A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

Commonweal

SEPTEMBER 13, 2013

'SAME-SEX MARRIAGE ADVOCATES DON'T JUST HAVE BETTER PUBLIC RELATIONS THAN THEIR OPPONENTS. THEY HAVE BETTER LOGIC, GIVEN THE PREMISES AVAILABLE TO THE CULTURE.'

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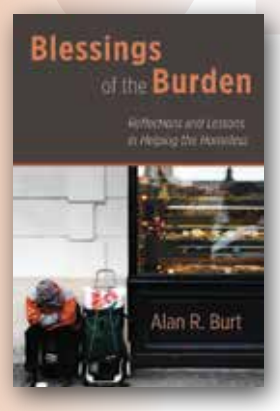

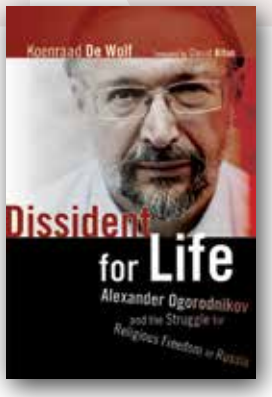

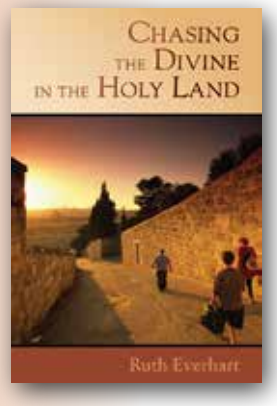

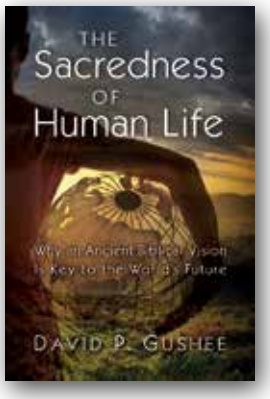

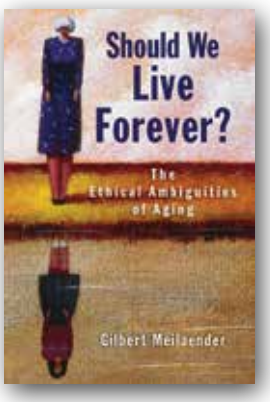

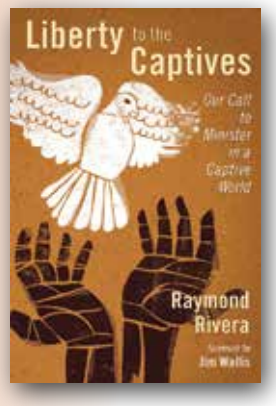

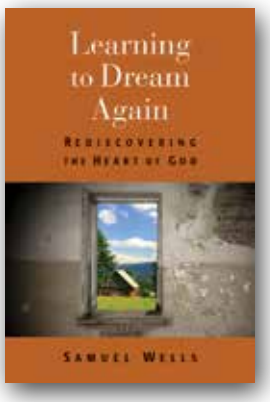

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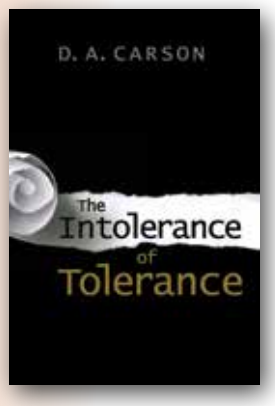

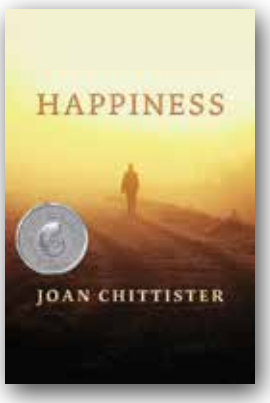

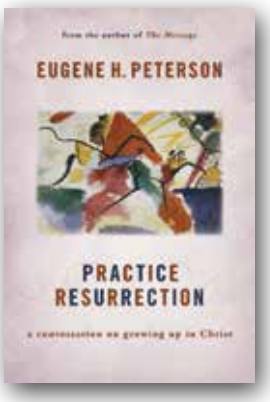

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Subscription Information
212-662-4200

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

Publisher
Thomas Baker

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LETTERS

Catholic universities, cremation, etc.

MISSION POSSIBLE

I am grateful to R. Scott Appleby for reviewing my book *Academic Freedom and the* Telos *of the Catholic University* ("Reclamation Project," July 12). In a collegial spirit I wish to note a few areas in his analysis that need correction. While he pokes some fun at my statement that Catholic universities should hire faculty with expertise in both their own disciplines *and* Catholic philosophy and theology ("Good luck with that!" he says), he omits the rest of what I wrote: "If the university is unable to recruit scholars with such dual expertise (and there are few today who possess it), then it must dedicate resources to train existing faculty who have a desire to [gain it]." The link between Catholic thought and some highly specialized disciplines may be a stretch too far (for example, molecular biochemistry), but there are many subjects where links are easier to make (evolution, cosmology, anthropology, psychology, literature). Some scholars, though not many, already do it and do it well.

Further, I was puzzled when Appleby stated that I "complain" that allowing and even encouraging scholars to "dwell solely within specialized domains ignores an inner teleology driving us toward greater understanding." I make no such complaint. Here is what I actually wrote:

> The mission of the Catholic university must be to provide a haven for the mind and spirit to follow their desire wherever it may lead and in whatever academic discipline a scholar may reside. If the desire calls one to explore some aspect of finite reality, and only that, then that must be protected. Not everyone must follow the mind's desire to God. Not everyone has to explicitly relate knowledge in their disciplines to Christian truth. The university—any university—must protect both those who do and those who do not want to pursue research beyond the confines of their specialization. The Catholic university, however, has an additional obligation: to ensure that there are *some* faculty members in each academic department who not only want to pursue knowledge beyond their disciplines but to actively explore its relation to Christian philosophy and theology.

Unfortunately, Appleby omits this key statement from his analysis. While he is correct that sabbaticals and seminars in the Catholic tradition are not sufficient to change the culture of Catholic institutions, I don't limit my suggestions to those two items. I argue also for: (1) adopting a new, theological understanding of academic freedom and incorporating it into mission statements and bylaws; (2) spiritual retreats for faculty; (3) fostering intellectual-spiritual community building outside disciplinary silos; and (4) strong support for faculty development by senior administrators with vision, backbone, and the wisdom not to impose Catholic theology on others *heteronomously*, but allow it to occur *theonomously* (another key concept Appleby overlooks).

Appleby asserts that Catholic universities must either abide by secular academic standards in order to get federal funds or refuse the funds and return to some form of Catholic sectarianism. That's a false choice. I argue that we can be both catholic (universal, open to all viewpoints) and Catholic. Small-c catholicity negates sectarianism; large-c Catholicity implies a dialogue between Catholic and modern thought. This is not a novel idea: read the "Land O'Lakes Statement," *Ex corde ecclesiae*, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, Edith Stein, Simone Weil, et al. I look forward to further discussions about the implications of my book for Catholic higher education.

KENNETH GARCIA
Notre Dame, Ind.

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From the Editors

America's Politics

Magazines of all sorts have been struggling to find their way in the digital age and in an increasingly fragmented cultural environment. Journals, like *Commonweal,* that have a special relationship to Catholicism, or to some other religious tradition, are no exception. Subscribers to established journals of opinion tend to be older, and this seems especially true for magazines such as *Commonweal, Christian Century, America, First Things*, and the *National Catholic Reporter.* But it is also true for the *New York Review of Books*, the *Nation, National Review*, and even for circulation titans like the *New Yorker.* Attracting a new generation of readers and supporters is crucial to the survival of the sort of vigorous opinion journalism and political debate traditionally fostered by "little" magazines. And so, preserving a magazine's identity while communicating a compelling vision of its purpose and future may be more important today than ever before.

In that context, it has been particularly interesting to read the mission statement of Matt Malone, SJ, the newly appointed editor of *America*, about the challenges facing his magazine and the Catholic media at large. In "Pursuing the Truth in Love: The Mission of 'America' in a 21st-Century Church" (June 3–10), Malone makes a compelling case for *America*'s unique character as a Catholic ministry as well as a forum for intellectual and theological deliberation. It is refreshing to come across such a passionate declaration of how a magazine like *America* should meet its twin obligations of illuminating church teaching while at the same time welcoming the discordant views of Catholics themselves on issues both political and theological or ecclesial. In tackling that problem, Malone is especially concerned with the politicization of the church. He attributes this, at least in part, to what he characterizes as a "body politic sickened by the toxin of ideological partisanship" and a "public square [that] has less space for overtly religious perspectives than at any previous time in American history."

Even allowing for rhetorical emphasis, that analysis of the broader political situation seems both overdrawn and incomplete. Politics, as the saying goes, ain't beanbag, and partisan strife is more the rule than the exception in American history. Nor would anyone who watched even a few of the Republican Party's interminable 2012 presidential debates conclude that religion—and specifically Christianity—had little purchase on our common political life. If religious voices have been marginalized in the way Malone suggests, it is sobering indeed to be reminded that Catholics are the largest self-identified religious group in Congress—making up 30 percent of the House of Representatives. Something more than partisanship must explain why the church's views fail to gain traction with the larger public, let alone with those in the pews. Yes, hostility to Catholicism exists in certain media, academic, and liberal quarters, but an openly antagonistic attitude toward religion remains a sure road to political oblivion in this stubbornly religious country. *America*'s mission statement is silent about which party and what politics might be more responsible for those partisan toxins. Pronouncing a plague on both political parties ignores the fact that it is currently a faction within one party, the GOP, that is doing everything in its power to obstruct the operations of government, a situation that has even Republican leaders perplexed and paralyzed.

Malone's more pressing concern is with what he perceives to be the destructive influence of secular political ideology on Catholic unity. "We view ideology as largely inimical to Christian discipleship," he writes, arguing that "our secular, civic discourse...is a mortal threat to the ecclesiastical discourse." In an effort to combat this "factionalism," *America* will no longer allow writers to use the terms "liberal," "conservative," or "moderate" "when referring to our fellow Catholics in an ecclesiastical context." That editorial experiment will bear watching.

Factionalism can indeed be a threat to the church (or to the country), but honest disagreement is not always destructive of ecclesial communion; in fact, it is often constitutive of it. As John Courtney Murray, SJ, once wrote, "disagreement is a rare achievement, and most of what is called disagreement is simply confusion." Paul took on Peter in the most direct way on the question of whether the promises of Christ could be extended to the uncircumcised. >>

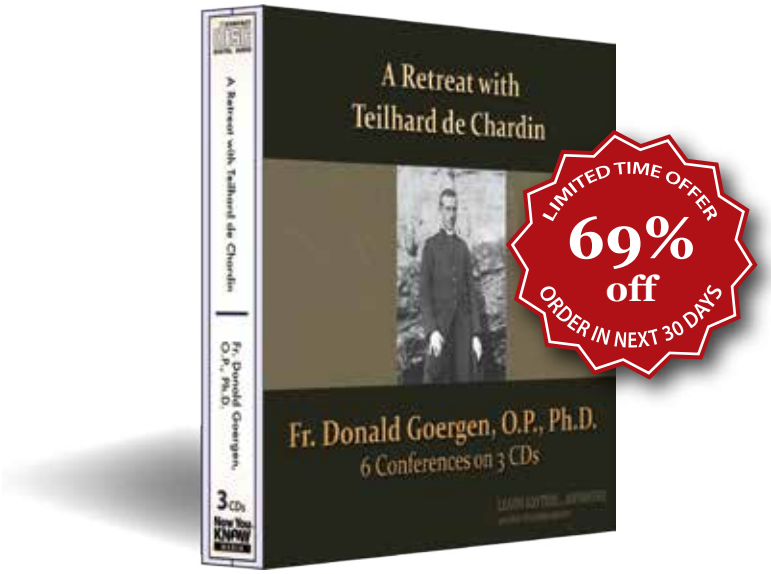
The church as we know it would not exist but for that bit of factionalism. The number of such disagreements throughout the church's history is hard to exaggerate. In fact, church unity is more often threatened when not enough room is made for the airing and resolution of honest disagreement. Nor does it do any good to pretend that the contemporary church is actually a community of harmony and virtue simply because ideally it should be. American Catholics belong to the church, but also to many other communities and organizations. They cannot, and should not, leave those attachments behind at the church door, nor should they regard their political commitments as peripheral to their Christian witness. Quite the contrary. For example, while *America*'s mission statement confesses a "bias" for the "preferential option for the poor and vulnerable," it asserts that the poor have no "special parties to speak for them." Maybe not, but that doesn't mean that all parties speak for the poor equally, or equally well.

"Pursuing the Truth in Love" is a bracing and welcome call to Christian discipleship, but it tends to draw too stark a dichotomy between a Catholic's religious identity and his or her secular political responsibilities. Malone, for example, refers to "the tired, quadrennial debate about which presidential candidate represents the lesser of two evils." The dismissive tone about electoral politics is striking. Millions of politically engaged Catholics, on both sides of the ideological fence, still believe that democratic politics is about a good deal more than the lesser of two evils, and that political involvement, despite its compromises, is no obstacle to Christian discipleship. Tiring of the messy trade-offs of politics is understandable, but it's no answer to our discontent, for history has issued a sure warning that the alternatives to democratic discord are far worse. The nation's current political impasse calls for a renewed commitment to the practice of politics, not to Christian detachment. The Catholic Church has been too eager to despair of representative democracy in the past, and must be ever vigilant in guarding against that temptation today.

Malone writes that "our principal point of reference is not civil society, and it is not the state," but rather the gospel. Amen. Yet a principal point of reference does not preclude other morally binding commitments. In making the gospel known, Christians will most often act as members of civil society and citizens of the state. Not just as Americans, but also as Catholics and Christians, we have a large stake in the success of our democracy. Historically, the churches have played an indispensable role in compelling the liberal state to live up to its promises about human dignity and freedom, whether the issue was slavery, civil rights, eugenics, economic opportunity and fairness, abortion, religious freedom, voting rights, gender equality, or war. As the commemorations of the 1963 March on Washington remind us, the language of social justice, which is fundamental to biblical religion, is essential to the health of democracy itself.

Criticizing the theologian Stanley Hauerwas's radical critique of American democracy in these pages, the philosopher Jeffrey Stout insisted that the churches condescend to or retreat from the political realm at their peril. "Christians have every reason to concern themselves with the integrity of the church and with the question of what way of life it is meant to exemplify," he wrote ("Not of This World," October 10, 2003). But that focus should not entail an escape from the duties of citizenship or from the influence serious Christians can wield in their roles as government and business leaders. "Christian ethics has traditionally taken all of these roles as falling within its scope, and made it its business to evaluate existing social arrangements in light of stringent standards of justice and love," Stout wrote.

In pursuing the truth in love, those stringent standards should apply both within the Catholic community and beyond it. Ideology is not always the enemy of Christianity; liberal democracy is an ideology itself, and it represents not a threat to the church but a welcome and necessary partner. There is no need to choose between fidelity to Christ and our secular democratic hopes. That at least has long been part of the mission statement of this magazine. ■



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Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Lost Sheep

IS THE CHURCH A LAZY MONOPOLY?

