A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

Commonweal

OCTOBER 20, 2017

REFORMATION ISSUE

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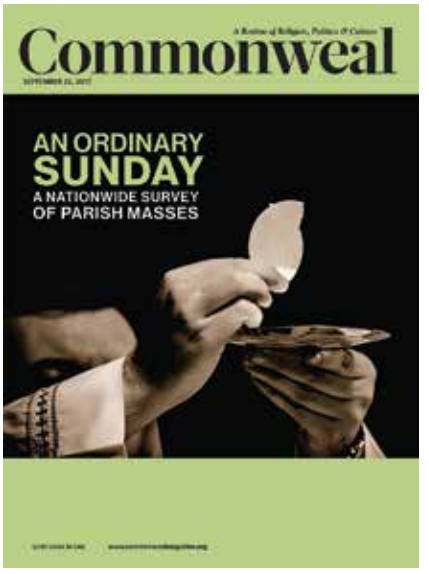
LETTERS

Mystery, parish visitors, etc.

MEETING THE MYSTERY

The survey of Masses in your parish issue ("An Ordinary Sunday," September 22) certainly struck many chords with me, as I am a person who typically worships with different Catholic communities during the course of a year. The varied reports all raise different and interesting questions. Why are some celebrations truly special and others "routine"? Recently I heard two homilies, one on Mary and the other on John the Baptist. In both cases the priests emphasized the way in which each saint points you to Jesus. I use the same criterion to answer the question of what makes a particular celebration truly special. Why are some celebrations transparent, focused on the mystery, and others not? My answer is that the transparent ones are truly sacramental, outward signs of an inward grace and an eternal presence. Others are less transparent because celebrants, musicians, nearby congregants, or other actors make themselves the center of attention. That said, I do not absolve myself of often failing to seek the mystery myself.



J. PAUL MARTIN
Barnard College
New York, N. Y.

WELCOME VISITORS

Scripture and church teaching make clear that Catholics should welcome visitors or newcomers from outside our communities and hold their perspectives in high esteem. To this end, Sunday Mass at Saint Thomas More, which I attend whenever I visit my parents in Atlanta, begins with an invitation to greet those around us in the pews "so that there are no strangers among us." However, the blessing it is to take part in and reflect on another community comes with a responsibility to engage with it fully and thoughtfully, lest one judge another's practices without understanding the assumptions that motivate them.

Unfortunately, Luke Timothy Johnson's account of Saint Thomas More reveals a failure on his part to do so. Johnson may have found the selected hymns shallow and the use of a guitar jarring, but he neglects the outside observer's key duty by failing to ask why the parish chooses to worship the way they do. After all, by his own account, a large and vibrant community appreciates Saint Thomas More's liturgy enough to continue attending. This despite the alleged lack of "Jesuitical learning and wit," qualities I have certainly never found lacking during my visits. The clue that more work was needed on Johnson's part should have been the phrase "for some reason." If an observer has not yet made the effort to learn what reasons lie behind another community's traditions, I must question what value his or her observation adds.

CALEB WEAVER
Medford, Mass.

The next issue of Commonweal will be dated November 10, 2017.

continued on page four

Commonweal

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Reformation Issue

COVER QUERY

The survey of parish Masses in the most recent issue of the magazine was an interesting portrayal of how diverse the "reception" of the post-Vatican II liturgical reform has been in architecture, music, and style of celebration. Yet the cover for the issue, while striking, was inappropriate, for what it portrayed was a moment from the Tridentine Mass and not from the Mass of Paul VI.

The large but broken host held together over a small paten was the gesture used by the priest in the Tridentine Mass while saying to himself the "Lord, I am not worthy…" just before he consumed all the host himself. The actual fraction was invisible to the congregation and had no connection to their own reception.

The latest General Instruction of the Roman Missal has made the fraction both public and theoretically essential to everyone's Communion. As #321 in that text explains, the fraction's purpose is to bring out "the sign of unity of all in the one bread, and of the sign of charity…[as] one bread is distributed among the brothers and sisters."

Yet at the Mass I attended in Denver's cathedral last July, the priest used exactly the gesture portrayed on the cover to do the invitation to Communion—and then ate all the host himself before getting a ciborium from the tabernacle for distribution to the people. He also had an ornate chalice from which he alone drank while the rest of the brothers and sisters shared cups that had been placed on the corner of the altar by the servers during the Presentation.

In short, the priest shared almost none of that meal with us. He gave us leftovers to eat and used the second-best tableware for us to drink from.

Maybe the lack of enthusiasm experienced in some of the parishes could be attributed to the fact that the core reality of the common meal has been neither preached nor enacted. And part of that much-needed catechesis could start with an appropriate cover picture next time.

MICHAEL MARCHAL
Cincinnati, Ohio

MORE DESCRIPTION

As you know, I am an old devotee of *Commonweal*. I wanted to thank you especially for the "Ordinary Sunday" package.

It was obviously orchestrated in that each contributor began with a rich description of the venue. And that description set the tone: as Herbert McCabe and Stanley Hauerwas remind us, ethics is largely description.

We are used to analysis from your pages, so detailed descriptions are welcome, for they even make the familiar come alive.

If we look ahead to capture some new venues in U.S. Catholic life, you might think of a complement on Hispanic parishes. Or perhaps another theme. Either way, I wanted to encourage the pattern.

DAVID B. BURRELL, CSC
Hesburgh Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Theology
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Ind.

INEXHAUSTIBLE

My biggest takeaway from your reports on Sunday Masses in various parishes is that this could be your topic for each and every issue from now until the Apocalypse, and you would never exhaust the topic. So many dimensions to consider for your correspondents:

1. Visit an urban, suburban, or rural parish?

2. Visit an English, Spanish, or Mass in a different language?

3. Attend the Saturday Vigil, early dawn, 9:30 a.m. high Mass, or noon late-risers Mass?

4. Attend during Ordinary Time, Advent, Lent, or post-Easter?

5. Visit a parish with a pastor or a visiting priest?

6. Attend a Mass with a choir, cantor, or no music at all?

7. And let's not forget, Catholic Mass happens seven days a week, not just on Sundays.

The variety of Masses has never ceased to amaze me, no matter how often I attend. Thank you for exploring, if only way too briefly.

PAUL CONLIN
Lake Zurich, Ill.

From the Editors

Taunting a Tyrant

During last year's presidential campaign, Donald Trump's penchant for mean nicknames and juvenile insults was a source of fascination and morbid amusement. Since the election, it's become an object of growing concern, even for members of his own staff. Instead of putting aside childish things and assuming the dignity of his office, Trump has given new meaning to the term "bully pulpit," abusing his position to attack not only his political rivals in Washington, but also mayors, movie stars, and professional athletes. His grudges seem to grow pettier and more obsessive by the day, distracting him and the country from more important matters.

Recently, though, his trash talk has become something much worse than a distraction. After telling reporters in August that any further threats from North Korea would be met "with fire and fury like the world has never seen," Trump used his first speech at the United Nations to taunt and threaten the country's thirty-three-year-old leader, Kim Jong-un: "Rocket Man is on a suicide mission for himself, and for his regime." Three days later, Kim responded in kind, calling Trump a "mentally deranged U.S. dotard" and promising to "tame" him. In Kim, Trump has found an adversary as thin-skinned, bombastic, and impetuous as himself—though, in fairness to Trump, Kim's preferred method of revenge is not the intemperate tweetstorm but public execution.

Talk of "fire and fury" may sound strange coming from a U.S. president, but it's the sort of thing we're used to hearing from North Korean dictators. Until this year their routine threats to reduce America to ashes seemed mostly empty. Then in July came two successful tests of intercontinental ballistic missiles, one of which indicated that North Korea might now be capable of striking the U.S. mainland. This was followed in September by the underground detonation of a nuclear bomb seven times the size of the one dropped on Hiroshima. U.S. intelligence agencies now believe that North Korea will soon be able to miniaturize a nuclear weapon so that an ICBM can carry it at least as far as Los Angeles.

For several decades, the United States has used a combination of deterrence, diplomacy, and economic sanctions to try to prevent North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons and long-range missiles. In 2000 the Clinton administration came very close to securing an agreement from Pyongyang to freeze its missile program in exchange for aid and a possible normalization of relations. But George W. Bush wanted nothing to do with Clinton's Agreed Framework or his pledge of "no hostile intent." After the September 11 terrorist attacks, Bush underscored his administration's hostility to North Korea by including it in his "Axis of Evil," along with Iran and Iraq. But what really decided North Korea against ending its nuclear-weapons program was not the Bush administration's moral condemnation so much as the examples of Saddam Hussein and Muammar Qaddafi, who, having given up their weapons of mass destruction, were removed from power and killed. It is not irrational for Kim Jong-un to suppose that, without nuclear leverage, he would suffer the same fate.

So what, if anything, can be done now? There is still a chance that tightening economic pressure will eventually force North Korea to reconsider its position, especially if China continues to step up its enforcement of UN sanctions. But if any country can withstand material hardship, it may be North Korea, whose population has been trained to accept deprivation as the price of patriotism. A preventive strike might succeed in destroying all or most of North Korea's nuclear weapons, but it would almost certainly provoke an immediate retaliation against South Korea and Japan. Seoul, a city of ten million people only thirty miles from the border with North Korea, would be decimated by heavy artillery. With nothing left to lose, Kim might also resort to his store of chemical and biological weapons. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of lives would be lost.

The best of the bad options available remains diplomatic engagement. The model should be the Iran nuclear deal, which is working quite well, much to the disappointment of President Trump, who has called it "the dumbest deal…in the history of deal-making" and is still looking for an excuse to scrap it. He now seems intent on sabotaging every effort to broker a similar deal with the North Koreans. When his secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, recently announced that Washington had direct lines of communication to Pyongyang and was still interested in resolving the crisis through talks, Trump quickly contradicted him, tweeting that Tillerson was "wasting his time trying to negotiate" with Kim Jong-un. "Save your energy, Rex, we'll do what has to be done!" That kind of reality-television bluster could easily inflame Kim's paranoia and lead to an unintentional escalation of hostilities. Trump's cabinet must remind him as often as necessary that his task is not to humiliate Kim or to show off his own toughness but to prevent an isolated dictatorship from plunging the world into a nuclear war. ■

October 3, 2017

Mollie Wilson O'Reilly

The Man Who Knew Too Little

CAN WE TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT PRESIDENT TRUMP?

President Donald Trump does not understand health insurance. By this I do not mean to say that he doesn't understand the complexities of the Affordable Care Act (although that is true), or that he had no real plan for replacing Obamacare despite its supposedly being one of his top priorities (although that is true, too). What I mean is: President Trump lacks even a basic understanding of how health insurance works.

I know because, in a July 2017 interview with *New York Times* reporters, he said:

> So pre-existing conditions are a tough deal. Because you are basically saying from the moment the insurance, you're 21 years old, you start working and you're paying $12 a year for insurance, and by the time you're 70, you get a nice plan. Here's something where you walk up and say, "I want my insurance." It's a very tough deal, but it is something that we're doing a good job of.

Pity the person who had to transcribe that outpouring of nonsense. I could quibble with the punctuation, but let's be honest: you could move commas and add dashes all day and never uncover what Trump was trying to say about preexisting conditions. What is clear is that the man who holds the presidency and leads the Republican Party, the man who never stops shouting and tweeting about how Obamacare is a disaster, thinks health insurance works like a pension. He thinks it costs $12 a year. And he is this ignorant after months in office. He is so completely ignorant he doesn't even know it's a bad idea for him to talk about it.

