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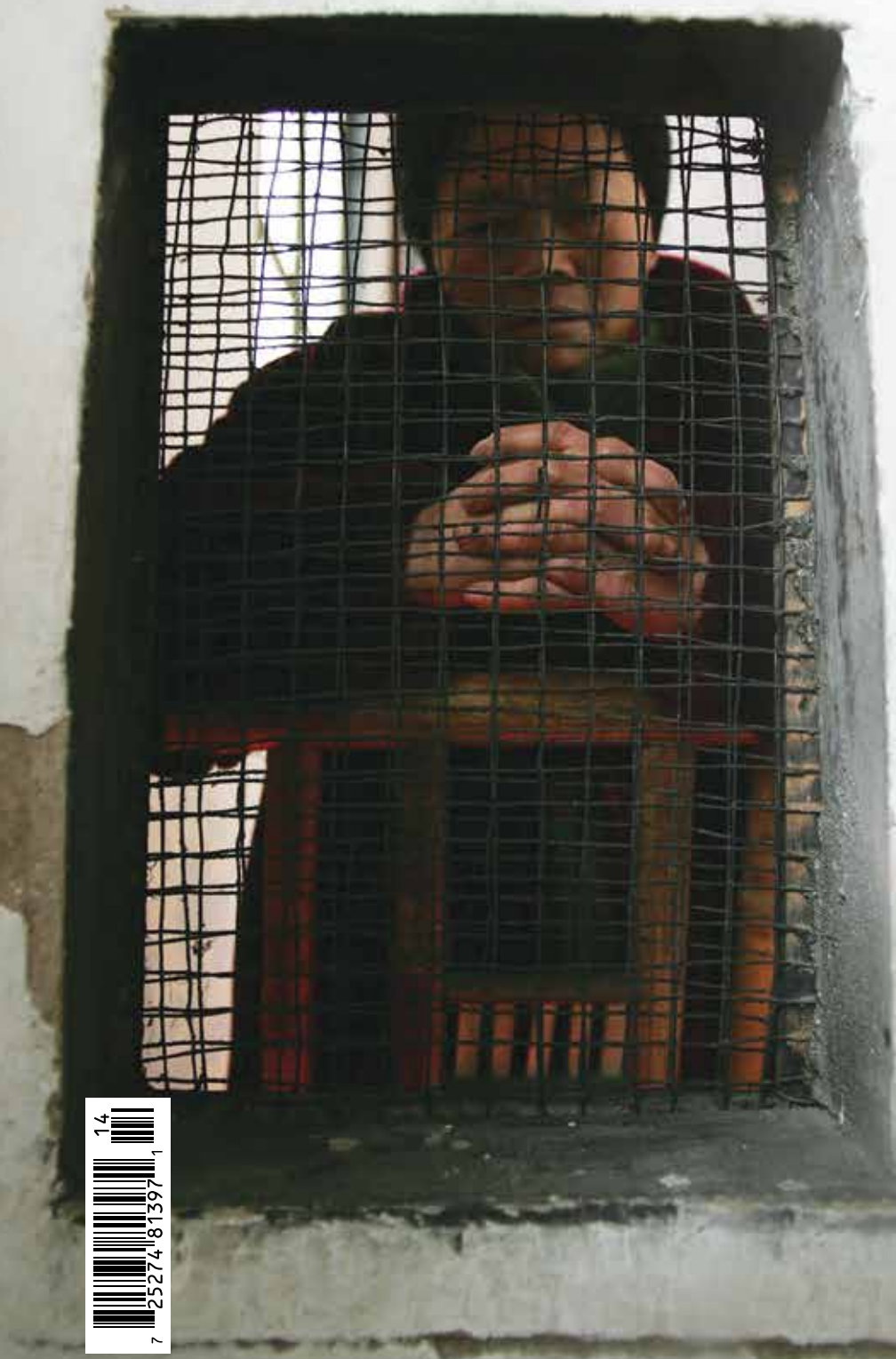

THE CHURCH IN CHINA

SEX ABUSE & CLERICALISM

THE POPE & THE DEATH PENALTY

AMERICAN PLUTOCRACY

AGAINST TOUGHNESS

PIETY & NATIONALISM

WILLIAM PFAFF, ECRIVAIN

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LETTERS

Humanae vitae, *annulments and marriage, the common good*

LOSING TRUST

Thank you for your republication of *Commonweal* articles concerning *Humanae vitae* ("An Unhealed Wound," June 15). One of the issues not thoroughly discussed was the effect on the lives of the clergy. I was eleven years into religious life and two years away from ordination when *Humanae vitae* was published. After a year of discernment, I left my order and abandoned my dreams of a life of service. The wounds were profound and the scars remain.

I had a complete loss of trust in the church's moral teaching authority. I also felt that I could not represent the church in preaching about birth control.

I was not alone. I know of classmates who left (some before and others after ordination) for similar reasons.

Seldom do I read articles regarding *Humanae vitae* as one of the causes of the decline in priestly vocations. At least for this ex-seminarian, it was the major reason.

JOHN A. LEONARD
Bronx, N.Y.

UPSETTING NATURE?

About forty years ago I told a Jesuit priest, the head of the theology department at the Catholic university I had gone to, my medical history. I had five children, four by C-section, the Last Sacraments with one. The rhythm method didn't work. He said, "I fail to see how God will be honored by four motherless children. You should be using birth control. I took a vow of chastity. You and your husband did not."

I am well past the age of childbearing, but I fail to see how having more children than can be cared for, or putting one's health at risk, can be moral. We upset nature in many ways—with medicine, operations, eyeglasses, and transplants. Birth control can be a benefit to a good marriage and good health.

JANE MERCHANT
Falmouth, Maine

STUBBORNLY ULTRAMONTANE

I wonder if I might take the liberty of adding a footnote to Jack Miles's interesting letter responding to the *Humanae vitae* issue (August 10). He notes three interesting things. First, that after a promising start, Vatican II was precluded from issuing an authoritative teaching on contraception within marriage because Paul VI stepped in, and reserved the matter to himself. Second, that the minority report of the commission on birth control (with which the pope was eventually to side) placed its emphasis not on contraception itself, but on the consequences for papal authority of admitting an error and making a change in the teaching that had prevailed since *Casti connubii*. Third, having surfaced the possibility that the Holy Spirit might have spoken through the doctrinal change effected in 1930 by the Seventh Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion, he notes that for the minority report such an eventuality was clearly beyond imagining.

True enough. But, then, skepticism about the guidance of the Spirit went well beyond that and may have extended,

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in the view of a beleaguered Paul VI, to the thinking of the Fathers assembled in ecumenical council at Vatican II. Why else, after all, would he have withdrawn from their purview not only the matter of birth control, but also the issues of clerical celibacy, reform of the Roman curia, and the establishment of a mechanism that might have served to make episcopal collegiality the institutional reality it has never become? All four issues touched ultimately on the papal authority. On that neuralgic matter, it seems, the thinking of the Council Fathers could not reliably be assumed to be responsive to the promptings of the Spirit. Here, as is so often the case, the central issue and stumbling block is the stubbornly persistent ultramontane vision of the papal primacy.

FRANCIS OAKLEY
President Emeritus, Williams College
Williamstown, Mass.

LIVED-OUT LOVE

Pope Francis and pastoral leaders on many levels understand the sacramental theology of marriage far better than Ross Douthat or Cardinal Burke ("A Precarious Unity?" March 19).

What is the indissoluble bond in a Christian marriage? Is it the law of the church that has defined marriage as a contract based on consent and consummation? Or is it the grace of Christ accepted and lived out in mutual self-giving love by the couple? I think most would at once say it is the latter: the grace of Christ made visible in mutual self-giving love of the two persons.

How does this sign come into existence and make a marriage indissoluble? It is evident to many of us that it comes by a process that will usually take years. This process is the constantly renewed and deepened decision by the couple to love each other. They are the ministers of the sacrament, and together with Christ they make an indissoluble covenant bond of love. Of these we can say, "God has joined them together." The sacrament bond is internal to them. It cannot be an external law.

The vows made in church begin the commitment. But every time an annulment is granted, the church acknowledges that the "indissoluble sacramental bond" did not come into existence. The sacramental union comes into being through tested fidelity and love. Church courts can only judge by externals, and so they must arrive at annulments by sometimes tortured reasoning. To me this is a development in doctrine made possible by the human development of the past hundred years. We have a deeper understanding of intimacy, of the "I and Thou," of depth psychology, of how divine grace works with human freedom. As Pope John XXIII put it: "It is not that the Gospel has changed; it is that we have begun to understand it better."

What Pope Francis and many Catholics realize today is that those "whom God has joined together" are those who have personally internalized the decision to love unconditionally. They have united themselves to grace.

Many well-intentioned persons fail in their decision; they are not "joined by God"; their marriage fails. In a second marriage with a new partner they may decide fully and wholeheartedly to love one another. If so, whether they have or have not obtained a Church annulment, their second union becomes a union in Christ. They are in a state of grace.

No annulment can undo a true marriage. An annulment does not "do" something. Annulment simply acknowledges the existing fact: the prior marriage was not "in Christ." If an annulment is not granted we cannot conclude that the first marriage was "joined by God." We simply know that there was no conclusive external evidence to prove the contrary.

Cardinal Burke and Ross Douthat presume that church procedures that are human laws are actually divine revelation. Divine Revelation, in Scripture and tradition, tells us that the essence of marriage is an event: the event of Christ's death and Resurrection informing a man and woman's lived-out love commitment. The only assurance of this event is by spiritual discernment, which cannot be reduced to legal proofs. Pope Francis and many more see this. This is why he calls for discernment about welcoming the divorced and remarried to Communion.

FR. JOHN HYNES
Wilmington, Del.

UNQUALIFIED RESPECT

However thoughtful and edifying are the several contributions to "Civic Virtue and the Common Good" (June 1), there is, as Matthew Sitman notes, much more to be said.

A concern with the common good is indeed a staple of Catholic moral thought, but, as the Vatican document "Economic and Financial Questions" makes clear, this concern ultimately rests on a fundamental conception of what it is to be human that is embraced by many intellectual traditions, both religious and philosophical. On this conception, each human being is owed an inalienable and unqualified respect precisely because he or she is a unique member of the human species.

The practical implications of this conception do have to be worked out in the course of the varied historical and material vicissitudes in which people live out their lives. This is the domain in which the practical wisdom that Cathleen Kaveny rightly emphasizes is irreplaceable. But it is a practical wisdom that never countenances violations of the inalienable and unqualified respect due to each human being. Indeed, the ability to exercise this practical wisdom is a distinguishing feature of the human way of being, and hence of the respect due it.

Today, this robust tradition of concern for the common good faces at least two forceful challenges. In the domains of economic and technological policies and practices one finds strong support for an "instrumental rationality" that prizes efficiency above all. It condones, explicitly or otherwise, the treatment by some people of others as tools or commodities or both. In the domains of scientific theory and research, today's default working hypothesis is that the human species is just one of many animal species, having no special status.

Confronting these and related challenges, proponents of the common good need a clear appreciation of its historically and conceptually rich foundation.

BERNARD P. DAUENHAUER
Montgomery, Ohio

From the Editors

Sex Abuse & Clericalism

It feels as if a lot of time has passed since Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley said in July that a "major gap still exists" when it comes to the Catholic Church's policies and procedures for dealing with sexual abuse and misconduct by priests, bishops, and cardinals. He was speaking in the wake of emerging details about the actions of former cardinal Theodore McCarrick and the clerical culture that enabled his semi-secret behavior to continue for decades with no repercussions. Of course, the existence of that gap has since been horrifically underscored with the release of a grand-jury report on seventy years of sexual abuse and systemic cover-up by bishops in six Pennsylvania dioceses. In remarkably blunt language, the report makes clear that church officials sought to protect hundreds of perpetrators and the institution at the expense of more than a thousand victims and their families. Its graphic description of a range of acts is a painful and necessary reminder of just what the sexual abuse of a child *is*—and why its evil is compounded when the perpetrator is a trusted adult vested with moral and spiritual authority. The pain caused by such abuse can crush a life.

In his letter this week to the world's 1.2 billion Catholics, Pope Francis said the church has "abandoned" its children. The expression is apt. Echoing O'Malley, the pope acknowledged that "we as an ecclesial community" have been slow in "realizing the magnitude and the gravity of the damage done to so many lives," and that "we have delayed in applying the actions and sanctions that are so necessary" to protect children, punish abusers, and hold accountable those who cover up such crimes. While many may welcome Pope Francis's statement, words do not suffice for those understandably frustrated by the lack of specific proposals. "The Vatican would do well to listen now": this was the final line of the *Wilson Quarterly*'s review of Jason Berry's *Lead Us Not Into Temptation: Catholic Priests and the Sexual Abuse of Children*, all the way back in 1993. How often have the bishops been similarly admonished since, yet with seemingly so little to indicate that they have mended their ways?

In the wake of the McCarrick revelations and the Pennsylvania report, many inside and outside the church are issuing sweeping demands born of outrage: punish to the fullest extent possible the church officials who let it happen; do away with mandatory celibacy; ordain women; get gay men out of the priesthood; let the laity run everything; force the resignation of the entire American episcopate. Such responses are natural but not helpful. One important fact buried in the Pennsylvania grand-jury report is that all but two of the cases it details predate the reforms implemented in the United States in the aftermath of the Boston scandal in 2002. There's more than cold comfort to this fact, for it shows how additional institutional reforms could be devised, carried out, and enforced. Certainly, a similar zero-tolerance policy is required when it comes to dealing with cases like McCarrick's, and with bishops and other church officials who fail to respond to reports of sexual abuse.

More broadly, a serious examination of a clerical culture that fosters such misconduct is needed. As Cardinal Blase Cupich recently argued, the whole church needs to confront attitudes of power, privilege, and entitlement that characterize many of the ordained and reinforce a structure that protects them from accountability. This means that the laity should be allowed greater participation in many aspects of the church's life. They must be involved in investigations into clerical sexual abuse and abuse of power, in the selection of candidates for ordination, and in the training these candidates receive—including in matters of sexuality, mental health, and trauma. Future priests should not be hidden away from the rest of the community in cloistered seminaries, where they pick up the bad habits of clericalism. If there is something to seize from this moment, it is the opportunity to envision—with vigor, clarity, and discernment—meaningful and measurable reform. ■

August 21, 2018

Charles R. Morris

Working Hard & Hardly Earning

WHY LIFETIME INCOMES HAVE STAGNATED

It is a truism that the United States, among all the advanced countries, has the most radically skewed income distribution. In the sixteen years from 2000 through 2015, including the years of the Great Recession, the pretax income of the top 1 percent of earners was *on average* more than one-fifth of all personal income. To put that in perspective, the only other time the rich extracted that much wealth was in 1928, just before the onset of the Great Depression. New Deal social reforms and postwar marvels like the GI Bill effectively evened out income distribution, so that even the richest Americans had to content themselves with income shares that regularly hovered around the 10 percent mark.

That regime ended with the wholesale financial deregulation that was engineered by President Bill Clinton and his Treasury Secretary, Robert Rubin, and enthusiastically adopted by President George W. Bush and Federal Reserve Chair Alan Greenspan. Predictably, a runaway financial sector precipitated a crisis second only to that of the 1930s. But unlike the Depression, the 2000s debacle was not followed by reform. The plutocratic wing of Congress has built formidable barriers to cultivate and protect its wealth. Virtually all the Trump economic initiatives—from his reckless tax cuts to the assault on the federal regulatory apparatus—are looting operations.

It is feckless to hope for an easy delivery from the plunderers, for their power is rooted in decades of gritty and remarkably effective organizing—gerrymanding state legislatures, packing the judiciary, and swinging billionaire-funded PAC money between critical regions to turn elections. That is the kind of battle that must be fought over a broad front—and one of the salients will be data. Although we have good annual data sets based on tax returns, until now there have been no decent statistics on the ebb and flow of individual workers' incomes over their lifetimes. But a recent paper, working mostly with social-security data, sheds considerable light on dark corners.

Working with a 1-percent sample of the American workforce (a millions-plus database), the authors created twenty-seven cohorts of workers and tracked their lifetime incomes—defining "lifetime" as the working years from age twenty-five through age fifty-five. The first cohort comprised workers who turned twenty-five in 1957, and the last cohort turned twenty-five in 1983, with each of the cohorts yielding thirty-one years of data. Inflation adjustments were made with both the Personal Consumption Expenditure deflator (PCE) and the Consumer Price Index (CPI). I use the PCE here in the interest of space, and because for most purposes the PCE better reflects the whole economy. The authors focus on the income gains, or lack of them, for each of the cohorts, breaking out the different experiences of male and female workers. Male workers entering the workforce in 1957 were a particularly favored group. In their first ten years in the workforce, the mean (or arithmetic average) showed a 22-percent cumulative income gain, while the median worker (or the worker in the exact middle of the distribution) showed a 12-percent gain.

Then something happened. Inflation-adjusted male income dropped sharply. The cumulative median worker's post-1967 income fell by 10 percent. Only men at around the eightieth percentile stayed even. Over the entire work life of the 1957–1983 male database, the only cohorts showing a meaningful real increase in income were the cohorts who began their careers between 1957 and 1967. Including that cohort produces a real increase in lifetime income of less than 1 percent, almost all of which went to the top 1 percent of earners.

The picture is quite different for women workers. In contrast to male workers, women workers improved their incomes by about 2 percent a year, year after year, in all cohorts. Remarkably, the lowest-paid and the highest-paid women improved their incomes at about the same rate. That good news is considerably dampened, however, by the inadequacy of women's pay: inflation-adjusted women's pay has risen from $14,100 for the 1957 cohort to $22,300 for the 1983 cohort. Highly qualified women have done particularly well, tripling their median pay, but women's pay still has a long way to go.

Men's pay, except for those at the very top (and despite low unemployment), is still essentially stagnant. There is a lot of history wrapped up in that statement: the massive influx of boomer job seekers in the 1960s; the runaway inflation of the 1970s; the assault by high-performance German and Japanese manufacturers in the 1980s; and, during the Great Recession, the wholesale financialization of big industry, stripping out workers and sucking out cash.

American executives appear to be following the latter strategy *à outrance*. Hiring is up, but downsizing and outsourcing are still the order of the day. Businessmen are braying about their successes, but they are not sharing the fruits of those successes with their workers. The boffo profits over the past few years have been dedicated to automation, with most of the rest going to shareholder dividends, stock buybacks, and executive compensation—feeding the insatiable greed of the 1 percent. ■

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Sister Is Counting on You

MEMORIES FROM A SECOND-GRADE DISCIPLINARIAN

According to a recent Religion News Service report, a study by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute found that "Catholic elementary school students, regardless of race, sex, or socioeconomic status, have more self-control and self-discipline than their peers enrolled in either public schools or non-Catholic private schools." Students at Catholic schools, the report went on, "did not fight, get angry, act impulsively, or disturb ongoing activities as frequently as students at other schools."

Is anyone surprised? Certainly not this 1955 graduate of St. Ita's parish school. And it wasn't all the doing of those Sisters of (occasional) Mercy. Why, I had a part in it myself. Let me tell you a story.

It was second grade. Tommy T. was plopped into the desk in front of me. Sister had grabbed him by the elbow and moved him from the front row, where she had been able to keep an eye and, when necessary, a hand on him. That day, she gave up and turned him over to me. My assignment: stop his wiggling in the seat, leaning into the aisle, talking out loud, and "behaving as if this was the playground." She gave me no further instructions. "Figure it out for yourself," I told myself. "Sister is counting on you."

