author to imagine that, if the whole world around him is suffused with Christian assumptions, he alone—in writing about Christianity—is somehow exempt from this influence. He gladly acknowledges the sign under which he labors. And that, far from undermining his approach, makes it even stronger because more honest:

> Even to write about it in a Western language is to use words shot through with Christian connotations. "Religion," "secular," "atheist": none of these are neutral. All, though they derive from the classical past, come freighted with the legacy of Christendom. Fail to appreciate this, and the risk is always anachronism.

The influence of Christianity on Western life—social, political, economic, intellectual, and linguistic—is, then, as pervasive as it is inescapable. No matter what we do, regardless of our personal faith (or faithlessness), we are—in our dealings with the world, with others, and with ourselves—bound to reenact some Christian truth, reheat an old Christian idea and serve it as new, or "invent" what may have been a commonplace in the life of the traditional Christian. We can certainly protest and rebel, but we will most likely end up with Christian assumptions even in our protestations. For all our sophisticated secularism, Christianity is here to stay, even if it takes increasingly disguised forms. The West, concludes Holland, "increasingly empty as the pews may be, remains firmly moored in its Christian past."

Of course, what is true of Christianity in the West is elsewhere true of Islam, Buddhism, and Confucianism—to give only the most obvious examples. This is touching testimony to the power of ideas to change the world. Compared with the glittering importance that, say, empires and armies enjoy, ideas seem utterly insignificant—next to nothing, really. Caught under the heavy weight of material conditions, they appear fragile and ephemeral. Cut off the head of the philosopher, stone the prophet to death, and their ideas will die with them—that's the materialist's assumption. In practice, however, things are more complicated. Sometimes it's precisely the death of their originator that gives ideas a new life. Provided they are sown in the right soil, at the right time, and by the right person, ideas can end up much harder than stone. The Buddhist idea is alive and thriving even though there are almost no physical traces left of the material world from which Siddhārtha Gautama came. That goes for the founder of Islam too. And who would have guessed that the crucifixion of a seemingly insignificant Jew by the world's greatest empire would give birth to a world-changing movement? But it did, and Tom Holland does a fine job of showing just how profound and pervasive the change was. If you needed a book to give to someone who doesn't know much about Christianity, *Dominion* would be an excellent choice. But you could also offer it to those who seem to know a bit too much, or all the wrong things, about Christianity.

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Elizabeth Ann Seton

# Holding Out for a Hero

MOLLIE WILSON O'REILLY

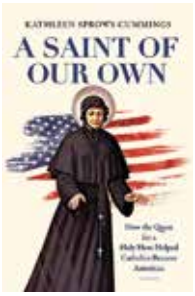
To get a spot on the Catholic Church's official list of saints, a person needs more than a holy life. She needs witnesses to testify to that holiness, miracles attributable to her intercession, supporters who have the influence and the means to pursue her cause and see it through to completion. Good timing helps, too. As Kathleen Sprows Cummings writes in the introduction to her new book, "Canonization may be fundamentally about holiness, but it is never *only* about holiness."

*A Saint of Our Own* is a deeply researched and absorbing history of what the process of declaring sainthood has been "about" for successive generations of American Catholics. "In the United States," Cummings writes, the process of recognizing saints "has often been about the ways in which Catholics defined, defended, and celebrated their identities as Americans." In tracing the major shifts in American Catholics' self-image from the nineteenth century to the present, Cummings demonstrates how each saint's path to canonization was affected by shifting political realities, power struggles in the hierarchy, and emerging awareness of feminism and racial justice. A great deal of social history is packed into this scholarly and readable book.

What did American Catholics need homegrown saints for, anyway? As immigrants swelled the population of the faithful, their answers to that question changed. The U.S. bishops of the 1880s, who petitioned Rome to open the causes of Kateri Tekakwitha, Isaac Jogues, and René Goupil, wanted an official affirmation of Catholicism's status in a country Rome still considered mission territory. A few generations later, those missionary-era candidates were eclipsed by people like Mother Frances Cabrini and John Neumann, "saints who evoked transplantation of European Catholicism rather than the conversion of native people." At the same time, America's increasing significance on the global stage meant Catholics in the United States no longer saw themselves as outsiders in the institutional church; particularly after the World Wars, Americans felt they had earned respect and recognition from Rome.

It is, of course, difficult to say what "Catholics" in general thought or felt about saints, or anything else, at any given time. What makes Cummings's book especially valuable is her attention to the influence that "both popular piety and structures of power" had on the histories of America's would-be saints. Popular opinion is represented here by well-chosen quotations from publications (including this one) that captured, or attempted to influence, Catholic thought throughout the last two centuries.

A major theme in *A Saint of Our Own* is the role of women as both candidates and petitioners in the quest to establish American saints. As in her previous book,




**A SAINT OF OUR OWN**

How the Quest for a Holy Hero Helped Catholics Become American

KATHLEEN SPROWS CUMMINGS

The University of North Carolina Press, $28, 336 pp.

*New Women of the Old Faith*, Cummings lucidly traces "the complicated relationship between gender and power in the church and in the early twentieth century." For instance, "until 1983," Cummings writes, "canon law stipulated that women could petition the Holy See only through male proxies." That meant "any women's congregation proposing one of their own members for canonization… would need to have the case mediated by a man—and by a man selected by the Sacred Congregation, not by the sisters themselves."