Perhaps more attention should be paid to this alarming fact? Perhaps it merits a follow-up question or two when Trump, without any prodding, reveals his fathomless ignorance in areas of great national importance?

JAMELLE BOUIE

There is no precedent for covering a president as incompetent as Trump. And so reporters go on treating him like they would any other commander-in-chief, instead of making his unprecedented incompetence the headline story it should be. In this case, no one replied, "Excuse me, Mr. President, but what you are describing is not how health insurance works"—at least not on the record. Instead, reporter Maggie Haberman said, "Am I wrong in thinking—I've talked to you a bunch of times about this over the last couple years, but you are generally of the view that people should have health care, right?"

Under normal circumstances, an on-the-record endorsement of universal coverage from a Republican president would be a scoop. (For what it's worth, Trump's response, per the transcript, was: "Yes, yes. [garbled].") But if you are a reporter and you accidentally discover that the president has no grasp on the basics of a major, life-and-death issue, you could also treat that like a scoop! Who cares about Trump's "general view" on health care when he is now responsible for a plan to overhaul the specifics? Why give him a chance to sound like a reasonable guy when he can't even be bothered to take a briefing? Why must we pretend Trump has a recognizable agenda and a strategy for accomplishing it when he plainly doesn't even have a clue?

It used to be safe for reporters and pundits to assume that the president was reasonably well informed. Now that assumption is no longer warranted. Professionalism cannot require ignoring what is obviously true. Trump's unfamiliarity with the basics of health insurance ought to feature prominently in any future reporting on his administration's efforts to influence healthcare policy. Other Republicans should be asked to address it. And on other subjects, his competency should not be taken for granted. There is no question too simple to be worth asking.

Even before he took office, news broke that Trump was refusing the intelligence briefings meant to get him up to speed. When challenged, he explained he didn't need them: "I'm, like, a really smart person." He may really believe that. The rest of us have ample reason not to. Journalists who proceed as though Trump knows his stuff are engaged in play-acting that only obscures the truth. ■

Fr. Nonomen

They Only Look like Zombies

WHY THE NOON MASS IS OFTEN SO QUIET

If the Zombie Apocalypse ever does arrive, I know where the Catholic zombies will be going to Mass. They will straggle-stumble straight for our twelve o'clock noon on Sunday. And they will feel at home. They will find community.

There is something strange about this Mass. People walk in late, very late. It is not uncommon to watch an entire family saunter in, casually look around, and debate which seat to take while I am halfway through a homily. Our church holds some five hundred people, yet the couple of hundred or so who make it to this Mass seem to deliberately scatter themselves as far from one another as possible. No one sings. The spoken responses are barely audible. Few receive from the cup and those who receive Communion at all tend to have a glazed, expressionless stare. Because it's our last Mass of the weekend, I think it draws some folks from other parishes, so a number of faces are unfamiliar to me. Many of the people I do recognize usually attend one of the other weekend Masses, catching this one because of convenience or other commitments.

It's true that every weekend Mass has its own personality and atmosphere. The Saturday vigil, for instance, is a pre-dinner crowd. People are in an anticipatory mood. This is the first stop on a night out, whether to a party or dinner with friends. The first Mass on Sunday morning, early as it is, might attract golfers, or kids with a later soccer game, or the older couple on their way to bacon and eggs at the diner. Mid-morning is the hands-down favorite of families with small children and their teens, dragged out of bed. But this last one of the day, high noon, always seems a little flat. I assure you that a great deal of care and energy is put into each of the weekend Masses with regard to hospitality, music, preaching, and the ministries of lectors and Eucharistic ministers. The noon Mass is no exception to this, yet nothing seems to help.

I called up some buddies and asked if they ever experienced this kind of thing. To my surprise, many had. Most chalked it up to "last chance" Mass syndrome—gotta go somewhere, anywhere, stop the car, let's duck in here—and simply accepted it for what is was, not letting it trouble them a bit. Some other pastors surrendered to it and turned it

into a "silent Mass" by eliminating the music completely, paring the homily to a couple of lines, and thereby creating a twenty-three minute worship experience designed to fulfill the obligation if not fill the soul. When I wondered out loud if they had considered a drive-thru for Communion, there seemed to be some silent consideration on the other end of the phone. One parish I called "gave" the Mass to the high-school Youth Ministry Group. The music is led by a contemporary choir and all the musicians and liturgical ministers are high-school kids. Only a couple of years old, it is still finding its way, although the pastor did need to veto a Lady Gaga–inspired Memorial Acclamation.

I found that doing even this minimal amount of research surprised me by providing a bit more insight into the "noon zombie" mindset. That glazed look wasn't so much uncaring as it was preoccupied. School and family demands do not magically stop on Sunday mornings. Family members are pulled in a million directions at once and sometimes getting to church to pray as a family is a tremendous challenge. If their home faith community couldn't accommodate their schedule, then isn't the Christian response to treat them as the guests that they are? These moms and dads are not teaching their children to simply fulfill an obligation; they are insisting that this time together is something important, no matter how crazy the softball schedule gets. And those individuals huddled separately in the corner? They might have chosen this gathering because it better matches the mood they're feeling, the need they have for a quieter spot in the church to think and pray about that sickness haunting their family, or that job that's on the line. The lady in the third pew? I know why she comes to this Mass. She and her husband of sixty-four years used to attend the earlier one every week. When he died a month ago, she needed a change. The memories were too much.

I'm still not sure what to do about the noon Mass. I don't think it needs a fifteen-year-old playing a guitar, but neither does dead silence seem like much of a solution either. Perhaps my peers who chose to accept the Mass for what it was are the wisest of all. At the very least, I shall stop calling it the Zombie Mass. That's just not fair. Or kind. After all, though many of them have gotten into my head and heart, none of them have bitten me. ■

Fr. Nonomen *is the pastor of a suburban parish. He has been a priest for more than twenty-five years.*

ANTONUCCI

William Storrar

From Scotland to Sicily

A PROTESTANT APPRECIATION OF CATHOLICITY

The Reformation runs through me like a river, five hundred years after its Wittenberg spring. I am a Protestant. Yet Luther's floodplain has left me with what may surprise you, the sediment of a catholic sensibility. What do I mean? Do you know the scene in the movie *Good Night and Good Luck* when legendary reporter Edward R. Murrow's colleague in the television newsroom is making elaborate plans for Christmas? But Jews don't celebrate Christmas, someone objects. Don't tell him that, comes the rejoinder. He loves Christmas! I would ask the same ecumenical restraint of you, dear *Commonweal* readers. Don't tell me Protestants are not Catholics. I know, but I love your catholicity. How so?

My wife and I celebrated our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary in Sicily. On this island marked by many Mediterranean civilizations, I was particularly struck by the Norman ruins; not by their antiquity so much as by their familiarity. You see, I grew up in a Scottish village clustered around a parish church with a twelfth-century Norman tower. Sicily and Scotland were the farthest bounds of Norman influence in Christendom. Nothing had changed in the Christendom of my childhood. This Norman tower was the original fixture of my faith, not Luther's Wittenberg door. Our parish church may have been Protestant for four hundred years but that was news to me. The name on the church noticeboard may have been Presbyterian but the stones were catholic. They stretched back in time even further than the church tower to the ancient Celtic cross still standing on the edge of the village. These stones nurtured my natal assumption of one faith, one Lord, one baptism. They stood in unbroken continuity with the first Christian missionaries from Iona. Such thoughts may have been presumptuous in Rome, but they were plausible in the Scottish village of Markinch.

It was this physical sense of one community of faith across centuries, continents, and churches that shaped my earliest experiences of being a Christian. That this was so was entirely contingent on my place of origin. It blessed my life with moments that a sectarian upbringing would have denied me. Everyone knows where they were the day John F. Kennedy was shot. But where were you the day that Gordon Gray, the first Scot since the Reformation, was made a cardinal? I was sitting around a grainy black-and-white television screen with my family, weeping with pride as a fellow Scot was honored by the pope, supported by kilted, bagpipe-playing pilgrims in St. Peter's Square. Yet my sense of catholicity ran deeper than these televised moments of patriotism. It was rooted in the spiritual riches I discovered in our village public library, John XXIII's *Journal of a Soul*. Its photograph of this beaming peasant pope visiting prisoners in jail became my icon of the Gospel.

Of course, such ecumenical innocence could not survive life beyond my village. Taking part in a high-school debating final in Glasgow as a seventeen-year-old shocked me into the realization that there was another Scotland, where

PHOTO: THE LAND

Melrose Abbey, Scotland

the rhetoric of rival schools echoed the binary mentality of divided Christian communities. We were either Catholics or Protestants, still fighting the Battle of the Boyne, not fellow Christians with a shared history stretching back fourteen hundred years, the timeline for my village church's anniversary celebrations. Happily, my primal sense of catholicity survived this rude awakening to the social reality of sectarianism. Just as well, for my years as a parish minister were spent in the West of Scotland. There the older ideology of anti-Catholicism that forged the British state and the more recent immigration of rival traditions from Ireland left a legacy of mutual distrust in local communities. It was therefore a political as well as a religious act to work with my closest colleague, the local parish priest, to counter such prejudice together in ecumenical services of worship, common Bible studies, and community projects for social justice. Working with Fr. McCarthy is the closest I have ever come to seeing God's kingdom come on earth.

But does a catholic sensibility mean more than just this kind of local ecumenism for a Protestant? My own Reformation Father is not Luther but Calvin. It was Calvin who wrote to Archbishop Cranmer in England in April 1552:

> Amongst the greatest evils of our century must be counted the fact that the churches are so divided one from another that there is scarcely even a human relationship between us; at all events there is not the shining light of that holy fellowship of the members of Christ, of which many boast in word, but which few seek sincerely indeed. In consequence, because the members are torn apart, the body of the church lies wounded and bleeding. So far as I have it in my power, if I am thought to be of any service, I shall not be afraid to cross ten seas for this purpose, if that should be necessary.

By "reformation" Calvin meant working to restore the ancient face of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church of the Creeds, not setting up some novel Protestant sect. Thus his commendable willingness to risk all to heal the bleeding wounds of division in the body of Christ. Yet his call to catholicity also had its shadow side in his condemnation of the Anabaptists, and complicity in the execution of Servetus in the name of trinitarian orthodoxy. For all that, Calvin endowed his successors across those ten seas with a catholic sensibility that is the mark of Reformed churches at their best. When they, like Calvin, fall into complicity with disunity, it is the catholic purpose of the Reformation that condemns them for wounding the body of Christ.

The starkest example of such a catholic sensibility and its shadow side among Calvin's heirs is to be found in the story of the Reformed churches in Southern Africa. European colonial conquest and settlement brought with it the Dutch Reformed Church, whose approach to mission was to establish separate churches for different ethnic communities. While these separate churches for whites, blacks, and "coloreds" were held to be spiritually one, they were called to live and worship separately in their own communities, as God had ordained in creation. This ecclesial doctrine of physically separate but spiritually equal churches was transmuted into the political doctrine of apartheid with the triumph of the Afrikaner National Party in 1948. Its legislative program of forced segregation was supported by the NGK, the white Dutch Reformed Church.