One out of every three Americans raised in the church is no longer a Catholic. These "formers" make up the second or third largest religious group in America (depending on whether Baptists are counted in their unity or diversity). In marketing terms, half these Catholics have chosen another brand of religion; the other half are "nones"—unaffiliated. It's as if roughly 12 million people had forsaken Crest for Tom's toothpaste, while the other 12 million stopped brushing their teeth altogether. Procter & Gamble, which makes Crest, would work hard to win back those customers: perhaps by banishing turquoise toothpaste or reducing the price. Not so the Catholic Church; it is not a manufacturer and need not be as enterprising as P&G. Does that mean lost customers are more valuable than lost sheep?

Albert O. Hirschman, a brilliant and iconoclastic economist (recently celebrated in a seven-hundred-page biography), laid out a plausible explanation for this kind of phenomenon in his classic study *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, which focuses on organizations that don't function effectively and their dissatisfied members or customers. Some leave (the "exit" of the title); some stay (the "loyalty"). Hirschman asked why.

He recognized that exiting is easy if we're talking toothpaste. Consumers dissatisfied with their usual brand can try another. Loyalty is more likely with organizations that invite a strong allegiance, possess a monopoly on something valued, or exact a high price for leaving—for example, families, religions, political parties, and totalitarian governments. Hirschman thinks that a strong sense of loyalty to the group makes exiting a tough, even unthinkable choice for discontented members. Instead, the dissatisfied voice their criticism rather than exit.

Back in the 1960s, when Hirschman was writing *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, voice was in vogue. Women were challenging patriarchy, Democrats protesting the war in Vietnam, Eastern European dissidents questioning Marxist orthodoxy, and Catholics debating Vatican II. These were the voices of critical members who would not or could not exit. Today the cost of exit has declined in all these arenas. Marriages became more egalitarian and divorce laws were relaxed. Ronald Reagan won the votes of FDR Democrats. The Soviet Union collapsed. The Catholic Church lost its monopoly on salvation.

And yet, even as exit from the church has grown, robust voices persist. Catholics, especially of the Vatican II generation, remain loyal in Hirschman's sense: they do not exit. But neither do they fall silent. Many of these observant (and older) Catholics remain loyal and voice criticisms. Younger Catholics, who do not always possess the same sense of loyalty, are more likely to exit—either to another religious group or to no religion. The church, in these circumstances, fits Hirschman's definition of an organization that responds neither to exit nor to voice. These he calls "lazy monopolies." Whether members complain or leave, "management happens to be inured or indifferent to their particular reaction and thus does not feel compelled to correct its course."

Some would argue that the Catholic Church, claiming a monopoly on truth as well as salvation, has no course correction to make. That has been the stand of recent popes and their episcopal appointees, who have rescinded or tinkered with Vatican II reforms and ruled out further change. Complaints have gone unheard, while conforming members have been embraced. And many have left.

Parents and friends of former Catholics now singing in a Baptist choir, serving on the vestry of an Episcopal parish, or meditating in a Buddhist monastery may be relieved that they're still praying, still believing in something. Perhaps even the "lazy monopolists" consider that these sheep are not lost, simply misplaced. But what of the "nones," those who abandon religion altogether or just drift away from it. We seem strangely indifferent to their exit. If 12 million people stopped brushing their teeth, we'd all take notice.

Though Hirschman is inventive in pursuing the combination and permutations of exit, voice, and loyalty that might insure an organization's long-term survival, he recognizes that efforts to change an organization may come to nothing. He sums up this eventuality on a religious note: "the martyr's death is exit at its most irreversible and argument at its most irrefutable." It is ironic to think of those who give up their Catholic faith as martyrs, but their departure is at least as drastic as martyrdom. Lazy monopolists take note. ■

Charles R. Morris

Free Market?

NOT FOR THE OIL GIANTS

In the mid-1970s, I spent a couple of years working in the British government as a kind of exchange civil servant. Yes, the meeting rooms looked exactly like the ones in the BBC/Alec Guiness version of *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, and tea and sweet biscuits were served promptly at four. At the time, the civil service was still drawn from the top ranks of "Oxbridge" graduates, with the emphasis clearly on general intelligence rather than technical training. One of my colleagues at the Home Office, a Cambridge man, had majored in modern languages. When I asked him which ones, he said, "Greek and Latin."

The British government's preference for generalists, however, was beginning to fray, especially in the case of economists, who were being hired in the Treasury Department, although pointedly only in "adviser" roles. In the United States, by contrast, economists had already become the Dumbledore magicians of the modern state, based on their supposed ability to "fine-tune" the American economy.

The hollowness of the economists' claims was soon exposed by the wild economic swings of the 1970s and '80s, and has been brutally exposed again by the Great Financial Crash. Even Ben Bernanke, chairman of the Federal Reserve, who happens to be an expert on crashes, failed to understand the catastrophe unfolding before him until very late in the game. Embarrassingly, the economics profession had been almost unanimous in its support of the radical regulatory overhaul that enabled the feckless risk-taking that led to the crash.

Recently, many economists have been raising hard questions about the relevance of their discipline. No one disputes that it provides powerful insights into narrow classes of problems like structuring the bidding process for government leasing of the high bandwidth radio spectrum. But important issues rarely come in such neat packages. Financial deregulation assumed that employees would always act in the best long-term interest of their firms, which is almost laughable, considering the pots of money bankers and traders could make by taking risky bets with their firms' money.

A current policy debate once again pits the bulk of the economics profession against common sense. Over the past decade, the United States, by dint of some stunning technological advances, has become one of the world's largest producers of natural gas, the cleanest of hydrocarbon fuels, and much cheaper than energy derived from petroleum. That is an important attraction for heavy manufacturers, like chemical and steel companies, in which energy costs have powerful bottom-line effects. The new U.S. energy advantage, along with rising costs in China and other emerging countries, has created a real prospect for a major manufacturing revival in the United States.

The burning policy question is whether America should export its gas. World prices are between two and three times as high as prices in the United States, and are especially high in Asia after the collapse of the Japanese nuclear-power industry. Economists reflexively argue that prices should always be set by competitive markets. Gas producers should be allowed to seek the highest-priced markets, regardless of whether it chokes off an American manufacturing recovery.

The gaping hole in that argument is that world energy prices are not set by a free market. They are controlled by the OPEC cartel. Some 90 percent of the world's oil supply is produced for less than $20 a barrel, but OPEC withholds enough of its cheap oil to force prices up to about $100, since the last percentages of supply come from expensive sources like deep-sea wells. In a true free market, the individual OPEC countries would increase production and lower prices to compete for market share, and oil prices would drop to a third or a fourth of what they are now.

The low American gas prices are actually set in a competitive auction market, and expose the deadweight costs of cartel energy pricing. That is not in the interest of big American gas producers, like ExxonMobil, the biggest of them all. Hence the all-out drive by gas producers and their minions in Congress to gain government approvals to build the very expensive processing facilities required to export natural gas.

The companies suggest, disingenuously, that the export market will be too small to affect American prices. But if they believed that, they wouldn't be pressing applications to export about half of all current production, at an initial capital cost of up to $100 billion. If they get their way, the East Asian manufacturing juggernauts will absorb all the gas we can send them, and our domestic gas prices will inevitably rise to the oil-equivalent level. The OPEC cartel will have enforced its writ. The global companies like ExxonMobil will see a huge jump in their margins. The nascent U.S. industrial recovery is likely to be smothered, and we will be in danger of slipping into the role of an extractive economic outpost and raw material supplier for the new Asian industrial empire. ■

Gabriel Said Reynolds

The Devil They Know

WHY MOST SYRIAN CHRISTIANS SUPPORT BASHAR AL-ASSAD

In the summer of 2011 ongoing protests against the rule of Bashar al-Assad in Syria turned into an armed rebellion. By the fall rebels had taken control of Qusayr, an important town in the hills between the city of Homs and the Lebanese border in western Syria. At first, rebel forces in Qusayr were controlled by the officially secular Free Syrian Army, led mostly by defectors from Assad's military. Yet over time Islamist fighters (or "jihadis") became increasingly powerful. On June 13, 2012, Islamists looted the Melkite Catholic church of Qusayr and posed for pictures dressed in clerical garments. When the Syrian army, with the help of the Lebanese militia Hezbollah, took control of the town almost a year later, on June 5, 2013, Christians hung the Syrian flag of the Assad regime from churches and joined public celebrations. Televised interviews featured Christians thanking Assad and Hassan Nasrallah, the charismatic leader of Hezbollah, for saving them from the rebels.

Other events over the past year have given Syrian Christians new reasons to root for the Assad regime. On April 22, 2013, Gregorius Ibrahim, bishop of the Syriac Orthodox Church, and Boulus Yazigi, bishop of the Greek Orthodox Church, were abducted by rebels near Aleppo as they were returning from a joint visit to refugee camps in Turkey. Their driver (also a Christian) was killed. The two bishops are still missing.

Grimmer still is the story of Fr. François Murad, a Franciscan priest who served in Ghassaniyah, a town in northwest Syria between Latakia and Idlib. Ghassaniyah was a popular vacation spot for Syrians, and before the current troubles it was home to 10,000 residents, almost all of them Christian. During the fighting, however, it fell under the control of Jabhat al-Nusra, an increasingly powerful Islamist militia with links to Al Qaeda. The town's Christian inhabitants fled and its churches were desecrated. In late June 2013 news spread that one of the few Christians to remain, Fr. Murad, had been beheaded by rebels. A grainy video of a beheading went viral on the internet. In the video Islamist militants shout, "God is greater!" (*Allahu akbar*), before savagely beheading two people with a kitchen knife. In the video, one of the victims is identified as Murad. The Franciscan Friars of the Custody of the Holy Land later announced that Murad was not one of the victims in this video. Instead, he had been shot dead inside a church in Ghassaniyah. For Christians in Syria, this is what counts as good news these days.

As stories like that of Murad have spread wildly through social media, the Christian community in Syria has moved ever closer to the Assad regime. Today many Syrian Christians who wouldn't deny Assad's record of repressing political opponents would rather put up with the repression than live under the rule of Islamists. And who can blame them? Under Assad things are clear: Oppose the regime and you're in trouble; support the regime, or pretend to, and you're not. Under Islamist rule all those who violate Islamic law—or who are even suspected of violating it—are in trouble. This has particularly grave consequences for Christians, who are often suspected of undermining Islamic morals, or offending Muslim sentiment. In an Islamist state Christian shops selling alcohol or pork might be destroyed by a mob, permission to build or rebuild a church might be denied, a Christian might be threatened with death for evangelizing Muslims or insulting Muhammad, a Christian boy might be assaulted because he has been accused of sleeping with a Muslim girl, and a Christian girl might be insulted, or worse, because she is showing too much skin in public.

Christian fears of an Islamist state help explain the hesitancy of Syriac Christians to oppose Assad from the beginning. When the Arab Spring broke out in Tunisia, the entire country turned as one against President Ben Ali. So too in Egypt, where Coptic Christians, who make up 6 percent of the country's population, closed ranks with Muslims in opposition to Hosni Mubarak. In Syria, though, most Christians have remained loyal to Assad.

Among the exceptions to this rule are those West Syrian ("Syrian Orthodox" or "Syrian Catholic") and East Syrian ("Chaldean" or "Assyrian") Christians who hope that the fall of the Assad regime will lead to greater autonomy for their communities. The Syriac Union Party and the Assyrian Democratic Association, political parties affiliated with these communities, have supported the rebellion. The Christian community of the city of Hama—mostly Greek Orthodox—is also known for supporting the opposition. Meanwhile, a number of Christian social activists, many with leftist political affiliations, are vocal supporters of the rebellion. These include George Sabra, who served as acting head of the Syrian National Council (the largest political body representing the opposition) for several months this year.

A particularly vocal supporter of the rebellion is Fr. Paolo Dall'Oglio, an Italian Jesuit priest who established a monastic community at Deir Mar Musa in the desert north of Damascus. Fr. Dall'Oglio has spoken out in support not only of the Syrian National Council, but even of the most violent Islamist groups, including the powerful militia Jabhat al-Nusra. In an interview on June 23, 2013, Fr. Dall'Oglio regretted that more Christians have not joined the opposition, "I see these [Syrian] Christians as victims too of what's happening, they're trapped in the middle, unable to believe in the revolution, in democracy."

In late July, Dall'Oglio entered Syria through rebel held territory in the north and made his way to Raqqa, a city under the control of Jabhat al-Nusra. On the evening of Sunday, July 28, Dall'Oglio was filmed at a rally organized in Raqqa in support of the rebels fighting against Assad in Homs. In the video Dall'Oglio declares, in perfect Arabic and to the cheers of the Syrians around him, his belief in the righteousness of the rebellion. The very next day, July 29, Dall'Oglio was taken hostage by Islamists. In mid-August it was widely reported that he had been executed, but that remains unconfirmed.

The case of Dall'Oglio is a tragic reminder of why so few Christians support the revolution. Dall'Oglio supported it because of his commitment to Muslim-Christian co-existence and to a more democratic Middle East. Yet most Syrian Christians, like members of most other religious or ethnic communities in the region, are primarily concerned with their own community—with the Christians in Syria, and not with the country, the region, or Arabs more generally. As for democracy, many Syrian Christians would rather do without it than see it lead to an Islamist state, preferring the repressive, yet secular Assad regime to Al Qaeda.

Assad is a Muslim, but he is not a Sunni Muslim, and his regime is not Islamic. He is a member of the Alawite community, which derives from Shiite Islam and makes up less than 10 percent of the Syrian population. (There are also small Alawite communities in Lebanon and Turkey.) In public Alawites declare themselves simply to be Muslims—believers in the Quran and in the Prophet Muhammad—but Alawite Islam is not Islam as Sunnis or Shiites know it. Alawite prayer rituals, which have numerous similarities with Christian liturgy, are unlike those of other Muslims, and some Alawite teachings are the stuff of apostasy to other Muslims—for example, that souls are reincarnated and that Ali (cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad) is a manifestation of the divine, or is simply God.

In theory, these beliefs are kept secret and revealed only to select members of the community. Yet Sunni Muslims have long accused the Alawites of unbelief. The famous fourteenth-century Syrian Sunni jurist Ibn Taymiyya (the principal authority for modern Islamists) declared the Alawites "unbelievers" in a series of fatwas. Today, the uprising in Syria has led to a new series of fatwas, which cite the unbelief of Alawites as a good reason to fight against Assad.

For its part, the Assad regime has consistently claimed that it is the only hope of protection for religious minorities in Syria—not only for Alawites, but also for Christians, Druze, and others. In view of how the Syrian civil war has developed, more Christians have come to accept this claim. The opposition is increasingly controlled by Islamists, who view the rebellion as a religious struggle and are not interested in interreligious dialogue. Jabhat al-Nusra, the militant jihadi group aligned with Al Qaeda and behind the murder of Fr. Murad, is steadily expanding its dominion in northern and eastern Syria. Incidents of religious persecution—of anyone accused of offending Islam—are on the rise in rebel territory. On June 8 Islamists publicly executed a fifteen-year-old Muslim boy accused of insulting the Prophet Muhammad in Aleppo. They shot him in the mouth in front of his parents.

In the wake of these events, the Obama administration's June 13 announcement that it would offer material support to the Syrian opposition was hardly welcome news to Syrian Christians. The administration insisted it would support only the Free Syrian Army and other officially secular forces, not the Islamist militias. But it is increasingly difficult to do the one thing without also doing the other. The Free Syrian Army claims to represent all Syrians, and its leaders have condemned the desecration of churches, the kidnapping of Bishops Ibrahim and Yazigi, and the murder of Murad. Yet they have also continued to coordinate their campaign against the Assad regime with Islamist militias. Indeed, while occasional skirmishes have broken out between the Free Syrian Army and the jihadis, the two groups are nevertheless allies, with open lines of communication, agreements on territorial control, and joint campaigns against the regime's forces. In its eagerness to defeat Assad—and in response to the financial support of radical Sunni Gulf states—the Free Syrian Army has worked hand in hand with jihadis.