It didn't take long for Tommy to wiggle and lean. I ignored him. He wasn't having that. He upped the ante. He raised and lowered the old-fashioned classroom desktop to the rhythm of its squeaky hinge. Poking him in the back hardly registered. Whispering "Stop that!" fell on deaf ears. He turned, put his elbows on my desk, smiled like the Cheshire cat, and stuck out his tongue. He had an amazing array of moves given the small size and short compass of our second-grade desks. Everything I tried fell short. I went back to ignoring him, and the kid in front of him turned and poked him in the nose.

Finally, it came to me: grab him by the short hairs at the back of his neck. I calculated that they were just long enough to give my thumb and forefinger a hold. Reaching forward, I clamped with a pincer movement. My grasp held on to those bristly red hairs. I pulled. And pulled some more. He stopped drumming on the desk. He jerked forward to pull free. I let go. His head hit the desktop. He let out a howl. He slowly turned around and tears fell on my still outstretched hand. "Peggy, that hurt," he sobbed.

The usual classroom shuffling and murmuring came to a halt. The silence was ominous. Then whispers of "crybaby" slithered around the room. I sat, shocked by the turn of events. Did I feel awful? How awful? I knew what I had done was mean; today, it seems possibly sadistic. Yet I was elated at my success in making him cry.

I never had to do it again. Sister bustled down the aisle. All of us, Tommy, me, and the crybaby whisperers, received her stern and silent reprimand. Was that what she had intended? Had all of us gone too far? Once again, Tommy was taken by the elbow and ushered to the front desk. From that day, he behaved himself under threat of having to sit in front of me, having his short hairs pulled, and being called a crybaby. Such, such were the joys of instilling "self-control and self-discipline" in second grade of parochial school. ■

CHARLOT

Santiago Ramos

Shrine Politics

WHEN NATIONALISTS EXPLOIT PIETY

There is a scene in Michel Houellebecq's controversial novel *Submission* that should be read by anyone who wishes to make the restoration of religious tradition part of a political project. *Submission* was much discussed when it appeared three years ago because of its provocative political speculation: the story takes place in a fictional near future when the candidate of an Islamic party wins the French presidential election after forming a coalition with the socialists against the right-wing National Front. At its heart, though, the novel is a satire aimed at the spiritual emptiness of the French cultural elite, represented by the novel's protagonist, a literature professor named François.

In the first half of the novel, François visits the medieval shrine of the Black Virgin of Rocamadour in south-central France as part of his half-hearted quest to find meaning in his life. The village of Rocamadour is a soulless tourist trap, centered on gastronomical activities. But there is still some life around the Catholic shrine. François attempts to venerate the Virgin: "Every day I went and sat for a few minutes before the Black Virgin—the same one who for a thousand years inspired so many pilgrimages, before whom so many saints and kings had knelt." But he doesn't have the same experience as those pilgrims. The statue "[bears] witness to a vanished universe" that he longs for but cannot enter. When, for purely pragmatic reasons, François finally becomes a Muslim, he converts to a religion no more alien to him than Christianity—despite the fact that all his ancestors were Christian.

This passage comes to mind every time I read about a politician from Europe or America trying to make use of the vestigial Christian culture of his or her country. There have been many such politicians lately. In June, Viktor Orbán of Hungary spoke of turning his country into an "illiberal democracy" with a formally Christian identity: "Unlike liberal politics, Christian politics is able to protect people, our nations, families, our culture rooted in Christianity, and equality between men and women: in other words, our European way of life." In Poland, the ruling party has affirmed the Catholic dimension of Polish identity through official ceremonies that blend church and state. In Italy, Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini of the Northern League (formerly a northern separatist party, now populist and nationalist), brandished a rosary and a Bible and spoke about his Catholic roots on the campaign trail during the recent elections. In the United States, politicians toggle between affirming one nation under God and proclaiming an outright Christian nation—two different things. And of course, there are the never-ending complaints about a "War on Christmas": last December, Donald Trump announced, "We can say 'Merry Christmas' again."

Some politicians have taken the further step of using the Cross as a political tool. Laymen in Bavaria (Markus Söder of the Christian Union Party) and Italy (Salvini again) have called for crosses to be placed in courthouses, police stations, and other public buildings. Salvini emphasized the desire to place crosses in Italy's ports of entry—"in an elevated and highly visible place" —presumably so that refugees and immigrants of other faiths might learn the religious identity of the country they're entering. Yet Salvini's party traffics in a brand of nationalism that treats Christianity not as a unifying faith but as a cultural artifact, on the same level as the pre-Christian pagan gods of northern Italy. For most Christians, the Cross is a symbol that a suffering refugee might find solace in, but for Salvini it is a symbol of a national identity that needs to be protected from foreigners.

Perhaps the most interesting developments are taking place in France, where only the Left appears to be keeping a secular tone that was, until recently, the norm for all politicians. On Pentecost, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen of the National Rally (the National Front's new name) joined a pilgrimage to Chartres, lead by Cardinal Robert Sarah, Chief of the Congregation of Divine Worship at the Vatican. Last year, François Fillon, presidential candidate for the center-right Republican party, spoke eloquently about the Catholic roots of France, arguing that they are just as significant to the country's identity as its Revolution in 1789: "You just heard the bells ringing.… A thousand years of history! How can you not feel the force, the power, the depth of this past that forged us, that gives us the keys to our future?" Even the centrist Emmanuel Macron, paragon of the European liberal establishment, told France's Catholic bishops in April that "we share in a confused way that relations between the church and state have been damaged and it is up to you, as much as us, to repair them." In theory at least, *laïcité* remains a bedrock principle of the Fifth Republic. Yet these French politicians all want to tap into the Catholic roots of French identity.

Christians who would like to see more room for religion in public life might be inclined to welcome this trend. They might see it as aligning with the message of Pope Francis, who argues in *Laudato si'* that our political problems have spiritual dimensions. Or they might see it is the beginning of a new "post-liberal" order grounded in transcendent faith. But these political-religious gestures usually have more to do with rallying the base for a particular party than with renewing faith in the West. Religious symbols are being

Faithful attend the religious procession of the Immaculate Conception in Caacupé, Paraguay, December 8, 2017.

EFE NEWS AGENCY / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

mixed with secular power for the benefit of the latter. Politicians wring the last bits of memory and meaning from religious traditions in order to secure votes. Even if some political leaders make religious gestures in good faith, they might leave their followers in a position like that of François at Rocamadour: thirsting for the sacred, but feeling more nostalgia than faith. Politicians can make a shrine popular, but authentic faith before the shrine requires intimate assent, the soul's inner movement of faith. The path to spiritual renewal cannot be made shorter or easier by mass politics. To understand the shrine at Rocamadour as something more than mere patrimony requires discernment and personal illumination. Political rallies cannot produce or preserve this kind of piety; only prayer can.

At least, that is how I feel whenever I contemplate the Catholic country of my birth. In the early 1600s, the Virgin Mary appeared in Caacupé, Paraguay. She saved the life of a member of the Guaraní tribe named José, who was fleeing from dangerous rivals from the Mbayá tribe. The Virgin appeared and spoke in the Guaraní language, helping José find a place to hide. Today, a blue and white basilica that rivals St. Peter's in size rises to the skies from the heart of the city of Caacupé. Thousands of pilgrims visit the site every year. Paraguayan flags adorn the altar. The President of Paraguay usually makes an appearance there on December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception—a sign of the influence the church still has on Paraguayan society, though that influence shrinks with every passing year.

I have visited Caacupé several times, both in school-sponsored trips and by myself as an adult. I have entered the shrine with different feelings: patriotism, sure, but also sadness, awe, curiosity, unsettled questioning. I can't recall too many moments when the patriotic element of the shrine felt essential to true devotion. I learned to venerate the shrine through a personal path that was not supported by any political regime I have lived in. Our Lady is a symbol, in the proper metaphysical sense of the word, of the presence of God and of our response to that presence. How to ponder such a notion? How to judge its veracity? Sure, it helps that there's a popular religious culture and community that sustains the shrine. A religious symbol can only be understood with the help of such a community, which interprets it. But that community isn't a nation-state; it's a communion of believers. Moreover, the act of faith in the symbol, the appropriation of the symbol's meaning for one's own life, is ultimately a personal act. What does it matter to *me* that the president of Paraguay makes an appearance at the shrine? Citizens of Poland, Hungary, Poland, France, and the United States should ask themselves the same question about their presidents and their shrines.

Before he leaves Rocamadour, François comes to a deeper understanding of its shrine. Despite being under the influence of the patriotic verse of Charles Péguy during his trip, François is able to disentangle the nationalist side of popular piety from the transcendence that the Black Virgin represents: "What this severe statue expressed was not attachment to a homeland, to a country.... It was something mysterious, priestly, and royal..." The failure to distinguish between the local and the sacred leads to either disappointment or idolatry. ■

Santiago Ramos *teaches philosophy at Boston College.*

Stephen J. Pope

No Mercy?

WE NEED COURAGE, NOT TOUGHNESS

A lot of Americans value "toughness." Lawyers are praised for being "tough-minded," politicians promise to be "tough on crime," therapists urge us to show "tough love," and professional athletes are praised for their "mental toughness." Advertisers use the appeal of toughness to sell everything from jackets and headphones to rain gutters and trucks.

President Trump is obsessed with toughness, the trait he most closely associates with his supreme value, "winning." He uses it to justify everything from the new tariffs on steel and aluminum to his outrageous effort to split undocumented children from their parents at the border. The effectively abandoned "zero tolerance" policy was said to be tough but necessary.

Trump's obsession with toughness goes way back. After the ruthless Tiananmen Square massacre of more than two hundred people in 1989, he praised the Chinese government for demonstrating its strength and power. As president, he has expressed his admiration for President Rodrigo Duterte, a known rapist who has overseen the extrajudicial killings of about thirteen thousand Filipinos.

After their meeting in Singapore, Trump dramatically switched from describing North Korea's Kim Jong-un as a "maniac" and "madman" to praising him as a "tough guy"—the highest form of praise Trump can offer. He admires Kim's skill at consolidating power, ruthlessly eliminating anyone perceived as slightly disloyal, and effectively controlling his population through relentless propaganda and institutionalized terror.

Of course, Trump's admiration of toughness reflects his own insatiable craving for respect. Discussing Kim during an interview on Fox News, the president observed: "He speaks, and his people sit up and listen.... I want my people to do the same." Trump is willing to concede that Kim "has done a lot of bad things" (including ordering the torture, imprisonment, and murder of hundreds of thousands of his own citizens). But the president sought to neutralize worldwide moral condemnation of Kim's behavior with the lame and irrelevant observation that human rights are abused in many other countries as well.

What is completely missing in Trump's discourse, and that of his allies, is any attempt to subject his love of toughness to ethical assessment. In ordinary language, toughness is a quality akin to strength, durability, resilience, or sturdiness. But rather than a virtue, toughness is morally neutral. We might praise the "toughness" of Abraham Lincoln, Gandhi, and Rosa Parks, because their perseverance served noble ends. All displayed various kinds of strength. In contrast,

Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump in Da Nang, Vietnam, November 11, 2017.

ITAR-TASS NEWS AGENCY / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

we do not praise bloody tyrants like Herod, Stalin, or Mao for the "toughness" they displayed in their ruthless pursuit and preservation of power.

The Christian tradition praises courage but not toughness. This virtue enables one to remain steadfast in doing what is right despite significant adversity. In this sense, we praise the courage of both the young soldiers who stormed the Normandy beaches on June 6, 1944, and Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was willing to risk his own life to act as a "voice for the voiceless" in El Salvador in the late 1970s.

Courage in the Christian tradition has some distinctive features. While the ancient Greeks envisioned courage in terms of soldiers waging heroic wars against their enemies, Thomas Aquinas thought that the essence of courage is standing firm in the face of aggression. Whereas Americans usually take the paradigm of courage to be the soldier's willingness to fight on behalf of a just cause, Christians have long regarded the martyr as the paradigm of courage. In Christian ethics, courage is most aptly displayed not in the taking of life, but in one's willingness to die for the sake of the greater good.

Dedication to the good is what distinguishes the virtue of courage from the character trait of toughness. Toughness is seen in those who engage in the wanton destruction of property and lives in pursuit of their own interests. Toughness combined with power and unrestrained by morality shows a callous disregard for the welfare of others, finds it impossible to respect the dignity of the weak, and treats cruelly those who are unable to protect themselves—exactly the kind of behavior displayed by Rodrigo Duterte and Kim Jong-un.

Those who praise toughness often want to obtain the moral credit that comes with genuine courage. But it doesn't take courage to put one's political opponents in prison, or to order death squads to assassinate street-level drug dealers, or to order troops to use automatic weapons and tanks against unarmed students protesting a repressive political system. And it doesn't take courage to deny people fleeing

for their lives a right to apply for asylum, or to subject young children to traumatic experiences that psychiatrists predict will scar them for the rest of their lives.

Christianity places the virtue of courage at the service of mercy. Mercy, for Christ, is the key form of human strength. It takes a strong character both to forgive and to ask for forgiveness. It takes courage to be truly meek, patient, and humble. It takes internal strength to show hospitality to strangers in the face of growing ethno-nationalism. As Pope Francis observes, "A merciful heart has the courage to leave comforts behind and to encounter others."

The courage to be merciful is not grounded in mere sociability, niceness, or enlightened self-interest, but rather in the Cross. The Christian paradigm of courage lies in Jesus' willingness to remain true to God even when doing so required him to go through horrific torture and a humiliating death. Early anti-Christian polemics scoffed at the notion that Almighty God could be vulnerable to harm, yet this is exactly what the Gospel proclaims. We must have the courage to love in a way that leaves us vulnerable to harm. Stoic *apatheia*, rooted in the desire for a kind of invulnerability, is a world apart from Christian *misericordia*.

St. Paul still offers the most striking description of the paradoxical nature of the Christian understanding of strength and weakness. Writing of his own hardships, he declares: "I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). The experience of weakness led Paul to a humble reliance on the grace of God. In the midst of all of his own ordeals, St. Ignatius of Loyola found consolation in this very passage relaying the Lord's words to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The contrast between toughness and Christian courage could not be starker. Whereas popular culture equates toughness with power over others, the Gospel sees weakness as the condition in which we learn to love others, to grow in solidarity with them, and to work for their empowerment. Realizing our own vulnerability and woundedness puts us in the best position to reach out in compassion to others. Jean Vanier, the founder of L'Arche, holds that each of us can enter into a deeper humanity by facing our own fragility, fallibility, and failures. He learned from decades of first-hand experience of living with people with intellectual disabilities that "the weak teach the strong to accept and integrate the weakness and brokenness of their own lives." Conceiving of strength as invulnerability to harm and as complete self-sufficiency, on the other hand, stunts our capacity for becoming integrated persons and forming healthy communities.

Compassion is the ultimate Christian criterion of the moral quality of both a person's internal strength and the public policies of a nation. The toughness we so often hear about takes as its norm "no mercy," but in its Christian sense courage acts compassionately even when doing so brings harm to its agent. Popular toughness seeks to win at all costs, but courage is willing to sacrifice short-term victories for the sake of attaining higher goods over the long run. Finally, many Americans today are prone to think that we have to be tough enough to assess the worth of persons strictly on the basis of achievements, power, and possessions, but the Christian knows that human dignity is based on God's unalterable and completely gratuitous love for every human being.

This commitment to compassion is fully consistent with enforcing just public policies and with taking reasonable steps to protect ourselves from undue harm. But it also implies that we do not respect people because they are bullies, admire leaders for their cruelty, support narcissistic public figures enthralled with raw power and willing to do anything to get it, or persist in tribalistic loyalties regardless of truth, human decency, or honor. Scripture tells us to "put not your trust in princes" (Psalms 146:3–5) when they are captured by such values. Today we must be courageous enough to resist purveyors of toughness who promise, or threaten, no mercy. We can only do so if we are truly committed—both as individual Christians and as members of the Christian community—to follow the way of Jesus rather than that of his enemies. ■

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B. D. McClay

Maria Goretti, Pray for Us

A SAINT FOR (ANOTHER) SEXUAL-ABUSE CRISIS

Maria Goretti was an eleven-year-old girl who was stalked, assaulted, and murdered by the twenty-year-old son of the family her own family lived with. For resisting his assault, crying out, "No! It is a sin," and for forgiving her attacker on her deathbed, she was canonized in 1950—forty-eight years after her death. Five hundred thousand people attended the canonization Mass of this child from a little Italian village. The Mass had to be held outdoors in St. Peter's Square to accommodate the crowd—a first, at that time.

I'm not sure she could summon such numbers now—largely, I'd imagine, because there's something about this story people find a little too horrifying, and the religious imagination that drew strength from that kind of horror is waning. But even picking up a book casually, such as Annie Ernaux's *The Years*, a memoir from 2008 and not a religious text in any sense, I find myself confronted with Maria Goretti: "[The girls] laughed up their sleeves at the story of Maria Goretti, who had preferred to die rather than do with a boy what they all dreamed of doing." Of course for these girls the story is about sex—not rape.

In viewing it as a story primarily about sex, though, they aren't alone. Undeniably, Maria Goretti was canonized for her devotion to chastity; more specifically, virginity. "With splendid courage she surrendered herself to God and His grace and so gave her life to protect her virginity"—this from Pius XII's homily on the occasion of her canonization. I mention this from the outset because any attempt to understand Maria Goretti must begin with why we know who she is.

There's no requirement, however, to stop there. For instance—a 2004 copy of the feminist journal *off our backs* records a story about "a crowd of angry girls" who attack a flasher outside of St. Maria Goretti School. "The girls came and started kicking him and punching him, so I wasn't going to stop them," one witness says. Perhaps this story also tells us something about Maria Goretti, or at least the girls under her patronage.

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Maria Goretti was an eleven-year-old girl who was stalked, assaulted, and murdered by the twenty-year-old son of the family her own family lived with. I think of Maria Goretti when reading the news about (ex-)Cardinal McCarrick, and the abused seminarians he left behind him. The price for serving Christ as a priest, in McCarrick's world, was either being betrayed or betraying others, being preyed upon or turning a blind eye.

Perhaps it is significant that Maria is not only a child, but a girl; one level removed from a boy, two levels removed from an adult male victim. Men are victims of sexual assault, too, but in terms of saints, it's the Marias who do the lifting for both genders. There's only one male child martyred for his virginity that I know of—Pelagius of Córdoba, a boy hostage of remarkable beauty who refused a caliph's advances and was thus killed.

Would abused seminarians and boys even pray to Maria? She is one face of a particular kind of suffering; theirs, actually, whatever the differences between them. Do they even know she is for them? Or would they think: But I wasn't a girl; but I didn't die.

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Maria Goretti was an eleven-year-old girl who was stalked, assaulted, and murdered by the twenty-year-old

CNS PHOTO / KAREN CALLAWAY, CATHOLIC NEW WORLD

A member of the Missionaries of Charity venerates the relics of St. Maria Goretti in Chicago.

son of the family her own family lived with. This makes her, as Brian McNeil astutely points out in his essay for *New Blackfriars*, "Maria Goretti—a saint for today?", less a woman resisting than a child abused. She is, he goes on, somebody whose life was overwhelmed by pain, whose pain is remembered by us, whose pain stands in for the pain of many; somebody from whom a victim of rape would feel solidarity, not reproach; one of the

> names that emerge for a brief historical moment from the illimitable sea of human misery and remind us of all those others whose names are now forgotten.... Perhaps [her veneration] can also remind us of the profound theological truth that no one is forgotten before God, and that all suffering—even the meaningless pain and involuntary death of the victims—is given a place in a hidden manner in the unfathomable divine mystery of cross and resurrection.