But then a remarkable thing happened over the subsequent decades of apartheid rule in South Africa. The Dutch Reformed Mission Church of mainly colored Christians challenged the NGK's support for apartheid on the grounds of the catholicity of their common Reformed faith. The Belhar Confession was drafted at its church synod in 1982, during the oppressive final years of the apartheid regime. Belhar was unequivocal in declaring that the basis of its condemnation of racial segregation in church and society was its commitment to visible Christian unity:

> **We believe** in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family. **We believe**...that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity, and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted.

The Belhar Confession was a landmark document in the transition to a nonracial South Africa. It demonstrated the continuing power of a catholic sensibility to reform church and society. Yet I am mindful of how frail this sensibility has proved in history when faced with the principalities and powers of racial prejudice, religious bigotry, and militant nationalism. My wife and I chose Sicily for our wedding-anniversary trip in part because my great uncle lies buried there in a war grave on the plains below Mount Etna. He was killed in the battle of Catania during the Allied invasion of Sicily, the first step in the liberation of Europe from Nazi racism and hatred. It is sobering to think that in this five-hundredth-anniversary year of the Reformation in Germany, those evils have returned to haunt it after its house was swept clean of them in 1945. And if it was the sons of Calvinist New England who fought and died alongside my kinsman to free Europe from such evils, then it is equally sobering to see the return of racist rhetoric to public life on this side of the Atlantic as well.

The only authentic way of marking this Reformation anniversary is to affirm our common commitment to a catholic sensibility in all churches. It is the charism of the Roman Catholic Church, which you hold in trust for all Christians. I love you for it and thank the Reformers for handing it on to me five hundred years ago. If we neglect this gift as Catholics and Protestants in 2017, even the stones of Sicily and Scotland will cry out against us. ■

William Storrar *is a minister of the Church of Scotland, and a visiting professor in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.*

Peter Quinn

Out of Reach

MEMORIES OF A DISTANT FATHER

I reached for my father's hand as he lay in his hospital bed. Sensing his unease, I quickly let go. It was my last attempt at intimacy. He died several days later, maintaining the distance between us to the end.

I arrived in my father's life as part of a double surprise, the elder of boy twins. Nine months earlier, he lost his seat as a congressman from New York and my mother accompanied him to Washington to close his office. They were the parents of two daughters. He was forty-three, she forty. I suspect that my father thought his begetting days were done.

My mother made no secret that we were conceived in a hotel close to the White House. She disliked the way politics kept our father away from home and the public scrutiny she felt it brought them both. Less than disappointed by his loss, she considered herself blessed rather than burdened by our arrival.

For my father, a passionate Democrat and rising star, his defeat had to be a crushing blow. But I never heard my father mention it. Glad, sad, or otherwise, he never discussed his emotions with me or, as far as I know, anyone else. As for sex, he shunned any mention to the point my mother once teased him, "Do you want your children to think they were conceived by the milkman?"

In the opening days of the post-war era, when a returning army of youthful G.I.s coached and encouraged their ball-playing sons, my father was an anomaly. Too old to serve in the war, he preferred homburgs to baseball caps. Instead of spending Saturdays on the playing field, he retired to his room to read. On Sundays after Mass, he tackled the crossword.

Any time we spent together was usually at my mother's insistence. He took us to an occasional ball game at the Polo Grounds, or to the Bronx Zoo, or schlepped us to the Museum of Natural History, where we spent listless Saturday afternoons wandering among stuffed bison and dinosaur bones. Wherever we went, he was half-present, orbiting in his own mental sphere and landing in places that made him appear more grieved than distracted.

My brother and I attended the same schools he had. Lackluster students, we were inevitably—and unfavorably—measured against his star performance. He made no secret of his disappointment. Try as we might, his approval seemed out of reach. The best we could do was avoid his displeasure. "I don't know if any man was ever less thrilled at having twin boys," my mother said.

My father's father was an Irish immigrant. Still in his teens, uneducated and unskilled, he paid his way west stoking coal on the railroad. He tried his hand at professional boxing, joined the labor movement, and became an itinerant union organizer. Eventually, he came back east, apprenticed as a coppersmith, married, and had a daughter. He fled to Cuba after his wife died, returned to New York, and married my grandmother.

PHOTO: OSSIE LEVINESS, *NEW YORK DAILY NEWS*

The author (right) with his father and twin brother in 1949

OLD MIAMI

Levine used to say if you remember one of his readings
that Donald Justice had never seen

a worker, and Justice who had practiced his childhood piano
on one of Miami's old streets

could recall a sunburned man with a bucket of masonry trowels
who had walked by the porch window of his piano teacher

one summer at the end of a lesson hour, his red hair
stiffened by mortar.

— Kevin Cantwell

Kevin Cantwell has published two books of poems and has had poems in The New Republic, Poetry Ireland Review, Irish Pages, Poetry, The Paris Review, *and* Commonweal. *He is Dean of Graduate Studies at Middle Georgia State University.*

My father never knew his father had a first wife or that his sister was his half-sister until informed by my grandfather from his deathbed. "I hope you won't use that to cheat your sister out of what's coming to her," he said.

I never met my grandfather. But I have pictures of him. In one, he is seated on a horse at the head of New York City's Labor Day Parade. In another, his laborer's build is on display—thick, broad shoulders and Popeye-sized forearms. In contrast, my father as a young man had a dancer's build. Tall, thin, a jaunty dresser, he was of a type his father's generation disparagingly referred to as "narrowbacks," those liberated by American birth and Jazz Age mobility from a lifetime of digging and hauling.

Afraid my grandmother was spoiling their youngest child into a "mama's boy," my grandfather occasionally brought my father along on his union-organizing expeditions. On one trip, my father remembered being surrounded by a menacing crowd furious with what his father had to say. Unintimidated, he continued with his speech.

My father enjoyed telling stories about his father's exploits in Cuba, where he found himself caught up in the Spanish-American War, and the time the Pinkertons threatened his life when he was organizing a strike. In my father's telling, there was a heroic aura about my grandfather that made him sound to me more like a character out of a novel than an intimate part of my father's life.

There was also a hardness that could cross into the cruel. When my father was just five or six, he took him to a pier in Coney Island and threw him off. The lesson was simple. The weak went under. The strong taught themselves how to survive. My father never said how long he flailed helplessly in the water or how terrified he was that his father would walk away.

Deeply attached to his mother, my father never spoke of his parents' relationship. Nor did he ever hint at the resentment he must have felt when his father disdained his ambitions to be an actor and pushed him into politics.

It's easy to theorize that the distance between my father and me owed itself in part to a pattern of emotional repression that reached back generations through grim, unsparing annals of poverty, oppression, and famine. Hard countries breed hard men.

As a child, I didn't have the luxury of reflecting on any of this. All I knew was my father's remoteness.

A civil engineer as well as a lawyer, my father had a long and distinguished career as a judge. After his death, I meandered toward a PhD in history until an unexpected bend in the road led me into political speechwriting. Although I never entertained following him into law or politics, I worked six years in Albany writing for two governors.

Several times, upon hearing my name, people recalled my father from his decade in the state legislature. "He was a brilliant orator," one long-term legislator remarked. A lawyer who argued several cases before him said, "He was the most compassionate judge I ever encountered."

I moved on to a career in corporate writing and became absorbed in the added responsibilities of marriage and fatherhood. I started rising at 5:30 a.m. to begin a long-contemplated novel. I had little time for distractions. Memories of my childhood felt as distant and irrelevant as the hodgepodge of fading black-and-white photos my mother kept in a box in her closet.

Soon after my daughter was born, my life was upended by back pain so excruciating it threatened my ability to work. I was diagnosed with a herniated disc and told it would require surgery. Seeking an alternative, I spoke with a friend who recommended a program that treated back pain as a symptom of psychological distress.

I was reluctant at first. I knew little about the relationship between psychic and physical pain and feared the stigma of mental instability. Instead of the quick fix of surgery, there was no way to tell how long psychotherapy would take. Yet, as hesitant as I was, I sensed that the root of my trouble was more profound than a disc.

I began working with a wise and caring therapist. She patiently helped me face the unspoken fear and anxiety that I felt at replicating with my daughter my unhappy relationship with my father. My back pain gradually subsided.

It returned with a vengeance several years later when my son was born. I began to doubt that psychotherapy could bring permanent relief. I toyed with surgery before I went back to my therapist. We dug deeper this time. Progress was slower. "When you talk about your father," she said, "you seem to know everything yet feel nothing." At one session, after I spent an hour circling around various memories, she asked, "What crime did you commit?"

Whatever my misdeeds, I was certain they never rose to the level of criminal. It was a while before I put what she said in the context of my religious upbringing and substituted sin for crime. Instead of following the biblical commandment to honor my father, I'd been possessed by silent resentment and rage, and the guilt that followed. It was only after I allowed myself to feel and articulate the full measure of those emotions that I could confront the lode of sadness and regret that I'd done my best to leave unearthed.

Except for the occasional twinge, I was never bothered by back pain again. I joined my wife in the ordinary and extraordinary experiences of raising our two children. In the beginning, I acted out of sheer determination to avoid my father's mistakes. But I quickly discovered that, along with the tribulations and frustrations, fatherhood brought intense joy and satisfaction in love openly given and freely reciprocated. I understood that in the gulf that separated us, my father's loss had been greater than mine. For the first time, when I thought of him, I wept.

I recently turned the age at which my father died. I find myself often thinking about him. I remember the soulful sighs drawn from a place burrowed within, as though he were exhausted from wrestling with ghosts he left unnamed. I recall how as a small boy I walked beside him on a pitch-black summer's night and, rather than voice my fear, bit my lip until it bled. Once, on a rare excursion, he took my brother and me fishing. Far away from land, bathed in sea-sparkled air, he sang lightheartedly, as if delighted with our company. Sometimes I ache with all that went unsaid.

I've reconciled as best I can to my father's limitations. I've also come to appreciate and admire his decency and honesty. He was utterly devoid of racial or religious prejudices. His generosity to various causes and charities sometimes squeezed our household finances. His intellect and integrity earned him the respect and high regard of colleagues and peers. Yet none of that can change what did or didn't take place between us. It's useless to wish otherwise. Facing my own mortality, all I can do is reach for his hand and say that I love him. ■

Peter Quinn, *a frequent contributor, is the author of* Banished Children of Eve.

Can the Churches Be Reunited?

The Orthodox Might Have the Answer

George Hunsinger

In 1967, when Joseph Ratzinger was a thirty-nine-year-old professor at Tübingen, he was the guest of honor at a doctoral colloquium held in Basel by Karl Barth. The topic for discussion was the Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (*Dei verbum*). Barth and his students devised two main questions for their distinguished visitor. Both concerned how, according to the council, the transmission of the Gospel was dependent on the church.

From a theological standpoint, was it really true, the Protestants wondered, that the Gospel depends on the church if it is going to be preserved and actualized, as suggested by the wording of the dogmatic constitution? Weren't matters really the other way around? Wasn't it really the church that depends on the Gospel—if the church is to be truly apostolic? In other words, didn't ecclesial life and witness always need to be tested against the living word of Scripture? And didn't that word remain sovereign as a critical norm over against the church and its traditions? The priority of the Word over ecclesial tradition was a traditional Protestant concern.