The administration's announcement that it would support the Syrian opposition also came just before the popular uprising in Egypt that led to the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi. A vocal supporter of the Islamist elements in the Syrian opposition, Morsi had cut off diplomatic relations with Assad's government. He also favored Islamist elements within Egypt, and tolerated a series of Islamist attacks on Christians, including a bloody siege of St. Mark's cathedral in Cairo on April 7. If Egyptian Christians had once marched alongside Muslims to demand the resignation of Hosni Mubarak, they now bitterly regretted that Mubarak's overthrow had led to an increasingly Islamist state. It was no surprise, then, that the Egyptian Christian community overwhelmingly supported the July 3 coup that put General Sisi in charge of the country.

In the wake of media reports about the growing reach of jihadis in Syria—on July 2 it was reported that Al Qaeda has set up camps in Syria—the Obama administration has publicly expressed its concern with the rise of Islamists in the Syrian rebellion. Most, though not all, Syrian Christians hope that this concern will lead the White House to reverse course and withdraw its support from the rebels. They increasingly fear that a post-Assad state will be an Islamist state, and there are good reasons for this fear. ■

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Gabriel Said Reynolds *is professor of Islamic studies and theology at the University of Notre Dame and co-director of the International Qur'anic Studies Association.*

Leslie Woodcock Tentler

Notown

THE DETROIT I KNEW IS GONE

Detroit has been dying for a long time. When my parents returned to the city in 1955—my mother was born there in 1917, while my father arrived as an immigrant in the mid-1920s—they reluctantly chose to live in a suburb. In retrospect their decision seems foreordained. Detroit began losing white population in the later 1940s, although its population peak of just under 2 million was recorded in the census of 1950. Population loss alone, troubling though it was, did not mark Detroit as unusual. Eight of the nation's ten largest cities lost population, nearly all of it white, over the course of the 1950s. None of these cities, however, was as dependent on a single industry for its survival as Detroit. None was so disproportionately blue-collar in its population. And none had its fortunes directed to the same extent by an economic elite that did not live locally. (Henry Ford, who was certainly a local, never built a plant within the Detroit city limits and held aloof from local efforts at civic improvement.) If my parents intuited an uncertain future for a city they loved, they had good reason to do so.

Detroit in the late nineteenth century possessed a diversified industrial base. The city produced rail cars, carriages, bicycles, pharmaceuticals, garden seeds, shoes, and a great deal more. By the 1920s, after a decade in which the city's population doubled, auto manufacturing dominated. Prior to the 1950s, excessive dependence on an industry notoriously sensitive to economic fluctuations meant simply that hard times were harder in Detroit. In the depths of the Great Depression, Detroit's unemployment rate was the highest of the nation's major cities. With the decentralization of auto production after World War II, the city's dependence on a single industry had new and even graver consequences. Manufacturing jobs in the city were disappearing by the 1950s, while regional auto employment was entering a longer, slower decline. Postwar prosperity helped many white working-class families cope by enabling their sons and daughters to get an extended education. With a man's seniority rights protected by his union contract—transfer rights to distant plants would eventually be part of the contract too—he could reasonably hope to work long enough to collect a pension. By that time, if life went according to plan, the kids would be safe in white-collar jobs.

Things worked differently for blacks, whose employment in the local auto industry dates for all practical purposes only to World War II. Those who entered the industry early accrued seniority rights and typically pursued the same family strategy as their white working-class counterparts. Detroit's substantial black middle class—average income among Detroit's African Americans in the 1960s was the highest in the nation—had its taproot in auto employment. But for the legions of black peasant migrants from the deep South who arrived in the 1950s and '60s, shrinking employment prospects locally led all too frequently to multiple generations in poverty. Growing pockets of the city were characterized by crime, drugs, and hopelessness, which gave the city as

Detroit in better days

a whole an aura of danger, at least for many whites. Resistance to open housing, a potent force in city politics even in the 1950s, was one discouraging result. So was accelerating white flight. When the city's black neighborhoods exploded in July 1967, leaving forty-three dead and thousands of torched homes and businesses, an already substantial white outflow turned overnight into a tsunami. Detroit had a black majority by the early 1970s.

With its economic base substantially eroded, the city inherited by its first black mayor—Coleman Young was elected in 1973 and served for twenty years—came with a built-in deficit. The relatively low educational level of its population discouraged investors who might generate alternative sources of employment. Its high rate of violent crime pushed growing numbers of the remaining middle class, black as well as white, into the suburbs. (The closure of numerous parochial schools in the 1970s and after was a factor too.) And while the local auto elite were generous with their charitable dollars, they did not—indeed, given the logic of the industry, probably could not—save their headquarters city by providing jobs. "There's nothing wrong with Detroit that a few auto plants can't cure," Coleman Young liked to say, which was true in the abstract but reflected the kind of delusional thinking that has long characterized the city's politics. Coupled with a racial politics that sometimes bordered on paranoia, this willful refusal to see present realities meant that local government often seemed dysfunctional, though it was in reality not notably more corrupt or inefficient than the governments of other large cities. With the conspicuous exception of Kwame Kilpatrick, currently a guest of the federal penal system, Detroit's mayors have been reasonably competent. Their failures rest squarely on the size of the problems they faced—problems that won't be solved without state and probably federal assistance.

Those of us who have watched Detroit's long dying tend to think in terms of the physical city—the abandonment of buildings, their subsequent decay and finally, if the city does its job of demolition, the rubble-strewn lot. For a very long time, I found love in the ruins (to borrow from Walker Percy). Life has hung on stubbornly in Detroit, in such unexpected forms as the flourishing Hungarian bakery, now gone, that I stumbled upon in a decaying working-class enclave close to the city's western border. (The proprietor had provided each of the often-married Gabor sisters with wedding cakes, which presumably helped his bottom line.) St. Cecilia's Church, with its apse mural of a black Christ, provided refuge to the Tentler family when it seemed that nearly every Catholic in our nominal home parish worshipped at the shrine of Ronald Reagan. Those memorable Cecilia's Sundays, suffused with incense and gospel music, probably kept my children in the fold. The Detroit Institute of Arts, a refuge of another sort since my adolescence, still delights with its dazzling collection and especially its famed Rivera murals, paid for with a second generation of Ford money. Flower Day at the city's sprawling Eastern Market, a plant-buying orgy for gardeners throughout the region, provided—and indeed continues to provide—a pageant of interracial good fellowship.

One can still find love in the ruins of Detroit, but it's harder now. So much of the city has disappeared that recent visits have left me disoriented. (I tend to navigate by landmarks, an astonishing number of which are gone.) A new generation of urban pioneers now hoists the banner of optimism—"say nice things about Detroit!"—while I alternate between rage and despair. Yes, there are signs of life there, some of them new, like the city's flourishing arts scene. But the decay is so vast and the human suffering so appalling that optimism seems not just delusional—an old Detroit problem—but almost obscene. Still, the city would be even poorer without it. Cheers, then, for the probably deluded optimists who say nice things about the imploding city they now call home. Given Detroit's status as the nation's busiest border crossing with Canada and its access to the world's largest source of fresh water, even I would admit that it likely has a long-term future in an increasingly globalized and water-starved world. Still, I worry in the shorter term about those many Detroiters who have been cast off as so much detritus in globalization's wake.

That human wastage brings us to the real significance of Detroit's collapse. The Detroit of my childhood, though in the first stages of decline, was still a place where working-class people could live in comfort and security. The blue-collar city of my youth boasted the nation's highest rate of homeownership. Working people paid dearly for their relative affluence: even unionized plants were dirty and noisy, most jobs were mind-numbingly repetitious, and overtime pay can't compensate for the toll exacted by excessively long hours. But that affluence was still a notable achievement, the result of strong unions locally and—honesty compels—relatively weak competition from overseas manufacturers. It made upward mobility possible for the next generation and fostered a strong communal ethos, albeit one that was ultimately undermined by race-based fears and resentments. We do well to remember, however, that a good many African Americans benefitted from the era of working-class affluence. The tragedy is that it ended before they were able as a group to enjoy the same shot at upward mobility as their immigrant predecessors.

Detroit's collapse is thus about more than race, however conspicuous the racial factor may be. It has everything to do with the recent history of the nation's working class, devastated by the implosion of manufacturing and the concomitant erosion of wages, union protections, and chances at upward mobility. We delude ourselves if we imagine that the fate of the nation's workers does not affect us all. In that sense, we are all Detroiters. ■

Leslie Woodcock Tentler *is professor of history at the Catholic University of America.*

The Things We Share

A Catholic's Case for Same-Sex Marriage

Joseph Bottum

There's this guy I know in Manhattan. Call him Jim. Jim Watson. We're friends, I guess. We used to be friends, anyway—grabbing a hamburger together near Gramercy Park, from time to time, or meeting out on the Stuyvesant Town Oval on a summer afternoon to play some folk and bluegrass with the guitar strummers, mandolin pickers, autoharpers, and amateur banjo players who'd drift by. None of us any good, but fun, you know? Old-timey Americana like "Wayfaring Stranger," "Pretty Saro," and "The Orphan Girl." A version of "Shady Grove," I remember, was one of his specialties: *When I was just a little boy, / all I wanted was a Barlow knife. / But now I am a great big boy, / I'm lookin' for a wife.*

A few years ago, his friendship began to cool, bit by bit. You understand how it is: a little here, a little there, and last time I was through New York he didn't even bother to answer my note suggesting we put together one of our low-rent urban hootenannies. The problem, our conversations had made pretty clear along the way, was that I am a Catholic, and Jim is gay.

Well, actually, *gay* isn't the word he would use. I have what might be the worst ability to recognize sexual orientation on the planet, but no one needed sensitivity to guess Jim's views. Not that he was campy or anything when I knew him, but he was always vocal about his sexuality, naming himself loudly to anyone nearby with words that polite society allows only in ironic use by gay men themselves.

Anyway, Jim gradually started to take our difference personally, growing increasingly angry first at the Catholic Church for its opposition to state-sanctioned same-sex marriage and then at Catholics themselves for belonging to such a church. His transformation didn't come from any personal desire to marry—or, at least, from any desire he ever articulated or I could see.

Joseph Bottum *is an Amazon.com-bestselling author whose latest book is* An Anxious Age: The Post-Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of America *(forthcoming in February from Image/Random House). The former literary editor of the* Weekly Standard *and chief editor of* First Things, *he lives in the Black Hills of South Dakota.* *Funding for this essay has been provided by a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation.*

But then, I've already mentioned how blind I can be, and maybe a hunger to marry was gnawing at his heart. However much the culture piously proclaims the equivalence of all lifestyles, a vision of the lonely bachelor's deathbed can begin to haunt any man. We could talk here of what even back in the 1820s Schopenhauer insisted was the *woe* in marriage, but we can't deny the sheer companionable comfort that marriage seems to promise as well: the hope that we won't grow old and die alone, the hope that the good life and good death of Baucis and Philemon (in Ovid's wonderful old myth about the gods rewarding an aging couple) might still be available—for me, for you, for any of us.

Still, as Jim began to formulate the emerging thought, his anger wasn't for himself but for his *people*: exactly as though sexual desire had created an ethnic group that was the source of his deepest, truest self-identity. Measured by the lifetime of most cultural upheavals in American history, the debate about same-sex marriage has risen to its current prominence with astonishing speed. But rise it did, like the sun, becoming the symbolic issue around which a whole galaxy of moral impulses, political aims, social discontents, and personal grievances seem to gravitate. And my friend Jim found himself, like many others, pulled into that orbit.

Fair enough, I suppose. Certainly, without an expressed desire to be married himself, Jim's support for same-sex marriage was at least partly free from the grating self-interest, the fallacy of special pleading, that infects too many declarations on the topic. When we're told—as we were, for example in the spring of 2013—that the conservative Senator Rob Portman (R-Ohio) now supports same-sex marriage because he's discovered that his son is gay, it may have a certain rhetorical effectiveness. And so too when a gay-rights activist speaks emotionally of the personal sorrows he suffered during the time he was unable to marry. But even when offered in service of something we agree with, doesn't that kind of personal fact deployed as argument reduce public discourse to little more than self-interest and self-importance? The sexuality of Portman's son doesn't strengthen the logic of the senator's new position; it weakens it, when offered as the reason for Portman's changed views.

Plaintiffs in the case against California's same-sex marriage ban greet supporters outside the Supreme Court

CNS PHOTO / JONATHAN ERNST, REUTERS

It's a little odd, I realize, to press an argument against special pleading while writing a personal essay—especially one that opens with a plaint about a decaying friendship. But Jim's increasing anger, the manner and the timing of it, at least helped bring into focus for me the question of what purposes the fight over same-sex marriage has been serving.

Not the *fact* of the legality of same-sex marriage, exactly. That ship has already sailed, as well it ought to have. By July 2013, thirteen states had already recognized it, and under any principle of governmental fairness available today, the equities are all on the side of same-sex marriage. There is no coherent jurisprudential argument against it—no principled legal view that can resist it. The Supreme Court more or less punted this June in its marriage cases, *Hollingsworth v. Perry* and *United States v. Windsor*, but it was a punt that signaled eventual victory for advocates of same-sex marriage. And by ruling in *Windsor* that Section 3 of DOMA (the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act) is unconstitutional, the justices made it clear that the court will not stand in the way of the movement's complete triumph. We are now at the point where, I believe, American Catholics should accept state recognition of same-sex marriage simply because they are Americans.

For that matter, plenty of practical concerns suggest that the bishops should cease to fight the passage of such laws. Campaigns against same-sex marriage are hurting the church, offering the opportunity to make Catholicism a byword for repression in a generation that, even among young Catholics, just doesn't think that same-sex activity is worth fighting about. There's a reasonable case to be made that the struggle against abortion is slowly winning, but the fight against public acceptance of same-sex behavior has been utterly lost.

I find these practical considerations compelling, just as I think most ordinary Catholics do. The church in America today is in its weakest public position since agitation about Irish and Italian immigration in the 1870s prompted thirty-eight states to pass anti-Catholic Blaine amendments to their constitutions. A great deal of goodwill was built up by Catholic work in the 1980s and 1990s, from John Paul II's successful campaign to "live in truth" by opposing Soviet Communism to the prestige of Mother Teresa's work with the poorest in India. But the goodwill disappeared in a flash, just over a decade ago, with the *Boston Globe*'s 2002 stories of the horrifying priest scandals.

Regardless of the church-bashing uses to which some commentators put the news, the central fact of the scandals remains: a corruption, a horror, and an outrage, which many bishops tried criminally to bury in their bureaucracies. And major effects of the scandal included feeding the schadenfreude and sense of victory among anti-Catholics, wiping out the moral stature of the church in the mind of the American public, and eliminating the respect in which the *seriousness* of Catholic ideas was once held even by those who thought that such seriousness began with mistaken premises and arrived at false conclusions. In the context of the deserved contempt that followed, what kind of loony, pie-eyed judgment could lead the bishops to engage in a sex-based public-policy debate they are doomed to lose—feeding mockery of the church while engaged in the expensive process of losing that fight?

An easy answer is that America's bishops have not always been famous for their skill at predicting public reaction. But the more serious response is that the bishops hold exactly what's held by everyone from the Communist Party to the NRA, Occupy Wall Street to National Right to Life: Prudential and practical concerns direct *how* one fights in pub-

lic but not *why* one fights. If a legal regime is wrong, then it's wrong. And however much the culture despises and punishes those who resist its judgments, somebody needs to rise up and say we're going to hell in a handbasket if that is indeed where the culture seems to be going.