The implications of this are illustrated in the case of Elizabeth Ann Seton, the Revolutionary-era Episcopalian wife and mother who became the founder of the Catholic Sisters of Charity and the first native-born American to be canonized. Seton's reputation for holiness was solid, but her cause had many complicating factors—including difficulty finding proof of her baptism in the records of New York City's Trinity Church. It is hard to find a pioneering nun whose legacy was not challenged, at some point, by an officious priest or bishop; in Seton's case the threat came decades after her death, when New York's Archbishop John Hughes forced a split in the Sisters of Charity. Those two groups, one in New York and one in Maryland, grew and splintered into seven communities of sisters, all of whom traced their origins to Seton without necessarily being in relationship with each other.

The division may not have interfered with the sisters' work, but it posed a problem for Seton's chances at sainthood. Canonization "requires a single story, and Seton's supporters would need to agree on one before her cause could succeed." That process was complicated by the assignment of an egotistical vice-postulator, Vincentian priest Salvator Burgio, who had a habit of inflaming tensions among the congregations Seton had founded and whose interventions tended to create new obstacles in his candidate's path. The sisters responded, as sisters so often have, by maneuvering around the patriarchy, forming their own alliance, called Mother Seton's Daughters, to advance their founder's cause.

Thus Seton's journey to canonization was a long one, and in Cummings's hands it is a fascinating study in the intersection of piety and power. As twentieth-century feminists argued for women's independence, church leaders directed the faithful's attention to Seton's "contentment" in her roles as "sister, daughter, bride, and mother." It takes some doing to portray as traditional and unambitious women like Seton, women who rose to prominence by creating their own paths, founding new movements, and resisting male control—but the church has always found a way.

Moving briskly through the twentieth century—Seton, after all, was not canonized until 1975—Cummings arrives at the Second Vatican Council and the long papacy of John Paul II as major epochs in the story of American saints. John Paul II oversaw changes to the canonization process that made it move more quickly, like requiring fewer miracles for beatification and canonization. He expanded the official roster of saints and blesseds, making it more global and diverse. He also, like all popes, had his own preferences, which boosted some candidates and left others behind. And he encountered some surprising resistance from congregations of women religious, who, after Vatican II called them to reexamine their founders' vision, began to question whether supporting canonization was in line with that vision. Cummings is particularly keen in her analysis of what she calls a "systematic and decisive shift in U.S. saint-seeking: an aversion to formal canonization among sisters who reevaluated their ministries and relationships to the hierarchy in the aftermath of Vatican II." The Society of the Sacred Heart, for example, stopped promoting the cause of Philippine Duchesne, a French sister who had devoted herself to mission work in North America, judging it "no longer justifiable in light of the congre-

gation's renewed commitment to the poor." They determined that applying their resources to the work Duchesne had begun in the United States would do her memory more honor than pursuing her canonization.

By the time Seton became St. Elizabeth, many sisters had grown impatient (to put it mildly) with male domination and the obstacles it created. In light of Seton's story alone, it is hard to argue with their decisions to redirect their energy. But Cummings warns that "in eschewing canonization processes, Catholic sisters who identify as feminists may be inadvertently ensuring that the holy women who lived among them will be lost to history." Men, as this book shows, have often tried to shape the stories of holy women to narrow the boundaries of what female holiness can look like. Opting out of that process could make the real diversity of women's witness even less visible.

Cummings writes perceptively about how, "by the last quarter of the twentieth century"—that is, about the time Seton was finally canonized—"the divisions among U.S. Catholics became much deeper than those that had once distanced them from Rome and from their fellow citizens." Today there are many American candidates at various stages along the path to sainthood, but the idea of a single patron saint for the country's Catholic faithful seems hopelessly quaint. Each "holy hero" can be used as an avatar in the intra-religious culture wars, helping Catholics stake out territory that excludes as well as inspires. Consider Dorothy Day, another woman of New York, and the uses to which her remarkable life of discipleship has been put. Look at how her witness has been defined, and how it has been narrowed, in the efforts both official and informal to promote her to St. Dorothy. As always, the quest for canonization is about much more than holiness. In the twenty-first century, the defining question may be what we mean when we say that a saint is "our own."

**MOLLIE WILSON O'REILLY** *is editor at large and a columnist at* Commonweal.

# Grace over Greed

**MEGHAN J. CLARK**


**CHRISTIANITY AND THE NEW SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM**

KATHRYN TANNER

Yale University Press, $35, 256 pp.

"No to a financial system that rules rather than serves," writes Pope Francis in *Evangelii gaudium*. Astutely and prophetically, the pope decries the idolatry of money, in which "we calmly accept its dominion over ourselves and our societies." The ideology of financial capitalism is all-encompassing, invading every aspect of our lives. Yet more than a decade after the latest financial crisis, it remains poorly understood.

In *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, Kathryn Tanner, a professor of systematic theology at Yale Divinity School, analyzes "finance-dominated capitalism" and offers a constructive theological response rooted in a Christian theology of grace and salvation. Recognizing the danger of a world in which "no future exists *outside* present capitalist arrangements," Tanner seeks to provide a "Protestant anti-work ethic" using a theology of grace to interrupt financial capitalism's monopoly on time and identity.

Public debates about economic policy rarely delve into the historical development of capitalism itself. The dichotomy between capitalism and socialism dominates media coverage, eclipsing the equally important contrast between the industrial capitalism of the past and finance-dominated capitalism of the present. Today, finance is considered more profitable than manufacturing, and finance-generated profits occupy a higher percentage of overall profits. It is therefore dominant because, as Tanner writes, "finance is no longer directly in service of production elsewhere but takes on a life of its own." Hence the emergence of secondary markets for virtually everything. One infamous example: the credit-default swaps we all learned about during the 2008 financial crisis.