The second question sharpened the first one to make it more concrete. How exactly did the church safeguard the Gospel's transmission along with the church's ever-increasing insight (as was supposed) into revealed truth? In particular, did the formation of "tradition"—the ecclesial process of reception and elaboration—really depend on the juridical-historical succession of bishops? How were the bishops, and in particular the magisterium, related to the work of the Holy Spirit? Weren't they subject to the Holy Spirit, or was the Holy Spirit actually subordinate, in effect, to them? For the Protestants, the hierarchy's perceived encroachment on the Spirit was another traditional concern.

In retrospect the encounter between Ratzinger, the future pope, and Barth, the twentieth century's leading Reformational theologian, seems more significant than might have been evident at the time. As far as I know, we have no record of Ratzinger's reflections on the occasion. However, according to one of Barth's students, Eberhard Busch, who attended the colloquium, Barth was impressed by the eloquence and precision of Ratzinger's ad hoc replies. After listening to him at length, Barth intervened only once. Why, he asked, didn't Ratzinger mention the role of the Holy Spirit more explicitly in his remarks about the richness of tradition in the Catholic Church? (There is much about the Spirit in the dogmatic constitution.) And why should the authority of "tradition" still loom so large for Catholicism? Wasn't there perhaps a certain "fear" of the Holy Spirit, and therefore of real change, in the Roman Catholic Church—change in accord with the Gospel? (Busch thought Ratzinger might have been a bit rattled by this intervention.) Barth concluded that despite large areas of agreement between Catholicism and the Reformation, no one should be deceived that ecumenical unity was just around the corner. We are still waiting, he stated, for the one apostolic church.

We can well imagine that Ratzinger might have had his own counter-questions for Barth and the colloquium, though at the time they apparently went unexpressed, perhaps out of politeness. Without an authoritative magisterium, Ratzinger might have wondered, who speaks for the Reformational churches? If hierarchy is the problem, what are we to say about Protestant "anarchy"? Are we not faced with a cacophony of Protestant voices, each with its own claim to be authoritative? Doesn't the Holy Spirit sometimes operate in and through established ecclesiastical structures? Or is the Spirit's work always freewheeling and charismatic? Again, doesn't the living Word operate in and through church traditions, or is it always beyond and over against them? Laxity could hardly be the antidote to rigidity.

We thus arrive at one of those points where Catholicism and the Reformation are still at odds. Whereas the Reformation regarded the church as strictly *under* the authority of the apostles, Catholicism saw that authority as operating *in and through* the episcopate, and of course especially the magisterium. As we read in *Donum veritatis*, an instruction

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Pope Francis and Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, chair of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, meet at the Vatican in February.

CNS PHOTO / *L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO*

signed in 1990 by Cardinal Ratzinger, in his capacity as prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith:

> When the magisterium of the church makes an infallible pronouncement and solemnly declares that a teaching is found in Revelation, the assent called for is that of theological faith. This kind of adherence is to be given even to the teaching of the ordinary and universal magisterium when it proposes for belief a teaching of faith as divinely revealed.

This instruction contained an implicit answer to questions posed by Barth's colloquium to Ratzinger.

The Reformation regarded the apostolic office as nontransferable and unique. Discontinuity between "apostle" and "bishop," as offices in the church, was therefore pronounced. The Reformation did not deny that Christian doctrine could "develop" in an authoritative way, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Ecumenical councils like Nicaea and Chalcedon were a case in point. Nevertheless, the Reformation wanted to distinguish more sharply than did Catholicism between developments that brought out the necessary implications of apostolic teaching, as scripturally attested, and dogmas that would substantially add to it. It was not in dispute that Scripture was the *norma normans non normata* ("the norm of norms not normed by anything else"). For the Protestants, however, the church could not go materially beyond Holy Scripture, because the apostles retained priority over tradition, imposing limits on doctrinal development.

Within those limits the Reformation generally agreed with Catholicism. It accepted, for example, the articles of the Creed, the Christological dogmas, the divine foundation of the church, the general inerrancy of Holy Scripture, and such ethical matters as the grave immorality of murder. (It could be argued that when it comes to modern warfare, neither the Reformation nor Catholicism has gone far enough on this score.) For the most part, however, the Reformation drew the line when it came to sticking points like the Marian dogmas, the Real Presence, the sacrificial nature of the Mass, and the primacy and infallibility of the Roman pontiff.

It is the Marian dogmas that still seem to pose some of the greatest obstacles to unity for the Reformation. The historically divisive eucharistic and papal questions have perhaps inched closer to resolution, as seen in the deliberations of ARCIC (the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission). In my book *The Eucharist and Ecumenism* (2008), I suggested that on such matters—the Eucharist, the papacy, Mary—much depends for Protestantism on future rapprochement between Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Since Orthodoxy and the Reformation arguably share a vital common front in important respects, ecumenical progress between the Catholics and the Orthodox could have profound repercussions. At this time of the Reformation's five-hundredth anniversary, perhaps the most important contribution the Vatican could make toward advancing Christian unity with the Protestants would lie in the Orthodox direction.

Like many Protestants, Karl Barth worried about the Marian dogmas as a prime obstacle to ecumenical unity. In line with the Reformation, he strongly denied that human beings could cooperate in their own redemption. Revelation and reconciliation, he urged, were "irreversibly, indivisibly, and exclusively God's work." It is perhaps not unimportant that the "immaculate conception," the dogma that Mary was born without original sin, has not been robustly embraced by most Eastern Orthodox. Nor was it endorsed even within Catholicism by such seminal theologians as Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas. Whether some form of confessional pluralism within a broader but fundamental unity can be achieved in this area remains an ongoing ecumenical challenge.

Disputes like these pose questions about the limits of diversity and dissent. Although Ratzinger did not press the role of the magisterium in his early encounter with Barth's seminar, he adopted a fairly hard line later on. In *Donum veritatis* we read: "The freedom of the act of faith cannot justify a right to dissent." Not even the obligation to follow one's conscience would justify dissent from the magisterium. Such dissent is said to threaten the theologian with estrangement not only from the church *but also from Christ*. Eastern Orthodoxy seems willing to allow more room for conscientious disagreement on such questions.

It was Georges Florovsky, the great twentieth-century Orthodox theologian, who posed the dilemma most sharply.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, Pope Francis, and Orthodox Archbishop Ieronymos II of Athens and all of Greece

Catholicism, he quipped, meant "unity at the expense of freedom," whereas Protestantism meant "freedom at the expense of unity." (He touchingly believed Orthodoxy showed how both could be achieved in practice.) Ratzinger's hardline view about the magisterium would seem to bear Florovsky out about Catholicism. How much wiggle room for dissent is still left? Lacking anything close to a magisterium, on the other hand, the fissiparous history of Protestantism shows, in a way well beyond the ken of Barth's colloquium, what can happen without one. According to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, there are roughly forty-three thousand Christian denominations in the world today. That was up from five hundred in 1800 and thirty-nine thousand in 2008. By 2025 the number is expected to rise to fifty-five thousand. Even if we cut these numbers by a factor of ten, as some would have us do, they are still staggering. Nearly a thousand years after the Great East-West Schism, and five hundred years after the Reformation, no one seems to know how to reconcile unity with freedom.

I want to turn for a moment to the Reformational doctrine of justification by faith, the idea that our salvation is solely the result of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and cannot be attributed in any way to our own efforts or "works." It was this doctrine, of course, that sparked the Reformation, and it was this doctrine that the Reformation found at the heart of the Gospel and the apostolic tradition. Nevertheless, although ecumenical progress has been made, it is an open question whether the issue has yet to reach a sufficient resolution. I register this demurral despite my respect for the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" (JDDJ) as signed in 1999 by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church. I am happy to note that in July 2017 the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) finally affiliated with the JDDJ, and that I played a role in drafting the WCRC signing statement. Although I regard the JDDJ as an ecumenical milestone, I remain uncertain about how much it has achieved.

According to JDDJ the "remaining differences" between the Lutherans and the Catholics on justification are "tolerable" (*tragbar*). Presumably this means they ought not to be regarded as church-dividing. Needless to say, during the sixteenth century the Reformers would have regarded all such "remaining differences" as conflict-ridden, and it is not clear whether they are overridden in JDDJ by anything more than ambiguous language. For example, one standard Roman Catholic objection to the Reformational doctrine of justification has been that it is too "extrinsic" and therefore "nominalistic." Isn't the "imputation" of Christ's righteousness to the believer little more than a "legal fiction," since it did not make the believer inherently righteous before God? The believer remained a sinner in some deep sense, even if the power of sin was broken in the Christian life. How believers could be declared "righteous" on account of Christ while still remaining "sinful" in themselves remained unclear. The Reformational doctrine seemed threatened with incoherence.

Although it would take a long disquisition to sort these matters out, a few general remarks may be in order. As far as I can see, the historic controversy about justification has been overdetermined by trying to account for too much within an essentially juridical or forensic frame of reference. While courtroom metaphors and concepts have their place, there are limits to what they can accomplish in elucidating the mystery of salvation. When they are not supplemented and held in check by other scriptural metaphors and concepts, the results can only lead to distortion. This observation would pertain as much to defenders of the Reformation as to its critics.

Let me suggest that courtroom metaphors are counterbalanced in Scripture by at least three other conceptual domains: the royal, the apocalyptic, and the priestly/cultic. None of these perspectives is sufficient in itself, and they are brought to bear eclectically (not systematically) in the course of scriptural argument. It is of some interest that each of these perspectives sees *removal* as the solution to the problem of sin—whether by defeat (royal), destruction (apocalyptic), or expiation (priestly/cultic), whereas from a forensic standpoint the solution is *punishment*.

If I am not mistaken, the Reformational doctrine of justification was implicitly based as much on priestly/cultic modes of thought as it was on forensic metaphors and concepts. The priestly/cultic modes of thought were often overshadowed, however, even in the minds of the Reformers, by legal ideas of retribution, condemnation, and punishment. Sorting out the forensic elements from the priestly/cultic elements, and

CNS PHOTO / PAUL HARING

placing the two modes of thought in their proper scriptural relationship—with and beyond the Reformers—could lead to greater ecumenical understanding.

Broadly speaking, some differences between forensic and cultic elements, as attested in Scripture, might be sorted out as follows. Whereas a forensic focus is individualistic, a priestly/cultic focus, as evident in Passover and Yom Kippur, is corporate or communal. The juridical logic of the courtroom leads to sin's condemnation, the rejection of the sinner with the sin. The logic of cultic sacrifice, by contrast, aims at sin's removal or displacement, so that the Israelites could be spared despite their sins. The logic of the courtroom rests on retributive justice, according to which offenses receive their just deserts, with little or no room for mitigation. The logic of sacrifice in the religion of Israel, by contrast, though drastic, is ultimately merciful, so that the Israelites could be restored to God beyond what was otherwise deserved. In short, the difference between the two systems is arguably the difference between retributive and restorative justice.

This account is very compressed, and much more would need to be said to round things out. The core intuition of the Reformation, however, was that Christ took our sin and death to himself so that we might receive his righteousness and life. The double transfer here—from us to Christ (sin and death) and from Christ to us (righteousness and life)—cannot be accounted for within the logic of the courtroom, nor yet even within that of common morality. It can only make sense, when typological allowances are made, within the strange and jolting logic of a ritual sacrifice like Yom Kippur. (See for example Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra's *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity*. Also Stephen Finlan's *The Background and Content of Paul's Cultic Atonement Metaphors*.)