Not a willing martyr for purity; rather, somebody who didn't want to die; somebody who exercised no choice, only her own ability to refuse to pretend that this was anything but a rape, who insisted to the end that she was a human being, beloved of God, and that the man attacking her was, too.

Perhaps this is what is ultimately unsettling about the Maria Goretti painted by Pius XII, intact except for having been stabbed fourteen times, the one to whom one prayer goes: "Teach me by your example to instill into others a real respect for modesty and purity." The trouble is that she didn't choose to die. Someone chose to kill her. No respect was instilled in him, until it was much too late for her. She was not a second Perpetua, coolly guiding the sword to her own neck.

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Maria Goretti was an eleven-year-old girl who was stalked, assaulted, and murdered by the twenty-year-old son of the family her own family lived with. One of the last poems of Francis Webb, an Australian poet, was dedicated to her. In it, a feverish Maria slowly dies:

> …you know you often asked me
> Why I was in tears at Mass before the Communion:
> I seemed to see Him there, heaving up to Golgotha,
> and rising and falling.…
> Three times He fell: the last note of the Angelus
> Falls with Him—I am falling with Him
> —Must I fall with Him into chloroform?
> Take up your cross.

But she must fall; so she does. The plaintive force of this question is perhaps what draws me to her peculiarly horrible, yet commonplace, story: abuse, rape, death. Must she? It would seem so.

Maria submitted to her abuse—up to a point—in part because her family's shelter hung in the balance. To the extent that those around her turned a blind eye, this too was the reason. Better not to know than to know, even if not knowing involves knowing precisely what you don't know. McNeil quotes one pious biography to this effect:

Alessandro said to the girl, 'Marietta, look! There is a shirt on my bed that needs mending!' When she did not reply, her mother assumed that she had not understood him. She said, 'Marietta, did you hear what Alessandro said to you? He has a shirt that needs mending.' Marietta pretended not to have heard Alessandro's words, because she sensed what it was he really wanted. She replied, 'But how can I tidy up the kitchen and mend the shirt? And I have to hold little Teresa on one arm too.' Her Mamma lost her temper and threw one of her slippers at Marietta, hitting her on the head. Then she said, 'Very well, Mamma, then I will just stay here alone.' Her mother's conscience reproached her for this until the day of her death.

Unlike the young man who killed Maria Goretti, Cardinal McCarrick held not only material help in his hands (no small thing) but supernatural as well. One of the men to come forward, James, was baptized by McCarrick—McCarrick's first baptism, in fact. His uncle, a close friend of McCarrick's, "advised him to take the secret to his grave." From an article in the *New York Times*:

> "He had chosen me to be his special boy," James said in the phone interview, with his lawyer, Patrick Noaker, listening. "If I go back to my family, they tell me that it's good for you to be with him. And if you go to try to tell somebody, they say 'I think you are mistaken.' So what you do is you clam up, and you stay inside your own little shoe box, and you don't come out for 40 years."

"Lord, to whom shall we go?" Peter asks Christ, when Christ asks him if he would like to leave. "You have the

words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God." These days, however, your representatives seem to be bent on holding you hostage, Lord. Rather a dangerous thing for such a representative to do, not only to your flock, but to himself. Even if he's a cardinal.

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Maria Goretti was an eleven-year-old girl who was stalked, assaulted, and murdered by the twenty-year-old son of the family her own family lived with. The man who stabbed her fourteen times when she resisted him went to prison, had a vision of his victim, and was converted. He lived to be eighty-seven. Another poem: "But after years of regret / Maria has forgiven you; as we do also."

In 2015, her body came to the United States. A woman named Cathy Costello went to pray to her because her own son had stabbed her husband to death:

> "Why?" she asks, her voice cracking. "Why did you kill the one person that loved you more than no one else in the world? Why did you hurt our family like this? I know it's not logical because he has mental illness. But if I'm going to be honest with you, that's the internal struggle" ("Before the Body of a Child Saint, a Mother Struggles to Forgive Her Child," November 22, 2015, NPR).

"What Maria Goretti represents is forgiveness," the NPR story says. Yes. On the other hand, I think about those school girls attacking their local flasher. It is hard for me to believe Maria was not, in that moment, in some way, protecting them. Maria, who could not fight back, grant us your strength. Maria, who was failed by so many, help us now.

"Maria's body lies in a glass shrine under the main pilgrimage church in Nettuno," writes McNeil. "The visitor notices at once how small the saint was." At the time of her death, she was eleven years, eight months, and twenty-one days old. She was murdered for no reason, the last period of her life an abusive hell. To Costello, just as to her own murderer, she extends a helping hand. It seems unfair to have received so little help and to have to continue helping beyond the grave. Then again, who needs it more than the people who turn to her?

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Maria Goretti was an eleven-year-old girl who was stalked, assaulted, and murdered by the twenty- year-old son of the family her own family lived with. I repeat these facts to myself when I think about her because I see no way to find in this story anything like heroism, only a terrorized child failed by those around her. But in this, Maria Goretti is hardly alone; children are not the only ones capable of being failed and abused. And yet what I appreciate in her story, I think, is that it remains her story—never her murderer's.

Men like McCarrick flourish, in part, because the price for challenging them seems too high (as if the price for tolerating them is not); but also because the story of their abuses remains theirs. For telling the stories of his victims and challenging the church leaders complicit in his crimes, we can be grateful to journalists doing hard work and asking difficult questions. Let this be a season of unmaskings, an apocalypse in the oldest meaning of the term.

But while we can and should expose and punish McCarrick and the network that enabled him (and no doubt others), there's very little to say about McCarrick himself. He was an evil man who abused his sacred authority. McCarrick's story is one about lust and power—an old combination. He saw something he wanted and he took it, many times over. He's not actually interesting.

Still, our attention naturally follows somebody like McCarrick—not his crimes, but the person himself, the same way our attention goes to a mass shooter, or a serial killer, turning their victims into pieces of their scenery. Victims, being only victims, can no longer be helped. Monsters, on the other hand, can be wooed. In a certain kind of cynical high-mindedness, the cultivating of monsters is more important; they are the lost sheep, not the shepherd who has lost them.

In Rachel Goossen's article "Defanging the Beast," a sober and thorough account of the Mennonite response to theologian John Yoder's sexual abuse of women, she makes it clear that every attempt to reconcile with Yoder was centered wholly around him, never around the women who, after being abused by him, abandoned their intellectual pursuits and sometimes their faith. They were both individually and collectively unimportant to Mennonite leadership, and if they became lost sheep, it was, in this view, by their own choice. Speculation as to why people who do evil do what they do lets them control the story of their actions, position themselves as the one ultimately affected and the one with whom the drama starts and ends. In a perverse way, it erases their crimes.

For a Christian, no one can be wholly monster—indeed, some monsters are victims themselves. But the Mennonite response to Yoder should serve as a cautionary tale. The story of what McCarrick did doesn't belong to him; it began with him, but will not end when he and his network have been completely exposed or completely punished. It belongs, rather, to his Maria Gorettis; those whose trust in him and whose faith in God were used as excuses for predation. It's they who have suffered at his hands and at the hands of those who preferred to remain ignorant. It's they to whom repentance must be made, and they whose healing will be synonymous with the church's. This must be done, not for future children, not for future seminarians, not for future Catholics who won't be damaged and in need of help; but for these people whom the church has failed.

Maria Goretti—pray for them. ■

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John Gehring

'This Is Huge'

SR. HELEN PREJEAN TALKS ABOUT FRANCIS & THE DEATH PENALTY

Sr. Helen Prejean, a member of the Congregation of St. Joseph in New Orleans, is a human-rights leader known around the world for her advocacy to end the death penalty. Her 1993 book Dead Man Walking, *based on her experiences serving as a spiritual advisor to death-row inmates, was made into a movie two years later starring Susan Sarandon. Her memoir,* River of Fire, *will be released in the spring of 2019.* Commonweal *contributing writer John Gehring interviewed Sr. Prejean by phone.*

John Gehring: Pope Francis made big news last week by revising the Catechism to declare the death penalty inadmissible in all cases. Why is this so significant?

Helen Prejean: Pope John Paul II said that the times when the death penalty could be justified were so rare they would practically be nonexistent. But this did reserve the use of the death penalty in cases of absolute necessities. Pope Francis has now established a foundational principle that, no matter the severity of the crime, it's never legitimate. In every death-penalty trial, the district attorney argues that, because of the gravity of this particular crime, the death penalty is required. So when the pope says it's never admissible, it pulls the whole rug out from that kind of argument. During my dialogues and correspondence with John Paul II, I always argued we needed a principled stance opposing the death penalty without any exceptions. In St. Louis on his visit to the United States in 1999, John Paul spoke about the dignity of life no matter the crime, but he didn't go so far as to establish the principle that under no circumstance is it acceptable. What Pope Francis did is just huge.

JG: A number of conservative Catholic commentators are upset about the pope's decision, arguing that church teaching can't change. What do you make of this opposition?

HP: Change happens when society grows and evolves, and we have alternative ways of keeping people safe. We've also learned from science. The fact that young juveniles' brains are not yet as fully developed as adults' influenced the Supreme Court's decision to end capital punishment for juveniles. Teaching can change. The church endorsed slavery for a long time and quoted Scripture to do so. Jesus also had to deal with religious legalism. People were so attached to the letter of the law they missed the person and human dignity behind it.

CNS PHOTO / PAUL HARING

Sr. Helen Prejean

Pope Francis also has direct experience with prisoners. In 2015, I got a call about Richard Glossip, an innocent man on Oklahoma's death row. We started a full-fledged campaign and I wrote a letter to Pope Francis. The pope got involved in the case by calling on the governor to commute his death sentence, which he did. When I visited Pope Francis in 2016, I delivered a letter from Richard thanking the pope for helping to save his life.

JG: Do you really think the politics will change? Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts, a Catholic, said he respected the pope's views but is moving ahead with the execution of Carey Dean Moore later this month. [Moore was executed on August 14.]

HP: The way it may change is with the religious-liberty focus: this is a religious-liberty issue now. During jury selection, a Catholic might say "it's against my religion to support the death penalty." Prosecutors may try to get Catholics off juries. Issues will be raised about religious liberty and conscience. Or think about an assistant district attorney who goes to work for a district attorney, but says "it's a matter of my faith that I can't support the death penalty." You begin to see repercussions throughout the criminal-justice system. We have been waiting for this for a long time. It was Pope John XXIII in his encyclical *Pacem in terris* who said that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights would be the beacon of life for all of us to follow. The church was behind on human rights. Now faith is aligned with human rights on the death penalty, and that is a powerful thing.

JG: Polls show declining support for the death penalty over the past few decades, but more than half of Catholics still support it. How can we do a better job of convincing those Catholics that capital punishment is wrong?

HP: The Catholic Church historically has been tied into empire and government, so that meant deference toward the right of the state rather than inalienable human rights. Since the days of Emperor Constantine, the church always had the rationale for the defense of society. Remember, the Goths and Visigoths were breaking down the gates. There was violence everywhere, and no prisons or criminal justice system.

The Catechism always talked about the dignity of innocent human life. But when I'm walking with a man to an execution and he says, "Sister, please pray for me," where is the dignity in killing that man?

I wrote to Pope John Paul II in 1997 and made this point as they were doing final editing on the Catechism. He really got it. For the first time, John Paul II made the death penalty a prolife issue. He moved the envelope morally, not just toward the dignity of *innocent* life, but of *all* human life. Pope Francis is the first to say the death penalty is contrary to the Gospel. But it's going to take more than a statement from a pope. Social justice has to be an integral part of our spiritual life. When you watch the government execute a human being, there is nothing prolife about it. We need a whole educational strategy in parishes. Suburban parishes are often disconnected from the reality of what it means to be poor and to face injustice.

JG: What have death-row inmates taught you over the years?

HP: Human beings are more than one terrible act. I also see how cushioned and protected I have been in my life, and I can't say that is just virtue on my part. People on death row make me feel so alive. I know that sounds like a contradiction, but when you want to make every second of your life count it reminds you what is real. You learn the meaning of grace.

JG: You've accompanied people who in many instances have committed heinous crimes. How do you connect with them?

HP: You have to be open to them as a human being. When you meet a person on death row, they are shackled and behind bars. Your eyes meet and you see their face and you begin to talk about ordinary things people talk about. The fact that you are present is meaningful. This is a meeting between two human beings.

The last two prisoners I accompanied to their death were innocent. I wrote about it in my book, *The Death of Innocents*.

JG: Are you more or less hopeful now than when you started your social-justice work?

HP: I'm more hopeful about ending the death penalty, and I see the impact that can happen when you engage with people, give talks, write books, or work with people in the art community. What I have found is that even when you talk with people who support the death penalty, they haven't really thought that much about the issue. It's a knee-jerk response. When people hear stories it changes them and it becomes harder to demonize and dehumanize.

The fact is, just a few prosecutors in certain counties account for a disproportionate number of death-penalty convictions. In Oklahoma, one prosecutor is responsible for fifty-four death-penalty cases. You have a cultural phenomenon, especially in the south, where politicians are rewarded for being "tough on crime."

JG: Is there a next phase you see in your journey?

HP: When your boat is in a current, you keep moving. I'm in a deep current with all these life-and-death issues. I'm going to keep going, following that current. ■

A Chinese Catholic carries a crucifix during a pilgrimage in the Shaanxi province of China in 2013.

CNS PHOTO / WU HONG, EPA

From Ricci to Francis

The Church's Past & Future in China

Nicholas Clifford

If China is, as many Westerners once appeared to believe, a society in which religion is unimportant, how does one explain the enormous number of temples and shrines that dot its vast landscape? That was the question put by the great sociologist C. K. Yang at the beginning of his book *Religion in Chinese Society* (1961), which dealt primarily with pre-Communist China. Perhaps a better question is why so many Westerners once believed religion to be irrelevant in China. One answer is the common Western misunderstanding of nonexclusive religious groupings (it is not unusual in other parts of the world for people to adopt religious practices from more than one religious tradition). Another answer is that many intellectuals, from Voltaire on, preferred to believe in a great ancient civilization that owed nothing to the superstitions and dogmas of the West. Later, many proponents of the modernization theories developed in the middle of the twentieth century held that "traditional societies," with their old cultures, old beliefs, and superstitions, would give way before the inevitable march of progress, secularism, and rationality. So too, after the victory of Communism in 1949, the theories of Marx and Lenin (to say nothing of Mao Zedong) left little room for religion.

In 2019 the People's Republic of China (PRC) will celebrate its seventieth birthday, and will boast of the accomplishments of the enlightened leadership of the Communist Party—increasing prosperity, huge modern cities, high-speed rail networks, a strong military, advanced technologies, and so forth. Chairman Mao's war on religion, culminating in the persecution of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), will

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once again be politely overlooked, and the officially atheist regime will simply await religion's ineluctable extinction.

They may have a long time to wait. Not only are the old ashes of Chinese religion still glowing but, as Ian Johnson's book *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao* explains, they appear to be bursting into flame once again. By the mid-1950s, the PRC recognized five official religions: Taoism, Buddhism, Islam, Protestantism (*Jidu jiao*, the religion of Jesus) and Catholicism (*Tianzhu jiao*, the religion of the Lord of Heaven). The divide between these last two may stem partly from earlier Christian missionary teachings in a pre-ecumenical age. It's worth noting that of these five, only Taoism is genuinely indigenous, though after some early persecutions Buddhism eventually came to be accepted as Chinese. Thousands of Christian missionaries were expelled or imprisoned after 1949, and in 1951 the old Protestant sectarian divisions—Congregational, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, etc.—were swept away, replaced by a new official unified Protestantism called the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). Catholicism was harder to domesticate for several reasons, chief of which was loyalty to the pope, a foreign leader and thus highly suspect in the eyes of a regime seeking to cast off the shackles of imperialism. Not until 1957 did the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) appear as the "official" Catholic Church. Both the CCPA and the TSPM were firmly under Beijing's leadership. But large numbers of believers, seeing these official churches as puppets of the regime, stayed away, coalescing into unofficial groups generally known as underground, unregistered, or house churches.

Soon the Cultural Revolution ended even this limited toleration. But in the late 1970s, religion began to reappear under the watchful eye of the state, as Deng Xiaoping's regime sought to clear away some of the wreckage left by Mao. The results have been uneven: while Buddhism and Daoism are growing once more, Catholicism is barely holding its own; in fact, it may be slightly declining. In 1949, there were roughly 3 million Catholics in China, and this year roughly 10 million—just keeping pace with China's population growth over those seven decades. Protestantism, by contrast, has grown from about 1 million in 1949 to about 60 million. Thus, as Ian Johnson points out, of the five official religions Catholicism is today the weakest and least consequential, even though the last three popes, and especially Francis, have made clear their wish to reopen relations with China.

Why this weakness? The answer is not simply persecution, bad as that has been—and still is. After all, Protestants, Buddhists, and others have also been persecuted. Catholicism in particular has struggled in China for a few reasons. First, as Richard Madsen points out in *China's Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society* (1998), Chinese Catholicism, despite its comparative strength in a few cities (Shanghai being the most obvious), was largely a rural phenomenon. Today, China's countryside is being left behind by massive migration into cities. There is also the contentious history of the Christian missions, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first permanent Catholic presence, established by the Jesuits in the late sixteenth century, was not imperialist. But many later missionaries, Catholic and Protestant both, were occasionally the beneficiaries of gunboat diplomacy. By the middle of the nineteenth century, France had managed to establish a protectorate over all Catholic mission activity in China, and used it as a way to build up France's presence and influence, the better to compete with stronger economic rivals such as Britain, the United States, and Germany. The protectorate took its orders from Paris, not Rome. Indeed, at one point France managed to block Pope Leo XIII from opening any independent Roman line of communication with Beijing.

While the French may have provided some protection for Catholics in a hostile environment, other aspects of their presence were less fortunate. Take for example the case of Aurora (Zhendan) University in Shanghai. Though the central figure in its founding was Ma Xiangbo, a Jesuit from an old Catholic family, within a few years the French Jesuits had eased him out in order to ensure that the school would be run on French lines. Ma later left the Jesuit order and was instrumental in the founding of Fudan (New Aurora) in Shanghai, which today remains one of China's top universities, its campus adorned by a huge statue of Chairman Mao.

By the 1920s, a France weakened by war saw its protectorate fading. In 1919 Benedict XIV's *Maximum illud* called for the growth of indigenous clergy in mission countries, and in 1926 Pius XI named six Chinese bishops—the first since 1685. French reaction was decidedly cool; the natural inclination of such bishops, the minister in Beijing warned darkly, would lead them into heresy. And a few years later, when the new Furen Catholic University in Beijing was started, it was pointedly put under the direction of American Benedictines, not of the French.

The whole missionary enterprise, both Catholic and Protestant, suffered from its ties to imperialism, as a new Chinese nationalism grew in strength during the early decades of the twentieth century. This nationalism denounced all forms of foreign domination and included a strong anti-Christian movement. It favored the modern and the scientific, and called for the overthrow of old forms of authority, conveniently lumped together as Confucianism. "National humiliation" (*guochi*) was one of its watchwords. The term evoked the lasting effects of the unequal treaties imposed on the country since the 1840s, first by the West and later by Japan. Though the treaties themselves vanished in the mid-1940s, the humiliation lasted until—so goes today's nationalist narrative—the victory of the Communist Party in 1949.