When finance serves finance, profits are increasingly generated by debt. Tanner describes how debt now pervades the American way of life: "One's paycheck routinely runs out before the end of the month, requiring one to amass credit card debt or take out payday loans, at exorbitant rates, to make ends meet. The government no longer provides money for an education but facilitates taking out the necessary loans to pay for it." One

effect of a system in which debt becomes necessary for daily survival is that workers become willing to accept any job. Tanner argues persuasively that much of this is to be understood as *forced debt*, and her account of how the poor find themselves trapped in the credit system is nuanced and sophisticated.

When it comes to discussing how all this affects governments, however, Tanner fails to distinguish adequately among local, state, and federal governments and their different relationship to debt. Nor does she address important differences among nations and regions. For example, the Jubilee 2000 campaign to lessen the debt burden from development loans for the Global South has no parallel within developed countries, where instead of debt forgiveness, we have personal bankruptcy laws, some more forgiving than others.

Through her exposition on debt, Tanner argues that we are chained to the past and that "the extreme pressures of past demands on future performance in this way come to colonize every waking moment." We are expected to have total commitment to work, for "one should make every effort, in a self-directed way, to maximize the profitable employment of the assets one has in one's person." Step by step, Tanner shows us how financial capitalism moved from Wall Street into civil society, the home, and even religious life. We are all entrepreneurs now: "One's own self-understanding is no different from that of one's employer: I am a business; the firm I work for is a business just like me, managing its assets in the same way I do in the attempt to assure maximum profitability." Where industrial capitalism fostered the identity of the "company man" through a sense of belonging, loyalty, and stability, financial capitalism needs to turn employees into entrepreneurs who view themselves as free agents, independent contractors in a constant state of flux.

This system is maintained through a combination of anxiety, self-direction, and management culture. It is not just about getting people to produce, "but getting them to desire what their employer desires. It is not enough for

employees to cooperate in the pursuit of ends not their own; their own interests have to converge with those of their employer."

Tanner also shows how financial capitalism inverts the Christian understanding of human dignity and the dignity of work. In Christianity, the dignity of work derives from human dignity—it is one (though not the only) expression of our humanity. The human person as *imago Dei* is creative because God is creative. Under capitalism, it is the other way around: human beings derive their dignity from the work they do, which means that the loss of work entails a loss of dignity. This is why Tanner's book is intended to develop an *anti-work* theology.

The Protestant work ethic "was the spirit of industrial capitalism," but financial capitalism is more complicated. On the one hand, the immediacy of short-term profits and the severing of any long-term responsibility between worker and firm weaken that ethic. But Tanner argues that, in another sense, financial capitalism also represents "the continuation of a work ethic, in a heightened, intensified form." In particular, "the link between effort and reward is not broken and assumes a highly moralized character. If one is not doing well, it is one's own fault—nobody else's." Individualism reaches new heights, and when everyone is considered an entrepreneur, individuals bear even greater blame for failure. Those who fail to adapt to new market conditions are losers in every sense of the term, and so deserve whatever distress their failure brings them.

Tanner believes Christianity has the resources to resist this perverse ethic. She argues that Christianity has the power to interrupt capitalism because of its rival demand for total commitment—one directed to God instead of profit. It's not just that we shouldn't try to serve both God and Mammon; it's that we *can't*. For both God and Mammon demand priority, and only one of them can have it. In the language of Scripture, both are jealous gods. Christian life should be marked by a commitment to God above all: "One should never be wholeheartedly committed to any ordinary pursuit in the way one is to be committed to God," Tanner writes. "Full commitment to God does bring with it a commitment to all the things God is committed to—including one's own good, care for the unfortunate, and so on." The Christian emphasis on perpetual and total conversion to the will of God means that God must occupy the center; anything else is a "sinful distortion." Tanner does not deny the legitimacy of other pursuits, but she does remind us that everything else must be subordinated to one's dependence on God. It is the Christian's awareness of this dependence, more than anything else, that allows her to resist the mood of constant anxiety that characterizes capitalist societies.

The logic of capitalism is based on scarcity. Christianity, by contrast, offers a vision of abundance, for "one has everything one needs...the grace provided in Christ." And yet, Tanner laments, "Christians have arguably so far made no especially great moral progress toward that new manner of existence made possible in Christ." That is, Christians do not often live as if they have everything they need; they seem as anxious, as fearful of scarcity, as anyone else.

"Salvation is not a scarce good to be fought over," Tanner insists. "Indeed, the more I think salvation a private property secured by excluding others the more I have reason to worry about my ever attaining it." Ultimately, Christianity upends the logic of financial capitalism by refusing "the privatizing [of] risk and reward" and instead upholding a vision where "one fails, morally and otherwise, in the company of others. And one gains salvation by God's grace alone."

*Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* is a formidable book. Its systematic analysis of financial capitalism in light of Christianity

is worth grappling with. But Tanner's approach to this subject is notably different from that of Catholic social teaching. While Tanner acknowledges that Christianity is marked by a concern for others and lived in the company of others, her attention to conversion, salvation, and grace remains fairly individualistic. In looking for traces of "anti-work" sentiment in the early church, her emphasis is on a faith and salvation delivered by Christ to the individual rather than to a community. Catholic social teaching, by contrast, focuses more on the vision of community in Acts of the Apostles, and on the church fathers' discussions about wealth and property. Tanner does not have much to say about the meaning and value of work as such, a theme of central importance in Catholic social teaching. Her critique of the Protestant work ethic is compelling, but her "anti-work" approach is unsatisfying compared to what might be called "the Catholic work ethic."