For the Reformation, a judicial end (the just condemnation of sin) was accomplished by ritual means. It was, in effect, accomplished "sacramentally," and therefore "effectually," by Christ in our place so that divine mercy to lost sinners might prevail. The double transfer was thought to involve a ritual "exchange" (*admirabile commercium*). Two things happened at once: an innocent One took the place of the guilty many ("substitution") while the sins of the many were removed ("expiated") by the blood (the "atoning sacrifice") of the innocent One. Christians were thought to receive this innocence (or "righteousness") in union with Christ by grace through faith, apart from their merit or works. The whole point of this strange transaction was to avert punishment while graciously extending mercy.

The Reformation found the mystery of this "double transfer" or "wondrous exchange" expressed in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "For our sakes he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." These words have been studied with an eye toward the history of their interpretation by Stanislas Lyonett, SJ. As I read his results, neither the medieval scholastics nor the post-Reformation Protestants were able to escape from being dominated in their exegesis by the forensic categories of the Latin West, while to some extent the same was also true of the Protestant Reformers themselves.

It was the Greek fathers, beginning with Origen, who consistently approached this verse not with a forensic mindset but implicitly with priestly-cultic categories to hand. Being largely innocent of the West's forensic approach, the Greek fathers had little problem with the substitutionary idea. In Cyril of Alexandria and Gregory Nazianzen, moreover, intimations of "objective participation" in Christ (another relatively cultic, non-juridical idea) can also be detected in a way that might begin to counteract Catholic worries about the "legal fictions" resorted to by Protestantism. Greater rapprochement with the Eastern Orthodox along with renewed attention to the cultic atonement background of much New Testament soteriology would seem to hold ecumenical promise for the excessively juridical and moralistic mindset of the Latin West, whether Catholic or Protestant.

Surely, ecumenical progress will continue to depend, as it has at least since Vatican II, on a renewed interconfessional study of Scripture. Like a good Reformational Protestant, Barth believed that the Scripture principle was enough for the church to be preserved and renewed in spite of itself through many toils and snares. As he observed when looking back on the Hitler period, "When nothing was left for the church, the one Word of God who is called Jesus Christ remained." Nevertheless, as Ratzinger realized, it is hard to see why the Scripture principle should rule out an essential role for the ordinary and universal magisterium. At the same time, however, the Eastern Orthodox might wonder, for their part, whether the Protestants are often too lax while the Catholics are often too rigid.

Meanwhile, on the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, it is worth remembering that the various communions are not always as far apart as they may seem. A figure like Isaac the Syrian from the seventh century can sound, for example, like a forerunner of the Reformation:

> We are justified by what is from God and not by what is ours. We inherit heaven by what is from Him and not by what is ours. It is said: *Man is not justified before God by his works*; and again: *Let no one boast in works but in the justice which is from faith*. This justice, then, Paul says is not from works but only from faith, that is in Jesus Christ.... One is redeemed by grace and not by works, and by faith one is justified, not by one's way of life.

And then there is always Thérèse of Lisieux:

> After earth's exile, I hope to go and enjoy you in the fatherland, but I do not want to lay up merits for heaven. I want to work for your love alone.... In the evening of this life, I shall appear before you with empty hands, for I do not ask you, Lord, to count my works. All our justice is blemished in your eyes. I wish, then, to be clothed in your own justice and to receive from your love the eternal possession of yourself. ■

Saving Calvin from Clichés

An Interview with Marilynne Robinson

Matthew Sitman

In the spring of 2010 I was teaching in the Politics department at the University of Virginia when the novelist and essayist Marilynne Robinson delivered a series of lectures in Charlottesville. I was able to join her and a few others for lunch after one of her talks, and the conversation inevitably turned toward her distinctive, highly sympathetic reading of John Calvin's work.

For years Robinson had tried to rehabilitate Calvin, switching out the image of a dour, severe, and authoritarian religious zealot for one that emphasized his debt to Renaissance humanism and classical learning. Her Calvin was democratic and liberal-minded, a brilliant reformer who viewed the world with rapturous wonder. Far from delivering us to the iron cage of modern life, Robinson's Calvin posited that the world was suffused with God's glory—there was nothing "disenchanting" about his theology at all. She unfolded these arguments in a number of essays, especially those collected in *The Death of Adam* (1998), and in her novel *Gilead* (2004), with its narrator, a Protestant minister named John Ames, describing Calvin in ways rather similar to Robinson. "Calvin says somewhere that each of us is an actor on a stage and God is the audience," Ames notes at one point. "That metaphor has always interested me, because it makes us artists of our behavior, and the reaction of God to us might be thought of as aesthetic rather than morally judgmental in the ordinary sense.... I suppose Calvin's God was a Frenchman, just as mine a Middle Westerner of New England extraction."

My own academic work focused on Calvin's political thought, and Robinson's bracingly revisionist understanding of him served as an inspiration—she allowed me to push aside the stale categories and clichés that dominated most treatments of his theology. After discussing Calvin with Robinson in Charlottesville, I asked her if she would answer some follow-up questions via email, which she generously agreed to do. At the time, I thought the interview might be published in a journal alongside articles dedicated to the political and social dimensions of her writing, so I tried to push her on how those themes connected to her understanding of Calvin—and, more broadly, her world-affirming vision of Protestantism. But within a few years I would leave the academic life for journalism and New York City, and so the interview remained unused.

With the five-hundred-year anniversary of the Reformation upon us, it seemed like a fitting time, with Robinson's permission, to finally share my exchange with her. Reading it again, I'm struck by how revealing it is of my preoccupations at the time—the questions I was asking, the ideas I was wrestling with—and how idiosyncratic and intriguing her replies are. If, as Robinson has argued, the past is prelude and permission, then her engagement with Calvin remains essential for our own self-understanding as inhabitants of a world he helped create.

Matthew Sitman: There's a wonderful passage of Thornton Wilder's that I have thought about in connection to your work: "The revival in religion will be a rhetorical problem—new persuasive words for defaced or degraded ones." How do you write about religious faith, especially in your fiction, without it coming across as cheap, didactic, or clichéd?

Marilynne Robinson: I really don't know why people have so much trouble now writing about religious faith. It is true that clichés can override more interesting impulses. But the desire to find meaning, to be generous, to live well in an ethical and spiritual sense, is so widespread that it should not seem alien to people when it is expressed in the terms of traditional religion. Religion, if it is genuine, is so profoundly interwoven with individual thought and experience that it is no more exhaustible than consciousness itself. And fiction, whose purpose is didactic, is bad no matter whether the matter to be "taught" is Christianity or the world view of Ayn Rand. It seems often to be assumed by writers that religion is a pose, meant to deceive oneself or others, or that it is a bad patch on doubt or complexity. This is only convention, however. The writers I know have a much deeper engagement with the real issues of religion.

MS: I have heard your fiction, especially *Gilead*, described as being "sacramental." Yet it also possesses an obvious debt

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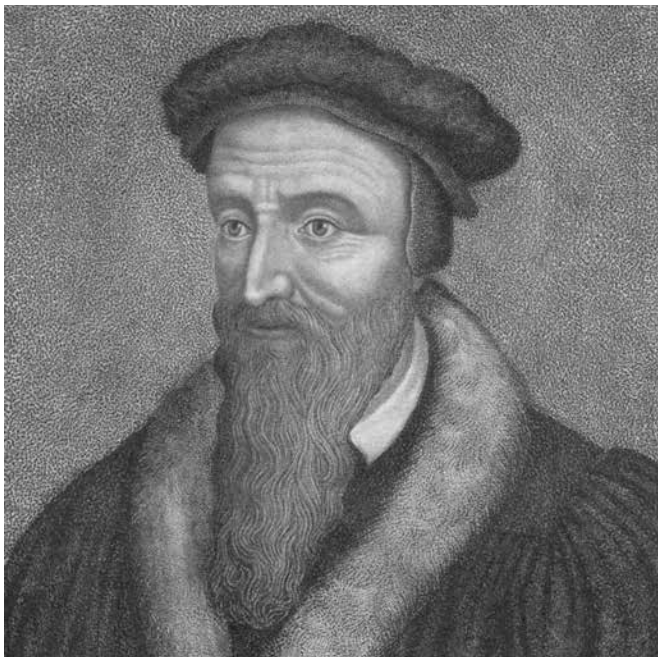

A nineteenth-century lithograph portrait of John Calvin by J. H. Fiedler

to Protestantism—for example, John Ames is informed largely by Protestant theology and the literary tradition that derives from Calvinism—which often, if perhaps mistakenly, is associated with "disenchantment," a world increasingly emptied of God's presence. How much of your work is an intentional retrieval of an alternative Protestantism, a non-disenchanted Protestantism? What's distinctive about a *Protestant* vision of a world imbued with grace?

MR: I don't think I had heard until I was in college that the Protestant world was "disenchanted," so the notion has never had much importance for me. It is not surprising, given European history, that there is a tradition of polemic available for use against Protestantism and Catholicism as well. It really ought not to be taken seriously as cultural analysis. I know it is a feature of modern thought that these drastic pronouncements are made and pondered. But they can be remarkably superficial. From a Protestant point of view the world is intrinsically enchanted. Nothing need be added. The world is filled with the glory of God. I doubt a Catholic would disagree! The two traditions simply respond to the fact differently. Protestants acknowledge only Baptism and Communion as sacraments, using ordinary water in the first and ordinary bread in the second—which implies the holiness of the ordinary, of all bread and all water. This seems to me to broaden the sphere of the sacramental and to give every holy—that is, loving or generous—use of the ordinary things of life a sacramental character.

MS: In *Gilead* you write, "the reaction of God to us might be thought of as aesthetic rather than morally judgmental in the ordinary sense." This follows a paraphrasing of Calvin's "theater" metaphor, that the world is a theater of God's glory. Could you say more about an "aesthetic" relation to God, and perhaps how your reading of Calvin has influenced your thoughts on this specific point?

MR: Calvin is very much a Renaissance humanist in his appreciation of everything wonderful in the human creature. We are, he says, the highest proof of the divine wisdom. It is rare indeed to find ourselves celebrated in such terms by anyone in any age. And Calvin sets us in a universe of wonders and splendors, which we excel. If this is how creation is to be understood, as a vast and continuous effusion of wisdom and beauty, then it seems trivial to imagine God weighing our merits and demerits as we would weigh them. This is only truer if, as Calvin says, so much of our beauty is inward, in the agility of our minds and souls, in the workings of memory and the capacity for art and invention. It seems fair to assume that we appear very differently as we figure in God's creation than we do as we live within the constraints of worldly circumstance and of our own perceptions. Given that beauty is, for Calvin, the signature of the divine in creation, that the aesthetic should be an aspect of human nature that reveals our affinity to God simply follows. And there is no reason to think it might not be, by our lights, a difficult, or obscure, or even a terrible beauty.

Everyone knows Calvin also says radical things about sin, as theologians have tended to do throughout Christian history. But no one has had a more exalted view of human nature than his, sin notwithstanding. It is a grander thing altogether to be a Calvinist sinner than a Freudian neurotic, for example.

MS: At the end of the first essay on Calvin in *The Death of Adam*, you note, "That mysterious energy, Calvinism, appears to be spent.... It is hard to imagine our recovering a sense of it." Yet surely you have some constructive purpose behind your fascination with Calvin. Apart, then, from simply doing justice to the past, what do you hope a renewed, sympathetic understanding of Calvin's theology might mean for us now?