Like most Americans, I've always had a sneaking admiration for those who resist cultural consensus—the gadflies, curmudgeons, and cranks—however idiotically they choose their fights. And given the social and historical prominence of their ecclesial positions, and the confidence in same-sex marriage among the young and the cultural elite, the American bishops have chosen what these days can only be called the countercultural side in opposing civil recognition of same-sex marriage in America. They cannot have done so for prudential reasons, for every such consideration is against them. Rather, they have taken their position, the place at which they make their stand, for the simple reason that they think same-sex marriage is philosophically *wrong*: damaging to the individual and destructive for society.

In other words, the bishops are not going to be convinced to end their hopeless fight by some casual appeal to cultural consensus or a feel-good call to join the winning side. And if we appreciate a willingness to be countercultural, how can we ask them to do so for those reasons?

In June 2012, David Blankenhorn took to the *New York Times* with an interesting op-ed titled "How My View on Gay Marriage Changed." To read Blankenhorn's books—especially his 1995 *Fatherless America*—is to think him the nation's leading commentator on the social importance of marriage. And he opened his op-ed with his long-held view that "marriage is the planet's only institution whose core purpose is to unite the biological, social, and legal components of parenthood into one lasting bond. Marriage says to a child: The man and the woman whose sexual union made you will also be there to love and raise you. In this sense, marriage is a gift that society bestows on its children."

Same-sex relationships, he noted, cannot by their nature fulfill the biological condition in his deep definition of marriage. But against that fact, he set three considerations that led him to support same-sex marriage: equal treatment ("legally recognizing gay and lesbian couples and their children is a victory for basic fairness"), comity ("we must live together with some degree of mutual acceptance, even if doing so involves compromise"), and respect for the emerging consensus on the topic ("most of our national elites, as well as most younger Americans, favor gay marriage").

I understand the point, and I suspect that Blankenhorn and I, like many others, are arriving at much the same place. But the Blankenhorn line leaves me unsatisfied. It's not enough for a Catholic to say that legal fairness and social niceness compel us. We have a religion of intellectual coherence, too, and the moral positions we take have to comport with the whole of the moral universe. That's the *reason* for trying to be serious—for demanding that the unity of truth apply, and that ethical claims cannot be separated from their metaphysical foundations.

If there is no philosophical or theological reasoning that leads to Catholic recognition of civil same-sex marriage, then we're simply arguing about what's politic. What's fair and nice. What flows along the channels marked out by the dominant culture. We're merely suggesting that Catholics shouldn't make trouble. And how is that supposed to convince anyone who holds intellectual consistency at more than a pennyweight?

I don't mean to hide this essay's conclusions. Where we're going with all this is toward a claim that the thin notions of natural law deployed against same-sex marriage in recent times are unpersuasive, and, what's more, they *deserve* to be unpersuasive—for their thinness reflects their lack of rich truth about the spiritual meanings present in this created world. Indeed, once the sexual revolution brought the Enlightenment to sex, demythologizing and disenchanting the Western understanding of sexual intercourse, the legal principles of equality and fairness were bound to win, as they have over the last decade: the only principles the culture has left with which to discuss topics such as marriage.

And so, I argue, a concern about the government's recognizing of same-sex marriage ought to come low on the list of priorities as the church pursues the evangelizing of the culture. For that matter, after the long hard work of restoring cultural sensitivity to the metaphysical meanings reflected in all of reality, Catholics will have enough experience to decide what measure of the deep spirituality of nuptials, almost absent in present culture, can reside in same-sex unions.

But before we reach for those conclusions, there remains, I think, a question religious believers must ask: a prior question of whether the current agitation really derives from a wish for same-sex marriage, or whether the movement is an excuse for a larger campaign to delegitimize and undermine Christianity.

The question is not an idle one. Yes, American culture, through the devices of American capitalism, has repeatedly proved its ability to adapt to social changes, reshaping them into middle-class norms. This was exactly the complaint of the activist Donna Minkowitz back in 1994. Bruce Bawer had just published *A Place at the Table*, his plaintive call for national acceptance of a bourgeois gay lifestyle, and Minkowitz raged against it as a betrayal, a co-opting, of the true radicalism of the gay and lesbian movement. "We don't want a place at the table," she announced on Charlie Rose's national television program. "We want to turn the table over."

In the years since, the radical wing lost badly the fight to be the public face of the movement, but Minkowitz's successors have hardly been shy about their desire to use the visibility of the same-sex marriage debate as an opportunity to damage public perception of Christianity. And watch, for instance, the downstream effect on someone like Patrick B. Pexton, who used his *Washington Post* ombudsman's column in February 2013 to explain that journalists like himself "have a hard time giving much voice to those opposed

to gay marriage"—because "they see people opposed to gay rights today as cousins, perhaps distant cousins, of people in the 1950s and 1960s who, citing God and the Bible, opposed black people sitting in the bus seat, or dining at the lunch counter, of their choosing."

One wonders what the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, led by the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., would have had to say about this interpretation of the civil-rights movement as fundamentally an overcoming of Christianity. But if that's what the same-sex marriage movement is really about—the redefinition of history as Christian oppression, the rereading of even success stories like the civil-rights movement as tales of defeating Christian evil, all for the purpose of cutting off the religious roots of Western civilization—then to hell with it.

To hell with it, as well, if the campaign for same-sex marriage has anti-Catholicism as one of its major causes, or a feeding of anti-Catholicism as one of its welcome effects. Well through the nineteenth century, the church often seemed as much a refuge as those who felt same-sex desire were likely to find. There are reasons that Oscar Wilde, for example, returned to the church after his public trials, and they involve his aesthetic sense of the capacious Catholic understanding of sin and grace in a fallen world: the beauty of European Catholic medievalism, matched with a sophisticated, confessional-trained understanding of the real pressures under which human beings labor.

In Protestant America, however, a word like *sophisticated* (to say nothing of *confessional*) was more a denunciation than mild praise of practical wisdom. Catholics sometimes exaggerate the extent to which they were oppressed by their WASP overlords, but they are not wrong that suspicion of Rome is one of the small but constant motors on which our national story has run.

By the late 1960s, some of the fuel for that motor was still coming from the far right, among the traditionalists keeping alive the antique quarrels of the Reformation. And some was coming from the far left, among the radicals who saw the Vatican as a hindrance to either the communist future of the world or the transformation of human nature through the sexual revolution. At least a little anti-Catholicism, however, remained in the central current of American elite culture, among the heirs of the old Protestant consensus.

They stripped out much of the doctrinal Christianity, of course; the general collapse of the mainline Protestant churches is one of the most fascinating historical trends in the past fifty years. But the elites kept that curious mainline class-based combination of a nobly wide ethical concern and an infuriatingly self-confident assertion of moral ascendancy. And to listen to its current members is to get the feeling that they may have also kept, and even reinvigorated, the good old-fashioned, all-American anti-Cathol-

icism and suspicion of Rome. If the campaign for same-sex marriage is just a further development in this historical line, then the theological argument isn't worth making. Isn't worth even *trying* to develop.

Think of it this way: The funny thing is that, back when I first knew him, my gay friend Jim Watson was more conservative than I was. Or more Republican, at any rate. My writings against the death penalty, for instance, produced nothing except a snort from him. He hated the huge tax bite of New York City, municipal taxes piled on state and federal, and the best way to turn him away from his let's-embarrass-strangers-with-my-sexuality game was to mention Manhattan's rent control—provoking a free-market tirade that was good for at least fifteen minutes of soap-box statistics. It bored me, but then my vociferous opposition to legalized abortion probably bored him, and affectionately putting up with each other's crotchets may be as good a description of friendship as we're likely to find in this fallen world.

Andrew Sullivan, Bruce Bawer, Michael Lind, even David Brock—the 1990s had its share of avowedly conservative or libertarian commentators who were also more or less openly gay or activists for gay causes. Sullivan, for instance, is a disciple of the British political theorist Michael Oakeshott, and I remember reading a passage in which Sullivan was willing to put (even though he disagreed with it) a fair statement of a political-theory rejection of same-sex marriage. To be conservative, Oakeshott had famously written, "is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss." No culture has ever fully embraced same-sex marriage; every culture has understood that marriage, through heterosexual procreation, touches the deepest and least-understood structures by which civilization survives. And this wide testimony from human experience, together with the dangers of meddling in the unknown, ought to make us hesitate.

By somewhere around the midterm elections of 2002, those conservatives had generally disappeared from mainstream conservatism. (Or, at least, the male ones had. Interestingly, the Libertarian, Catholic, and Straussian lesbians tended to remain, many of them still writing for conservative publications.)

Some gay conservatives would later insist that they had been pushed out of public-intellectual conservatism by what they believed were bigoted Evangelicals—the people a conservative movement needs to attract to overcome the large Democratic voting blocs. A good example might be the argument, through the 1990s and 2000s, against allowing gay and lesbian anti-abortion groups a place in prolife marches and strategy meetings. And there are still portions of the Republican world that suffer no dissent on social issues. Just this year, I was invited to give a small talk on faith at CPAC, the enormous annual conservative convention in Washington—and then disinvited, my time given over to someone safer on the topic of marriage.

Other gays seem to have felt the pressure more on the inside, finding it impossible to hold both support for same-sex marriage and any political theory that rejects same-sex marriage. But regardless of the cause, they nearly all disappeared from conservative discussions precisely at the time the issue grew in public importance, and I doubt that there was a single one who didn't vote for Democratic candidates in the 2008 and 2012 elections.

My friend Jim Watson certainly became a functional Democrat, suppressing his fiscal conservatism to vote for Barack Obama as the official candidate of gays. A relatively wealthy man who inherited trust-fund money from his grandparents, he stopped giving to conservative candidates and even gay groups like Log Cabin Republicans, transferring his election-year donations to left-leaning same-sex-marriage organizations and Democratic office-seekers.

Along the way, Jim also picked up a case of virulent anti-Catholicism. I suspect that there genuinely exist activists who welcome same-sex marriage as part of the great destructiveness of the Enlightenment project: a blow against whatever medieval Christian ideas still linger in modernity. I also suspect that they are a minority, and Western culture will prove, as it has so often before, resilient enough to absorb same-sex marriage—turning it possibly into an aid to, but at least not a further weakening of, the endangered culture of marriage.

Still, I can't ignore the changes in Jim. In the first years I knew him, he would speak of the Catholic Church as something like a batty great-aunt: crazy, of course, but fondly indulged. He admired the solemnity of the Mass, in the abstract, together with the beauty of the church's long deposit of art and architecture. The dedication of hospice nuns invariably made him quote Santayana's wistful line, "There is no God, and Mary is his mother." Without a religious bone in his body, as far as I could tell, he nonetheless appreciated the seriousness of Catholic intellectuals, even if the church's continuing ability to attract *any* intellectuals seemed to him one of the mysteries of the age.

A decade or so later, and all that was gone. The Catholic Church now appeared to him genuinely *evil*, and Catholic intellectualism an entirely malignant force, born mostly from hatred of gays in general and even, at his most paranoid, of him personally. The long denunciations of the bishops' contrarian and countercultural leadership had taken its toll. The old ACT-UP protests over condoms hadn't moved him, but the same-sex marriage agitation pushed him over the edge—until I do not believe Jim can now be conciliated even by something like the Catholic case for same-sex marriage. Nothing but the total eradication of the Catholic Church, its complete repudiation by its members, will satisfy him. *Ecclesia delenda est*, I can picture him mumbling

to himself as he paces through New York. The church must be destroyed.

One more aside before we arrive at the argument for same-sex marriage—not a mea culpa exactly, but an attempt to examine my own conscience, for even as I write this personal essay, I'm growing uneasy with the petulant and aggrieved way it is presenting the idea that anti-Catholicism was one of the purposes of, or at least one of the bonuses for, the cultural elites who took up the cause of same-sex marriage.

I've made it sound, for example, as though the fading of my friendship with Jim came entirely from his side. Actually, it did, considered purely as a private matter. If only the personal *were* the political, as the 1970s feminists used to claim, then Jim and I wouldn't have had much more than an abstract disagreement. Unfortunately, often enough, the political becomes the personal, and Jim had public activities for which to blame me.

I did not believe then, as I do not believe now, that opposition to same-sex marriage must, by its nature, derive from (or issue in) hatred of gays and lesbians—else one would never see pieces like Doug Mainwaring's "I'm Gay and I Oppose Same-Sex Marriage," which appeared in March 2013 to argue, "In our day, prejudice against gays is just a very faint shadow of what it once was. But the abolition of prejudice against gays does not necessarily mean that same-sex marriage is inevitable or optimal. There are other avenues available, none of which demands immediate, sweeping, transformational legislation or court judgments."

Still, in the current state of the public square, opposition to same-sex marriage gets portrayed (and thereby perceived) as hatred. And if I have felt old friends pull away from me over the issue, then I also have to admit that they must have felt my occasional public work on the topic to be the equivalent from my side. To be my breaking off friendship with them. To be an attack on them individually in what they take as part of their very existence.

I think I met Bruce Bawer once at a poetry festival or a magazine party, but maybe not, and regardless I can't say I know him. Still, perhaps we could use him as an example here—for I recall being taken aback when I came across an interview in which he declared me fundamentally unchristian, some years after my negative review of his 1996 anthology, *Beyond Queer: Challenging Gay Left Orthodoxy*. Insofar as I remember the book, I still think *Beyond Queer* was not great work. For that matter, even though Bawer is an admirable poet and interesting author of nonfiction, he has surely received other unflattering reviews. But what I hadn't considered is the way disagreement over this particular topic feels intensely *personal*: perceived not as rejection of a public position but rejection of how one understands the self.

We could probably work up an indictment of the media, identity politics, and the grievance industry for this perception (as Bawer himself has in other contexts): turning even slight deviations from the accepted position into occasions for full-blown accusations of bigotry. But why bother? Hot or cold, the water in which we find ourselves is the water in which we have to swim. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes a distinction between same-sex orientation and same-sex activity that might have once seemed intelligible, even commonsensical. But the distinction has absolutely no purchase today. And what good does it do to complain—as does, for example, Ryan T. Anderson, the sharpest of the younger activists now working against same-sex marriage—that the distinction somehow *ought* to have purchase?

Some of the perceived offense may have come from inattention. In 2011, the *Washington Times* asked me for a little piece celebrating the anniversary of the classic 1981 BBC mini-series version of *Brideshead Revisited*. And after its publication, David Boaz, the gay-marriage supporter from the libertarian Cato Institute, dropped me a note taking me to task for using the word "homosexuals" instead of "gays" in my opening description of the series' reception. He understood that I was trying to recapture the tone of those early 1980s days, when *homosexuals* was still more or less the polite term of reference. But we are long past all that, he insisted, and I should realize that the word, taken as a generic noun, had picked up enough negative connotations that writers ought not to employ it even in a historical way.

I think I replied with a casual apology and a hackneyed

quip about how one should never give offense unless one actually means it. But I didn't mean personal offense with *any* work I did on same-sex subjects—and still I managed to give offense.

How rarely the subject actually came up surprises me now, looking back. In the hundreds of essays, poems, and reviews I published over those years, opposition to legalized abortion and rejection of the death penalty are constant themes. Raging themes, to the point where I probably lost most of even the best-willed readers. But gay topics? A brief contribution as the token Catholic in a little-noticed symposium in *Newsweek*. A 2004 editorial co-written with Bill Kristol. A review of Bawer's anthology in the *Weekly Standard*. Another of Andrew Holleran's depressing novel *The Beauty of Men*. And not much else that I can still find.