Despite *Maximum illud* and Pius XI's decision to ordain Chinese bishops in 1926, and despite the passionate advocacy

of a few priests (notably two Lazarists, the Belgian Frédéric-Vincent Lebbe and the Egyptian Antoine Cotta), by the time the Communists took power, relatively little had been done to build up an indigenous clergy and church leadership. Of the hundreds of bishops in China before 1949, living and dead, very few bore Chinese names. Thus, as Ian Johnson points out, the Catholic leadership was decapitated after the Communist government's mass expulsion of foreign missionaries. Worse, Catholic leaders had shown little sympathy for the modernizing social and intellectual movements that had been sweeping across China since 1919. Lucien Bianco, a leading French historian of modern China, gives the Protestant missionary movement far more credit for participation in social reform than its Catholic counterpart. Particularly surprising is that Catholics seem to have ceded leadership in higher education to Protestants. Aurora University in Shanghai (founded in 1903) and Furen in Beijing (founded in 1925) stand in lonely contrast to the network of universities started by the Protestants from 1878 onwards. Richard Madsen has faulted the two Catholic universities for turning out not critical intellectuals, as the Protestant institutions were doing, but a patrician elite whose duty it was to impart their knowledge to others without questioning it—or encouraging others to question it. This was probably not the best way to build up an indigenous leadership.

Since the Vatican broke with Beijing in 1951, there have been sporadic attempts by Rome to heal the breach. But the one underway now seems the most serious. Writing on "the future of the Sino-Vatican dialogue from an ecclesiological point of view" in February 2017, Cardinal John Tong Hon of Hong Kong made it sound as if the two sides had already reached an agreement. Two points about Tong's intervention stand out. First, recognizing that the core issue in any agreement would be episcopal appointments, Tong stated that Beijing would now "let the pope play a role in the nomination and ordination of Chinese bishops." The PRC had come to accept "that the pope is the highest and final authority in deciding on the candidates for bishops in China." Presumably this meant that the PRC would propose a candidate or slate of candidates for a particular see, while leaving to Rome the final decision or at least the power of veto. In March, *America*'s Gerald O'Connell reported that Cardinal Tong, then on a visit to Rome for a seminar on the church in China, had said that Pope Francis was very much on the right track in his negotiations with China.

Just a few days later, however, Chen Zongrong, an official in China's State Administration of Religious Affairs, introduced a new set of detailed regulations governing the conduct of religious matters, and insisted that the PRC would allow no foreign interference in religious affairs, adding that "there is no religion in human society that is above the state." He also claimed that it was no restriction on religious freedom to deny Rome full control over episcopal appointments. What he meant by "foreign interference" is not entirely clear, but the *New York Times* concluded that his comments dashed any hopes for a quick agreement. These new regulations may well be, as some suggest, primarily aimed at Islamic Uighur practices in Xinjiang province. But they can also be used against anyone who, in the Party's view, contravenes state law, which is why Christian groups of all sorts are worried.

True religious freedom would mean that the church would be able to appoint its own bishops without hindrance. Since that's impossible, the choice now is between two evils: take what is being offered and thus become "an imperfect but true church," or hold out for complete freedom, which may never arrive.

In any case, Cardinal Tong's second notable point seems accurately to define the dilemma facing the Vatican. True religious freedom would mean that the church would be able to appoint its own bishops without hindrance. Since that's impossible, the choice now is between two evils: take what is being offered and thus become "an imperfect but true church," or hold out for complete freedom, which may never arrive. To Tong, at least, the first choice is clearly preferable.

Not everyone agrees. Cardinal Tong's predecessor, Cardinal Joseph Zen, sees rapprochement as a great mistake, betraying China's faithful underground Catholics. He thinks Pope Francis simply does not understand how the Chinese Communist Party operates and how it will manipulate any agreement to its advantage (his opposition earned him a Vatican reprimand earlier this year). In this country, the conservative Catholic commentator George Weigel strongly opposes any agreement, as do many influential Catholics elsewhere.

On the other hand, Drew Christiansen, the former editor of *America*, has defended the Vatican's efforts to normalize relations with the Chinese government—and he is far from alone. Supporters of Rome's overtures to the Chinese Communist Party hold that half a loaf is better than none, and that we may hope and pray for better times to come.

But what if the church is asked to settle for a quarter of a loaf, or an eighth, or a sixteenth? And how many of us are willing to bet on China's future? Think how wrong so many Westerners were in believing that China's growing prosperity and its integration into the world economy would mitigate its autocracy. The increasing centralization of power in both state and Party under Xi Jinping, particularly in the past year, gives the lie to this hope, suggesting that while we may have been able to deal with "socialism with Chinese characteristics" (as China's authoritarian capitalism calls itself), we are now watching the development of what the human-rights lawyer Teng Biao calls "fascism with Chinese characteristics." The church has certainly found a way to function under dictatorships, but how good has its record been, particularly when it shuts its eyes to injustice or even atrocity in the hope of preserving the Catholic faith? What might have seemed, to some at least, good enough in the days of Pius XII is unlikely to work in the days of post–Vatican II Catholicism.

In fact, the Vatican concordats with Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Franco's Spain all gave those states some say in reviewing episcopal appointments. Many other issues will need resolution. What, for instance, is to be the future of the Patriotic Association after an agreement? Will it simply fade into the background once the church is reunified? Cardinal Tong seems to hope so, but that may be wishful thinking. It is much more likely that Xi Jinping expects today's underground Catholics to come out into the light and happily—or at least with minimal coercion—join the Patriotic Association. Xi himself is enormously concerned with social and political stability, and though he has problems far more difficult than dealing with religious dissent, some suggest that an agreement with Rome will actually make it easier for Beijing to bring disruptive Catholics under its control.

Another issue closely related to the Vatican's dealings with the Chinese government has more to do with national prestige than with religion itself. This is the question of Taiwan, which China regards as a "renegade province" that must inevitably be reunited with the motherland, regardless of what the island's inhabitants think. (A 2017 poll claimed that 54 percent of them thought of themselves as "Taiwanese" rather than Chinese.) The Vatican is one of the dwindling number of states that maintains diplomatic relations with Taiwan under its formal name of Republic of China, or ROC—a name that goes back to 1911–1912, when the last imperial dynasty fell and China became a republic. Taiwan was then a Japanese colony and only reverted to Chinese control after the victory over Japan in 1945. Since its founding in 1949, the People's Republic of China has insisted that formal recognition of Beijing means cutting diplomatic ties to the ROC.

The number of Catholics in Taiwan is small—no more than three hundred thousand. Most of them were either among the roughly two million who fled the mainland after the Nationalist defeat of 1949 or are the children and grandchildren of those who did. There is today an archdiocese of Taipei and six other dioceses on the island, but the number of Taiwanese Catholics has lagged well behind the island's population growth (from some 6 million in 1945 to roughly 23.5 million today). The Holy See has no wish to be seen as abandoning Taiwan's Catholics, and the Vatican's formal diplomatic recognition is important to Taiwan, for reasons of prestige if nothing else. Beijing, of course, demands a break in these diplomatic ties. In early May 2018, a delegation of bishops from Taiwan made an *ad limina* visit to Rome, impressing on Francis the need for his support. To their voices has been added that of Chen Chien-jen, Taiwan's vice-president, himself a Catholic but also a leading member of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which wants Taiwan to be a genuinely independent country. There has even been talk of the pope visiting Taiwan, though as yet no official invitation. Such a visit would be the end of any meaningful Vatican-Beijing negotiations. It is possible that an agreement might tacitly allow some form of continued Vatican presence on Taiwan, but that is a matter for the diplomats to settle.

The major issue remains that of inculturation, or a "sinification" (*zhongguohua*) of the churches, a matter on which Xi Jinping has insisted in the past few years. No one would maintain the impossibility of being a loyal and patriotic Chinese citizen and a Christian at the same time. Yet even in societies that are not dictatorships, there can be troublesome differences between heads of state and ordinary citizens over what it means to be "loyal" and "patriotic" (think, for instance, of Protestant America's grudging acceptance in the past century of Catholics and Jews).

For Catholics at least, "sinification" has a long and complex history stretching back to the Jesuit Matteo Ricci and his colleagues on their arrival in China in the late sixteenth century. A central question then was how to deal with Chinese religious rites, and more particularly what Westerners came to call the practice of "ancestor worship." Did that mean that one's ancestors were in fact spirits, or even gods, whom one might worship and to whom one might turn for practical help? Or was "ancestor worship" really nothing more than a Confucian form of filial piety, a matter of honoring the founders of a particular family? The answer seemed to depend on which person one asked. Some historians have suggested that the Jesuits, who were settled in Beijing by 1601, got much of their information from highly educated Confucian literati, who emphasized filial piety. Other missionaries who came later—particularly Dominicans and Franciscans—worked among the less educated, from whom they picked up a very different idea of what "ancestor worship" meant: not simply honoring one's forebears but getting them to help you buy the land you wanted or marry off your daughters.

The question went to Rome: Were such rites compatible

with Christianity or were they not? Clement XI's *Ex illa dei* of 1715 decided against the Jesuits, finding the rites incompatible, and in 1742 Benedict XIV's *Ex quo singulari* upheld the prohibition. In 1689 the great Kangxi emperor had issued an edict tolerating Christianity, but Clement's decision changed his mind: in 1721 he outlawed the missions, though allowing useful Jesuit scientists and experts to remain in the capital. It would be two centuries before another pope, Pius XII, reversed his predecessors' prohibition in a new decree, *Plane compertum est* (1939), which opened the way once more to Confucian rituals honoring ancestors.

The great Belgian Sinologist Pierre Ryckmans, who wrote under the name Simon Leys, observed some thirty years ago that while Matteo Ricci had understood that the church in China must become a *Chinese* church, most other Christian missionaries did not. Unfortunately, Leys never spelled out what this would mean in modern terms. How do you disentangle a faith which, despite its Middle Eastern origins, has become, in its practices and institutions, so firmly Western and, even more narrowly, European? Today, with the vision of a Marxist-Maoist utopia having vanished, Xi must depend more and more on old-fashioned nationalism as an ideological underpinning and has essentially written his own views on this into the new Party constitution. Like Ricci, he demands that the church become sinified. But sinification in Ricci's Confucian Ming dynasty would have been very different from the sinification demanded by today's China under Xi Jinping.

What exactly is the China to which the church (or any other institution) must become adapted? As foreign companies in China must often share their advanced technology, so Christian groups, both the Protestant TSMP and Catholic Patriotic Association, are expected to contribute to building the Party's version of a "socialist" China—to help Make China Great Again. "The construction of Chinese Christian theology should adapt to China's national condition and integrate with Chinese culture," Wang Zuoan, Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, recently told a Protestant gathering in Shanghai. What form would the church take, or be *forced* to take, in such a country? A lot more is at stake than merely translating a Western liturgy into Chinese.

In the May 2018 issue of *Civiltà Cattolica*, Benoit Vermander (Wei Mingde), a French Jesuit at Fudan University in Shanghai, sounds a hopeful, if guarded, note. On the question of sinification, he points to two sorts of dangers. The first is obvious: the Party's demand that it lead in all aspects of social and cultural life. Here Christians must remain wary and above all true to their convictions. The other danger, however, is that of rejecting outright any such appeal for adaptation simply because it comes from the government or Party organs: "The right attitude for Christians is to hear the call and to examine what changes it may lead them to imagine and implement, while remaining keenly aware of the dangers this might create."

This assessment echoes a recent remark from the pope himself: "Dialogue is a risk, but I prefer risk rather than the certain defeat that comes with not holding dialogue." In February 2017 he told the staff of *Civiltà Cattolica*, "A Catholic should not be afraid of the open sea, he should not seek refuge in secure ports…. The Lord calls us to engage in mission…. When we set out into the deep, we encounter storms and there can be a contrary wind. Yet the holy voyage is always made in the company of Jesus who said to his disciples: 'Courage, it is I, do not be afraid!'"

Is he, like Vermander, being too optimistic? It is tempting to see such ideas, coming today from the first Jesuit pope and printed in the leading Jesuit journal, as an implicit warning against any repetition of those condemnations two hundred years ago, which many historians believe did lasting damage to the Catholic faith in China. Might Francis and his supporters on this issue be playing a long game—*very* long and also very risky?

For there are certainly risks. Since taking effect in February, the new religious-affairs regulations have caused trouble for churches both Catholic and Protestant. In Henan province, for instance, those younger than eighteen appear to be barred from attending church. There are also stories of the destruction of religious pictures and symbols, now replaced by portraits of Xi Jinping himself (shades of Chairman Mao). The new regulations may not explicitly require such persecution, but they do at least seem to have emboldened local authorities to crack down on Christians in whatever way they see fit.

On August 6, a brief report from the BBC indicated that an arrangement between the Vatican and the Chinese government was indeed imminent. According to this latest report, Beijing would recognize a papal veto of its own episcopal nominees, while in return Catholic bishops still loyal to the underground church would step down. As of this writing, however, there seems to be no further information.

Whatever comes of these negotiations, the future of Catholicism in China remains uncertain. Even if the church is one day able to teach and preach freely, can it find a way to make Catholicism attractive to a China that is increasingly urban, prosperous, and modern? As many have pointed out, Maoism largely managed to destroy the country's old value systems, chief of them the Confucian ethic. Though the post-Mao leadership has tried to bring back its own version of Confucianism, a 2017 poll showed that 47 percent of Chinese identified "moral decline" as their chief concern. As Ian Johnson reports, many Chinese now believe that religion—though not necessarily traditional religion—provides a better basis for morality and spiritual fulfillment than the prescriptions handed down by the Party. In particular, Protestantism, with or without Chinese characteristics, has helped many people fill the moral void. Can Catholicism, with its traditional rituals, its exclusivity, its hierarchical structures and systems of authority, speak to the Chinese people? The Vatican would like to find out. ■

Civilizing Sentiments

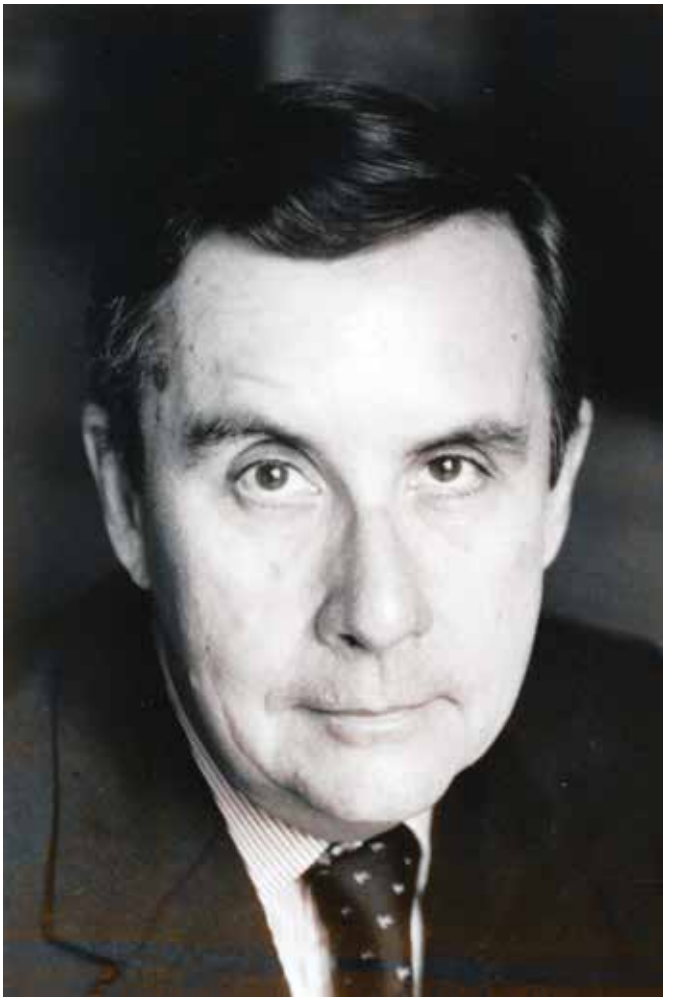
The Unlikely Career of William Pfaff

Christopher Schaefer

When William Pfaff died in April 2015, his ashes were interred in Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris. He had never given explicit instructions about the inscription for his final resting place, so the task of summing up his life and career fell to his son Nicholas. It was not an easy one. There was no single position or accomplishment that clearly captured Pfaff's identity. He began his career as an editor of this magazine, going on to join the United States Army, and, during the early days of the Cold War, serve as a political-warfare officer. Then, after two decades in a think tank, he spent the last thirty-seven years of his life with no institutional affiliation, working as a columnist, a conference speaker, and even occasionally a teacher (although he considered himself particularly ill-suited for the job). Along the way he also wrote or co-wrote ten books.

If there was a common thread connecting each of these professional activities, it was his erudite foreign-affairs analysis. Yet Pfaff was no academic, never having obtained a degree beyond his BA from the University of Notre Dame. Nor was he comfortable with the word "intellectual," which he thought sounded hollow and pretentious to the American ear. He did use a variation of the term, though, when he wrote about his sense of vocation in an essay originally published in *Salmagundi* and later included in 1987's *Best American Essays* under the title "The Lay Intellectual: *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*." If he was to be an intellectual, it was as an outsider, having undergone no official formation and taking no orders from the academic powers that be—an unconsecrated and self-motivated trafficker in ideas. "Lay intellectual" may have been the perfect phrase to capture his independent streak, but it was also far too unwieldy for a grave marker. Nicholas chose to focus on his father's primary means of expression, his writing. Given his father's inveterate Francophilia and long residence in Paris, the French word ultimately seemed most fitting: *William Pfaff, Ecrivain, 1928–2015*.

Columnists and commentators, unlike poets and novelists, are rarely read or remembered after their era. The memory of devoted readers fades and then disappears forever. The only new readers of yesterday's analysis and debates are historians with their synthetic sweep. So while longtime *Commonweal* readers may remember Pfaff—his first piece appeared in this magazine in 1950 and his last almost sixty-five years later—he has largely faded from the general conversation. But for more than three decades in the pre-internet era, he was one of the most respected foreign-affairs commentators



William Pfaff

Christopher Schaefer *recently completed a year-long project in William Pfaff's Parisian home, preparing his papers to be archived at the University of Notre Dame.*

in the world. Pfaff's columns on the op-ed page of the *International Herald Tribune*, the only paper that has ever had a legitimate claim to be the global paper of record, were read in boardrooms and embassies across the world. Former heads of government and future heads of state penned personal letters to him in response to his columns and books. He was a regular at Davos. And he had the privilege of writing for the greatest American magazine editors of the latter half of the twentieth century: Lewis Lapham at *Harper's*, William Shawn at the *New Yorker*, and Robert Silvers at the *New York Review of Books*, among others. Pfaff corresponded with some of the greatest minds of his time—ambassadors, academics, politicians, journalists—and welcomed many of them into his sumptuous 7th-arrondissement Parisian apartment on the rue de Varenne, where he and his wife Carolyn would entertain them in style.

Örjan Berner, the Swedish ambassador to France during the 1980s and to the Soviet Union at the time of its collapse, numbered among them. Last year, Berner told me over the phone that Pfaff stood in the same company as George Kennan, the American diplomat who was the author of the United States' Cold War containment policy. In Berner's view, the two men were virtually unparalleled among Americans in their capacity to navigate the transatlantic divide. Berner was far from alone in his praise. In 1990, Jacques Chirac, then mayor of Paris, wrote Pfaff a letter after reading the French translation of *Barbarian Sentiments*, a critique of the global superpowers' misreading of third-world nationalist movements. The mayor expressed his hope that more Americans would follow in Pfaff's footsteps and deepen their knowledge of European affairs, because "the key to our two democracies' enduring relationship resides most certainly in mutual understanding." One of Pfaff's most intriguing correspondents was Svetlana Alliluyeva, Joseph Stalin's only daughter. In 1991, she wrote him a letter in response to one of his *International Herald Tribune* columns about the CIA, confirming his analysis and informing him that he was uniquely placed to understand her own story, which she then proceeded to recount in detail.