MR: It is an irony that Calvin is always pilloried for his insistence on "election," though the concept is Scriptural and also nearly universal among Christian theologians of every stripe. Yet people in his tradition were active, innovative, and very much inclined toward social transformation. We have opted for petty determinisms—childhood trauma, genetic inheritance, social conditioning, etc.—that have made us comparatively passive. We seem to prefer to find excuses—which are really nothing more than the embrace of determinism, a sort of Stockholm syndrome relative to whatever we can claim as limitation. I am fascinated by the more enabling self-understanding. It has helped me to find my way out of the cloying comforts that are offered by prevalent psychological models. I suspect that the appeal of bare-knuckles competition and even the unembarrassed

pleasures of hostility that are rising among us now might have a similar origin. There is a great difference, however. Calvin taught reverence for human beings as such, seeing Christ even in one's deadliest enemy. If this one thing can be recovered, then perhaps what was best in that ethos will be recovered as well.

MS: You emphasize, rightly, the vital place of "perception" in Calvin's theology. What separates this subjectivity and individualism from its Cartesian variant, which stands at the head of our contemporary confusions about what the "mind" is, and that you rightly criticize? Or rather, why should certain Reformation emphases—perception, inwardness, subjectivity—not be included in a narrative about the sources of the modern Cartesian self?

MR: I have read Descartes a number of times, trying, and failing, to find the basis for his historical reputation. I have had versions of this experience so often I don't know why it continues to surprise me. In any case Descartes' thinking appears to me to be based on an understanding of consciousness that strongly resembles Calvin's. He did live his adult life in the Low Countries until he left for Protestant Sweden, and he served in the army of a Protestant general in the Dutch wars against Spain. This is not to say that he saw any need to accept Calvinism as a religious identity, though it certainly suggests a degree of sympathy with it. However, it is to say that he found a way to affirm the truth and value of scientific insight in the Calvinist model of thought and perception as continuous, if partial and erring, communication with God. By the standards of medieval dualism, the opposition of mind and body is not even an issue in Descartes. Indeed, his conception of the workings of the mind is strikingly physical. Misreading Descartes is really one part of a larger project, which is the rejecting of the fact that science and perception or thought both open on the problems of epistemology, the nature and accessibility of objective or scientific truth. The modern self is precisely not Cartesian.

MS: You have written a number of essays on political and social themes, from *Mother Country* to "Onward, Christian Liberals." However, with a few exceptions, politics seems absent from your novels. Even their titles indicate something of this: *Housekeeping, Home, Gilead*, all of which gesture toward your concern for the interior, domestic lives of your characters and the dynamics of family life or, slightly more broadly, a particular community. What response do you have to this?

MR: My politics, and my religion as well, are based entirely on the loveliness and value of ordinary human lives. The creaky apparatus called politics shelters or oppresses or threatens these lives, and is therefore of interest.

My politics, and my religion as well, are based entirely on the loveliness and value of ordinary human lives. The creaky apparatus called politics shelters or oppresses or threatens these lives, and is therefore of interest.

MS: Another way of getting at this question about politics would be the following: given your emphasis on perception, subjectivity, individualism, "the mind," and related themes, how do you move outward to consider the basis of political and social life? That is, when you start from the classic Calvinist posture of an irreducible individualism, what cast does that give to theorizing and thinking about politics, society, and community?

MR: People have reduced Calvin just as they have Descartes. Calvin's social ethic insists on the reverence we owe one another. His sermons are full of attacks on greed and arrogance. His Geneva had public education for all children, boys and girls, with the schooling of poor children paid for by the city. It had institutions for the relief of the poor and refugees. Early generations of Americans looked to Geneva as a model community on these grounds. If "individualism" means the sanctity of every individual, as for Calvin it did, then the creation of a mutually respectful and sustaining community follows very naturally.

MS: Given the topics your non-fiction essays, and the numerous theological references in your novels, the religious concerns informing your work are readily apparent. But I also wonder how much growing up in Idaho continues to shape your work? An older essay you wrote on your "Western roots" was remarkably revealing, I thought. I especially am interested in how your Western roots have mixed with your theological preoccupations—how do you see them fitting together, or not?

MR: No doubt my childhood has had a strong influence on all my work. ■

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James J. Sheehan

When Was It Better?

The Strange Death of Europe
Immigration, Identity, Islam
Douglas Murray
Bloomsbury, $26, 352 pp.

"The democratic social state," Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, "comprises those like oneself." The history of democratic society has been shaped by the questions embedded in this deceptively simple remark: How much alike must we be in order for democracy to work? How much can or should be done to abolish the things that divide us, such as differences in education, status, or wealth? And what do we do about those sources of diversity that seem impossible to erase, such as differences in religion, ethnicity, or gender? Are there some groups so unlike ourselves that they will never be members of our democratic social state? Efforts to answer this final question have generated many of modernity's bitterest and most destructive conflicts as some people struggled to exclude or restrict those "others" who they were convinced were too different to belong: Catholics, Jews, blacks, and many more. The main purpose of Douglas Murray's book is to add some new groups to this long and unhappy roster.

"The civilization we know as Europe," Murray writes in his introduction, "is in the process or committing suicide… as a result, by the end of the lifespans of most people currently alive, Europe will not be Europe and the peoples of Europe will have lost the only place in the world we had to call home." There are, he argues, two main reasons for Europe's imminent demise: first, mass immigration, "the replacement of large parts of the European populations by other people," and second, the steady erosion of those values and commitments that once shaped Europe's identity. "The world is coming into Europe at precisely the moment that Europe has lost sight of what it is."

The Strange Death of Europe is an untidy book, filled with repetitions and digressions. The relationship between the two parts of Murray's argument—the crisis of immigration and the erosion of European identity—is implied but not clearly defined or persuasively demonstrated. The book's disparate pieces are not held together by evidence or analysis, but rather by the author's incandescent anger and righteous indignation. He is angry at the hordes of outsiders who have entered Europe in the recent past, changing the appearance and texture of urban neighborhoods, importing alien values and foreign languages, threatening to reduce the native-born inhabitants to an embattled minority in their own country. He is indignant about those intellectual apostles of multiculturalism, whose shallow platitudes about the value of diversity mask the real problems created by mass immigration. And above all, he is angry and indignant about Europe's political elites, people like Barbara Roche (we are told twice that she is Jewish), Tony Blair's minister of Asylum and Immigration, who have persistently failed to protect their societies from an invasion of these aliens.

Most of Murray's book is devoted to anecdotes that illustrate the criminal

STEVEN GREAVES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Police arrest Afghan asylum seekers in Calais, France, on March 20, 2010.

activities of recent migrants, Islam's inherent intolerance, the fatuous hypocrisy of Europe's political leaders, and decline of the European tradition's core values. Murray writes with eloquent urgency; he has a journalist's eye for dramatic incidents and a skillful debater's ability to anticipate his opponent's objections.

Many of the problems that Murray describes are real enough. Some immigrants have indeed committed violent crimes; political elites have not always been honest with themselves and their constituents about the scale and costs of immigration; there has been a precipitous decline in traditional values and practices, especially those tied to Christianity. The "sea of faith," whose retreat Matthew Arnold lamented in the middle of the nineteenth century, continues to ebb, leaving some unwholesome flotsam on the cultural shore.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that Murray vastly overstates the depth and severity of the current crisis. Even if we accept much of Murray's overheated assessment of the European condition, can we really say that Europe's deathwatch has begun? The most troubled parts of the continent—Russia and Ukraine, for instance—do not suffer from either excessive immigration or a crisis of cultural identity. The support for radical nationalist movements in Western Europe has apparently peaked. Moderates prevailed in the most recent French and German elections. Brexit, which might be taken as evidence for Murray's argument, seems to have produced buyer's remorse among important sectors of the British public. Almost everywhere, Europeans live better—and longer—than at any other time in their history. In sum, while hardly without serious problems, most of Europe remains peaceful and prosperous enough to provide the basis for a good life for its inhabitants and to attract a substantial number of those seeking better opportunities for themselves or their children. The fact of mass immigration, while surely a source of dissension and difficulty, is also a clear sign of Europe's enduring attraction and compelling strength. Europe is certainly changing—and not always for the better. But Europe, however we want to define that elusive concept, is not dying.

Like many unsatisfactory books on important subjects, Murray's deficiencies point us toward what Europeans need to consider in order to confront the problems posed by immigration.

First of all, they need an accurate picture of the role of immigration in European society and politics.

Murray is right to criticize those who have downplayed or denied the problems caused by immigration, but his own pastiche of atrocity stories and underanalyzed statistics is not an adequate alternative. What is the record of social and cultural assimilation among immigrants? Which groups do better and why? Which societies—or local communities—have more success than others in dealing with these issues? How much of the current situation is a result of short-term crises—the civil war in Syria, for example—and how much to structural changes in the global economy?

Second, Europeans need a balanced assessment of the costs and benefits of the alternative ways of managing the problems of immigration. Here Murray is not much help. He is occasionally clear about what should have been done in the past, but has little to say about what to do now. One thing is certain: there are no cheap and easy solutions to the global problems of political unrest and economic inequality that are driving the massive movement of populations both within and across national boundaries. Some states have taken stern measures to keep the aliens out—Japan, for example, and to a lesser extent, Australia. Are these the models that Murray wants Europeans to follow? And if these stern measures are adopted, then Europeans must ask themselves just how much human misery and state-sponsored violence they are prepared to tolerate in order to seal their borders and preserve that European identity to which Murray seems so attached? Won't the violent defense of Europe's borders undermine European values every bit as much as the arrival of outsiders?

Finally, as Europeans seek to address these issues, they need to be aware of their strengths as well as their vulnerability. Overheated predictions of Europe's demise undermine the confidence democracies need to prevail. Denying the existence of problems is a grave mistake, but so is the sense of inevitable decline that pervades Murray's account. The fact is that, with all its problems, Europe in the second decade of the twenty-first century is still in far better shape than at any other time in its often-turbulent past. Among the questions one would like to ask Douglas Murray is, "At what moment in European history would you prefer to live?" It is well to remember that for most of this history, despite what Murray calls Europe's "philosophically and historically deep foundations (the rule of law, ethics derived from the continent's history and philosophy)," Europeans managed to do quite terrible things to one another and to non-Europeans around the world. They do significantly fewer of them now, in part because of the spread of those sentiments—"respect," "tolerance," and (most self-abnegating of all) "diversity"—which Murray views with undisguised contempt.

The Austrian critic Karl Kraus once called psychoanalysis "the disease of which it pretends to be the cure." The same can be said of Douglas Murray's book, which is a symptom rather than a diagnosis of Europe's current discontents, an expression of the malaise that seems to have infected a number of people on both sides of the Atlantic. People who share Murray's view of the world will no doubt applaud the eloquent conviction with which he expresses their fears and frustrations. But those who recognize that they have a responsibility to find ways of dealing with Europe's very real difficulties will have to look elsewhere for inspiration and instruction. ■

James J. Sheehan *is emeritus professor of history at Stanford University, and the author of* Where Have All the Soldiers Gone.

Frank B. Farrell

Tuning In & Out

The Songs We Know Best

John Ashbery's Early Life

Karin Roffman

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $30, 336 pp.