In *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis focuses his critique of "the economy of exclusion" on how it affects those on the margins, especially the poor. Like Tanner, he is also concerned with what capitalism does to our sense of time and the way it makes us all more anxious than we should be. Yet his critique remains centered on Christ's identification with the excluded. For Francis, "The dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges. When these values are threatened, a prophetic voice must be raised." Tanner would not deny any of this, but in this book at least, the margins remain mostly a marginal concern. Her attention is fixed on the ways financial capitalism damages us all individually, rather on the ways it rewards some groups of people at the expense of others.

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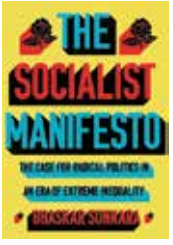
## BOOKS IN BRIEF


**RISING**
Dispatches from the New American Shore
ELIZABETH RUSH
Milkweed Editions, $16, 328 pp.

**Elizabeth Rush** describes nightmares of drowning: sucked under the encroaching ocean, caught in the storms that batter the American coast with increasing intensity and frequency. Reading *Rising*, the reader is sometimes infected with Rush's panic. But Rush's book is not merely a catalog of fatalistic scientific phenomena. Rather, it's a collection of stories about individual places and the specific people who inhabit them. Chapters in residents' own voices are interspersed with Rush's essays about visiting high-flood-risk areas around the country. She emphasizes the outsize threat that rising waters pose to poor and marginalized communities, and her conclusion is poignant. Though it offers no false hope about the state of our coasts, *Rising* is a beautiful elegy for lands and communities too often invisible to society, and now disappearing.




**THE SOCIALIST MANIFESTO**
The Case for Radical Politics in an Era of Extreme Inequality
BHASKAR SUNKARA
Basic Books, $28, 288 pp.

**Bhaskar Sunkara** has established himself as a publishing wizard, founding *Jacobin* out of a dorm room at age twenty-one and fashioning it into the most influential magazine on the socialist left. His new book, audaciously titled *The Socialist Manifesto*, sketches a history of socialism and argues for its continued relevance. Sunkara's gifts lie as a marketer, an explainer, a convener of talent; his quite funny first chapter distinguishes European social democracy from democratic socialism with a hypothetical involving Jon Bon Jovi and tomato sauce. His book is also an effective summary, condensing centuries into a couple hundred (rarely boring) pages. *The Socialist Manifesto* is an essential read for anyone curious about how the resurgent American left thinks.


**THE RISE OF THE LATINO VOTE**
A History
BENJAMIN FRANCIS-FALLON
Harvard University Press, $35, 504 pp.

**Is the "sleeping giant" about to awaken?** The quadrennial question informs Benjamin Francis-Fallon's *The Rise of the Latino Vote*. The 2020 election seems to offer an opportunity for Spanish-surnamed, Hispanic, Latino-Americans—a growing proportion of the electorate, whose communities are disproportionately affected by immigration policies—to redefine U.S. politics. The catch? There has never been a true Latinx constituency—the descriptors above have all been used to demographically group Cubans, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and others. And immigration isn't the only issue. Francis-Fallon's history of Latinx political power examines the elusive idea of a unified vote, while detailing how activists, laborers, and officeholders have nevertheless influenced American politics for decades. In short, one presidential candidate's "proficiency" in Spanish has as little to do with anything as another's lack of it, and demographics are not destiny. The "giant's" multitudes deserve more respect.

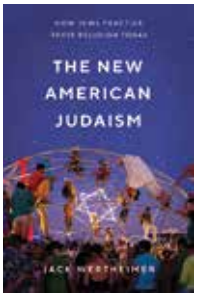
# The Author & the Expert

TZVI NOVICK

There are two ways of feeling at home in practicing Judaism. One is to make the Judaism that one practices an expression of oneself. The other is to conform oneself to the practices of Judaism. The Jew who takes the first path adopts the posture of an author, while the Jew who takes the second aspires to the self-assurance of an expert. If the first expresses power (more precisely, self-empowerment), then the second accumulates knowledge and know-how. This binary is, of course, reductive. The Jewish author does not, and does not wish to, altogether reinvent Judaism, nor can the Jewish expert forgo invention. But these two poles nevertheless are indicative of a basic division in contemporary Jewish life, and indeed, in all contemporary communities that purport to interpret a tradition.

In his new book *The New American Judaism*, an inquiry into the state of Jewish religious life in America today, Jack Wertheimer finds, to his dissatisfaction, too much of the first pole and too little of the second. The basic frameworks of Wertheimer's narrative are well known. Traditional Jewish religious life in America is waning, beset by an epistemology that is suspicious of truth claims, especially religious ones, and by a culture that, orbiting around the twin foci of the individual self and the universal other, looks with indifference or even hostility on Jewish peoplehood. A relatively small but growing camp of Orthodox Jews, modern and ultra, resists these developments and cultivates the Judaism of the expert. Among the far more numerous Jews outside the Orthodox camp, Jewish literacy is typically no more than elementary, exogamous marriage outpaces the endogamous variety, and Judaism serves mainly as a framework for addressing universal moral obligations and the individual's spiritual and therapeutic needs.