In my editorial jobs at the *Weekly Standard* and *First Things*, of course, I came to know some of the people fighting same-sex marriage. Ryan T. Anderson, for example, co-author of the widely discussed, career-defining 2011 essay "What Is Marriage?" in the *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*. Later expanded into a book, it remains the clearest, most cogent defense of traditional marriage. David Orgon Coolidge, too, founder of the Marriage Law Project before his untimely death in 2002: Richard John Neuhaus helped raise money to support Dave's work, and we would often sit together and drink at Fr. Neuhaus's innumerable theological and social-policy meetings.

I was much under the influence of the Christian poetics of W. H. Auden in those days—a man who, though gay himself, hated organized homosexuality: "the Homintern," he mockingly named the gay establishment in poetry (playing off the Comintern, the international arm of party-line Soviet policy). Under the influence, for that matter, of the suspicions of attempts to claim victimhood expressed by René Girard—the contemporary writer who most formed my mental universe. Then, too, as the mantle of gay rights passed from the wild contrarians and countercultural figures of its early days to become the received view of the entire elite liberal class, it came to seem increasingly bland and uninteresting, with little in it tempting me to reject the general conservative position.

"At times one remains faithful to a cause," Nietzsche writes, "only because its opponents do not cease to be insipid." It's a sad observation of human behavior, but who among us hasn't been guilty of it? "Same-sex marriage is *the* great civil-rights struggle of our time," a young newspaper writer grandly announced to me in 2009. She had come to interview me for some article she was planning, but she spent most of her time lecturing me on how immoral it is that anyone opposes the right of gays to marry.

As it happens, when I asked, she proved to know almost nothing about the controversy: hadn't read the legal decisions, hadn't followed the arguments, hadn't examined DOMA, hadn't even tried to keep up. Only the warmth of her conviction of her own moral superiority seemed necessary, and I remember thinking: *This* is supposed to persuade me? Insipid self-righteousness—delivered in exactly the hectoring tones with which her Protestant great-grandparents would have lectured me about lack of Catholic support for Prohibition?

> The campaign for traditional marriage really isn't a defense of natural law. It revealed itself, in the end, as a defense of one of the last little remaining bits of Christendom—an entanglement or, at least, an accommodation of church and state. The logic of the Enlightenment took a couple of hundred years to get around to eliminating that particular portion of Christendom, but the deed is done now.

At the same time, looking back, I can see that even in my editorial choices I was avoiding the topic. Not entirely: there are some pieces the institutional weight of a magazine simply won't let an editor refuse. But generally I turned down pieces on same-sex topics—and I did so by telling myself I found the subject dull. That's an editor's privilege, of course, and a lot of the thinking genuinely was dull. Dull as dishwater, gray from all the old, similar writing that had already been washed in it. But the avoidance was also, I now realize, a species of dishonesty: an unwillingness to sit down and decide what I really thought about it all.

Not that the world was waiting breathlessly for my nattering asseverations on the topic—and, anyway, the moment for being genuinely serious about same-sex marriage may have passed while I wasn't looking. Or while I was refusing to look.

Still, it all came to a head for me when, one morning down in Lansdowne, Virginia, Chuck Colson woke up with a plan to gather every religious leader he could find and decry the destruction of Christian culture in America—promising civil disobedience, if necessary. The outcome was *The Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conscience*, a manifesto issued in November 2009 that equated abortion, same-sex marriage, and intolerance of religion, and vowed to oppose any mainstream consensus that licensed them. Dozens of important religious figures met with Chuck Colson in New York to become the initial signers, and *The Manhattan Declaration* would go on to find half a million additional signatories.

One of the problems with the document was that none of the people on the drafting committee—Chuck himself, Princeton's Robert P. George, and the very smart Baptist di-

vinity-school dean Timothy George—were primarily writers. They were activists and teachers who happened to write, sometimes (as in Robby George's 1995 book *Making Men Moral*) with real skill. But the genuine literary talent behind an entire generation's set of manifestos had been Richard John Neuhaus—first as a Christian protester against segregation and Vietnam, and then as a Christian neoconservative. And with Richard's death from cancer earlier in 2009, they had to produce *The Manhattan Declaration* in his absence.

The result would prove turgid, politically clumsy, and strangely disorganized. Just as there's a rule in some online discussion groups that you've automatically lost an argument if you compare your opponents to the Nazis, so there ought to be a rule in public discourse that you've guaranteed your failure if you compare modern America to the decline of Ancient Rome. But that's how the declaration opened, and as it wandered through its various complaints about the nation, it came to seem more and more a laundry list in search of a thesis: there's bad stuff out there, people hate us, and it all adds up to, well, a picture—a modern reflection of the moral collapse of Rome from the stern glories of the republic to the satyricon of the empire.

I spoke to Chuck privately about the draft several times, urging him to reorganize it and tone it down, but he was too enamored of the frisson of rebellion in its call for civil disobedience to agree. Finally, at the New York meeting, I got up and announced publicly my unease: The equating of these three concerns is a mistake; not only do the possible negative results of same-sex marriage fail to match the horrors of abortion, but religious freedom isn't even the same kind of thing. It's like equating a small weed to a giant sequoia—and then lumping them both together with an umbrella. The entire text needs to be recast, I said. If the document has to threaten civil disobedience, then it ought to be about freedom: religious Americans may accept a culture that recognizes same-sex marriage, but they hereby announce that they will not accept a legal regime that uses same-sex marriage as a wrecking ball with which to knock down every religious building in the public square.

And in response, Maggie Gallagher stood up in that crowded room to call me a coward—or, at least, she declared that any reduction in the status of the fight over same-sex marriage was a counsel of cowardice, born from a fear that same-sex marriage was inevitable. A writer and activist, former president of the National Organization for Marriage, Gallagher has always struck me as a fearless and contrarian figure, and in this case, I think, she was correct.

Oh, not about the law: the legal victory of same-sex marriage actually was inevitable; not a single persuasive legal argument emerged against it in the courts. But right in her accusation of cowardice—although maybe not in quite the way she thought. My worry with *The Manhattan Declaration* wasn't about the consequences of defeat, as Gallagher suggested; if something is wrong, you oppose it even though the heavens fall. But cowardice about my own mind, yes: my profamily friends were a strong public-intellectual force opposed to abortion, and I went along with them on same-sex marriage mostly because I lacked the seriousness and strength of mind to work through it for myself. I was just like that young woman journalist I found so insipid and self-righteous for pronouncing uncritically the views of her class.

In the end, my friends...but why should I continue to blame them for my own fault? In the end, I let myself be talked into publishing the (only slightly altered) document, despite my objections—talked into becoming one of the original signers of *The Manhattan Declaration* myself. It was a mistake, and one I regret.

Let's turn at last to the actual intellectual questions raised by same-sex marriage. At the time Americans were waiting for the Supreme Court to rule on the two pending marriage cases, Catholics were waiting to see if the new reign of Pope Francis would signal any change in the church's views. And if, as I suggested earlier, the Supreme Court basically punted when it handed down its opinions on June 26, the pope refused to punt at all when he promulgated his first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, on July 5.

There's something in the new encyclical to disappoint everyone who longs for direct political action from the Vatican. Those who were hoping that a radically leftist Pope Francis would repudiate what they saw as the radically right-

PATRICK O'SHEA

My soul waits for the Lord
as do we on watch until morning,
more than we who watch for the morning.
—Psalm 130

I.

We charter a large motor yacht
to strew Alan's ashes,
and Patrick says what St. John taught.
The wreath of orchids splashes
into the vessel's foaming wake,
as turbid as my thoughts.
Pinned to the wind for Alan's sake
we motor at three knots.

II.

Mucking the sheep pens in your father's fold,
snatched by Franciscans, just thirteen years old,
Father, what better job than be a priest?
You have learned English, Spanish, and at least
ecclesial Latin. You never have learned Greek
nor watched a sunset where you didn't seek
some Revelation. You are a chosen one
vigilant at the setting of the sun,
poised at the ramparts as the night draws on,
one of our sentries waiting for the dawn.

III.

Father Tom phoned as I was adding leaven
to bread dough, saying Pat has gone to Heaven
to lounge grandly with Alan on his cloud,
leaving his earthbound body to its shroud.
O'Shea and Sullivan, oh what a pair
to draw to, and the drawn cards turn up aces!
I see them limping down my sailboat stair,
nothing but joy and laughter in their faces.
Few priests could rival Pat in joie de vivre,
no priest of my acquaintance, a believer
with more fervor. I hope before Pat died
he learned John Twenty-Third, beatified,
was made a saint, for how he loved Pope John.
Now Patrick is a saint, and life goes on
though much diminished, three years to the day
since Alan's death. Remember, we are clay.

—Timothy Murphy

Timothy Murphy's newest books are Mortal Stakes and Faint Thunder *and* Hunter's Log, *both from the Dakota Institute Press.*

ist work of his predecessor are bound to be saddened. A draft was prepared under Benedict XVI before his retirement on February 28, and Francis himself has described the completed document as written with "four hands"—Benedict's and his own.

At the same time, disappointment must haunt those who hoped that a radically traditional Francis—a lifelong churchman instead of an academic theologian like his predecessor—would step back from the softness of Benedict's economics and confront the world with the hardest edges of the institutional church. Faith is at "the service of justice, law, and peace," Francis insists. We need it "to devise models of development which are based not simply on utility and profit, but consider creation as a gift for which we are all indebted." Yes, he notes, all "authority comes from God," but it is meant for "the service of the common good."

Not since John Paul II's great crusade against Soviet Communism has the Vatican been easily classifiable by the world's political categories, despite the incessant effort of the world, left and right alike, to pin the church with those categories. That unclassifiability may be the best way to understand our new pope. He is an advocate of the poor who opposed many of the Argentinian government's programs for the poor. A social activist who cannot be counted on to support social reform. A churchman who refused the elaborate trappings of his office even while he promoted the power of the church. A radical who rejects the state power and cultural change demanded by the secular left. A traditionalist who despises the accumulation of wealth and libertarian freedoms praised by the secular right. No attempt to impose liberal and conservative definitions on him will succeed. Pope Francis simply won't fit in those categories.

Still, in *Lumen Fidei* he grants the faithful Catholic little room to maneuver on same-sex marriage. In "Faith and the Family," section 52 of the encyclical, he calls the family the "first setting in which faith enlightens the human city"—a political-theory reading of the church's interest in the institution. Indeed, "I think first and foremost of the stable union of man and woman in marriage," he explained. "This union is born of their love, as a sign and presence of God's own love, and of the acknowledgment and acceptance of the goodness of sexual differentiation, whereby spouses can become one flesh (cf. Gen 2:24) and are enabled to give birth to a new life, a manifestation of the Creator's goodness, wisdom, and loving plan." In marriage, "a man and a woman can promise each other mutual love in a gesture which engages their entire lives and mirrors many features of faith.... Faith also helps us to grasp in all its depth and richness the begetting of children, as a sign of the love of the Creator who entrusts us with the mystery of a new person."

But perhaps Francis does offer us an opportunity to think about marriage in terms of the politically unclassifiable that constitutes much of Catholic teaching. The stony ground on which the church must sow is the landscape created by the sexual revolution. Made possible by the pill, accelerat-

ed by legalized abortion, aided by easy pornography, that revolution actually needs none of these any longer to survive, because they never *defined* it. They merely *allowed* it, and the completed change is now omnipresent. The revolution is not just in the way we use our bodies. It's in the way we use our minds.

One understanding of the sexual revolution—the best, I think—is as an enormous turn against the meaningfulness of sex. Oh, I know, it was extolled by the revolutionaries as allowing real experimentation and exploration of sensation, but the actual effect was to disconnect sex from what previous eras had thought the deep stuff of life: God, birth, death, heaven, hell, the moral structures of the universe, and all the rest.

I understand that this is not the answer my traditional-marriage friends demand. But then, it's not the answer same-sex marriage advocates want, either. Far too many people on both sides see the issue in such stark terms that they dismiss any nuance as merely giving excuse to immorality.

The resulting claim of amorality for almost any sexual behavior except rape reflects perhaps the most fascinating social change of our time: the transfer of the moral center of human worry about the body away from sex and onto… well, onto food, I suppose. The only moral feeling still much attached to sex is the one that has to hunt far and wide for some prude, *any* prude, who will still condemn an aspect of sexual behavior—and thereby confirm our self-satisfied feeling of revolutionary morality. Of course, the transfer of moral anxiety away from sexual intercourse might not be so peculiar. Think how often ancient thinkers, from the pagan stoics to the church fathers, would reach to gluttony and fasting, instead of lust and chastity, when they needed examples for their discussions of virtue and vice.

The turn against *any* deep, metaphysical meaning for sex in the West, however: that is strange and fascinatingly new, unique to late modernity. Jean-Paul Sartre once denounced Michel Foucault as one of the "young conservatives" for his refusal to embrace Communism, but in other ways, the radical gay philosopher, the very model of a star French *philosophe* before his death from AIDS in 1984, was the key explicator of the sexual revolution. And just as he saw a change in moral understanding of the body slowly developing among Christian writers from the fourth-century John Cassian to the eleventh-century Peter Damian, so he saw yet another change emerging in modern times. The comic line that "sex was invented in 1750" is an exaggeration of his thought, but Foucault quite rightly understood that there were bound to be consequences to what Max Weber called the great "disenchantment of the world" in the joining of the "elective affinities" of the Protestant Reformation, the scientific and industrial revolutions, and the triumph of Enlightenment philosophy.

Those consequences were, in essence, the stripping away of magic—the systematic elimination of metaphysical, spiritual, and mystical meanings. Science, Francis Bacon told us, could not advance in any other way. Real democracy, Diderot explained, would not arrive "until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest." When the Supreme Court gave us the infamous "mystery passage" in the 1992 abortion case *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*—"At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life"—the justices were merely following out to its logical conclusion the great modern project of disenchantment. And it's worth noticing that the mystery passage was quoted approvingly and relied upon in the 2003 sodomy-law case *Lawrence v. Texas* and by the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts in 2005 when it ordered the state to register same-sex marriages.

As a practical matter, the gay-rights lawyers were probably smart to take the mystery passage and run with it. You use what tools you're given, even if they confirm your opponents' inchoate sense that all social issues are somehow joined, abortion of a piece with same-sex marriage. But as a theoretical matter, I'm less convinced. What kind of moral or social victory do you obtain if the marriage you're granted is defined as nothing more than a way in which individuals define the concept of their own existence? Marriage seemed one of the last places left where Weber's "great enchanted garden" of traditional societies could still be found.

And yet, again, I could be wrong, even about a premodern enchantment perduring in marriage. G. K. Chesterton once suggested that if there truly exists such a thing as divorce, then there exists no such thing as marriage. The root of the paradox is his observation of the metaphysics implicit in marriage ceremonies: "There are those who say they want divorce in the second place without ever asking themselves if they want marriage in the first place. So let us begin by asking what marriage is. It is a promise. More than that, it is a vow." If we allow divorce, then we have already weakened the thick, mystical notion of marriage vows. Adultery is an everyday sin. Divorce is something more: a denial of a solemn oath made to God.

I'm not trying to argue here directly for an end to the culture's embrace of legalized divorce, much as the sociological evidence about the harm to children now appears beyond dispute. Rather, the point is that the legal and social acceptance of divorce, building in Protestant America from the late nineteenth century on, culminated in the universal availability of no-fault divorce. And if heterosexual monogamy so lacks the old, enchanted metaphysical foundation that it can end in quick and painless divorce, then

Robert P. George speaking at a press conference for The Manhattan Declaration *on November 20, 2009*

what principle allows a refusal of marriage to gays on the grounds of a metaphysical notion like the difference between men and women?