The poet John Ashbery died on September 3. The praise that followed his death, with several commentators calling him the greatest American poet of the past half-century, shows how much he is esteemed by critics and fellow poets. Shortly before he died, Karin Roffman published *The Songs We Know Best*, a biography of his early life. Any biography of Ashbery is bound to raise interesting questions about the relationship between life and art. If one reads the poetry of Ashbery's almost exact contemporary James Merrill, one gets a rich sense of his life—of the places where he lived and traveled, of his friendships and love affairs, and of his emotional life. Most of Ashbery's poems are much less obviously confessional and much more elusive. They provide few ordinary narrative guideposts and are full of odd shifts of register and tone. Ashbery said that while he wrote out of his experiences, he did not write about them. His poems begin, so he claimed, past the point where one reports on the kind of personal happenings common to all.

Roffman met Ashbery when both were teaching at Bard College. She has portrayed his early life up until the moment, in his late twenties, when he won a Fulbright fellowship to France and was selected by W. H. Auden for the Yale Younger Poets series. Ashbery provided her with two sources not previously available: a thousand pages of entries from the diary he kept from age thirteen to age sixteen and a box of poems, plays, and stories he wrote as an adolescent. She interviewed former friends and classmates, consulted the papers of his well-known associates, and read Ashbery letters already available elsewhere. Importantly, Ashbery offered her a series of long interviews over several years. All this access makes the biography read like a novel, with a novel's immediacy, detail, and confident narration of past scenes, with the tone almost of an omniscient narrator. In perhaps 120 cases or so, a citation directs the reader to these Ashbery interviews. Of course, Roffman was interviewing a man in his late eighties who was recalling events from many decades earlier. Was he accurate and fair in recalling tensions with various classmates and possible lovers, most of whom had already died? That question is not raised here. In any case, the fan of Ashbery's poetry is likely more interested in his version of events than in an objective account. Roffman has corroborated his stories when other witnesses were available. And getting such long personal interviews with Ashbery while he was alive provides a valuable emotional history.

John Ashbery's early life was of a certain familiar type. He grew up in a small town in upstate New York. His father owned a farm and orchard, where John picked cherries and sold them by the roadside. John disliked sports, felt different and lonely, had a rich interior life, and designed fantasy games and theatricals with playmates. He wrote poetry and painted, was attracted to boys and felt guilty about it, and was determined to use his intellect and his artistic ability to escape to the city and make a name for himself. After winning a local competition, he was invited to participate in a national radio show called "Quiz Kids." The tragedy of his early life is that his only sibling, a younger brother preferred by his father because of his easy charm and athletic skill, died of leukemia. Ashbery was mostly left on his own to train himself as a poet through the popular collections that he found at the public library, and as an adolescent he developed a special interest in the work of three female poets: Elinor Wylie, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Marianne Moore. A rich woman with a summer home near his farm was impressed by him and recommended him to the headmaster of Deerfield Academy. At Deerfield he joined an art club made up of boys who saw themselves as outsiders, and was acclaimed for his performances in female roles in plays put on at the all-boys school—though he was also teased by some classmates for his gait amid rumors that he was homosexual. At Harvard he wrote

Portrait of John Ashbery by Fairfied Porter, 1952

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for the *Advocate* and developed a liking for classical music (Alban Berg and Francis Poulenc were two of his favorite composers). His academic work was uneven, but he read widely. He studied seventeenth-century poets, Wallace Stevens, and Proust. His senior thesis was on Auden.

Roffman does not try to minimize the importance of Ashbery's homosexuality. From a powerful unrequited love at Deerfield to frequent trips to gay bars while he was at Harvard, we see Ashbery trying to erase an early feeling that he might be the only one constructed in this way. A poem written at Harvard about a real-life love affair contains only the subtlest reference to an affair and no hint that it's a gay one. In New York after college, he fell in love with a French Canadian. The relationship seemed to work until the two moved in together; two weeks later they broke up.

It is the New York scene of 1950–55 that will be familiar to readers of David Lehman's *The Last Avant-Garde*. We see Ashbery hanging around with Frank O'Hara, Larry Rivers, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler, Jane Freilicher, and other poets and painters, while taking low-level jobs in publishing and advertising. Roffman is good at portraying not only the group's camaderie but also its tensions, quarrels, and gossip. The unity of the "New York School," as it came to be called, was mostly a myth. Ashbery's poetry became more experimental as he was influenced by the music of John Cage, by French poets such as Raymond Roussel, and by the tone of the English novelist Ronald Firbank. He attempted to unshackle words from ordinary language by playing with *Roget's Thesaurus*.

Besides synthesizing her research into a lively, readable narrative, Roffman analyzes a number of poems written during this early period. Here some readers may have reservations. She interprets a poem with quite complex imagery as offering a straightforward message to his Harvard classmates "to travel widely and to explore without worrying about being correct." In an earlier juvenile poem he says: "The trees / Tore our hearts back with them from the canoe. / And the boughs bled bright with our sacrifice." Roffman sees the poem as anticipating a later lyric where trees viewed as joining arms suggest the promise of a satisfying human love. And she sees "the canoe / And the boughs" as together forming a safe shelter that love might restore. But the trees are hardly sheltering here, for as their branches brush against the pair on their way out of the cove, they tear at their hearts: the branches are bright with bloody sacrifice. Roffman too often makes the path from Ashbery's life to his poetry more direct and obvious than it really was.

Some critics think of Ashbery as a con man whose poems take advantage of our insecurities about the avant-garde. It is true that his work leaves many read-

ers confused and disoriented. And a poetry that is deliberately fragmented, sometimes obscure, and full of abrupt changes of register can invite scholars and critics to project their own meanings onto it. But Ashbery's poetry does more than mystify. It manages to capture the penumbral, hard-to-name contexts that shape experience while remaining always at the edge of them. Some things are learned, he says in "The Wrong Kind of Insurance," "the way light at the edge of a beach in autumn is learned." We become more aware of how meaning takes shape when we see it almost coming into a clear form and then dissolving. Ashbery says he is interested in ephemeral shifts of consciousness rather than in any particular sustained experience. He poems often focus more on the act of experiencing than on the substance of experience, or more on the process of making a poem than on the poem as a finished artifact. Some readers hold that Ashbery's poetry is more about the culture at large than about him. Reading his poems can be like turning from one station to another on an old radio; we rapidly tune in and out, picking up a phrase here, a fragment of melody there.

One is grateful for Roffman's research and for the splendidly readable book she has produced from it. Not only does it tell us things about Ashbery's life that his poetry declines to; it tells us things no other biographer could have. But it also leaves us with unanswered questions about the poetry itself—and above all, the question of whether the cost of Ashbery's severe indirection is not sometimes too high. Ashbery offers important poetic experiences that traditional poetry has not typically offered. But in doing so he leaves out reference to a range of life experiences that many readers would like to see treated in poetry—and that this very biography shows to have been crucial to Ashbery's own life. ■

Frank B. Farrell *is a professor of philosophy emeritus at Purchase College, State University of New York. His most recent book is* Why Does Literature Matter?

Paul Horwitz

Both Sides Have Their Reasons

Religious Freedom in an Egalitarian Age

Nelson Tebbe
Harvard University Press, $39.95, 288 pp.

For the past decade I have helped organize an annual roundtable of law and religion scholars. Some years back, I complained half-jokingly to my fellow organizers that the roundtable was too *nice*. Most conferees shared some basic premises—in particular, that religious belief is important and deserves both respect and substantial legal protection. While that made the conference more pleasant, it removed the sense of fierce conflict that drives debates over law and religion in a wider world that is often indifferent or even hostile to religion and religious liberty. I asked: "Can't we all just *not* get along?"

Well, I got my wish. In recent years disagreement has become more heated, as views about religion have changed and conflicts involving same-sex marriage and LGBTQ rights have soared to the top of the religious-freedom agenda. The cast of characters at our roundtable has also changed. Law professors who focus on the Constitution's equality protections, with religion only a secondary topic of interest, are now as frequent as religion scholars for whom equality is just one consideration. The days of shared premises are gone. The room now comprises two camps—one focused on religion, the other on equality—competing to set the terms of engagement preemptively. For better or for worse, our roundtable has become more reflective of the wider debate.

One of my co-organizers for this event is Nelson Tebbe, a professor at

CNS PHOTO / JOSHUA ROBERTS, REUTERS

Edie Windsor, plaintiff in the lawsuit against the Defense of Marriage Act, outside the Supreme Court

the Brooklyn and Cornell law schools, and author of the important new book *Religious Freedom in an Egalitarian Age*. Although Tebbe is clearly aligned with the "egalitarian" camp, he respects religion and religious freedom. That respect makes his book a useful, approachable introduction to the new egalitarian thinking driving so much social and legal conflict over religious liberty today.

It helps that Tebbe does not think the conversation is advanced by simply placing scare quotes around the phrase "religious freedom." Unlike Martin Castro, the former chairman of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, he does not dismiss "religious freedom" as a code for "discrimination, intolerance, racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia or any form of intolerance." Egalitarians should welcome a book that does not reject the meaningfulness of religious exercise and community. Religious libertarians should appreciate engaging with someone who does not simply rule them out of bounds from the start. That makes the book cause for hope. But not enough hope, in the end.

Despite its focus on reasoned elaboration, a certain magical thinking drives this book, with its relentless mixture of *is* and *ought*. "We should insist *both* that current conflicts between religious freedom and equality law are intricate *and* that they are not intractable," Tebbe writes. "Justified solutions can and must be found." Readers may rightly worry about words like "should" and "must." That we face urgent problems is no guarantee that we can find a way to "diminish or dissolve the apparent tension between peace and justice" in this area. But Tebbe wants lasting solutions; and though he insists that his book "is not a recipe for the end of disagreement," he advocates a method, and a set of outcomes, that will "shape civil rights law and religious freedom guarantees into the future." Like the warring camps at our law and religion roundtable, he wants to set the terms of engagement and treat certain "settlements" as final. The losers should not only "understand why their arguments have been rejected," but accept defeat with good cheer.

That seems unlikely—and not only because some will reject Tebbe's proposed outcomes on issues such as the contraceptive mandate, religious accommodations, religious associational freedom, and the reach of nondiscrimination law. More important is the method he relies on for resolving these issues. That method is labeled "social coherence." Despite Tebbe's reluctance to say so explicitly, it is essentially a fairly aggressive form of political liberalism. Its aim is to provide a way of addressing not only current conflicts between religious liberty and equality, but "questions of law and political morality" in general. Central to the method is the importance of "warranted" conclusions: conclusions "backed by reasons." Tebbe holds that if we can come up with "ways of discussing complicated questions of constitutional law, about which there are strong convictions on both sides, in a *reasoned* way"—a way that leads to

what he considers non-arbitrary judgments—then the outcomes should be acceptable to both sides.

Expecting dissenters to accept particular outcomes, which ultimately involve the imposition of coercive state power, because they are "reasoned" or "warranted" is itself an unreasonable expectation. It is a low bar, after all. Practicing lawyers, with their quiver of rhetorical skills and argumentative "reasons" plucked from history, analogy, and legal precedent, understand this. Sometimes they buy their own arguments and convince themselves that they deserve to win; but this is not a requirement. Law is always revisable, always dependent on current social phenomena and an ever-shifting consensus—the courts may hold that the Constitution requires same-sex marriage, but that decision would be meaningless in the absence of changes in public consensus on the issue—and it is mostly concerned with achieving working solutions, not a final state of abstract "justice." But law professors, whose worldview revolves around their skill in mustering and parsing arguments, often fall prey to an excessive faith in reasons—especially their own. Legal academics are bedazzled by reason.