That Pfaff understood Europe well enough to generate this level of respect from European elites had much to do with his education. When Pfaff studied English at the University of Notre Dame in 1945, he entered a unique liberal-arts curriculum at a compelling moment in history. He began his university studies as a seventeen-year-old with the first wave of GIs returning from the war, at a university that had benefited greatly from the ideological ferment of the preceding decades. Not only had French and German-Catholic intellectuals enriched Notre Dame's faculty roster over the course of the war, but the war's human destruction had sharpened the usually abstract inquiry of the humanities around very real and palpable questions. In "The Lay Intellectual," Pfaff describes "studying the Greeks, aesthetics, Dante, Shake-

speare, Kierkegaard, Rimbaud and Baudelaire, Maritain, Bernanos, Mauriac, Hermann Broch, Romano Guardini." It was not, he admitted, "a bad education to offer provincial boys from the Catholic immigration; but it was not exactly an education calculated for success in the American Dream."

If his undergraduate degree didn't prepare him for success in industry or finance, it most certainly prepared him for a lifetime of independent, critical inquiry. Perhaps most importantly, it familiarized him with the lessons that Europeans tend to draw from the history of the first half of the twentieth century—an understanding more tragic than triumphal. It thus comes as no surprise that Pfaff's biggest and most recurrent criticism of his country's foreign policy concerned America's understanding of history. In his 2004 collection of columns about Afghanistan and Iraq, *Fear, Anger and Failure*, Pfaff quoted his first book *The New Politics*, cowritten with Edmund Stillman in 1961, noting that little had changed in the intervening four decades:

> Here is our flaw: a defective sense of history, a refusal to acknowledge our implication in time. For whatever we think, history is flawed and uncertain and incalculable. And if the American nation makes it its mission to solve history's riddle and bring time to a stop, it will wreck itself. That is what we are in danger of doing…. The American interest does not lie in clumsy para-empire or in the self-contradiction of ideologized democracy: the one is futile and the other a dangerous absurdity. We must remember that America is not exempted from the historical imperatives, the laws of life and decay. And the American destiny, whatever it may be, is certainly not to hold universal responsibility.

If his Notre Dame education was Pfaff's crucial formative experience, his time at *Commonweal* came a close second. On the recommendation of a Notre Dame professor, longtime *Commonweal* editor Edward Skillin wrote Pfaff in 1949 to ask him if he would like to "try his hand" at journalism. Against his father's wishes, Pfaff said yes and moved to New York, where he entered not just the world of journalism, but the churning intellectual milieu of postwar Manhattan. Throughout his life, when asked about the prestigious publications for which he had written, Pfaff would always compare them poorly with the collegial environment of *Commonweal*.

In the 1950s Pfaff cycled through several jobs: military service during the Korean War, a return to *Commonweal*, and then stints at ABC News and the Free Europe Committee. The latter was a CIA-funded outfit (a detail unknown to most at the time) that engaged in political warfare in Eastern Europe. In that capacity Pfaff met a number of politically involved exiles from behind the Iron Curtain. Eastern Europe became for him not just a battleground between communism and liberal democracy, but a place with history, religion, and culture, all attached to faces, names, and stories. With this background, it was simply impossible for him to accept that the Cold War was a Manichean struggle between the evil of Communism and the good of liberal democracy, or that politics could be reduced to the allegiance of each country's government to one or the other.

One of his American colleagues at the Free Europe Committee was Edmund Stillman, a secular Jew from New York with similar literary, cultural, and political sensibilities. In 1960, they co-wrote a review of Herman Kahn's *On Thermonuclear War* that bears all of what would become the hallmarks of Pfaff's contrarian approach. Kahn's method is "interesting," they admitted, "but a severely limited one, employing a scientific method on materials that are not always susceptible to such analysis." Those materials included "the true passions and motives in the lives of men and nations," as they put it. "The Soviet Union is not governed by a digital computer, nor is the West." Despite the critical nature of their review, it earned both Stillman and Pfaff employment at Kahn's newly formed think tank, the Hudson Institute—then a big-tent institution with much more ideological diversity than its current neoconservative instantiation. In fact, for the rest of the 1960s Stillman and Pfaff served as the loyal opposition at the Hudson Institute. Where Kahn addressed the topic of thermonuclear war with almost clinical abstraction, Stillman and Pfaff insisted breezy discussions brought such war one step closer to reality. Where Kahn sought technological and game-theory solutions to political dilemmas, Stillman and Pfaff insisted on a more historically based approach that stressed the limits of American power and was more likely to advocate for political and diplomatic solutions to thorny conflicts in foreign affairs.

In *The New Politics*, the first of three books the two men wrote together, they took their cues from de Gaulle's rise in France, the Sino-Soviet split, and nationalist revolts in Hungary, Poland, and Egypt, among other events of the 1950s, to argue for a new American politics for a multipolar world. They argued that Soviet Communism was a spent force politically, capable only of being an "eager second" to nationalist revolutions. The reviews were excellent, and President John F. Kennedy was even photographed with the book under his arm. A Rockefeller grant for a second book quickly followed. With the grant money, Pfaff traveled through Southeast Asia before meeting Stillman at the Rockefeller Foundation's center near Italy's Lake Como to work on what would become *The Politics of Hysteria* (1963). This time, the two friends placed the Cold War in the broader sweep of the West's destructive penetration of the rest of the world. Many years later, the writer Pankaj Mishra discovered the book in a used-book store in India. He was amazed that two American men in the early 1960s had been capable of articulating this dynamic, so acutely felt in what was then called the Third World. Stillman and Pfaff's third book, *Power and Impotence* (1966), critiqued America's crusade against Communism, for which neither its history nor its character had prepared it. It was their most direct rebuke yet of the messianism and Manichaeism of American foreign policy.

A common thread running through Pfaff's lifetime of writing was the violence of utopian ideologies. The obsession was as personal as it was historical. Stories of military valor and the pageantry of uniforms greatly interested him when he was a young boy. During his adolescence outside of Fort Benning, Georgia, he imbibed Southern notions of chivalry and honor. He was too young to enlist for World War II, but he did join ROTC, and then a few years later, when the Korean War broke out, he enlisted in the Army, eager for combat. The armistice ending the war was signed, however, just as he arrived in Eastern Asia to be deployed. So he returned to the world of journalism at *Commonweal*, and then, a few years later, he joined the Free Europe Committee, convinced that Stalin presented a unique threat to Europe. Throughout his life, he consistently defended his role preparing what was essentially political propaganda as a necessary measure. But he increasingly called into question his own country's military posture. By the time he and Stillman wrote *The New Politics* in 1961, Pfaff had become largely skeptical that the United States' Cold War measures were necessary. Pfaff was an early critic of the American role in Southeast Asia, for example. In 1962, he visited Vietnam, where he reported on American military operations, witnessing firsthand the gap between actual American activity in Vietnam and the U.S. government's rhetoric. America's seeming ignorance of Vietnam's complex history of regional, ethnic, and religious conflict only confirmed his opposition to reductive Cold War binaries. From then on, he would urge restraint and prudence in American foreign policy.

America's seeming ignorance of Vietnam's complex history of regional, ethnic, and religious conflict only confirmed Pfaff's opposition to reductive Cold War binaries. From then on, he would urge restraint and prudence in American foreign policy.

As Pfaff grew increasingly vocal in his opposition to the American intervention in Vietnam, he became interested in what drove so many men to find redemption through violence. He had noted the influence of T. E. Lawrence on his own life, and he knew he was not the only one. Pfaff came to believe that the Western belief in progress, often to be achieved through supposedly redemptive violence, was a cause of some of the worst tragedies of the twentieth century. In 1966, he wrote a letter to his editor Alice Mayhew at Harper & Row proposing a book project about romantic violence, examining figures such as Lawrence, Andre Malraux, Ernst Jünger, Willi Münzenberg, Gabriele D'Annunzio, and Arthur Koestler. He would rework the idea time and again for four decades, but when the book was eventually published in 2005 as *The Bullet's Song*, its structure followed the 1966 proposal almost exactly.

For much of the 1960s, though, Pfaff's concern was with the misplaced violence of America's intervention in Vietnam. The best example of Stillman and Pfaff's disagreement with their colleagues at the Hudson Institute can be found in the 1968 publication of a debate titled "Can We Win in Vietnam?" Daniel Ellsberg, the RAND employee who later leaked the Pentagon Papers, wrote a thoughtful review of the debate. He praised the ideological diversity of the Hudson Institute, singling out Stillman and Pfaff's contributions in particular, especially their emphasis on "factors of culture, politics, and history, and particularly on American limitations." If this "neglected" point of view had been heeded, Ellsberg suggested, "we might have avoided an American tragedy."

Eventually, their role as the in-house opposition at the Hudson Institute wore thin. Pfaff and Stillman felt a certain futility in their attempts to change public opinion or official policy. So when Kahn asked Stillman to found a European offshoot of the Hudson Institute, Stillman agreed but insisted it be based in Paris. Pfaff followed the next year, becoming deputy director. The two men, who met in a CIA-funded political-warfare outfit and struggled through the '60s in opposition not just to their government's policy but their own employer's views, thus gained a new start in the French capital.

Of the many aspects of Parisian life that pleased Pfaff, foremost perhaps was the respect France offered its intellectuals. Because of its educational system and the centrality of Paris to all aspects of French life, there was a joint conversation that involved industry leaders, politicians, journalists, and academics. Pfaff was particularly taken by what were essentially economics lectures on national television by Prime Minister and Minister of the Economy Raymond Barre, an absolute impossibility in the United States. It was the tail end of the

Trente Glorieuses, three decades of sustained economic growth following World War II. Pfaff and his colleagues at the Hudson Institute Europe saw only upsides for the French. In 1973, they published a report on the French economy titled *Envol de la France* that predicted these trends would continue. France, they argued, would clearly establish itself as the leading economic and political power of Western Europe. In retrospect, the analysis extrapolated too much from current trends, even if it did help turn attention to the real dynamism of the French economy.

Simultaneously, Pfaff was branching out into a solo writing career. Just before leaving for Paris in 1971, he published his first book without Stillman, *Condemned to Freedom*. It was excerpted in the *New Yorker*, whose editor William Shawn wrote Pfaff to say he looked forward to publishing more of his work. Thus began a twenty-year series of *New Yorker* articles on foreign affairs that ran under the banner "Reflections." This enviable arrangement and the newfound prominence that came with it gave Pfaff margin for maneuver when he came into conflict with Stillman in 1978 over the management of the institute; Pfaff chose to quit.

This shift back to freelance journalism, which Pfaff would later characterize as the "wiser" course, involved more than just the *New Yorker*. He began a weekly column for the *International Herald Tribune* at the invitation of its editor Buddy Weiss, which Pfaff then self-syndicated across the United States. The *Tribune* was one of the first newspapers to use remote printing sites, and the first to achieve a truly global distribution network, placing itself at the elite end of the market. Pfaff's columns were thus put in the hands of a growing number of international elites from the 1970s to the 1990s. This was the general situation in which Pfaff would write "The Lay Intellectual" in 1987: as a successful writer with a loyal following, independent of any institutional context. In the closing paragraph of that essay, he expressed an acute awareness that it might not last:

> I cannot say that I am sorry, haphazard and hazardous as all this has so far been, and God only knows where it will end. Possibly it will end in a trailer park in Arizona like everybody else, or in a room without a view in Antibes with all those books we've accumulated. Possibly it will be at a university nonetheless, as happens to aged journalists, to become—I believe I have the right expression—a "resource person," whom I take to be an elderly mariner or retired explorer propped up with a gin to tell repetitive tales of the cannibals and kookaburras of the cloistered world. Thus may the circle close and the irreconcilable to reconcile. I cannot say that I really look forward to it.

His greatest success, however, was still to come when, just two years later in 1989, Pfaff published *Barbarian Sentiments: How the American Century Ends*. Based on several of his *New Yorker* "Reflections" pieces, the book argued that there was a certain "intellectual confusion" in how both the United States and the USSR approached nationalist movements throughout the world. The fall of the Berlin Wall seemed to vindicate his thesis, and the book received abundant acclaim. The English version was a finalist for the National Book Award in the United States, and the French translation won the Jean-Jacques Rousseau award in Switzerland.

These were Pfaff's glory years. Requests for speaking engagements and contributions rolled in. Former German chancellor Helmut Schmidt wrote him to comment on one of his columns. Former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing invited him to be on the panel of judges for the Prix Tocqueville. Singapore's founder Lee Kuan Yew asked to meet him on a trip to Paris. Czech playwright and president Václav Havel invited him to be a speaker at Forum 2000. Pfaff's columns were required reading for world leaders and his contributions on geopolitical debates were followed with deep interest. Another one of his books even found its way into the American president's hands. *The Wrath of Nations*, Pfaff's follow-up to *Barbarian Sentiments*, was a study of nationalism itself. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a friend of Pfaff's, gave a copy to Bill Clinton in the White House. As Moynihan later reported back to Pfaff, the president remarked, "He's a pretty smart guy." Moynihan, the one-time professor, promised to follow up with a quiz.

The universal acclaim, however, was not to last. Jacques Chirac's parting comment on the importance of European-American mutual understanding in his 1990 letter proved to be prescient. Just over a decade later, in the run-up to George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq, when Chirac was president of France, relations between the two countries dropped to historic postwar lows. Perhaps predictably, Pfaff found himself on the side of the French. "France," he wrote in one of the columns published in his 2004 book *Fear, Anger and Failure*, "offers the only coherent and relevant modern model of constructive resistance to U.S. power: the Gaullist model." In a country that had recently undergone the shock of 9/11, this was too much for many. Some viewed Pfaff's criticism of Bush's plans to invade Iraq as treasonous. Bill O'Reilly devoted a ten-minute segment on Fox News to one of Pfaff's columns, denouncing him as out of touch and anti-American. If his analysis has held up much better than anything O'Reilly had to say on the matter, it was also true that Pfaff had grown distant from the American sentiment during his many years abroad.

Whether because of his principled criticism of Bush's "Global War on Terror" or because of the sector-wide decline in journalism, many longtime subscribers to his syndicated column stopped publishing it altogether. The *International Herald Tribune*, which had been acquired in full by the *New York Times* in 2002, also stopped publishing his columns having to do with American foreign policy. Pfaff continued to explore the themes he always had, but the American

political and media context had altered greatly by the early 2000s. His voice, long a respected—if also ignored—staple in American debates over foreign affairs, was now pushed to the political margins.

In his last book, *The Irony of Manifest Destiny* (2010), Pfaff linked the preceding decade's war against Islamic radicalism to a long line of American exceptionalism—from the United States' inexorable westward expansion to its emergence as a global superpower and Cold War crusader. This emphasis on the historic context for political and military conflicts was the great strength of his writing. Allusions to the fate of the Roman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire abound. For most of the Cold War he wrote that Soviet Communism was a spent force, soon to be overwhelmed by nationalism and its own contradictions. In that respect he was correct. He also warned of American hubris and a potential day of reckoning—an imperial implosion—if the United States continued to overextend itself. Over the decades, there have been few to no takers for his policy prescriptions. And yet thus far, the United States has managed to hold on to its global preeminence. Time alone will tell if Pfaff's warning of imperial overreach and collapse was prophetic.

Notably, Pfaff's worries in "The Lay Intellectual" turned out to be unduly pessimistic. He filed his last column in April 2015, two weeks before his death. Written from his Parisian apartment, in a room with a view of the Eiffel Tower, Les Invalides, and Sacre Coeur, he addressed David Cameron's decision to hold the Brexit referendum. Contrary to his fears, Pfaff was not in a trailer park in Arizona or in the Caribbean, nor was he propped up with a gin telling wide-eyed university students stories of the Cold War. He lived out his lay vocation, the life of the mind, right up to the end.

Pfaff's service to democratic society brought countless readers the pleasure of a better understanding of international affairs. But despite his access to the highest levels of power, Pfaff left little to no mark on actual policy during a lifetime of writing. From the 1960s on, Pfaff kept on criticizing the Manichaeism, messianism, and utopianism that perennially marred American foreign policy. One of Pfaff's major themes was the endurance of national character; yet when it came to his own country, he always hoped that he could help change it, if ever so slightly. But the United States went on as before. Unheeded, though not unheard, in his own country, William Pfaff's real legacy was not his influence but his example of intellectual integrity: he bore witness to another, better way. ■

Our Representatives, Their Servants

The Growing Threat of Plutocracy

Jeff Madrick

Our democracy is under threat, and the threat did not begin with Donald Trump. Trump's assault on our democratic norms and institutions is deeply disturbing and dangerous, to be sure. He claims with no proof that he lost the popular vote in the last election because of voter fraud. He has spoken little about Russian tampering with American elections, or about efforts in this country to establish rigid voter-registration requirements, often racist in intent. Like autocrats around the world, he has disdained the rule of law, firing the FBI Director James Comey, and threatening to fire the Special Counsel Robert Mueller. All this has been done with impunity in full view of the public. He has also appointed people to cabinet positions and other agencies who say they want to undermine the institutions they run, and they are doing so: Betsy DeVos at the Department of Education, Ben Carson at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Mick Mulvaney at the Consumer Financial Protection Agency. Trump has contempt for America's immigrant legacy, and his administration has separated families seeking asylum in this country. He has spitefully overturned Barack Obama's executive actions, including trying to end protection for undocumented immigrants who entered the country as minors. The list goes on, of course. Let me add one more item: his constant lies about serious issues as documented by the *Washington Post* and other media outlets is a direct assault on a key foundation of true democracy, open and reasoned discourse.

But there are other threats to our democracy that are less immediately visible though just as grave. In *Democracy in America: What Has Gone Wrong and What We Can Do About It,* Benjamin I. Page and Martin Gilens show that for a generation our lawmakers have not been responsive to the will of the majority. Their conclusion, based on surveys and statistical analysis, is "that the wishes of ordinary Americans actually have had little or no influence at all on the making of federal government policy."

Page and Gilens attracted attention a few years ago for an earlier academic paper that showed the excessive power of money on public policy and argued that the United States was fast becoming an oligarchy. This book is an expansion of that thesis. Prior research by political scientists had largely concluded that policies usually do follow the wishes of the public. But Page and Gilens used statistical techniques to separate the views of wealthy interest groups like the National Association of Manufacturers, the Chamber of Commerce, and the American Medical Association. Their research shows that if 20 percent of middle-class Americans want a policy, they will get it about one third of the time. If 80 percent of the middle class want a policy, they will also still get it only about one third of the time. Americans with income that puts them in the top 20 percent have much more influence on policy, according to Page and Gilens's analysis. If 80 percent of the well-off prefer a policy, it will become law more than half the time. The authors find that, when it comes to certain important issues, the concerns of the wealthy are very different from the concerns of everyone else. Fortunately, the views of average Americans coincide with those of the truly powerful just often enough to mollify the masses and prevent revolt. The authors call this "democracy by coincidence," and they insist it is not good enough.

Democracy in America
What Has Gone Wrong and What We Can Do About It
Benjamin I. Page and Martin Gilens
University of Chicago Press, $30, 352 pp.

We all learned as children that the beauty of democracy is that it gives everyone an equal voice: the vote of a poor citizen counts as much as that of a rich one. It follows that the votes of two citizens, rich or poor, should count for more than the vote of one millionaire. But majorities favor gun control, environmental protections, higher taxes for the rich,

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and the expansion of Social Security; and Washington has ignored them. Page and Gilens present evidence that this problem is structural and persistent. Before reading their book, I believed that a generation of stagnating median wages for all and *falling* median wages for men were the main source of bitterness that put Trump over the top in the Electoral College. But the research of Page and Gilens suggests to me that frustration over the failure of our supposedly democratic government to respond to the general will may have been a key to the 2016 election. Many Americans are losing faith in the benefits of democratic procedures. And democracy seems increasingly under threat in other rich countries of the West.