Think of the parallel with laws against sodomy. Justice Thomas may actually have been right that, bad as such laws were, it's better to have our feckless legislators accept democratic responsibility and replace them than it is to have the courts rule on their constitutionality. But whatever the cruelty and prurience of such laws in the first place, they had become entirely ungrounded by the time of the 2003 *Lawrence* case. If marriage is nothing more than a licensed sexual playground, without any sense of sin attached to oral sex and anal sex and almost any other act, then under what intellectually coherent scheme can one refuse to others the opportunity for the same behavior?

And, of course, not only did marital relations become a value-free zone in the sexual revolution, but *non*-marital relations did as well. The seal of virginity, the procreative purpose, the mystical analogy of marriage to Christ's espousal of his church, the divinely witnessed vow, the sexual body as a temple, the moral significance of chastity: all that old metaphysical stuff got swept away. And regardless of whether the metaphysics was right or wrong, without it there is simply no reasoning that could possibly outweigh the valid claims of fairness and equality. Same-sex marriage advocates don't just have better public relations than their opponents. They have better logic, given the premises available to the culture.

This points us toward the general problem with arguments that rely on natural law—natural law, that is, in the modern sense, as developed most notably by the philosophers John Finnis and Germain Grisez, and explicated for political application by Robby George and many subsequent conservative writers. As deployed in our current debates, this kind of thing has always seemed to me a scientized, mainline-Protestantized version of the thicker natural law of the medievals: natural law as awkwardly yoked to the "elective affinities" of modernity.

On point here is Russell Hittinger's critique of "new natural law" as an attempt to have a theology-free version of a rational philosophy that depended, by its original internal consistency, on premises of God, creation, and Aristotelian natural forms. Natural law was always a little theologically thin. It derived from a rich understanding of the world, yes, but it was something like the least common denominator of spiritual views: a "mere metaphysics" (to misapply a concept of C. S. Lewis's). And it worked well enough as a philosophy in a time when people generally agreed that the world was enchanted, however vehemently they disagreed about the specifics of that enchantment. Natural law broke spirituality down to its most basic shared components and then built a rationally defensible ethics up again from that foundation.

Don't get me wrong. I believe in a thick natural law. To read the questions on law in the *Summa* is to watch Thomas Aquinas assemble a grand, beautiful, and extremely delicate structure of rationality. As the Duke theologian Paul Griffiths pointed out in a prescient 2004 *Commonweal* article ("Legalize Same-Sex Marriage," June 28, 2004), the premises may not be provable, but they are visible to faith, and from them a great and careful mind like Thomas's can logically derive extraordinary things. The delicacy is revealed, for example, in his analysis of the questions of marriage. Too careful, too honest, simply to condemn everything except the sanctified monogamy that Christianity had given him, Thomas works through an escalating series that ends up preferring the Christian idea of nuptials as the richest, most meaningful form of marriage—without condemning even polygamy as necessarily a violation of the most philosophically abstract application of the natural law.

In this, I think, is a model for how Catholics might think about the world in which legal recognition of same-sex marriage has emerged. The goal of the church today must primarily be the re-enchantment of reality. This is the language in which Pope Francis speaks: Marriage "as a sign and presence of God's own love." Birth as "a manifestation of the Creator's goodness, wisdom, and loving plan." Mutual love as something that engages our entire lives and "mirrors many features of faith."

Is sex the place in which that project of re-enchantment ought to begin? I just can't see it—not after the nearly complete triumph of the sexual revolution's disenchantment, not

CNS PHOTO / DANIEL SONE

after the way "free love" was essentially sold to us by the Edwardians as an escape from narrow Victorian Christianity, not after part of the culture's most visible morality became the condemnation of those perceived as condemning something sexual. The campaign for traditional marriage really isn't a defense of natural law. It revealed itself, in the end, as a defense of one of the last little remaining bits of Christendom—an entanglement or, at least, an accommodation of church and state. The logic of the Enlightenment took a couple of hundred years to get around to eliminating that particular portion of Christendom, but the deed is done now.

We should not accept without a fight an essentially un-Catholic retreat from the public square to a lifeboat theology and the small communities of the saved that Alasdair MacIntyre predicted at the end of *After Virtue* (1981). But there are much better ways than opposing same-sex marriage for teaching the essential God-hauntedness, the enchantment, of the world—including massive investments in charity, the further evangelizing of Asia, a willingness to face martyrdom by preaching in countries where Christians are killed simply because they are Christians, and a church-wide effort to reinvigorate the beauty and the solemnity of the liturgy. Some Catholic intellectual figures will continue to explore the deep political-theory meanings manifest in the old forms of Christendom, and more power to them, but the rest of us should turn instead to more effective witness in the culture as it actually exists.

In fact, same-sex marriage might prove a small advance in chastity in a culture that has lost much sense of chastity. Same-sex marriage might prove a small advance in love in a civilization that no longer seems to know what love is for. Same-sex marriage might prove a small advance in the coherence of family life in a society in which the family is dissolving.

I don't know that it will, of course, and some of the most persuasive statements of conservatism insist that we should not undertake projects the consequences of which we cannot foresee. But same-sex marriage is already here; it's not as though we can halt it. And other profound statements of conservatism remind us that we must take people as we find them—must instruct the nation where the nation is.

For that matter, the argument about unforeseen consequences is a sword that cuts both ways. Precisely because human social experience has never recognized same-sex marriage on any large scale, we don't know the extent to which metaphysical meanings—the enchantment of marriage—can be instantiated in same-sex unions. How faithful will they prove? How much infected by the divorce culture of modern America? How spiritual? How mundane? How will they face up to the woe of the quotidian that, as Schopenhauer insisted, marriage forces us to see? How will such unions aid their participants to perceive the joy of creation?

The answer is that we can't predict the effects of same-sex marriage. I think some good will come, I hope some good will come, but I cannot say with certainty that all must go well with this social change. Still, as the church turns to other and far more pressing ways to re-enchant the world, we'll have time to find out. And when we are ready to start rebuilding the thick natural law that recognizes the created world as a stage on which the wondrous drama of God's love is played, we will have the information we need to decide where same-sex marriage belongs in a metaphysically rich, spiritually alive moral order.

I understand that this is not the answer my traditional-marriage friends demand. But then, it's not the answer same-sex marriage advocates want, either. Far too many people on both sides see the issue in such stark terms that they dismiss any nuance as merely giving excuse to immorality. As only lending countenance to evil.

Certainly it will not satisfy Jim Watson, my old friend from New York. How could he accept talk of the Catholic Church's charity and evangelizing? He wants the church hurt, its tax exemptions and even property-holding rights stripped away until it not only accepts laws allowing same-sex marriage, not only encourages same-sex marriage, but actually *performs* same-sex marriage. Even that might not be enough; the institutional weight of the history of Catholic bigotry, he thinks, is probably too much for repentance and reformation to overcome. Best, really, if the Catholic Church is systematically outlawed.

And that is one Catholic fear about same-sex marriage with force—the fear that the movement is essentially disingenuous. That gays don't actually want much to marry, but Catholic resistance to the idea is just too useful a stick not to use. That modern Americans, heirs to the class-based self-satisfactions of their Protestant ancestors, look at same-sex marriage and think how wonderful a device it proves for a little Rome bashing.

But how can we not take same-sex marriage advocates at their word, accepting that they really seek the marriages they say they desire? For that matter, I still believe in the general resilience and common sense of America, which will halt those who wish to hijack the movement. Christians are sometimes called to martyrdom: "The sacrifices you want to make aren't always the only sacrifices God wants," as the interesting lesbian Catholic commentator Eve Tushnet once observed here in *Commonweal* ("Homosexuality & the Church," June 11, 2007). But I just don't think that same-sex marriage is going to be the excuse America uses to go after its Catholic citizens.

At the same time, there's been damage done in the course of this whole debate, some of it by me. And I'm not sure what can be done about it. I certainly lost my friend Jim along the way. *Some come here to fiddle and dance,* I remember he used to sing. *Some come here to tarry. / Some come here to prattle and prance. / I come here to marry.* You remember how it goes. "Shady Grove," the song is called. A bit of old-timey Americana, the stuff we all still share. ■

Richard Alleva

Recording Angel with a Camera

'FRUITVALE STATION'

In Oakland, California, during the early morning of January 1, 2009, Oscar Julius Grant, a twenty-two-year-old African American, was shot and mortally wounded by an almost equally young policeman who later said he thought he was firing his taser, not his gun. Before he was shot, Grant, detained for allegedly brawling on a train, had been ordered to lie face-down on the platform of Fruitvale Station; he had complied and was perhaps struggling for breath in an uncomfortable position, which is perhaps what provoked the cop to reach for the taser. There are lots of perhapses in this case, but it was certainly a tragedy in the usual pathetic sense of the word: an event that caused great suffering. Was it also a social tragedy underpinned by bigotry and injustice? And could it also have been a tragedy in the classic sense—a terrible fate befalling an individual whose suffering was somehow at one with the way he lived? To answer yes to that last question is not to blame the victim, for Oscar Grant did not deserve to die any more than King Lear deserved to suffer. But was Grant's death in any way connected to his character?

Among the several virtues of *Fruitvale Station*, the film Ryan Coogler has made about the event, perhaps the most remarkable is the way Coogler shows that *all* these definitions of tragedy may apply. His avoidance of easy blame and too-simple social commentary, along with his willingness to face up to the human messiness of what may have happened, mark him as an important new artist. In *Fruitvale Station*, character and social injustice and sheer fortuity all join at a fatal juncture.

Like Joyce's *Ulysses, Fruitvale Station* is a day-in-the-life story, but here we know from the start that this is also a last-day-in-the-life story; much of the movie's pathos grows out of our awareness of doom hovering over everydayness. Many of Oscar's last actions, according to the movie, were attempts to correct his past mistakes so that he would have more of a future. He tries to get a job back that he lost through irresponsibility, gives up his petty drug-dealing, recommits himself to the mother of his child after cheating on her, and tries to win back the trust of his own mother, Wanda, after alienating her by going to jail for gun possession. The sense of an aborted self-redemption swells the pathos. A decent, loving, but severely flawed man was on the cusp of becoming a better one when he was killed.

But suppose Oscar Grant hadn't struggled against his flaws but had surrendered to them? Wouldn't he have been killed anyway? Wasn't it Grant's skin color and not his character that made the officer in charge order him and his friends out of the subway car and onto the platform? Or, more immediately, when an incompetent cop's gun went off, was it malignant fate—which brings down airplanes and afflicts children with dreadful diseases—that canceled out Oscar's good intentions and rendered futile all his struggles? Were Oscar's character and past entirely beside the point?

Not quite. As a flashback shows, the thug who attacks Oscar on the train and provokes the ensuing melee was in prison with Grant, and their enmity began there. So should we say that Oscar's crime and jail time brought him into contact with the catalyst of his death? That would bestow a sort of character-is-fate gravity on Oscar's end, but it would also be too pat, as Coogler evidently realized. We can't blame Oscar for resisting the thug's attack, and we can't blame his pals for rallying to his

Fatal juncture

THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY

defense when the hoodlum sucker-punches him. But would Oscar have been forced to lie down on the platform if he hadn't mouthed off to the senior officer? Would anyone have thought to tase him? (In the film, Oscar's less obstreperous friends are lined up but not tased.) Then again, doesn't any citizen have the right to protest police misconduct without being tased? This movie is endlessly complicated and messy because life is endlessly complicated and messy.

To make us feel the maddening contingencies and twists in the story, Coogler employs cinematic methods that mimic documentary: handheld cameras that float around a scene, lengthy takes, concentration on faces, sparing use of music with silence sometimes serving as a kind of music. Here the camera is a sympathetic voyeur, always hunting for the significant detail, the telling reaction. It slides into family gatherings, shows Oscar lounging by a bay as he contemplates his prospects, ambles down a train aisle on New Year's Eve as the passengers spontaneously break into a jam section. The compositions are loose and artfully contrived to look haphazard. (One lapse into artiness: the use of slow motion to convey Oscar's joy in being with his little daughter. The phony lyricism of this scene reminded me of a 1970s perfume commercial.)

But when the director needs a strong composition, he rises to the occasion. Oscar's mother, Wanda, walking away from him after a bitter argument in the prison visitor's room, moves into close-up on the right side of the frame, and we see the frustrated love she feels for her son welling up in her eyes. In the same shot we see Oscar in the background on the left running after her, pleading for forgiveness, but also struggling violently with the guards holding him back. So much about this troubled young man's life is visible in that moment: his need of the love his mother is so willing to give, the volatility that slides him from affection to anger and back again, his cluelessness about where and when to rebel.

The casual naturalism of the first three-quarters of *Fruitvale Station* cunningly nudges us into feeling that so unmelodramatic a day should have ended as most days end, in peaceful banality. This makes the last twenty minutes shattering. The same camerawork that lulled us in the earlier scenes now steers us into the chaos on the station's platform, and amid this chaos the film manages to pinpoint the exact moments that turned the altercation into a tragedy. The sudden shifts of viewpoint, including glimpses of what passengers' cell phones are capturing, are masterfully executed. (The superb editing is by Claudia Castello and Michael P. Shawver.) After the shooting, the tension holds. The panic of cops suddenly realizing that the situation has gotten out of their control, the bewilderment of the girlfriend separated from Oscar in another part of the station and unable to decipher what's going on, the hard-pressed competence of the medics trying to save a life, the gathering of the family at the hospital with the mother trying to fortify hope with prayer, even the visions flitting through Oscar's dwindling consciousness on the edge of death: all this is rendered as documentary beyond documentary, as if the Recording Angel were using an Arriflex camera instead of a quill.

Michael B. Jordan has won well-deserved praise for his nuanced performance, but he is simply first among equals. The entire cast excels at the ultra-realism that American film acting has pushed to its limits over the past sixty years, a style perfect for the low-budget world of independent filmmaking. This kind of acting comes so close to everyday behavior that the camera almost seems to be spying on the actors. By comparison, the pioneer realism of such actors as Marlon Brando and Geraldine Page has now begun to look as stylized as Kabuki. The naturalism of the acting perfectly suits *Fruitvale Station*, which seeks to do justice to the all the layers of this real-life episode. It lets no one and nothing off easy—not our racial situation, not our economics, not the police, and not even the object of the film's fierce compassion, Oscar Julius Grant. ■

Paul Horwitz

And Yet It Works

Defending American Religious Neutrality

Andrew Koppelman
Harvard University Press, $55, 241 pp.