But now more than in the past, notes Wertheimer, this latter camp welcomes rituals, not as religious obligations but as spiritual and therapeutic praxes, and this novel posture is perceptible in the synagogue. In preparation for writing the book, Wertheimer conducted interviews with more than one hundred and sixty rabbis, which (coupled with other evidence) establish, in his view, that the non-Orthodox synagogue is not a stagnant, dying institution but a vibrant and essential space that has done much to accommodate itself to a changing clientele. One cannot but marvel at the energy and creativity of the congregational rabbis described in the book. (Of course, the reader would welcome confirmation of Wertheimer's portrait from surveys of synagogue-goers, or interviews with them, but there seems little reason to doubt it.) The synagogue's shortcoming, for Wertheimer, lies precisely in thinking of the Jews that it serves as its clientele. Too often, it sells them the Judaism that they want to buy, rather than challenging them to take on a thicker, more literate Judaism, a more obligation-centered Judaism, a Judaism that embraces both poles of the traditional tension between identification with the Jewish people and identification with humankind.




**THE NEW AMERICAN JUDAISM**

How Jews Practice Their Religion Today

JACK WERTHEIMER

Princeton University Press, $29.95, 400 pp.

What is wrong with thin, therapeutic, spiritual, personalist, universalist Judaism? Wertheimer is a historian, not a theologian, and so his chief objection comes from the data. Surveys indicate that "Jewish religious identification and participation correlate strongly with all other forms of Jewishness." An American-Jewish community interested in the replication of Jewish identity into the future should, therefore, cultivate sustainable religious practices. And yet survey data also shows that the thin Judaism that prevails outside Orthodox circles often fails to transmit to children.

In the book's subtext, and sometimes in the text, Wertheimer also voices a substantive objection to some of the dominant expressions of Judaism in America: they are inauthentic, having departed too far from the fundamental commitments of traditional Judaism. He is especially suspicious of the close correspondence between the religious positions that Reform Judaism espouses today and the political positions championed by the Democratic Party. With obvious disapproval, for example, he contends that Tu Bishvat,


Kiruv

IRA BERGER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

the traditional New Year for trees, "has been redefined, Tevi Troy has noted, as a time 'to indoctrinate children in environmental activism while cementing the Jewish community's ties to environmental causes.'"

Wertheimer is no doubt right that a perfect correlation of religious and political identity is prima facie evidence that the latter has colonized the former. Just as the Constitution, a set of commitments originating in the deep past and interpreted over centuries, serves to check the passionate impulses of the present citizenry, so religious tradition should challenge and nuance an adherent's political instincts. At the same time, many values supported by the Democratic Party are indeed Jewish values, and a Judaism that cannot speak to the pressing issues of the day, including climate change, is not worthy of the name. A reader might sympathize, then, with Wertheimer's frustration, while distancing herself from some of his more cantankerous expressions of the problem.

The book's survey of the American-Jewish religious landscape is wide-ranging and deeply informed, moving easily between helpful generalization and telling anecdote. In lieu of a comprehensive summary, I will note one especially intriguing set of findings, and one important lacuna. Near the end of the book, Wertheimer describes the phenomenon of *kiruv*, Orthodox outreach to non-Orthodox Jews. Such outreach is chiefly the province of the ultra-Orthodox rather than the modern Orthodox: perhaps because there is a greater sense of mission among the ultra-Orthodox, perhaps because the ultra-Orthodox do not worry as much about defining themselves against non-Orthodox Jews, and perhaps, more mundanely, because outreach work does not pay well enough to support a modern Orthodox lifestyle. In any case, the spectacular expansion of Orthodox outreach means that two stakeholders now compete for the attention and allegiance of non-Orthodox American Jews: the non-Orthodox (chiefly Reform and Conservative) denominational leadership on the one hand, and ultra-Orthodox *kiruv* workers on the other. They proffer dramatically different visions of what it means to be Jewish, and different expectations of their audience. The fundamental questions of American-Jewish identity surface starkly in this large, contested arena.

The important lacuna in the book is Israel. Wertheimer is, of course, aware of Israel's central importance for many American Jews, but contends that he can sideline it in a treatment devoted specifically to religion rather than to ethnicity or identity. But these categories are, I think, too tangled, in theory and in the daily life of American Jews, to justify the inattention to Israel, especially when, as noted above, American-Jewish religion is important (even most important) for Wertheimer insofar as it can support a sustainable Jewish identity.

Two recent developments that bring non-Orthodox American Jewry into closer contact with Israeli Jewry arguably merit special attention. First, there is now a sizable Israeli-Jewish diaspora in America. While this diaspora might have identified as secular in Israel, in America it often affiliates with religious but non-Orthodox Jewish communities, which can furnish some of the sense of Jewish identity that Jews in Israel can take as a given. Second, whereas in the past Israeli Jews (especially of Ashkenazi origin) largely divided between Orthodox (or "religious") and secular, increasing numbers of Israeli Jews in Israel are identifying, at least dispositionally, with non-Orthodox Jewish denominations, which have institutional presences in both Israel and America. These two developments, presumably mutually reinforcing, may produce a new pathway through which Israel impacts the future of American-Jewish religion.

While there is a prescriptive strain in Wertheimer's book, he wisely refrains from detailed recommendations. The main contours of American-Jewish religious life have been and will be shaped, in any case, more by large social forces and geopolitical trends than by the conscious decisions of religious elites. But we can venture with confidence that Judaism will retain its vitality among American Jews to the degree that Jews are expert enough in it to be oriented by it, and that it will remain important beyond American-Jewish circles to the degree that American Jews can also find in it the resources through which to author a worldview.