Page and Gilens believe that the answer to American travails is "more democracy," which they define as "policy responsiveness to ordinary citizens—that is, popular control of government. Or simply 'majority rule.'" In my view, they are correct. This is a particularly important argument at a moment when dictatorial powers like China are impressing the world with their economic growth. Trump would apparently like *less* democracy, and is jealous of strong men like Putin and Erdogan.

The United States was designed by the founders not as a pure democracy but as a representative republic with natural checks on the potential tyranny of the majority, not least with the Bill of Rights. Page and Gilens acknowledge this. "In the Federalist Papers," they write, "Madison argued that federalism in an extensive republic, together with separated, counterbalancing national institutions and severe limits on democratic control of each institution (at first only the House was directly elected) would protect individual Americans against government 'tyranny'—tyranny pursued by anyone, even a popular majority."

A government of checks and balances is designed to give any of the three independent and "equal" branches—the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary—the power to restrain the others. The Supreme Court, whose justices are not elected, has been given the final word on interpreting the Constitution. Moreover, anti-democratic norms have long been part of the American way. The lopsided representation of small states in the Senate is another legacy of early America, giving rural states more legislative power than their population warrants. Today, twelve states that together have just 4 percent of the U.S. population have twenty-four of the nation's hundred senate seats. The oft-criticized Electoral College is another example of the founders' skepticism about a true democracy. In almost all cases, a simple majority determines which candidates get all the electors allocated to each state. This system can lead to cases in which the winner of the popular vote loses the election, as it did in 2000 and 2016. And it was not until 1914 that U.S. Senators were elected directly by citizens rather than state legislatures.

But even the Founders' insistence on checks and balances

PANTHER MEDIA GMBH / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

and their skepticism about the rationality of the masses can't quite explain the consistent failure of lawmakers to act on the general will of the public in a few critical areas of policy. The Bill of Rights and Constitution's checks and balances were intended to protect individuals and minorities against, as noted, a tyranny of the majority; they were not intended to produce today's gridlock and inaction.

A prime example of the gridlock is Congress's failure to agree on a budget, which led to a shutdown of the federal government in 1996 and 2013, and to extended battles again this year. As for the inaction, it can be quantified. In the 1950s, between eight hundred and a thousand new bills were enacted each year. In the early 2000s, that number fell to at most five hundred and, in recent years, to fewer than two hundred. Page and Gilens present two explanations for this trend: "clashes between our two sharply divided political parties [aided by rules that give the majority veto power] and obstructive actions by corporations, interest groups, and wealthy individuals."

Survey after survey shows that the public decisively wants government action on gun control, global warming, and transportation infrastructure, and they are not getting it. A majority of voters believes the federal government should provide jobs to those who can't otherwise find them. A majority wants Social Security benefits to be increased,

not reduced. But in all these cases—and others that could be mentioned—public opinion seems to have little traction on Capitol Hill.

Would "more democracy" really help dislodge us from our legislative impasse? Page and Gilens certainly think so, and I think they are generally correct; but in their enthusiasm they oversimplify public opinion. A majority of Americans may favor many beneficial policies, but do they really want more government in the aggregate? That question is harder to answer. The rise of neoliberal economic thinking since the 1970s has led more Americans to be distrustful of government interference. And those who propagate this way of thinking—at universities and think tanks or in the media—have been lavishly rewarded by wealthy right-wing donors such as the Koch Brothers.

The '70s were ripe for a rightward shift. Difficult economic conditions impinged on Americans' standard of living. Inflation began eating away at their purchasing power, while wages stagnated. The United States was no longer the world's leader in income or social mobility. Americans resisted higher taxes and voted for candidates who promised the biggest tax cuts. That pattern has continued.

Page and Gilens believe that the health of this country's democracy is critical to its future. The rise of progressive social policies in the past—from the Age of Jackson, to the Progressivism of the turn of the last century, to FDR's New Deal—all succeeded in promoting more opportunity and fairness, as did the progressive reforms of the 1960s. It is fashionable to say that Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty was a failure, but the poverty rate would be much higher today without food stamps, the earned-income tax credit, and unemployment insurance. Medicare and Medicaid, housing subsidies, and progressive income taxes have all made America a more equal country.

But since the 1980s, as government has become less responsive to public opinion and less concerned with public welfare, income inequality has grown to staggering levels. Average wages (especially for men) have fallen, as incomes at the top have soared. Our child-poverty rate is among the highest in the developed world. Job-creating programs are virtually non-existent at the federal level. There is no required paid family or sick leave at a time when fewer parents can afford not to work. College—public or private—has become prohibitively expensive. Critical public investment in transportation, renewable energy, and more equal quality education is being neglected here while others nations, not least China, move forward. Meanwhile, according to the World Income Report, the American tax system has become less and less progressive since Ronald Reagan, who cut (progressive) income taxes while raising (regressive) payroll taxes.

Fortunately, as the authors point out, there are signs that Americans do still value government:

In a spring 2015 poll, for example, two-thirds of Americans declared that "the money and wealth in this country should be more evenly distributed among more people." About the same proportion said the gap between rich and poor "needs to be addressed now." Large majorities favored requiring employers to provide paid sick leave and paid parental leave; raising the federal minimum wage from $7.25 to $15.00; raising taxes on people earning more than $1 million per year; and raising taxes on the sale of stocks or bonds. In a democratic political system, one might think that such popular policies would quickly become law. But they did not.

Page and Gilens, both experts on opinion surveys, blame this unresponsiveness on the growing place of money in politics. Rich Americans and business organizations "are opposed to paying more taxes themselves and uninterested in spending public money on programs to benefit average citizens." The authors note that politicians who support policies that are generally unpopular with the rich have trouble even running for office, let alone winning, because political campaigns have grown so expensive. They say both Republicans and Democrats have been corrupted by money. The big donors to both parties tend to agree with each other—and to disagree with the average American—on such issues as "government budgets, international trade, social welfare spending, economic regulation, and taxes." Several powerful business groups—including oil companies, defense contractors, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce—regularly take stands opposed to what most Americans say they want.

By analyzing the history of nearly 1,800 laws, Page and Gilens have found that the more support a bill has from the well-off, the more likely it is to pass. Meanwhile, even overwhelming support from the non-rich has virtually no effect on a bill's chances. The authors also show how much more business interests spend on lobbying than social-interest groups do. In 2012, for example, the average big association spent $625,000 a year while the average social-welfare group spent only $116,500.

The most recent big push for health-care reform furnishes the authors with a particularly useful example of how money influences lawmaking. The Affordable Care Act was originally supposed to include a "public option," allowing ordinary Americans to buy their insurance directly from the government rather than from private-insurance companies. Needless to say, the private-insurance companies were opposed to this, rightly anticipating that the public option would be cheaper than the insurance products they sold for a profit. The House passed a bill in 2010 that included a public option. But a bill with the public option fell one vote short in the Senate, where a supermajority was required. Joseph Lieberman, an independent senator from Connecticut who usually voted with Democrats, was the deciding vote. There were seventy-two insurance companies headquartered in his state, and many of them had contributed money to his 2006

reelection campaign. After Lieberman effectively killed the public option, Democrats introduced new legislation that would have allowed Americans between the age of fifty-five and sixty-four to buy into the popular Medicare program. A large majority of Americans favored this idea; the insurance companies opposed it. Lieberman again voted no.

Using a 2011 Chicago survey of those in the top 1 to 2 percent of income earners, Page and Gilens show how different the views of the wealthy are from those of the average American. Overall, 87 percent of Americans agreed that the country should spend whatever is necessary for "really" good public schools, while only 35 percent of the wealthy did. Overall, 57 percent of Americans favored more government-financed worker training, compared to only 30 percent of the wealthy. Overall, 55 percent of Americans wanted to expand Social Security, compared to a stunningly low 3 percent of the wealthy.

The Supreme Court has amplified the political power of wealthy individuals and corporations. Surveys show that most Americans want strict limits on campaign contributions. Many would even like to see public financing of elections. But beginning in the 1970s, the Supreme Court began rejecting efforts to control campaign financing. Most famously, the high court ruled in *Citizens United* (2010) that corporate political contributions are an exercise in free speech. Page and Gilens argue that the judiciary has too often contravened laws that would protect democracy by limiting the power of corporations.

In one study of five socio-economic groups (divided by income and education), 89 percent of the top group voted in presidential elections, while only 55 percent of the bottom group did. These numbers reflect a lack of confidence, especially on the part of low-income voters, in the democratic process itself. Those who could most use some help from the government are the ones most alienated from it.

But money is not the authors' only concern. Certain features of our electoral system also undermine democracy. In addition to the imbalance of popular representation in the Senate and the Electoral College, brazen gerrymandering has insulated the House of Representatives from democratic accountability. Local legislators draw district boundaries in such a way as to exclude voters from the other party. Today this process is mostly controlled by state Republicans. The courts have blocked some of the most extreme gerrymandering, as in Pennsylvania. But Page and Gilens point out that, even without gerrymandering, most congressional districts are homogeneous. Black and Latino voters tend to be concentrated in the same localities, as do many white liberals. The authors argue that residential segregation, including self-segregation, is an even greater threat to democracy than gerrymandering.

Of still greater concern, however, is low voter turnout. Only about 60 percent of eligible Americans vote in presidential elections. Only 40 percent vote in local elections. And poorer Americans vote less often than richer Americans. In one study of five socio-economic groups (divided by income and education), 89 percent of the top group voted in presidential elections, while only 55 percent of the bottom group did. These numbers reflect a lack of confidence, especially on the part of low-income voters, in the democratic process itself. Those who could most use some help from the government are the ones most alienated from it.

Page and Gilens's explanation of the many "veto points" in our legislative system is one of the most important contributions of this book. These are the rules that enable either a single legislator or a minority of legislators to block legislation. Consider, for example, the Senate. There a long-standing rule enables a senator to halt any nomination of someone from his or her own state to the executive or judiciary branches. The so-called hold rule gives individual senators—or a small group of senators working together—enormous obstructive power. When you combine this rule with the filibuster and the fact that every state has the same number of senators no matter what its population, the result is a very partial form of democracy. The House of Representative, which was intended to be the more democratic of the two houses of Congress, has its own set of anti-democratic rules and norms. One, known as the Hastert Rule (after Dennis Hastert, former Speaker of the House) allows a "majority of the majority" to block a vote on any piece of legislation. This means that, in theory, only 26 percent of the House is needed to veto legislation. Page and Gilens claim that the proliferation of such veto points is the main reason so little gets done in Congress.

This book's inventory of American democracy's ailments can be exhausting and dispiriting. Some of these ailments are well known, but even these aren't fully understood. In my view, one of government's main responsibilities is to keep up with social, economic, and technological change. Strict originalist interpretations of the Constitution are plain silly in light of all the ways society has changed in the past two hundred

years. Among these changes has been more educational requirements for jobs. This did not start in the 1980s but a century earlier, when basic numeracy and literacy were new requirements to work. America created a high-quality, free school system in response. Congress has passed some legislation to help students afford college in recent decades, but the cost of higher education has spiked dramatically during that period and funding for state universities has been gutted by cash-strapped legislatures. Or take another example: health care was fairly inexpensive two hundred years ago mainly because it was still rudimentary. There was little doctors could do for people with serious illnesses like heart disease, cancer, or bacterial infections. All that has changed for the better. But some of the miracles of modern medicine would be unaffordable if people had to pay for them out of pocket, the way people paid for medicine in the eighteenth century. Today most developed countries treat access to basic health care as a right, just as they treat access to basic education. But not the United States, where, even after the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, millions of Americans still lack health insurance.

Page and Gilens profess optimism about the prospects of reform. The various Congressional rules, including the Hastert rule and the "hold," as well as others, can be changed. The filibuster can be limited or eliminated. But will these changes be made any time soon? Campaign-finance reform is of course high on their list of things to fix. Some states have successfully adopted versions of public financing, such as Connecticut's Clean Election program, which provides funding to candidates who agree to take no private money. This program helped Connecticut pass a sick-pay requirement for the state's businesses. The authors hold out this example as a sign that things may be improving. But public campaign financing on a national level is still a long way off. Improving voter turnout would also make our system more democratic. Oregon has adopted a universal voter-registration program that could work on the federal level in a reform-minded America. Many argue that elections should be held on the weekend or a federal holiday, not on a work day. This relatively simple change could improve turnout markedly.

Democracy in America could have been better organized; parts of it are unwieldy and repetitive. Some of Page and Gilens's statistical certainty has been challenged. But their general argument is persuasive—and damning. We should be at least as concerned about the homegrown dysfunction of our political system as we are about Russian meddling. The 2016 election did not so much break our democracy as remind us of the extent to which it was already broken, not by leaks and bots but by money. ■

Three Poems by Ute von Funcke

translated by Stuart Friebert

DESPAIR

I wear
the cross in my throat

choke it out
balance it
on my clavicle

it grows beyond
thrusts back into me

can't protect
my heart
from its force

VERZWEIFLUNG

ich trage
das Kreuz in der Kehle

wües heraus
balanciere es
auf meinem Schlüsselbein

es wächst hinaus
stößt in mich zurück

kann mein Herz
nich schützen
vor seiner Wucht

JOB

your path
leads me
to me

in me
you are
in you

let us drink
the chalice
and break
the bread of darkness

HIOB

dein Weg
führt mich
zu mir

in mir
bist du
in dir

lass uns trinken
den Kelch
und brechen
das Brot der Dunkelheit

LUCIFER

Lucifer beats
his wings

looks at his God
in an unending glance

God is not without him
Lucifer is not without God

the world
at war

Lucifer turns
his glance

his torch still on fire
in the fall

LUZIFER

Luzifer schwingt
seine Flügel

sieht an seinen Gott
im ewigen Blick

Gott ist nicht ohne ihn
Luzifer ist nicht ohne Gott

die Welt
im Krieg

Luzifer wendet
seinen Blick

im Sturz noch
die Feuerfackel

Ute von Funcke *has published three collections of poems, most recently* frau auf der flucht *(scaneg Verlag/Munich).* ***Stuart Friebert*** *has published fifteen volumes of translations (from German, Romanian, Czech, Italian, and Lithuanian) as well as many books of poems.*

Rand Richards Cooper

Changes in the Neighborhood

'EIGHTH GRADE' AND 'WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?'

Two recent films speak to the abiding needs, and the evolving predicaments, of children. *Eighth Grade* is notable for its pitch-perfect take on early adolescent angst: the all-absorbing self-consciousness; the aching sense of exclusion; the sudden fixation on, and endless curation of, one's "look." From the parental point of view, middle school is when every bit of playful, joyous curiosity that your child has shown up until now gets vacuumed away, leaving a nervous, distracted, and sporadically surly stranger.

And from the thirteen-year-old's point of view? That's where writer-director Bo Burnham and his star, Elsie Fisher, achieve a bit of forlorn magic. Fisher plays Kayla, a shy and ungainly eighth grader, the only child of a single dad (Josh Hamilton). It was smart of Burnham to choose as protagonist not someone who is bullied, but merely ignored; anonymity, rather than indignity, is Kayla's fate. Her reticence crashes against the self-salesmanship recommended by her father, who urges her to "put yourself out there"—advice Kayla poignantly tries to follow, filling her notebook with lists of how to make friends and be assertive. But no amount of assertiveness training can change the fact that she's uncool, and wants it all too badly.

Burnham's investigation of Kayla's unhappiness places the protocols of digital culture and social media front and center. She lives on her device, and *Eighth Grade* captures the fragmented, ADHD-like rhythm of life in the digital age, even as it cues up a paradox: How to put yourself out there when real life is in here, in the enclosed and jittery realm of the web? That is where Kayla wants to be loved—or at least Liked. But while the teen makeup guru whose YouTube vlogs Kayla watches has 2 million views, her own earnest, stumbling attempts at advice videos—collected in a site she calls "Kayla's Corner"—garner none. The excruciating paradox is that Kayla is desperate for someone, anyone, to listen to her online (the "you" whom she so hopefully addresses in her videos), while deflecting any and all attempts by her real-life father to talk with her. "I just want to be on my phone right now, OK?" she says, unplugging one earbud to brusquely ward off his conversational entreaties.

Burnham explores how the obsession with online life intensifies Kayla's despair, as popular classmates frolic amid a never-ending churn of messaging, parties, and fun—and she can do nothing but watch, a social-media spectatorship that ramps up envy. To try to counter that envy, she formulates life lessons that she herself can't follow. "The topic of today's video is being yourself," she asserts in Kayla's Corner. "Don't care about what other people think about you!" Not care? A sequence in which Kayla attends the pool party of a popular rich girl (whose mother forces her to extend an invitation) is a small tour de force, as we follow slump-shouldered, chubby Kayla, awkward in an ill-fitting lime-green bathing suit, through an afternoon of casual rejections.

Eighth Grade has its flaws. In depicting Kayla's vulnerability, Burnham loads the dice, saddling her with a father who is laughably inept at advising her, and a social isolation so total that she seems never to have had a friend, ever. The film's coming-of-age happy ending seems like a patch job. Nothing in it compares, for instance, with the movement at the end of last year's *Lady Bird*, marking an authentic passage toward adulthood—or with that film's nuanced evocation of family life.

In contrast, *Eighth Grade* feels like pretty thin stuff. But the thinness of the social texture Burnham surrounds Kayla with may be less realistic than diagnostic. *Eighth Grade* lays bare the glaring insufficiency of life lived trapped within the digital realm. It's useful to place Burnham's film in the company of *The Breakfast Club, Sixteen Candles, The Outsiders*, and other teen films of the 1980s. Those movies put their young cohorts through all sorts of age-related tribulations. But those kids were, first and foremost, cohorts, and in comparison with their group solidarity and shared hijinks, today's tween-teen experience seems mighty lonely.

Those needing reassurance can turn to *Won't You Be My Neighbor?,* whose genial hero, Fred Rogers, set out a half century ago to make reassurance his stock in trade. An ordained minister, Rogers fell in love with the still relatively new medium of television and used it as his church, conducting a decades-long sermon for generations of children who formed his congregation. As those many millions recall, each episode of his long-running show, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, began with the beaming host opening the door and entering to hang up his coat, don a sweater, and sing: "It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood, a beautiful day for a neighbor—would you be mine?" For thirty-five years Rogers welcomed kids into the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, where he used puppets to present a range of alter egos, and invited human visitors to share gentle conversation and life lessons.

Morgan Neville's documentary is not exactly biographical; we learn next to nothing about Fred Rogers's early life, except for a series of animations, using a *Daniel Tiger*-like protagonist, that explore generic, even mythic, modes of childhood—imagination, vulnerability, illness, dread, joy, and the persistent need to be loved. *Won't You Be My*

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Neighbor? is really about how Rogers conceived the show that made his career; the film opens with black-and-white footage of him sitting at a piano in 1967, musing aloud about his plan "to help children through some of the difficult modulations of life"—like going, he explains with a quick twirl on the ivories, "from an F to an F sharp."

A central mystery is the question of who Fred Rogers "really" was. If you stripped away the milquetoast persona so frequently lampooned by comics, what would you find? Neville strongly suggests that the mild, kind, childlike, and endlessly patient presence on the set was, in fact, the man himself. Neville includes footage from Rogers's 1969 testimony before a Senate panel tasked with funding public television, chaired by the gruff Rhode Island senator, John Pastore. With unalloyed sincerity, Rogers explains his mission to "give an expression of care to each child"—then recites the lyrics to a song from his show, "What Do You Do with the Mad That You Feel?" We watch as Pastore gapes, then visibly softens. "I think it's wonderful," he says.