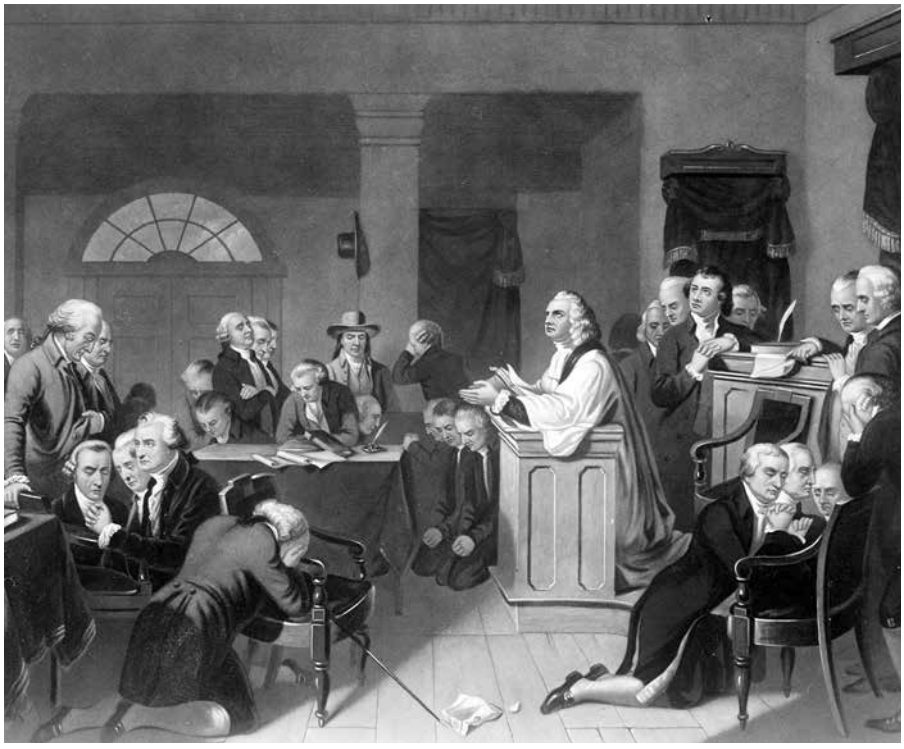
The first thing to note about Andrew Koppelman's important new book, *Defending American Religious Neutrality*, is that word "American"—a heavy proper noun sitting awkwardly beside the abstract concept of "religious neutrality," like an elephant sharing a bench with a ballerina. The modifier tells us a lot about the book. Koppelman is a political theorist, and his examination of religious neutrality is understandably full of abstractions. But he's also a law professor, and he aims to tell a more pragmatic story about how religious neutrality has actually fared when rooted in America's unique history and law.

Religious neutrality as a concept has faced withering attacks from many quarters: accused of being unclear, unattainable, or just plain incoherent. But *American* religious neutrality—that's a different thing. *Defending American Religious Neutrality* reminds the theorists that the American "experiment" in religious liberty might just work better than we think. If Koppelman's book does not succeed completely in rescuing the concept of official neutrality toward religion from its critics, it does an admirable job of reminding us that American religious neutrality has done a pretty good job of keeping the peace and promoting religious practice—and still can.

Koppelman writes at an inauspicious time for defenders of "neutrality" as a core concept in church-state law and relations. Neutrality commands less allegiance than it once did. From the secularist side, some insist that true neutrality should erase any difference between religion and conscience or other strongly held beliefs, and may even demand "the complete eradication of religion from public life." From some religious quarters we get the opposite argument. Neutrality is a sham, because it always involves the smuggling in of non-neutral substantive commitments, such as gender equality or a high regard for personal autonomy rather than associational obligations. They ask: If the state can't be truly neutral after all, why not let it take the side of religion, by allowing government to erect Ten Commandments monuments and make other "frank endorsements of religious propositions"?

Against these contending sides, Koppelman makes some basic points. We must first acknowledge the simple fact that "America has been unusually successful in dealing with religious diversity." It has achieved a measure of peaceful coexistence among different faiths and between religious believers and nonbelievers that is the envy of many nations.

The second point is that as America has become more religiously diverse, the concept of religious neutrality has expanded to welcome that diversity. The nation moved over time from its heavily Protestant origins—although even then other faiths were present, and "Protestantism" itself was a label that obscured many sectarian differences—to a point at which Judaism, Catholicism, and even Islam were roughly embraced as the core of an acceptably neutral "Judeo-Christian" or monotheistic coalition. That monotheistic settlement is still celebrated by nostalgic figures such as Justice Antonin Scalia.



First prayer in Congress, September 1774

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

Now a wider range of faith traditions, along with individual patchwork faiths and the absence of faith altogether, are all recognized as belonging to the diverse landscape of American religion. The larger and more open the landscape, the more neutrality has stretched to embrace it.

The state's neutrality toward various religious practices and affiliations brought us to this point, Koppelman argues, and can take us further still. Understood properly, the concept of neutrality can still lend order to what is widely acknowledged to be the unruly mess of church-state law. It can tell us where the cases have gone wrong, how they might be brought back in line, and how to face tomorrow's controversies. And an affirmation of state neutrality toward religion can ease the culture wars, by permitting "state recognition of the distinctive value of religion" while staving off the "heightened civil strife, corruption of religion, and oppression of religious minorities" that a weakening of anti-establishment doctrine might provoke.

But what, exactly, is the ideal of "American religious neutrality" that Koppelman is concerned to defend? With a nod to neutrality's critics, he acknowledges that "the idea of neutrality can stand for so many different political conceptions that standing alone it cannot resolve any actual controversy, about religion or anything else." Whenever someone invokes neutrality, the question always arises: Neutral with regard to *what*? Neutrality *between* what and what, and using which baseline—the line between Protestantism and Judaism, say, or between religion and non-religion?

Koppelman has a pragmatic answer to that question. Neutrality cannot mean any one thing. Yet we have a particular *American* conception of religious neutrality—and it works. The American way of neutrality is to treat "religion," understood at a vague and inclusive level, as a "good thing" that is worthy of accommodation. At the same time, it insists that "religion's value is best honored by prohibiting the state from trying to answer religious questions." The state can honor and protect religion in general as a positive good. But it cannot favor one religion over another, or "take a position on contested theological propositions." The state should treat religion like a parent treats her children, encouraging and valuing each of them without ranking or privileging any of them. "The state is agnostic about religion," he writes, "but it is an interested and sympathetic agnosticism."

It will come as no surprise that, as the author of a book called *The Agnostic Age*, I largely approve of Koppelman's approach. But the value of *Defending American Religious Neutrality* goes beyond its general argument. Koppelman does several things particularly well. He offers a thorough, ground-level analysis of the actual church-state jurisprudence of the Supreme Court, showing

that the American conception of neutrality he describes helps make its disparate and often disparaged decisions much more coherent. Second, he shows where the Court has gone off the rails. Third, he rehabilitates the much-maligned "secular purpose" requirement, which says that a law must have a secular legislative purpose to avoid running afoul of the First Amendment. He argues that an attractive idea lies at the heart of the requirement: the state must not "declare any particular religious doctrine to be the true one, or enact laws that clearly imply such a declaration of religious truth."

Finally, Koppelman reaches into history to revive a central concern of the Religion Clauses: that "religion can be corrupted and degraded by state control." That fear, which was evident to leading figures of the founding era, has faded to a sepia tone with time. Some modern advocates of church-state separation now think separation is about protecting the state from any taint of religion, and sometimes go further to argue that religious arguments must be stripped from public debate. On the other side, advocates of greater government support for religion, whether through school vouchers or public prayer, give too little thought to what religion risks in accepting the state's patronage. Both miss something important. It is precisely because we think of religion as a genuine, independent *good* that we should worry when the state lends its voice or opens its coffers to the church. Political and financial support always comes with strings attached. History is replete with too many indolent churches, tame priests, and dead state churches. That concern with corruption helps us understand why there is a difference between the accommodation of religious needs and more active forms of state endorsement.

The fear of corruption can't always answer questions about what the law should do. It doesn't tell us whether vouchers, when they simply involve equal access for religious schools to the same secular resources that nonreligious schools get, are inappropriate. And surely the question of whether particular forms of aid present a danger of corrupting a church should rest largely with the church itself. (Substantially, but not entirely. If we view religion as a social good, we may prevent the state from corrupting religion not for the sake of any one church, which might gladly accept the risk of "corruption" as good business, but for *all* our sakes.)

But the concern about corruption still helps make better sense of the twists and turns of church-state law in general. Religious groups should be reminded that there are good reasons to worry as much about *getting* the state's help as about being denied it. In its monumental *Declaration on Religious Liberty*, the Second Vatican Council emphatically affirmed the importance of religious freedom for all individuals and groups. At the same time, it remained far more sanguine, to say the least, about government acknowledgment of, and support for, the church. Despite the church's historical advocacy on this question, we should have prudential concerns about the costs the state might exact for its official support. The history of government corruption of religion that Koppelman provides—and the church's own history—supply ample reason for caution when taking the state's outstretched hand.

Koppelman's book does not satisfy on every front. Some issues he addresses—and they're big ones—are bound to leave lingering questions. One is whether it makes sense to treat religion itself as a good in the first place, without giving equal regard to claims of conscience and other strongly held, but expressly nonreligious, beliefs (See "Claims of Conscience," May 3). Why accommodate someone whose God tells her not to work on Saturdays, but not someone whose heart tells her the same thing? There may be good reasons to do so, though this is a hotly contested question. But "neutrality" won't get us there; if anything, it leads us in the opposite direction.

And that leads us to the $64,000 question: Why talk in terms of "neutrality" at all? Koppelman is right that our uniquely American version of religious neutrality has done a lot for both the church and the state, and continues to do so. We would be better off if the courts made even more loyal use of it. The theorists may grumble, and with reason. On the ground, though, "neutrality" has earned that popular, too-dismissive label: "good enough for government work." Anything that works well in practice shouldn't be scorned just because it can't stand up to interrogation in the seminar room.

Koppelman is also right that the law and politics of American church-state relations have become a major battleground of our so-called culture wars, and that both sides—if they would only realize it!—have gained more than they have lost from the particular American approach to religious strife. His book shows with wit and skill that the American way of doing things, one that is genuinely sympathetic to religion but avoids answering religious questions, has real wisdom in it.

But will the culture wars end if we insist that what we have is "neutrality?" Will a militant atheist feel better knowing that government vouchers for religious schools are "neutral?" Will an evangelical Christian be satisfied on being informed that the state that refuses to allow student-led prayer at a high school football game is being sympathetically "neutral?" I doubt it. We need more appreciation of what current law does for both sides. Koppelman's book will help there. But we also need more dialogue between those contending sides, dialogue that avoids official declarations of religious truth while acknowledging just how important it is for all of us to ask those questions. I'm not sure that calling that activity "neutral" will get us there. ■

Paul Horwitz *is Gordon Rosen Professor of Law at the University of Alabama School of Law and author of* The Agnostic Age: Law, Religion, and the Constitution *(Oxford) and* First Amendment Institutions *(Harvard).*

Paul Johnston

Goaded by Doubt

My Bright Abyss
Meditation of a Modern Believer
Christian Wiman
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $24, 192 pp.

Modern poetry, like all modern intellectual endeavors, seems to be primarily an arena of religious disbelief, its practitioners too educated, too sophisticated, and too *modern* either to seek or to offer meaning in the faith that sustains much of the world. Christian Wiman shared this modern intellectual disdain when he became the editor of *Poetry*, the foremost magazine of modern poetry in America. Wiman's evangelical Baptist upbringing in rural Texas had long been left behind—or so he thought, until his diagnosis with a rare form of cancer in 2005, on his thirty-ninth birthday. In the ensuing life crisis he recognized not only his long dormant but never abandoned faith, but the religiousness of poetry, even seemingly God-absent modern poetry. In his new book, *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer*, Wiman reflects on faith, death, poetry, and God.

My Bright Abyss began as an essay in the *American Scholar* in 2007. That journal is not exactly rife with narratives of religious belief, yet Wiman writes that his essay generated a large response, revealing an educated, intellectual, modern readership less hostile to religious belief, even Christian belief, than it so often seems. The importance of *My Bright Abyss* lies partly in this affirmation, Wiman's discovery that one *can* be both thoroughly modern and open to religious faith. But important too is its portrayal of what modern Christian belief must necessarily be like—mixed equally of faith and doubt, affirmation and despair.

Wiman's book is organized as a series of brief meditations, over a hundred in all, some as short as three or four lines. They are best read without hurry and with highlighter and pencil in hand, for each asks of us the attention we would give a good poem. Many of these "prose fragments"—Wiman's words—address the modern poetry that his life's work has immersed him in. Reflecting on one of his own poems, "a love poem by a person who is incapable of love," he acknowledges that "God is nowhere in it. That's what makes it modern." Yet he now recognizes that it is nevertheless a devotional poem, indeed that *all* good poetry is devotional. More specifically Wiman asserts that all good poetry is in a sense Christian, whatever its author's belief. This recognition depends on the twofold Christ Wiman has come to embrace: the Christ of the Incarnation and the Christ who cries out on the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"; the divine Christ who made God present in our fleshly, feeling, contingent humanity, and the human Christ who suffered God's absence. The theologian may struggle with abstract terms to reconcile this simultaneous presence and absence. For the poet, there is no need to reconcile them, for both are part of the reality of the world, however contradictory they may seem.

Among Wiman's favorite poets are the seventeenth-century Anglican priest George Herbert and the nineteenth-century Catholic priest (and convert), Gerard Manley Hopkins. But Wiman is critical of them for believing that faith requires the poet to have a circumscribed imagination. "If faith requires you to foreclose on an inspiration," Wiman writes, "surely it is not faith." This is not to say that a poet cannot have wrong ideas. Wallace Stevens's poem "Tea at the Palace of Hoon" is beautiful, Wiman admits, but its belief—that the numinous world is not real, but only a projection of ourselves—is fatal. Better even this modern idea, though, particularly when so beautifully expressed, than postmodernism's ironic refusal of commitment to any idea at all.

Last year Wiman published a book of his translations of selected poems by the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam, who died in 1938 in a transit camp for political prisoners on their way to Siberia. Other influences include the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was hanged in a German concentration camp in 1945, and Simone Weil, who died of tuberculosis in England in 1943 while contemplating returning to France to participate in the Resistance. (Much of Wiman's thinking on God's simultaneous presence and absence is indebted to Weil.) He is influenced, that is, by women and men who maintained or even found their faith amid the worst evils of the twentieth century. Such European poets and thinkers are a long way from the Baptist fundamentalism of Wiman's rural Texas childhood; and *My Bright Abyss* doesn't entirely make clear how much of Wiman's belief is a continuation of his Christian upbringing and how much traces to these and other writers. In any case, his illness didn't take him back to the Baptist Church, but rather to a liberal United Church of Christ congregation, near his Chicago home, whose pastor he engaged in endless hours of argument and discussion. "To every age Christ dies anew," Wiman finally declares, "and is resurrected in the imagination of man."

This is as true of today's American Christian fundamentalism as it is of every other historical manifestation of Christianity, yet it is not the relativism that it appears. The deeper truth Wiman uncovers is that "there is no permutation of humanity in which Christ is not present." For the modern human permutation, our defining feature may well be our sense of the abyss that awaits us in the darkness of death. This sense, though it defines twenti-

eth-century thought, had its origins in the nineteenth century, when geology first began to unveil the earth's secret—namely, that it and the universe in which it exists are far older than we can imagine and will abide for an equally unimaginable time into the future, far beyond our brief human moment. Within such an abyss of time, what can our lives and our deaths signify? This is the question that lies behind Wiman's meditation. In what sense can Christ be present to the modern man, whether poet or philosopher or theologian or mere husband or wife or parent, who feels this question's awful power?