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# Religion Booknotes

**Luke Timothy Johnson**

## THE QUR'AN AND THE BIBLE

Text and Commentary

GABRIEL SAID REYNOLDS

Yale University Press, $40, 1,032 pp.

The seventh-century claim that Muhammad was the last and greatest of the prophets inevitably put Islam into competition with Judaism and Christianity, which already had their own greatest prophets. Anyone who has dipped into the Qur'an knows how frequently it asserts not only the finality of God's revelation to Muhammad, but also its status as a correction of the previous "peoples of the Book" who had betrayed the oneness of God by first writing and then distorting the books God gave them through Moses and Jesus. Indeed, it is one of the most fascinating aspects of the Qur'an that it so consistently presupposes those prior revelations even as it supersedes them. Beginning with the second Sura ("the Heifer"), the Qur'an plunges into a lively polemic against unbelievers (especially the Jews) that corrects and even retells elements of the biblical story, sometimes in considerable detail.

According to standard Muslim doctrine, the prophet received the contents of the Qur'an directly from God; the Suras were written down only after he recited them orally to his followers. The authoritativeness of the Qur'an's version of the history of revelation is therefore based on its coming from the very mouth of God. For scholars, by contrast, the complex and contrarian readings of biblical traditions suggest a more complicated form of interaction among the prophet and his first followers, and with the Jews and Christians with whom they had some level of communication. Such a possibility seems bolstered by closer analysis indicating that the Qur'an bears traces not only of standard biblical accounts, but also of Christian apocryphal writings and Jewish midrashic compositions. Whether through oral means, written compositions, or both, the Qur'an reveals knowledge of Jewish and Christian rereadings of Scripture prior to the seventh century.

A full assessment of these intertextual connections is now available in a new translation of the Qur'an by Ali Quli Qarai, and an extensive commentary on the text by Gabriel Said Reynolds, professor of Islamic studies and theology at the University of Notre Dame. Reynolds occasionally modifies Qarai's translation; the result is bracingly fresh and direct, and those familiar with older versions will often find themselves invited to new thought about what the Qur'an actually means. The reason for studying this very large book, though, is Reynolds's commentary, which searches out, identifies, quotes from, and discusses the many Jewish and Christian texts or traditions on which the Qur'an touches. In Sura 12 on Joseph, for example, Reynolds shows how the many apparent discrepancies between the Qur'an's account and that found in Genesis can virtually all be traced to Christian apocrypha and Jewish midrash. Similarly, the statement in Sura 3.49 that Jesus as a child fashioned birds out of clay and made them fly derives from the so-called *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, which dates to the second century.

Massive in size and scope, this is a reasonably priced, legibly printed, and deeply informative study that serves best not as bedtime reading but as a scholarly resource for those eager to push past stereotypes into the very heart of the Islamic tradition—and to discover its roots in the traditions with which it has always been in tension.

## MEDJUGORJE AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Science, Mysticism, and Extraordinary Religious Experience

DANIEL MARIA KLIMEK

Oxford University Press, $99, 392 pp.

The foreground here is the mystical encounter of Croatian teenagers with the Blessed Virgin Mary, beginning on June 24, 1981—the first Marian apparition to become a global media event, and one that has made Medjugorje a pilgrimage destination for Catholics to this day. The background is the ecclesiastical and academic debates concerning the possibility of miracles in general and the veracity of these in particular. Beginning as a doctoral dissertation at Catholic University, Klimek's impressive study manages to bring faith and science into earnest conversation in a manner that is both learned and accessible.

From the start, Medjugorje—a town in Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose name is used to cover all the events involved—drew attention far exceeding the usual crackpot claims of seeing the face of Jesus in an oil slick or omelet.

The youth, simplicity, and transparency of the visionaries were appealing. These were manifestly ordinary youngsters, and for the most part remained so, despite the crush of attention they drew. People who observed them in their trance state came away convinced that, whatever else, the youths were not faking. And as so often happens in remote places of pilgrimage where the presence of God is believed to be powerful, other signs and wonders were experienced by those who made the arduous journey there.

It is significant that such plausible accounts emerged when they did. Scholarly discourse about religion in the late-twentieth century was not hospitable to mystical experiences; Catholics were only four years into the papacy of John Paul II and still unsure how *aggiornamento* would be implemented in the face of sharply opposing parties within the church. But the real value of Klimek's work is not its on-scene reporting (the author relies on generally available evidence) but its engagement with ecclesiastical and academic contexts. On the ecclesiastical side, Klimek lays out in great detail the protocol for authenticating miracles and visions—on paper, the very model of the principle of subsidiarity—and then how that process was hijacked by the enthusiastic endorsement of John Paul II.

The bulk of Klimek's work, however, is a thorough review of all scholarly theories concerning mysticism, running from the ideas of William James and Evelyn Underhill to more contemporary secular-sociological reductionism, showing the strengths and weaknesses of each. Klimek discusses how neuroscience has been brought to bear on the experiences at Medjugorje, and argues finally that the visions reported there hold out the possibility of a new and more capacious epistemological framework for understanding mystical experiences—and for that matter, all of God's creation. This is an important book for anyone desiring a way to think about religious experience that betrays neither faith nor science.

## ABSOLUTE POWER

How the Pope Became the Most Influential Man in the World

PAUL COLLINS

PublicAffairs, $30, 384 pp.