Rogers's show was part of the emergence of PBS, and though he was a lifelong Republican, it isn't hard to see his outlook as the prototypical liberal one: concern about the environment; opposition to the war in Vietnam; emphasis on racial harmony and justice; worry about a popular culture rife with casual violence; faith in the importance of childhood self-esteem. But beneath this pro forma set of stances resided something far more visionary: his abiding belief in the dire necessity, and the transformative power, of love. Neville is at pains to reveal the Christian radical hiding behind the nerdy milquetoast.

This radicalism evinced itself with quiet force. In the cast of Rogers's show was a neighborhood policeman played by François Clemmons. Clemmons was black, and in one sequence Neville shows us searing footage of race hatred at integrated public swimming pools in the 1960s—then cuts to the show, where Rogers invites Clemmons to join him in dipping his feet into a plastic wading pool. Couched simply as an offer of relief on a hot day, the scene reveals Rogers extending a coded political message without abandoning, even for a moment, his pose of childlike innocence.

The moment sums up Rogers's MO and suggests why, far from being simple, his show in fact was so subtly powerful. Clemmons was also a closeted gay man, and interviewed decades later, he tears up with gratitude, recalling how it became clear to him that Rogers's message of acceptance extended to that level of his identity. Similarly moving is a scene in which Rogers welcomes onto the set a boy suffering grievous disability from a childhood spinal tumor and facing daunting surgery. As Rogers sits by the boy's wheelchair, the two end up singing together, and we appreciate the courage flowing forth amply from both sides of the encounter. As with the moment when Rogers gently sloshes water on the other man's feet, the act evokes something pastoral, even papal. In the end, we realize that what we are watching is a genius of love.

Neville uses clips of other 1960s kids' TV shows, from *Howdy Doody* to *Space Ghost,* to peg the comic violence and antic slapstick that formed the norm from which Rogers chose to depart. "I saw people throwing pies at each other's faces," he recalls, "and I thought, 'This is a wonderful tool. Why is it being used this way?'" How did he want to use it? To inculcate respect, to preach the dignity of all people, and to promote a model of emotional intelligence exercised through imagination and kindness. "Fred was radical," comments David Newell, who played the delivery man, Mr. McFeely. Indeed.

Rogers, who died in 2003, surely would have been dismayed by where we are now: the depth and rancor of our political divisions; the nastiness of online trollery; the bruising carelessness, isolation, and speed of life as we too often live it. His show—steeped in gentleness, and radically *slow*—seems almost impossible to imagine today. And yet we need it more than ever. ■

Michael Peppard

So? Completely

Poppies of Iraq

Brigitte Findakly & Lewis Trondheim
Drawn & Quarterly, $24.95, 112 pp.

In the opening sequence of Brigitte Findakly's memoir, *Poppies of Iraq*, we meet the author as a young girl in Iraq. Her family is picnicking at the archaeological site of Nimrud, outside the city of Mosul. She plays ball with her brother, while their father, an Iraqi Christian, tries to take pictures of the cute, carefree kids. We see them posed in front of a gate framed by two ancient yet vaguely familiar pillars in a black-and-white snapshot on the book's first page. Such historic parks of "ancient stones" were "the perfect spot for climbing," she says, and "for picking poppies," the red flowers of the book's title. Her French mother informs her that the flowers "will wilt right away, *ma chérie*." But young Brigitte instinctively wants to memorialize the happiness of her childhood, and these poppies are the only thing she's allowed to bring past the military guards and out of the park. "Taking stones was strictly forbidden," she was told, in order "to preserve the site forever." The grass withereth and the flower fadeth, says the scripture, but these landmarks of the ancient Nineveh plains would stand forever.

They didn't. The pillars in the photograph look so familiar because we have seen news footage of members of Daesh, the so-called Islamic State, destroying them with sledgehammers. "If my father had known those winged lions would be destroyed one day," Findakly comments dryly, "I'm sure he would have framed the shot differently." Within the book's first two pages, Findakly has invited the reader to a meditation on what is permanent and what is ephemeral. All the more remarkably, these pages, like the whole book, are presented as a series of cartoon images drawn by Findakly's husband, Lewis Trondheim, and colored by the author herself.

Like any great memoir, the story is both about the author and not about her. Findakly's gift is not so much an extraordinary individual life, but exceptional powers of observation during rapidly changing circumstances. Through well-paced vignettes, Findakly portrays a grown-up world of military coups, political propaganda, minority rights, Christian-Muslim tension, and reactionary sexual norms through a child's eyes—or rather, through a reconstruction of herself as a child in light of her present concerns. Her literary style is often absurdist, favoring high-contrast juxtapositions. A charming tale of her mother's popular French desserts in Mosul is followed on the next page by mass hangings of Baathist militiamen. Her brother's school bus of nine-year-olds took a class trip to witness the hangings.

Many of us may still assume that "comic books" are for children, but adult themes emerge from almost every panel of this graphic memoir. Findakly is especially concerned with forms of surveillance and threats to freedom of thought. During her childhood in Iraq, her father's phone calls home from his work as an army dentist were monitored: "Speak in Arabic, or hang up!" someone yelled when her parents spoke in French. Later, after the family had moved to France and Findakly returned to Iraq for a visit, she was alarmed by the new panopticon: photographs of the country's rulers hung in every house and shop, and public conversation about the government was considered dangerous. Though reluctant to give up on her homeland, she refused to surrender her freedom of expression and so ultimately decided to remain in France as an adult.

Findakly's childhood best friend was a Muslim who lived next door. Her friend's mother helped the young Brigitte with her confusing Quran homework. Such stories of mutually beneficial religious diversity appear here and there throughout the book, but we see far more suspicion and conflict—between Christians and Muslims up close, with Jews at a distance. "The first time I heard the word Israel was in 1973 when we moved to France," she writes. She describes the arrival, while the family was still in Iraq, of a new French dictionary in the mail. They looked up the page for Iraq, but it had been torn out, censored "to remove the entry about Israel included on the same page." Even photographs of celebrities who were Jewish had been cut out of their French magazines.

Baptized Orthodox and then Catholic, the young Brigitte also learned the Quran in public school and later recited prayers for her first Communion in Aramaic, through a school run by Syriac Catholic nuns. She also took private French lessons with a Dominican priest, rounding out a variegated religious upbringing, but none of this "made me a believer." Though a member of a Christian minority in Iraq and an Arab minority in France, she never felt the zeal of the persecuted. Instead, her adult self adopted the secularism of France, an attitude projected back into her childhood self in her description of her first Communion. "I got a watch," the young Brigitte flatly remarks on that day, "and I'm dressed like a bride."

Political turmoil provides the backdrop of the narrative, and Findakly successfully portrays it as a child would, focusing only on the concrete ways it affected her: how it changed school assignments, friendships, or the safety of her father at work. Only much later did Findakly learn about the constant threats to Christians during her childhood, and she confesses that, amid all the unrest of the 1960s in Iraq, she felt danger only once—in France during a student protest in the summer of 1968. She decided France was really the dangerous place. It was in Paris, a decade later, that the roof of their family's parked (and empty) car took a bullet hole during a hostage crisis at the Iraqi embassy. After that, whenever her family drove in the rain, she would catch the drops of water in a glass.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that a well-received memoir packed with grown-up themes could today be presented in the same visual style as a comic book. This is, after all, a mash-up era that celebrates a hip-hop musical about Alexander Hamilton. The book, like the genre-mixing show, does not merely offer prosaic content in a flashier form. The picture panels and interspersed photographs are more than ornaments to the words of Findakly's story. Like the choice to shoot a contemporary film in black-and-white in order to thrust the viewer into the past, Findakly's choice of medium helps the reader adopt the viewpoint of a young girl.

Beyond that, the genre packs a punch. A memorable example comes from the first of a series of interludes labeled simply "In Iraq." These brief excurses dramatize cultural differences between the Iraq of the author's childhood and her later life in France. Here an Iraqi man sits at home, smoking a hookah. "So?" says a second man in the doorway, asking about something as yet secret to the reader. "Completely," answers the first. The second man leaves toward the street. There he meets with a woman. "So?" she asks him. "Completely," he replies. The woman leaves and walks to another house. She approaches a younger woman at home on her couch. "So?" the young woman asks. "Completely" is the reply. The young woman's eyes widen. In the final panel, she lifts her hands to her face in grief. Two pages, six words. The reader has had no introductions to these people, and has to move slowly through the generously spaced panels searching the images for clues. What are these people talking about? What are their relationships to one another? Why don't they just use the telephone? Why does the young woman cry? The final panel unveils the meaning, like the end of a parable. Before an arranged marriage in Iraq, Findakly tells us, "the future husband is asked if he wants his fiancée's pubic hair completely removed or left as is." The reader is stunned, still trying to figure out what kind of book this is. The young woman on the couch keeps crying.

With this spare vignette, Findakly depicts the separation of the sexes in the Iraq of her childhood and the social control of women's bodies by men's whims, even without enforcement by the state. She also foreshadows observations from her final trip to Iraq in 1989. "My female cousins had stopped working… now they serve their husbands.... There were no bare shoulders to be seen in the city. And skirts had to cover the knees." The author's emphasis on the policing of women's bodies would be noteworthy regardless of her own circumstances, but it is all the more so in a memoir written in contemporary France. The original French edition of this book (titled *Coquelicots d'Irak*) came out during the summer of the "burkini ban" on the French Riviera, when police forced Muslim women to remove their full-body bathing suits on the grounds that the burkini is not an outfit "respecting good morals and secularism," according to the police summons obtained by *Agence France-Presse*. The memories recalled by Findakly in her memoir are, like all memories, stimulated by present concerns.

The English edition of the book is the same as the French, except for the cover art. The original French cover shows the young Brigitte running and smiling with poppies in hand, leaving petals behind her, like the trail of "good memories" with which she concludes her book. The new cover—either a newly drawn panel or one reclaimed from the cutting-room floor—better captures the book's overall effect. Brigitte sits atop a stone pillar with the resignation of her adult self drawn into her childhood face, as if she had already gained the perspective that comes with growing up. Here, she's not holding the flowers, but looking at them where they sprout from beneath the ruins. She seems to be looking, from a safe distance, for a further sign of spring. ■

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Julia Lichtblau

A Miracle May Happen

Aetherial Worlds

Tatyana Tolstaya
translated by Anya Migdal
Knopf, $25.95, 256 pp.

After reading *Aetherial Worlds*, Tatyana Tolstaya's new collection of short fiction, I looked up "aether" in a 1727 edition of *Cyclopedia or Universal Dictionary of the Arts and Sciences*. I thought her choice of the antiquated spelling might say something about her use of the word throughout the book, whose Russian title uses легкий (*lyögki*), meaning "light," or "easy." Modern dictionaries say the Greeks called the substance between heav- enly bodies ether or *aether*. The *Cyclopedia* weighs the ancients against Newton and Descartes at length, concluding:

> In effect, *Aether,* being no object of our sense, but the work of imagination, brought only on the stage for the sake of hypothesis or to solve some phenomenon, real or imaginary; authors take the liberty to modify it how they please.

This seems appropriate. There's no pixie dust in Tolstoya's universe. Its zones are often dark and foreboding. At times, the most aetherial aspect of a story is the way Tolstaya turns it inside-out to reveal its meaning.

Tolstaya is a formidable figure in contemporary Russian culture. Five of her books have been published in English, including *White Walls,* which combines two collections, and *The Slynx,* a novel. She's also a political commentator, a historical novelist, the granddaughter of Aleksey Tolstoy, and an indirect descendant of Leo Tolstoy. She invokes her lineage in the first line of "20/20," the story that opens *Aetherial Worlds*. As a young man, her grandfather quit engineering school, driven by the uncontrollable flow of stories in his mind. She too possessed "this ability to daydream," but she had no plans to become a writer until age thirty-two, when she underwent pre-laser surgery for myopia. Convalescing in darkness, she discovered a "second world…a multi-faceted underside of so-called reality, a dungeon full of treasure, an aetherial world through the looking glass, a mysterious box with passcodes to all enigmas." She wrote her first story soon after.

Few of the eighteen pieces of *Aetherial Worlds* fit conventional genre or narrative forms, making it hard to characterize them individually, or even the book as a whole. "Aspic" starts with the second-person narrator bringing home ingredients for a New Year's jellied consommé: "The chopped up legs in the shopping bag are pulling your arm down, and it seems as if at the very last moment they'll refuse to get in the elevator. They'll twitch, break free, and run away, clacking across the ceramic tile: clippity-clop, clippity-clop, clippity-clop. Maybe that would be for the best? No, it's too late." The parts are soon boiled down to "a lake of gold with fragrant meat." The bowls cool on the balcony. There, the narrator confides: "Might as well stay out on the balcony, bundled up in your shawl… If you feel like senselessly crying, do it now, while nobody can see you. Do it violently, about nothing and for no reason… Because how to reach this *there* and where this *there* is—no one knows." Like that, we are in the heart of a woman who can't bear to mark another year. Is this an essay? A short story? Or something else?

At an April colloquium at New York University's Jordan Center for Advanced Russian Studies, Tolstaya said she now usually writes autobiographically, because "it's more honest to write about yourself." Indeed, only one story, "The Window," a satirical, third-person fable in a dystopian vein, fits the form and subject of her earlier fiction. The protagonist, Shulgin,

learns of a magic window that doles out free stuff. When a disembodied voice names an object, the recipient must answer, "Deal," and the object appears. Shulgin quickly learns that to get anything worthwhile, he has to accept whatever the window offers; soon he has appliances, rooms, and a hypersexed nanny who threatens to ruin his marriage. But the window is a stickler, a "totalitarian regime…absolute control and no free market," the overwhelmed Shulgin complains, though not "totally inhumane." Eventually, he gets the window to reverse the process: he names an item, the window says "Deal," and it vanishes—starting with the nanny. He's just about to speak his wife's name when he realizes in horror that she would vanish too. Even Communism made more sense than this.

The loveliest piece in *Aetherial Worlds* is "The Invisible Maiden." From its opening line it recalls Proust's elegiac descriptions of summers in Combray: "We would arrive at the dacha in several shifts." The dacha fills and empties as people come and go, but death remains a haunting presence. The title refers to a nanny who drowns:

> That invisible maiden, lying on the lake's shore, on the grass behind the grown-ups fussing, leaning over her, and blocking the view with their legs—was all of them: Nina, Klavdia, the other Nina, and Zoya…on her back, on her side, and facedown; propped up against a tree, covered with a blanket, naked, wearing a blue wool swimsuit, or a cotton one with orange dots or tiny flowers; in her underwear—pink satin or white cotton—or, for some reason, with a long, white nightgown clinging to her pale young body.

The nannies epitomize the play between constancy and impermanence, youth and age, life and death, at the story's heart. The young ones are interchangeable. The old ones are almost but not quite part of the household, supporting characters who after years of loyal service have no claim on family resources, their vulnerability captured in the story's closing scene. The narrator visits an old nanny in the city and finds that the woman has nothing—not even a refrigerator to hold the sausages she has brought: "That's why her room was so spacious and full of light."

"Father" has a similar quality. The figure of the title appears in his daughter's dreams wearing clothes from an old suitcase. She recalls his explanations of the universe, and his dread of death, which "put him in a foul mood, as if it were an execution." As an adult, she soothed him, saying: "there is no death, there is only a curtain, and that behind that curtain is a different world, beautiful and complex, and then another, and another." Before dying, her father promised to send a sign. "A certain agreed-upon word. Telling me what it was like. He never lied to me. Never. And he didn't lie to me this time." In her dreams, he wants to speak. But of course, we never learn the word.

In "Official Nationality," Tolstaya defines the Russian character by faith of a different kind:

> "We should attach this part with screws, otherwise it might fall off…"
>
> "Ah, let's hope it doesn't."
>
> But why? Why wouldn't it fall off? Vibration, gravity, mathematical probability—all these say it will! And it always does! Always! But again and again, a Russian refuses to screw in.

Instead, a Russian "lives every minute, every second, in expectation of a miracle…he expects Grace, for that's what Grace is—a manifestation of goodness and benevolence perpendicular to all probability and merit."

At the NYU colloquium, Tolstaya said she chose stories for *Aetherial Worlds* that Americans could understand easily. I wish she'd given us more credit. For example, "Doors and Demons" (aka I Have the Worst Luck in Paris) and "Faraway Lands: A Letter from Crete to a Friend in Moscow" read like pieces travel magazines commission from celebrated writers on places no one can say much new about.

And it took me several reads of the title story to understand why Tolstaya centered her collection around a ramshackle house in "Bumblefuck, New Jersey" (near Princeton). Its concerns are terrestrial. The narrator buys the place upon her arrival in the United States in 1992 to teach classes at a college that's 220 miles away. The house is a money-pit, but she loves it: "We don't know where happiness comes from, but places do exist where it's sprinkled in heaps. Each time I take off, I leave happiness behind." Meanwhile, ridiculous Americans traipse through her life—contractors, lawyers, students (inspired, idiotic, indifferent). There's a poignantly brief reference to divorce. "Meanwhile, my family quietly fell apart—everybody going their separate way." When she moves closer to the college, she rents the house to a lunatic. He ends up wrecking it but pays nothing thanks to absurd tenant protections. We meet a parade of potential buyers, and then the narrator returns to Russia.

Throughout the story, the word "aetherial" recurs, like a musical theme. The home's unfinished patio is "this airy, translucent box promising entry into an aetherial world." She sleeps there despite cold drafts: "There's entry here into aetherial worlds." The miraculously honest American carpenter "attempts no entry into aetherial worlds with the aid of moonshine."

Such didactic, insistent labelling was annoying at first. Yet it made me persist. And then, eventually, I saw the house—with its porous lines between inside and outside—as barely there. Could one say the same of its owner? One senses that she wants to sink her roots in "my earthly pod, one of my shells" but is unable to. "I should know by now that the right place is inaccessible; maybe it exists in the past, over the green hills, or maybe it's drowned, or perhaps it hasn't materialized yet," she says.

In this story, one of the best in this haunting book, Tolstaya goes round after round with intangible forces she doesn't name: homesickness, culture, isolation, absurdity. Formidable as she is, those forces prevail. "Yanked out the needle from my heart and walked away," the narrator says in the last line. It's a fatalistic Russian shrug that captures the book's tone. A miracle may happen, or not. ■

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William H. Pritchard

Closing Remarks

A Carnival of Losses

Notes Nearing Ninety

Donald Hall

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, $25, 224 pp.