Poets perpetually seek to connect with something absent, yet greater than themselves, and in so doing, they come to understand that the objects of the material world are numinous with a presence greater than their materiality. Though I have emphasized Wiman's engagement with modern thinkers, most of *My Bright Abyss* deals with his personal story, giving glimpses of the life of a husband and father who goes to work each day and comes home; who visits his doctor and undergoes treatment; whose prospects for living fluctuate from dire to hopeful and back again. Those familiar with the names cited earlier will have perhaps the easiest time reading *My Bright Abyss*, yet the book's rewards are available to all who in their religious longings sometimes feel themselves, like Wiman, "wandering through a discount shopping mall of myth." Rather than cause for despair, such honest doubt is essential to a faith that must embrace both God's absence and God's presence, for the abyss—Christ's cry on the cross—is as real as Christ's divine presence in the midst of that abyss. Doubt is the creative force that pushes us to imagine both God and Christ anew. For all readers beset by doubt, Wiman's gift is the transformation of the abyss from an all-enveloping darkness to a place of realistic belief, an abyss bright with the love of God. ■

Paul Johnston *teaches at the State University of New York, Plattsburgh.*

Andrew J. Bacevich

The Party of Humanity

For the Republic

Political Essays

George Scialabba

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Let us begin with the subtitle, where a correction is in order. *For the Republic* is not a collection of political essays. Instead, it consists almost entirely of book reviews, published over the course of the past decade or so in venues ranging from the *Nation* to the *American Conservative* (and also including *Commonweal*). Appended as a sort of postscript are a couple personal reflections, one of which movingly describes the author's struggles with severe depression.

For the most part, book reviewing is to literature as weeding is to gardening—necessary work, but neither glamorous nor especially rewarding. To recycle one's published reviews and call the result a book requires considerable courage—or perhaps chutzpah.

Fortunately, as reviewers go, George Scialabba is a skilled practitioner. In evaluating books by or about Thomas Friedman, Tony Judt, Irving Kristol, Christopher Lasch, George Orwell, I. F. Stone, and Edmund Wilson among others, he demonstrates a capacity for fair-minded description along with a talent for crisp and candid evaluation. On occasion, candor becomes entertainingly intemperate as when he suggests that cigarette makers marketing their wares in the underdeveloped world should be "disemboweled on television by terminal lung-cancer patients." Disembowelment also describes the fate that the super-rich as a class "undoubtedly deserve."

Sometimes Scialabba goes too far as when he writes that "the Cold War was about" nothing more than "the freedom of those with a lot of capital to do anything they pleased with it." Tell that to the Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, and others stuck on the far side of the Iron Curtain. On occasion, his judgments are just flat-out wrong, as when he attributes the Cold War to "America's insistence on rearming West Germany." In fact, the U. S.-Soviet rivalry predated the *Bundeswehr*'s 1955 founding by nearly a decade. Yet these qualify as minor transgressions. When you are in the business of hurling thunderbolts, at least a few will inevitably go astray.

The issues that gnaw at Scialabba relate primarily to political economy. For an avowed man of the left, "the last three decades have been bitter medicine." During that period, "the country's political center of gravity has shifted far

George Scialabba

PHOTO BY ANNA SUMMERS

to the right," yielding a host of negative consequences. "A four-letter word beginning with 'f' has tragically corrupted the minds of countless innocent Americans," Scialabba writes. "I mean 'free' as in the expressions 'free market' and 'free enterprise.'" Allowed to have their way, the titans of corporate capitalism have produced appalling inequality along with "a truly staggering amount of needless suffering." With "plutocracy triumphant nearly everywhere," democracy itself has become a sham, the United States itself having been transformed into "a banana republic, indebted up to its eyeballs, with an obscenely rich upper class, a corrupt and mediocre political class," and pretty much everything else going to hell in a handbasket.

This is bracing stuff. It might even qualify as mostly true. Yet in denouncing the sins attributed to Big Business, Scialabba leaves out half the story. For as American politics was shifting to starboard, American culture was hurtling in precisely the opposite direction. The corrupting effects of the f-word extend well beyond the realm of economics. In the name of liberation, equality, and choice, for example, Americans have claimed the prerogative of recasting the most intimate human relationships. The indifference to collective welfare that Scialabba decries in the economic arena finds its counterpart in the fate of the family, presently defined as whatever happens to suit my preferences today. (Some different arrangement might suit me tomorrow).

"Freedom," writes Scialabba, "has value, indeed has meaning, only in relation to constraint." Just so. Yet with Americans socialized to define freedom quantitatively—just give me more—persuading them to embrace an alternative measure will require some doing. Simply driving the money-changers from the temple of democracy, however satisfying such a purge might be, won't suffice.

The political and economic ailments to which Scialabba points are real but they derive from and are nourished by an even more fundamental crisis of culture. Scialabba seems to sense this, even if only vaguely. Reflecting on the prospects of the information revolution producing the "empowerment" that its hawkers promise, he foresees a different outcome. Our preoccupation with being connected, he speculates, may well make life "less gracious, subtle, sensuous, and profound" while simultaneously "more sterile, frenetic, shallow, and routine." Yet the prospect Scialabba describes is not some theoretical possibility; it's reality, the here-and-now outgrowth of tech entrepreneurs harnessing deeply embedded cultural predilections to make tons of money while millions of Americans persuade themselves that adding to their inventory of electronic gadgetry holds the key to happiness.

What basis then is there for hope? On this score, Scialabba has little to offer. A sentimental socialist, he is realistic enough to appreciate that the twentieth century totalitarians who appropriated that label permanently besmirched the brand. Don't expect capitalism to shrivel up and die anytime soon. By extension, don't look for salvation in some formal ideology.

What else is there? For Scialabba, not religion. Born and raised Catholic, he eventually left the church and never looked back. Following his "autoemancipation" from the faith, which he describes as "the supreme drama" of his life, Scialabba enrolled "timorously but proudly" in "the Party of Humanity," to which he remains committed. Yet apart from its belief in "freedom, science, and progress," it's not entirely clear what the Party of Humanity stands for. It's a vessel adrift without an anchor. We "secular liberals are barred from using the old methods," Scialabba writes.

> We want bonds, we want limits, we want authority; but we don't want illusions. The will of God, the infallibility of Scripture, and the divine right of husbands and fathers seem to us illusions.... We can't accept these illusions, and we can't ask others to accept them—even if it will make them better behaved.

With admirable succinctness, Scialabba has thereby outlined the secularist's dilemma. Recognizing the need for bonds, limits, and authority, the secularist doesn't know where to find them and would never dream of prescribing them for others. The drift continues. The shoals beckon. ■

Andrew J. Bacevich *is a professor of history and international relations at Boston University. His new book* Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country *will be published this month.*

LETTERS (continued from page 4)

THE REVIEWER RESPONDS

My Notre Dame colleague Kenneth Garcia makes three points in his letter "correcting" my review of his book. I did scoff, gently I hope, at his proposal that Catholic universities should hire faculty with expertise in both their own disciplines *and* Catholic philosophy. Acknowledging that this bird is indeed a rare species of academic, Garcia quotes his equally implausible suggestion that Catholic universities "must dedicate resources to train existing faculty who have a desire to [gain it]." Unfortunately, he misses my larger point about how Catholic universities actually operate—those, like Notre Dame, Georgetown, Boston College, etc., that "take the money" in order to compete with the major state and secular private universities. These Catholic research universities reward their faculty for becoming grant-winning researchers and published scholars in one area (or closely related areas) of expertise. If they wish to be promoted and gain influence among their peers and administrators, these scholar-teachers go deep, not broad. (This sets them apart from many of their peers at the smaller sectarian colleges.) Some research faculty, especially those already inclined to do so, gain a passing familiarity with Catholic philosophy and theology through the seminars and extracurricular programs Garcia mentions—all to the good! But this kind of exercise hardly rises to the level of the faculty's becoming "trained" in the academic sense, or even of their being able to articulate the "inner teleology" of their discipline in terms faithful to its standards as well as to Catholic principles, as Garcia seems to expect. As to his second point, he confuses complaint and proposal. He does, in fact, "complain"—on approximately one-tenth of the book's 164 pages! The complaint about specialization and secularization takes many forms: it is a departure from classical Catholic educational ideals (pp. 2–9); it reflects an understanding of academic freedom that "is confined to investigating and discussing the problems of one's *particular* science" (p. 74, italics

in the original); it destroys the unity of knowledge, which must be restored by the integration of the disciplines within a Catholic theological and philosophical framework. (This unity must not be forced "prematurely," p. 98). So much for his *complaints*.

As to his *proposal*, it falls far short of answering the book's critique. "The Catholic university, however, has an additional obligation: to ensure that there are *some* faculty members in each academic department who not only want to pursue knowledge beyond their disciplines but to actively explore its relation to Christian philosophy and theology." In the complaint sections of the book, it is clear that each discipline and department must include *several* faculty members who can bridge these two areas of knowledge. Of necessity, the narrow specialist is allowed to hang on; but the direction of reform is clearly toward the whole-of-faculty model—as his integrative goal would indeed require. Finally, Garcia wishes that I had covered all of his proposals and ideas with equal attention in my 1,500-word review; having been edited down to size many times myself, I know how he feels! Many of the proposals turn, however, on his concept of theonomy, a vague state of affairs that somehow avoids the imposition of Catholic standards and allows integration to occur "naturally." What can I say? Good luck with that!

R. SCOTT APPLEBY

KIDS THESE DAYS

I very much enjoy Fr. Nonomen's column in your excellent magazine. I read with great interest his article "Wedding Crashers" in the July 12 issue. As a teacher in a Catholic high school that takes its religious identity seriously, I lament with Nonomen the fact that young people do not take religion in general and Catholicism in particular very seriously—even when receiving sacraments. Yet, with all due respect to good priests like Nonomen, the people who ignored him probably hadn't been to church since confirmation. The young no longer find the Catholic Church a welcoming place—for themselves and those they love. For the unchurched, a Catholic priest represents an institution that treats women as second-class citizens while proclaiming their importance to the gospel message, describes gay people as "disordered," and divorce as sinful. That, coupled with the fact that the Catholic Church has, for this generation, completely lost its moral authority because of the sexual-abuse scandal, might explain the shy smiles, texting, and even passive-aggressive gestures like nail polishing on the part of younger people who feel alienated from the church—or are actively hostile to it because of their own histories.

ED DOOLEY
Danvers, Mass.

ASHES TO ASHES

I read with interest Paul Schaefer's August 16 article ("Looking Away: Fu-

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nerals Aren't What They Used to Be"), especially his reference to the growing acceptance of cremation, as opposed to embalming and viewing. I recently buried my older brother's ashes in the family plot in Minnesota. As he was the first in our family to choose cremation, I was curious about the Catholic Church's view of the practice, and found it in a July 25, 1968, issue of *The Witness* magazine, while doing research for a family memoir (my late mother wrote a column for the magazine). In a Q&A column titled "Cremation Allowed for Catholics," Msgr. Ray Bosler was asked about the church's long-standing opposition to cremation, which was banned in 1888, and whether Catholics who asked to be cremated would not be refused the last sacraments. He explained that Pope Paul VI had ordered the Holy Office to relax the church's opposition to cremation in July 1963, and that those who asked to be cremated would not be refused the last sacraments. "Now a Catholic who chooses cremation may be given the sacraments and receive church burial unless it is clear that the choice is made from a defiant or irreligious motive," he wrote. "The nineteenth-century ban was a response to such defiance because cremation then was looked upon as a challenge thrown in the face of the church, a gesture deliberately employed out of contempt for the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. Now, however, it is so common and accepted a practice that all historical overtones have disappeared." He continued: "It is still the position of the church that burial is preferred: cremation is only 'tolerated.' Though the choice of cremation is not conditioned by any permission from the local bishop, bishops are encouraged to do all they can to preserve intact the Catholic tradition of inhumation."

I was glad to learn that because I saw to it that my brother received the last sacraments and his ashes joined the remains of my parents, three other brothers, and a sister. As the only surviving family member, I will also be cremated.

AL EISELE
Falls Church, Va.

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Place Holders

John C. Seitz

"Detachment gives us the understanding that we are born into a world that is larger and more important than we; that we are drops in an infinite sea…and that we cannot have both intensity of experience and permanency of duration."

So wrote Rabbi Joshua Liebman in his 1946 self-help book *Peace of Mind*, a striking and very American celebration of the value of detachment. It perfectly describes the impulse I felt in my youth when I went to the Colorado Rockies in search of the transcendence promised by America's prophets of transcedence—Whitman, Thoreau, Emerson.

For Liebman, postwar America presented the ideal site for cultivating detachment, and Americans were especially equipped to usher in the new "mature" understanding of God that this virtue makes possible. *Peace of Mind* became a bestselling religious book, the first by a non-Christian. Today it's out of print, having been eclipsed in 1952 by an even more optimistic self-help manual, *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Reformed minister Norman Vincent Peale. Liebman didn't share Peale's famous anti-Catholicism, but his ode to detachment offered a similar rejection of religious sensibilities rooted in place and memory.

Of course, the Catholic tradition has also regarded a certain kind of detachment as a virtue. When Catholic spiritual writers talk about poverty of spirit or abandonment to the will of God, they, too, are recommending detachment. More concretely, architectural and liturgical reformers in the wake of Vatican II (1962–65) often saw it as their job to undo Catholics' excessive attachments. The thousands of saint statues gathering dust in storage rooms today speak powerfully to the force of these concerns to create a more detached Catholic sensibility.

But Catholic tradition also assigns deep religious meaning to places, objects, and the memories they carry. Devotion to one's parish continues to be a prime marker of Catholic identity. Fidelity to the universal church is understood to manifest itself in fidelity to a church—a particular group of people in a particular place. Attachments make this fidelity possible.

Recent efforts to consolidate dioceses by shuttering churches and merging parishes have brought this part of our tradition to the surface. As bishops cite financial difficulties, changing demographics, and priest shortages to justify parish shutdowns, some Catholics have worried that the language of detachment that inevitably accompanies these efforts threatens not only a building or a neighborhood, but also the very heart of the church's self-understanding.

I was there in Boston in 2004 when the new archbishop instituted a plan to close more than eighty parishes in a span of six months. Hundreds of Catholics from nine parishes took over their churches and began to appeal the closures. Some of these churches are still being occupied by protesters eight years later. Their example is at odds with Liebman and Peale's way of imagining Americanness and spiritual maturity.

But the struggles are not only against an American ideal of flexibility. The battles are fought against archdiocesan officials who encouraged parishioners to detach for the good of the church as "the people of God." They are also fought against fellow-parishioners who have—at least physically—"moved on" and who see their friends' lingering as a wound in the body of Christ. And the battles are also internal: the protesters struggle within themselves, as they, too, acknowledge the widsom of keeping one's soul untethered.

In exposing these tensions, Boston's Catholics invite exploration of the power and the limits of the optimistic post–World War II celebration of detachment. The stakes are very high. Resisters took social, personal, and religious risks in opting for attachment. Most profoundly, they risked being labeled as backward, immature, superstitious—terms of tremendous historical sensitivity for American Catholics.

They accepted these risks because, for them, faith and faithfulness are inseparable from memory. For them, keeping the faith means, among other things, keeping faith with a local community where that faith has been practiced. The occupations also affirm the significance of sacred places—places where their friends and family have been baptized, married, and mourned, places they did not want to see turned into new condos or a mall. This kind of attachment expresses continuity between the past and the future, between ancestors and descendents, all joined together as the body of Christ. It manifests a hope for some small measure of control over what happens in life.

We are ill served by thinking of such attachment as a kind of idolatry in disguise or nostalgia run amok. The alternative to attachment isn't always freedom; sometimes it's isolation. This is why I now read Rabbi Liebman's words with a divided heart. My study of the parish shutdowns forced me to reconsider what we—as individuals and as communities—should be willing to let go of, and what we should hold on to, whatever the cost. ■

John C. Seitz *is an assistant professor and an associate director of the Curran Center for American Catholic Studies at Fordham University. His book* No Closure: Catholic Practice and Boston's Parish Shutdowns *was published by Harvard University Press in 2011.*

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