Paul Collins is an Australian historian and broadcaster whose 1997 book *Papal Power: A Proposal for Change in Catholicism's Third Millennium* made the modest suggestion that papal infallibility ought to be balanced by the *sensus fidelium* ("the sense of the faithful"). His proposal led to a three-year wrangle with the Vatican's CDF and to his eventual departure from the active priesthood—upon which the wrangle ceased, nicely illustrating the Vatican's abiding attitude toward heretics—namely, "those who cannot be controlled need not be noticed."

We might well expect, then, a certain amount of bias in Collins's historical survey of the papacy from 1799 (the death of Pius VI) to the first days of Pope Francis. Perhaps because I share some of his bias, I notice it less—or it bothers me less—than it might other readers. I happen to agree with him that both Pius IX and John Paul II were, each in his fashion, disasters for the church: the first because of what he accomplished in Vatican I, and the second because of how he subverted the reforms of Vatican II. But it is important to emphasize that Collins's account is no mere polemical payback. Far-ranging, subtle, and instructive, his story includes sharp delineations of each pontiff over this long period, accounts that focus on both personality and policy even as they locate each papacy in the complex social and political realities facing the church at the time. Collins may have his personal grudges, but his book does not show them; empathy, rather than hostility, is the dominant emotional tone throughout.

The account nevertheless argues a strong and paradoxical thesis: namely, that as the papacy became forcibly detached from worldly claims to power, it became ever more powerful within the church itself. Ultimately, through a combination of internal control and external communication, the pope became "the most influential man in the world." The book closes with the hopeful thought that Francis will not carry forward the ethos of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, but rather that of John XXIII. From his pen to God's ear.

## BEYOND THE CLOISTER

Catholic Englishwomen and Early Modern Literary Culture

JENNA LAY

University of Pennsylvania Press, $69.95, 256 pp.

The English Reformation celebrated the dissolution of convents where virgins prayed and worked and celebrated a queen, Elizabeth I, whose vaunted virginity asserted independence from any male dominance. In this small but dense scholarly study, Jenna Lay examines and critiques the effect of this paradoxical combination that profoundly shaped English literary history. She speaks of a double erasure evident as early as George Puttenham's *The Art of English Poesie* (1589), which set the standard for a Protestant and male canon of English literature. Catholic women were doubly ignored or, when noticed, ridiculed. Both the lay recusants who resisted the Reformation in a way their husbands (by law) could not, and the nuns who went into exile in France, Spain, and Portugal to continue their cloistered life, were considered to have nothing to say.

Lay does not put forward all the evidence of the extensive literary activity carried out by women, especially in continental convents, but her footnotes provide leads to these rich resources. Instead, she undertakes intense interrogations of canonical and non-canonical literary texts. She begins, for example, by demonstrating how "virginity" is a fraught topic for Spenser, Marlowe, and

Shakespeare, some of whose passages reveal a suppressed anxiety she credits to the collision of a Protestant ideal of chaste marriage, an ascendant virgin queen, and the ugly fact of recently banished virgins.

Her most effective discussions are those in which she allows Catholic women to speak for themselves. One noteworthy instance is the response of the nuns of Syon Abbey, exiled in Lisbon, to a scurrilous pamphlet by Thomas Robinson that portrayed them as passively manipulated by corrupt priests. Their published response, skillful and rhetorically sophisticated, demolished the pamphlet's assertions and showed that the nuns were nobody's patsies. Another example is *The Spiritual Exercises* of Dame Gertrude More, which made nuanced arguments concerning the discrimination that ought to be exercised by religious women in the matter of obedience. Obedience is owed to God alone, More argued, and even the orders of a spiritual director should be resisted when one's conscience speaks against them. Writing in the aftermath of the conflict between the ruminative Benedictine spirituality of Augustine Baker and the more stringent direction found among the Jesuits, Dame More showed herself a worthy great-great-granddaughter of St. Thomas More.

Although Lay repeatedly asserts the vitality of the female literary culture found in recusant Catholic manors, the specifics she adduces make a less forceful case for inclusion within English literary history than do her discussions of the literary activity within convents. By contrast, her concluding discussion, which compares the transparency of an anonymous woman's poem on the passion of Jesus to the congested versions of Milton, Donne, and Herbert, is excellent. Whether her work has implications for the "canon" of English literature—which in most universities already seems so expanded as to lose significance—I am not in a position to say. But if the first job of feminist scholarship is to recover the voices that history has silenced, Lay has certainly succeeded.

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# Why I Came, Why I Stay

MELODY S. GEE

If you count the time between attending my first Mass and receiving my first sacraments, it took me just over three years to become a Catholic. If you count the time before my official conversion, when I was asking versions of the same questions that led to my baptism in 2016, it took me more like twenty-five years. There was no religion in my household growing up. Had they stopped to give it any thought at all, my Chinese parents would have seen the church as anathema to many of their values—tithing away hard-earned money, confessing sins, contemplating death (and worse, talking openly about it), and spending unpaid time on unproductive activities like prayer. Having endured famine, immigration, exclusion, and the shock and grief of cultural assimilation, they came by their values honestly and so forbade me to speak of death or bad luck, to save anything less than half of what I earned, or to venture out among the strangers who might cheat, lie, or take me for a fool. I realize now just how perfect a teenage rebellion religious conversion would have been.