More dangerous still are those legal academics committed to advocacy. They believe sincerely in the power of reason, even as they use their skills as advocates, writers of amicus briefs, and authors of tweets and op-eds to ensure victory. In seeking to enforce their academic "oughts," they move from the academy into the public arena, routinely working the refs in varied traditional and social media. Their rhetorical skills may win individual battles. But reason does not end wars. In the meantime, their advocacy contributes to the erosion of public and professional trust in the very "reason" in which they place their faith. That a lawyer can come up with "warranted" explanations for a suggested outcome is no surprise—but neither does it typically resolve disagreement. Advocates on the other side of these battles have their own store of "warranted" arguments. They won't accept unwelcome outcomes simply because some "expert" fetches up a legal or philosophical justification for them. Courts occasionally change minds, but rarely move hearts and souls.

This reality is not merely the product of a newly polarized, populist, "post-truth" society. It has been so at least since the breakdown of the mid-century "consensus era," in which a broad range of governing elites shared both common values and the common faith that technocrats could implement these values wisely. And the problem is only amplified when lawyers purport to act not only as legal technicians but as moral philosophers, wantonly mixing and fusing law, legal theory, and moral theory, until one is never sure which tool is being used (or ignored) in order to reach some preordained outcome.

Such is Tebbe's method in his new book. When legal precedent will get

him where he wants, he describes it as "settled" precedent or the "consensus" view. When it won't, he draws on moral or legal theory to argue that some precedent is inconsistent with larger "principles," or to stretch a judicial decision by asserting that moral theory reveals its "deeper" implications. He notes, for example, that the so-called "endorsement test" under the Establishment Clause, which asks whether a government action sends a message of civic exclusion to religious outsiders, is "besieged" in the courts, but concludes confidently that it is still "the best understanding of constitutional law." As lawyers do, he relies regularly on legal and historical analogy—perhaps the weakest and most suspect of all legal and philosophical tools, given its malleability and present-oriented bias.

The result is a confidently stated set of "principles" and outcomes. They may be coherent, but that's not a difficult standard to achieve, given Tebbe's willingness to move between high principle and narrow legal reasoning as needed and his tendency to rely on the shared premises of an audience of sympathetic readers. His project may be undertaken in good faith and without cynicism. But it need not convince anyone, either as an abstract matter or in particular cases.

Tebbe argues that finding "rationally justifiable" arguments will answer skeptics (like me) who believe that religious liberty and equality are incommensurable goods, and that conflicts between them are incapable of final resolution. I'm not convinced. No scale has yet been invented, for instance, to weigh the value of religious or associational freedom against the value of nondiscrimination. There may be islands of peace and consensus in the stream of history, but not because "reason" prevailed. The stream always rushes on, and what is incontestable or unthinkable today will be a live issue tomorrow. Tebbe argues that "[s]kepticism is not the only available response to the current conflagration—and it should not be seen as the most attractive one." But attractiveness is not proof. Skepticism isn't pretty, but it's not wrong either.

Consider some of the principles he comes up with to "guide our thinking about conflicts between religious freedom and equality law." Tebbe identifies "four primary commitments that run through defensible constitutional decisions in this area." They are sound enough, broadly speaking. In keeping with his general method of moving between legal precedent and moral and legal theory, however, he applies either one or the other, broadly or narrowly, as the need arises—sometimes pounding the table with precedent, and sometimes describing or distinguishing particular legal decisions "on the level of general values." He nonetheless insists that his principles "are not vague ideals or aspirations. They have the status of constitutional law." I am not clear what this adds, other than the ability to back his recommended outcomes with state power. Law after all is a collection of holdings that can be altered or reversed. The "principles" discerned behind them may provide a foothold for the next decision, but are not themselves "law" in any useful sense. And the more they are abstracted from the cases they inform, the less likely they are to have any clear legal status at all. They are just arguments: "warranted" ones perhaps, but neither binding nor final.

Thus, Tebbe argues that a central animating principle of law and religion is "avoiding harm to others," meaning that while religious accommodations whose costs are borne by the state are permissible, government cannot make others bear the costs of religious accommodation. The usual citation for this principle is *Estate of Thornton v. Caldor*, in which the Supreme Court struck down a state statute that allowed all employees to take off the Sabbath day of their choice. The Court said the law violated the Establishment Clause because it applied an "unyielding weighting in favor of Sabbath observers," and thus imposed an "absolute" requirement on employers and employees, "no matter what burden or inconvenience this imposes on the employer or fellow workers." In other words, religious accommodations

that impose third-party costs, with no consideration whatsoever of competing interests, are unconstitutional.

This is quite different from Tebbe's emphatic "principle" that religious accommodations "may not shift meaningful costs to others," period. Tebbe argues that the Court erred in its *Hobby Lobby* decision because the accommodation accepted by the Court for employees who wanted insurance coverage for contraception would take time to set up, and thus have some impact on employees. Maybe so. But such cases *could* also be read to suggest a narrower understanding of any "rule" against third-party harm, one which requires *some* balancing of interests rather than unyielding accommodation. That balancing is arguably already provided by the statute in *Hobby Lobby*, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, itself.

I won't rehash that debate here. (Although readers shouldn't naively assume, just because it has been pressed ardently on Twitter, that the strong version of the "no harm to third parties" argument is an accurate statement of "the law.") My point is that what it means for this or that principle to "have the status of constitutional law" is a difficult question even when it's confined to *legal* texts. When one also adds to those legal holdings a variable mix of moral and legal theory, one soon recognizes that the mere fact of a particular legal argument being "warranted" can't be expected to quell social and legal conflict. Lawyers and law professors know this, even if they pretend otherwise. General readers should not be blinded by the invocation of this or that principle as having "the status of constitutional law." And "no harm to third parties" isn't even the most controversial of Tebbe's four "principles."

I will glide over the outcomes Tebbe counsels in specific disputes, such as the wedding-cake case; readers interested only in concrete results may read the book to find out what they are. Tebbe points out that some of his recommendations will be unexpected. That's true—at least insofar as the "social coherence" method (in his hands, anyway) can lead to occasional results "that [hard-core] progressives might not reflexively adopt." Tebbe is an assertive egalitarian, but no absolutist. Nor does he simply sneer at religious belief and practice. That is why, despite my disagreements with the book, I consider it a genuine contribution to the current discussion, and one of the more thoughtful statements of the egalitarian side of the "equality" vs. "religious liberty" debate.

Still, it's worth noting that anyone can find "warranted" grounds for particular results in that debate. Neither the Republican nor the Democratic Party platform committees needed the aid of a legal or political theorist to do so. That those platforms *could* be backed by reasons did little to make converts, and *nothing* to bridge the gulf between the two camps. The fact that some position represents a legal or social "consensus" or "settlement" only means it may succeed in being backed by force if need be, not that anyone needs to accept it with good will—especially if one is watching the political changing of the guard and the restaffing of the Supreme Court, and suspects that "warranted" arguments for a more aggressively libertarian and less forcefully egalitarian approach to the Religion Clauses are on the way.

Social peace and legal clarity are good things, to be sure. But unlike Nelson Tebbe, I doubt that the mere presence of "warranted" arguments is the coin that will buy them. ■

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Reformation 2.0

Ed Simon

October 31 marks the quincentenary of a certain Augustinian monk nailing his ninety-five theses to a church door in Wittenberg, Germany—a perfect moment to consider having a repeat. Pundits often claim that Islam needs its own Reformation. But maybe all of us—Christian and non-Christian, believer and non-believer—would benefit from a New Reformation, one that changes our sense of what the word "religion" means. Present conditions indicate that we might be on the verge of another Reformation anyhow.

In some ways, Martin Luther's world was not so different from ours. In 1517, old certainties were failing, and politics was in turmoil. New discoveries transformed understanding, and poisonous nationalisms emerged. Media technology altered how people received information. And most crucially, a crisis of faith marked his world. We suffer from a similar malady, one that, ironically, was in part precipitated by that brave monk himself.

Depending on whom you ask, Luther is either to thank for liberal modernity, or to blame for the doctrinaire, literalist form much of Christianity now takes. Scholars debate the details of the Reformation, concerning both timeline and implications, but maybe it's still too early to know what Luther's full influence will be. In any case, the romance remains half a millennium later, the image of the man who bravely declared, "Here I stand; I can do no other."

Despite Luther's popular image, since the early twentieth century there has been the creeping suspicion among some thinkers that he helped set in motion the disenchantment of the West. Terry Eagleton claims that "the Protestant self moves fearfully in a darkened world of random forces, haunted by a hidden God." Eagleton argues that the Reformation altered the relationship of the sacred and the profane. We're all Protestants now, in the sense that we adhere, mostly unconsciously, to the parameters that marked out Luther's understanding of religion. His emphasis on religion as defined through faith alone made creeds, confessions, and denominations more significant than they should be. A New Reformation could reinvigorate practice, ritual, and culture over mere propositional belief, and in the process allow for a more expansive definition of religion.

Luther's call for "Scripture alone" ultimately privileged literalist reading, which led to fundamentalism. Literalism isn't the relic of a barbaric medieval past but the consummate product of modernity. Literary scholar James Simpson describes the method of reading advocated by the early Protestants as "immensely demanding and punishing...marked by literalist impersonality." Medieval thinkers were at home with allegory, but that way of reading is now minimized, and instead an idol is made out of "original intent," whether in the Bible or elsewhere.

Finally, with his insistence on the interior disposition of the individual soul and its unmediated relation to God, Luther inadvertently weakened the connection between meaning and the world. Philosophers Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly

explain that "Reform Christianity had the effect of emphasizing the individual as defined by his inner thoughts and desires at the expense of…worldly meanings outside the individual," with the result that Luther accidentally "prepared the way for the active nihilism associated with the death of God."

For all that was valuable about Luther's rebellion—and even most Catholics would now admit that he had good reasons for his dissatisfaction with Rome—let's also acknowledge that the Reformation introduced ways of thinking about faith that make it narrower and more rigid than it should be. I am not arguing that we must return to primitive Christianity, as Luther claimed he had. Nor am I arguing for a return to some faux-medieval tableaux of relics, pilgrimages, and liturgical celebrations. The bare ruined choirs will remain empty. There is no going back; there is no undoing or escaping modernity.

And yet, as a growing crisis of meaning seems ever more apparent, it's fair to ask what can possibly come next? The literary historian Andrew Delbanco says that in contemporary society "the ache for meaning goes unrelieved" and an "unslaked craving for transcendence" seems almost universal. Where there are aches, there are eventually analgesics; where there is craving, there must eventually be sustenance. The issue, then, isn't whether there should be a New Reformation, but rather what kind of Reformation it will be. Will it be a retreat to the pleasures of certainty, a doubling-down on literalism? Or will it offer new possibilities for sacred meaning, and even perhaps reenchantment? Could it challenge the idols of our age, including the Market? The truth is I don't know. I have no theses to nail to any church doors. But that a shift in religious consciousness is necessary to address the maladies that confront us, from ecological collapse to authoritarianism, I heartily affirm—for I can do no other. ■

Ed Simon *is a senior editor at the* Marginalia Review of Books, *and a frequent contributor at several websites. His collection* America and Other Fictions: On Radical Faith and Post-Religion *will be released by Zero Books in 2018.*

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