The summer of 2013, I was pregnant with my second daughter and reading spiritual literature with an almost-hormonal hunger. Conversion stories by Anne Lamott and Mary Karr and the tender gang-rehabilitation narratives of Fr. Gregory Boyle fed my cravings. That my conversion began with storytelling shouldn't have surprised me as much as it did. When we first met, my now-husband had been alienated from the church he was born into for over ten years, yet he gave me a copy of *The Screwtape Letters* for our first Christmas. We read it together, both laughing out loud and falling still before ourselves as reflected in C. S. Lewis's patient. Long before, I had tagged along to church services with high-school friends, and in college took classes like "The Bible as Literature" and "Christianity and Nonviolence."

When I look to my childhood for clues, it seems to offer no clear trail to my religious turn. But my parents' connection to the mysterious is probably what set the dial for my religious attunement. My mother lived with spirits of ancestors, tracing a direct line from our behaviors to their displeasure to our consequences. She appeased, served, and honored the dead we remembered and the dead we could only imagine, ever vigilant of their ceaseless inspection and impossible expectations. Our home was rich with traditions both ancient and adapted to America, all of them liturgical.

My second daughter was born in October 2013. The Sunday she turned four days old, my visiting mother-in-law asked me a question as we sat up together in the early hours, listening to the baby's rumbling sleep. "So, what do you think about Mass?" I'd pilfered the Anne Lamott books from her shelf during a recent visit, but we hadn't told her that we were considering, tentatively, registering at our neighborhood parish. When she asked, without agenda, I thought of my C-section incision still inflamed around its stitches, of how I would remain awkwardly seated while everyone else took Communion, of everyone's sleeplessness and disorientation in this new configuration of life. Still, when I said yes, it was not simply to please her.

My husband, his mother, and I piled around two bulky car seats and headed to Mass, me clutching my Percocet. Maybe it was the music lifting into the high arches of College Church in St. Louis, or my hormone-soaked body, or the fresh newborn and chirpy toddler taking up all of our arms. Or that my body knew it was finished growing babies, that my husband and I were, after a lifetime of ceaseless building, suddenly looking at our completed project. A house, a car, two jobs, and two daughters were running our cups over. I was Simon Peter pulling up nets so full they threatened to capsize the boat. I was reaching for something to hold the largeness of the catch.

Raw and open, I fumbled through the motions of Mass, standing and kneeling a few beats behind everyone else. Normally, I would have felt anxious and desperately self-conscious about my out-of-placeness. But that morning, despite the unfamiliarity that surrounded me—the strangers, the ritual, my own altered body and family—I recognized a calm, steady weight settling around and in me. I felt a sense of plantedness in a place I'd never been before.

I came because despite having a quiet, comfortable life with a job I liked—teaching writing to community-college stu-

Hans Baldung, *Conversion of Paul*, c. 1508

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, HARRIS BRISBANE DICK FUND, 1924

dents—and a steady group of friends in our small midwestern city, there was no other place to hold the conversation about why I'm here and what I am to do. And there was no other place that said quite so clearly that our answers would never lie in more exciting jobs, a bigger home, or moving to a coastal city. We certainly didn't lack obligation or commitment; we needed a sense of seeking together through, in spite of, and because of deep mystery.

For six years, staying has been challenging for reasons I know challenge many Catholics: the ongoing crises of abuse cover-up, the disenfranchisement of women, clericalism that stands in the way of lay people's empowerment, the prohibition on birth control, and the troubling treatment of LGBTQ parishioners and priests. Describing why we stay often sounds like an apology or rationalization. Perhaps it is. We stay because of fellow parents in the pews, with whom we share a liturgy of crying, questions, hushing. We stay because we hear lectors and cantors in Côte d'Ivoire French and Burmese. We stay because of the way our choir sings "All Creatures of Our God and King." And we stay because it is through all this that we see others differently, anew, and more.

A friend asked recently why I don't choose a church that feeds me spiritually and aligns better with some of my personal values. My response, which surprised me more than my friend, was, "I think it's because the transubstantiation matters to me." I came for the faith that daily life is sacramental, that Jesus is present in moments of both holiness and ordinariness, which grow harder to distinguish between the longer I am here. I stay because people I respect—mostly women who are older and wiser, and relentless in their demands for justice—are here, and I have something to learn from them. I stay because the church feels enough like my own that I can say to those guilty of abuse, neglect, and coverup, I won't let you have it. Maybe the church needs to hit rock bottom, to experience death in order to be resurrected. I'd like to be there when we discover the stone that has been rolled back.

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NOTRE DAME FORUM 2019–2020

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*moderator*
JOHN ALLEN

*Panelists*
09/25/19

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**NOV. 13, 2019**

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## Natalia Imperatori-Lee
Professor of Religious Studies,
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Professor Imperatori-Lee will explore how undervalued narratives from marginalized communities can and should inform our understanding of the church's identity and mission. Drawing from historical, demographic, and artistic sources, her lecture will illuminate how women are both vital to the life of the church at present, and indispensable to the work of imagining a more inclusive, more just church for future generations.

## Tuesday, November 5, 2019 | 6 p.m.

Tognino Hall, Duane Library | Rose Hill Campus | Fordham University | Bronx, New York
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Natalia Imperatori-Lee, Ph.D., is professor of religious studies at Manhattan College in the Bronx, New York, where she also coordinates the Catholic studies program. Her research and writing focuses on the intersection of Latinx theologies, feminist theologies, and Catholic ecclesiology. She is the author, most recently, of *Cuéntame: Narrative in the Ecclesial Present* (Orbis Books, 2018).

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