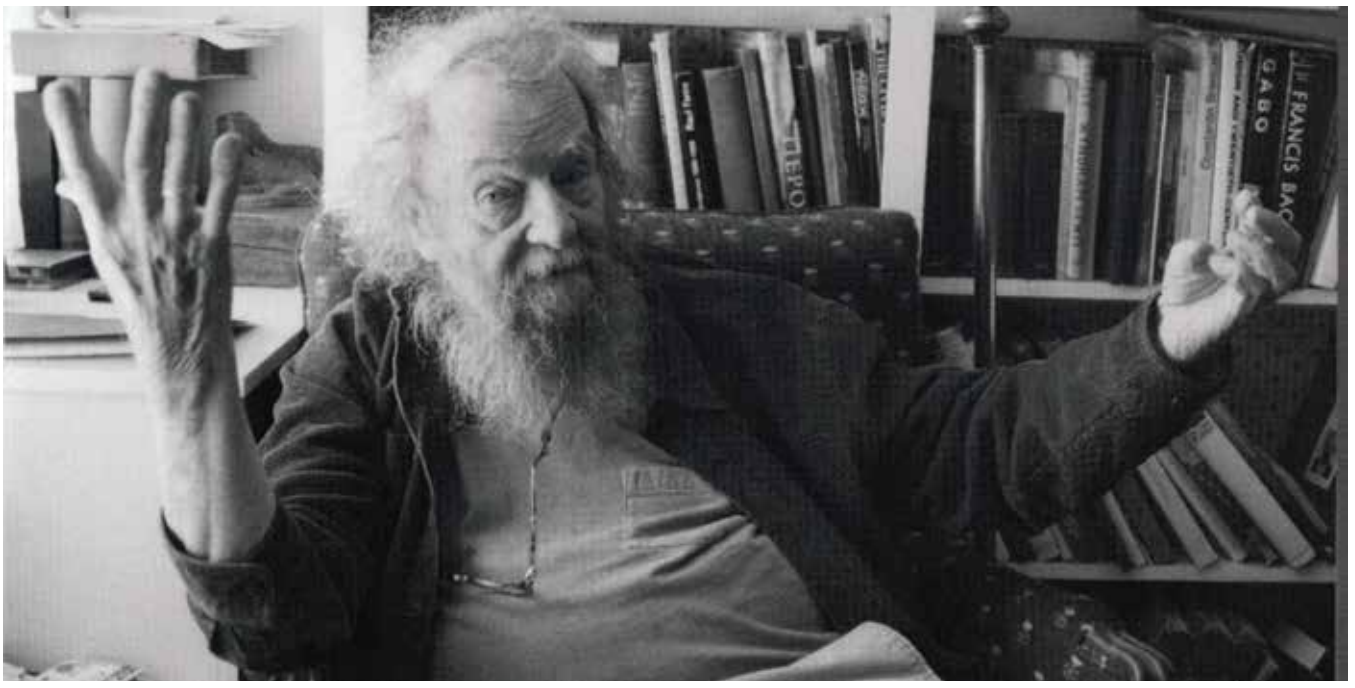
"Old people are a separate form of life," declared poet Donald Hall in *Essays After Eighty*, a few years back. "When we turn eighty, we understand that we are extraterrestrial." In *A Carnival of Losses*, published shortly before his death in June at the age of eighty-nine, Hall explains that in recent years poems stopped coming to him, but that "prose endures," and in these two hundred and some pages of mostly short and spiky items, he assesses his current situation: "I shed my skin, I tell short anecdotes, I hazard an opinion, speculate, assume, and remember. Why should the nonagenarian hold anything back?" But in Robert Frost's words about writing, something always "has to be held back for pressure," and it would be a mistake to think that Hall in old age was content to let it all hang out. Instead, a pervasive wit gives pressure to these opinions and reminiscences. "In your eighties you are invisible," he observes. "Nearing ninety you hope nobody sees you."

Writing about Andrew Marvell, T. S. Eliot defined "wit" mainly through negatives: "It is not cynicism, though it has a kind of toughness which may be confused with cynicism by the tender-minded." When Hall began to publish poems, roughly sixty-five years ago, anything like wit was notably absent. One of his early poems, "My Son, My Executioner" (originally and pretentiously titled "Epigenethlion"), consisted of three stiff quatrains that ended "We twenty-five and twenty-two / Who seemed to live forever / Observe enduring life in you / And start to die together." Decades later, after the death of his wife, the poet Jane Kenyon, he was able to write in a rather different spirit about a visit to her grave with his dog: "Every day Gus and I / take a walk in the graveyard. / I'm the one who doesn't / piss on your stone." Not cynicism, such wit, though it may be thought so by the tender-minded; its presence in Hall's late poems, as well as in his prose, gave continuing life to the aging writer's performance.

Carnival of Losses consists of four sections, the first of which contains a number of short pieces, each characterized by a humorous twist. "The Beard Generation," for example, begins by alluding to our beardless founding fathers—Washington, Hamilton, the Adamses, Jefferson—men Hall describes as "shaved mostly by slaves with straight razors." He continues:

> Then Abraham Lincoln grew a beard.
> Poets with three names wore beards except for Edna St. Vincent Millay. Ezra Loomis Pound wore a beard. T. S. Eliot wore initials. I grew my first beard halfway through the twentieth century, when they were shocking. The English department where I taught had a hundred teachers with hairless faces, only three of whom were female.

After these casual-sounding sentences, Hall moves into the sports arena, with an exclamatory list of baseball players impossible to associate with beards: "Imagine Lou Gehrig with a beard! Jackie Robinson! Babe Ruth! Ted Williams!"



ULDIS TIRONS

Donald Hall

But today's sluggers are bewhiskered, and basketball and football players have followed suit, or perhaps hirsute: "There are beards under football helmets and above LeBron James's basketball uniform," Hall notes. "Some hockey players wear beards, although they are Canadian." The closing paragraph is a one-line prediction: "Soon everyone will shave."

In an essay titled "Pharmacies and Treasuries," Hall writes a paean to the vanished "drugstore" and the items it contained, which—along with stools on which you could sit and drink the Coke provided by the druggist, who could also manufacture a chocolate sundae—sometimes included books not to be found at today's CVS. Hall remembers finding a copy of what he calls a "drugstore paperback" that turned out to be an anthology of poems in which he appeared. He ponders what we have lost:

> Today, in the twenty-first century, in the MFA era, there are *more* poets, *more* poetry magazines, *more* poetry publishers, *more* books of poems—and *no* corner drugstores, *no* drugstore paperbacks, *no* book reviews, *no* bookstores and *no* anthologies.

From here he is led to some sharp remarks about two of last century's favorite poetry anthologists, Louis Untermeyer and Oscar Williams. Williams's *Little Treasure of Modern Poetry* "prints nine bad poems by Oscar Williams and four by his wife Gene Derwood," Halls reports, and continues parenthetically, "(William Carlos Williams gets two.)" This reader remembers that book, with its "printed oval photographs of the poets," but failed to remember one salient fact acerbically noted by Hall, who asks, "Would you care to guess whose portrait ends the book? Or whose portrait resides next to Homer on the cover of the paperback?" Randall Jarrell once said that Oscar Williams's poems were "written on a typewriter by a typewriter." Hall deflates Williams's status further still, by recounting once introducing him to T. S. Eliot at a dinner party. "Eliot said, 'I recognize you from your photographs,'" writes Hall, adding that "without irony Williams burbled that he recognized Eliot too."

Hall's final book of poetry was a slim volume of eighty poems, culled from his lifetime output of verse. In *A Carnival of Losses*, this *Selected Poems* is followed, in properly comic fashion, by "The Selected Poets of Donald Hall," a hundred pages of brief reminiscences of mostly American poets from Theodore Roethke to James Wright. Of these, by far the shortest is devoted to Allen Tate: "My recollections of some poets are brief. Allen Tate always looked grumpy." E. E. Cummings, conjured in the act of judging an undergraduate poetry contest, doesn't fare much better: "His face never looked as if he heard anything. He was sullen, unsmiling, dour—possibly because he was judging an undergraduate poetry contest." Though not a poet, Saul Bellow appears briefly, leaving early from a meeting because he was "pissed off" at something. (Hall expands: "Over four decades every time I saw Bellow he was pissed off.") As for poet and novelist James Dickey, Hall describes him as the best liar he ever knew.

These squibs might sound malicious, yet there is little or no malice in the jaunty, pleased mode with which Hall delivers them. Some portraits are notable for their mischievous warmth, especially the one of Richard Wilbur, whose poems Hall discovered when he was a freshman at Harvard. Decades later in 2017, just before Wilbur died at ninety-six, Hall telephones him, and after a brief conversation hangs up relieved that "he still sounded like Dick. His appearance and demeanor have always resembled his work—handsome, formal, warm, wry, as elegant as the curls of his italic hand, and *young*." A just and noble epitaph for an old poet, from a slightly less old one.

In selecting moments from these pages that seem rich with a sardonic (though not at all bitter) humor, I have neglected a deeper poignancy, in which the diversions of the carnival give way to a less protected sense of the losses entailed as the carnival goes on. In the book's third section, "Necropoetics,"

Hall revisits the illness and death of his second wife, Jane Kenyon, juxtaposing his thoughts with some of their poems, such as the close of his "Weeds and Peonies":

> ...I pace beside weeds
> and snowy peonies, staring at Mt.
> Kearsarge
> where you climbed wearing purple hiking
> boots.
> "Hurry back. Be careful, climbing down."
> Your peonies lean their vast heads westward
> as if they might topple. Some topple.

He ends the personal essay with the memory of how "after her death Jane's voice and mine rose as one, spiraling together images and diphthongs of the dead who were once the living, our necropoetics of grief and love in the unforgivable absence of flesh."

But the book does not end on that ultimate note of loss; rather there is a touching move back toward the living. The poet recalls his great-grandfather, Ben Keneston, the original occupant of Eagle Pond Farm, the house Hall so frequently celebrated in print. It is told of great-grandfather that he once instructed a hired man to count the number of a herd of cattle moving from one pasture to another. The hired man, unable to cipher, is heard repeating, "There's one, there's one, there's one..." Hall assumes that after his own death the farm will be no more, but is unexpectedly assured by his granddaughter that she and her husband will move into it. These were, he relates, "the happiest words I ever heard, a joy that depended on dying, therefore an inevitable, even a reliable joy."

And so the great-great-great granddaughter of Ben Keneston, together with her husband, will keep alive the family residence. "And after Allison and Will?" Hall muses. "There's one, there's one, there's one, and maybe there's another." No further words necessary. ■

William H. Pritchard *is the Henry Clay Folger Emeritus Professor of English at Amherst College. His most recent book is* In Search of Humor.

Andrew J. Bacevich

Pretend You Don't Care

Eat the Apple
A Memoir
Matt Young
Bloomsbury, $26, 251 pp.

The author photo inside the dust jacket of this beguiling, yet disturbing, memoir reminds me of the young Bobby Orr. Square jaw, broad nose, twinkling eyes, ready smile: these comprised the clean-cut Orr "look" back in the 1960s when the star Boston Bruins hockey player broke into the NHL.

Orr was a natural for whom difficult things seemed to come easily. He also came across as the sort of fellow you wouldn't mind your kid sister dating.

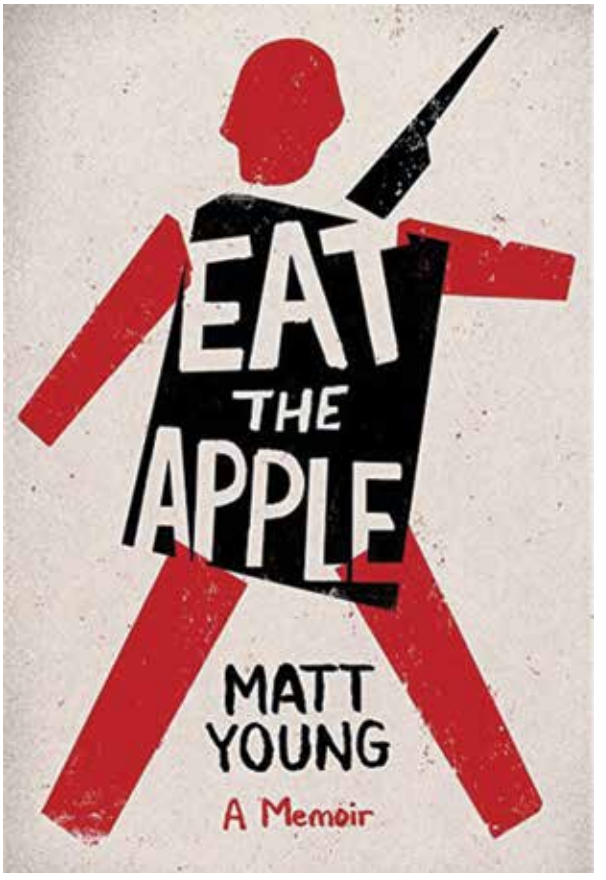
Judging from his own account, few things have come easily for Matt Young. As for dating your kid sister: you might want to ride along as chaperone. Indeed, the reader gets to the end of this book wondering: Why is this guy grinning?

Eat the Apple is Young's retrospective look at his tour of duty as an enlisted Marine during our ongoing era of endless war. The title refers to a putative Marine adage that, even in our anything-goes Age of Donald Trump, remains unprintable in this magazine. A G-rated version might go like this: when fate deals you a lousy hand, pretend you don't care. Before the last card gets played, thumb your nose at the dealer.

Be forewarned, however: nothing about *Eat the Apple* is G-rated. Young's vocabulary leans heavily toward the scatological. A vulgar but familiar synonym for fornication, pressed into service as a noun, verb, adjective, and all-purpose expletive, further reinforced as the occasion demands with a maternal prefix, appears on nearly every page, frequently on multiple occasions.

Herewith a suitably expurgated example. New recruit Young has failed to accord a corporal appropriate respect:

> Know what happens to boots who don't
> sound off, boot?
> No, Corporal.
> They get really dead, Young. You want to
> really die, boot?
> No, Corporal.
> Too darned bad, because you're going to get
> your darned head blown off over there
> because you don't have the darned stones
> to sound off…



The one-sided exchange goes on from there.

The story that Young tells adheres to a now-familiar arc of military memoirs: deciding to sign up (nothing much doing: "the only way to change is the self-flagellation achieved by signing up for war"); recruit-training (thirteen weeks of degradation: essential, according to the Corps, to creating real Marines); further training at another stateside post (reclaiming a smidgen of autonomy by consuming copious amounts of booze and having lots of sex while off-duty); deployment to the combat zone, in Young's case Iraq (filth, stench, innovative approaches to masturbation, and long periods of boredom laced with odd moments of terror, all accompanied by the gradual realization that the people in charge don't know what they're doing); redeployment back to the United States (painfully awkward reunification with clueless loved ones, followed by plenteous booze and sex in the company of Marine buddies); and then volunteering for a second tour in Iraq (nothing else doing: why not give self-flagellation another shot?)

Eventually, Young receives his discharge from active service and is flung back into the civilian world, which soon enough finds him

> trying to forget those times I chugged whiskey and fought and was shot at and exploded and lived in a hole and hated life and hated everyone and hated myself and shot mongrel dogs and screwed anything that moved and smoked two packs a day and hazed new joins and ran until I threw up because I was still drunk from the night before and made my family cry.

In recounting the sequence of events leading to this moment of reckoning, Young dabbles in just about every known literary form this side of iambic pentameter. He tries his hand at omniscient third-person narration, shifting as the spirit moves him to the first-person, both singular and plural. He offers up miniature screenplays, droll sketches, reveries, do-it-yourself advice columns, and letters addressed to "past-me"—the person Young used to be—along with a formal apology to a nameless San Clemente cabbie he punched out while inebriated. He even includes a sappy love story of sorts.

Throw in a fifteen-step formula for "How to Ruin a Life" ("Step 1: Start out with something to prove. Join the United States Marine Corps"), stick-figure cartoons, and other pen-and-ink drawings that include anatomically correct renderings of the male body (with both frontal and rear exposure), and you end up with quite a festive display of creative talent. Somewhere between boot camp and his emergence as a Bobby Orr lookalike, Young developed a capacity for pungent and incisive writing.

So make no mistake—this book is as darkly entertaining as it is crude and salacious. Young's tone throughout is sardonic, self-mocking, and grimly humorous. Imagine *Dr. Strangelove*'s prissy Group Captain Mandrake finding himself suddenly reassigned from Burpelson Air Force Base to a desert war that can't be won, with foul-mouthed post-adolescents as his bunkmates; the comic possibilities that Young exploits are comparable. The result is not laugh-out-loud funny. It's cringe funny. It's laugh-to-keep-from-weeping funny.

As to what it all means, I am less certain. Perhaps, in our postmodern moment, questions about meaning are out of order. Perhaps *Eating the Apple* means nothing at all, and readers are thereby invited to classify Matt Young's ordeal as of no greater significance than a bad movie or a lousy restaurant meal. Or perhaps Young's memoir is merely an exercise in personal catharsis, enabling the author once and for all to consign his Marine "past-me" to the past. If so, it is a vanity project of little relevance to the rest of us.

My own inclination is to push back against such a conclusion. I have known more than a few Marines. To a man (all are men), they take pride in their military service and in the Corps. They take seriously the values that the Corps professes to represent: honor, courage, and commitment. It is not for me to question whether those values adequately describe what it means to be a Marine today. But Matt Young would beg to differ. ■

Once a soldier, **Andrew J. Bacevich** *was never a Marine.*

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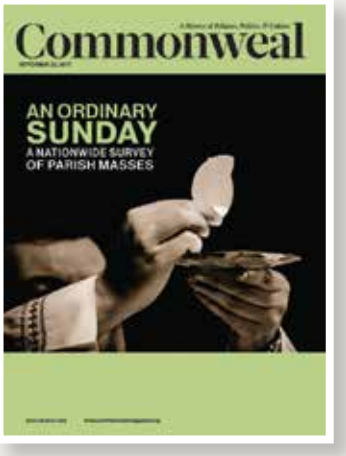

‘You’ll Do Good’

Timothy P. Schilling

Lately my heart has been troubled. I suddenly feel as if time is running out—but on what exactly? I find myself asking, “Why not finally be the person God wants me to be?” I feel that question as a kind of ache, but, sadly, an ache is not a plan.

Which brings me to a sign I saw on a window in Helena, Montana—on Last Chance Gulch of all streets. It said, “God’s Love,” and below that were the words “Health Care for the Homeless.” Coincidentally, that very subject had been on my mind. The day before, while I was in Missoula, I’d felt on my foot what I’d thought was a blister. Later, I decided it was a spider bite, before determining, with the help of the internet, that it was in fact ringworm. So I bought some antifungal cream and solved my problem. But the next day, while I was on my way to Helena to meet the local bishop, this little matter reentered my mind at a rest stop off of Highway 12. It occurred to me how miserable it must be to be homeless—to have to beg to use restrooms, to not have enough money to get rid of a thing like ringworm, not to speak of bigger health problems. Ugh. The thought came and went, then came again when I saw that sign.

El Greco, Christ Healing the Blind*, ca. 1570*

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. CHARLES WRIGHTSMAN, 1978

Bishop George Thomas and I had been acquainted in our Seattle days and I’d found him to be an excellent priest. I asked if we might get together while I was in Montana. We had agreed to meet at a Starbucks, and I was on my way there when I came upon “God’s Love: Health Care for the Homeless”—how wonderful, I thought, that someone is doing this work. For a moment I just stood there looking at the sign. Then I went in to learn more and maybe make a donation. As I entered, I ran into a man muttering to himself. Then I found myself alone in a room with an open Bible and brochures. I peeked around a corner. The receptionist led me to the back to see the director.

Have you ever met someone and known immediately exactly what her heart is like—just from her eyes, the look on her face, her voice? That’s how this was. The director invited me to sit down. I started to explain to her why I had come in. I saw the sign, I said. I’ve been thinking about this. But then I couldn’t say anymore.

She said, “It’s okay. Take your time.”

I was suddenly in tears. She asked, “Do you need help?”

Back in the Netherlands, where I live, I had been trying to help a man who really needs God’s help but doesn’t dare to ask for it. I think it’s because he doesn’t think he’s worthy of it. Instead of asking for help, he asks God, “What can I do for you?” As I sat there in that office on Last Chance Gulch, I thought of all the people in my life who need help—and of how hopeless it can all sometimes seem.

The director of God’s Love handed me a tissue. Go ahead, she said, let it all out. Then she told me about how she’d once been deeply depressed. “I’d worked here for years,” she said. “My husband and I started this place. When I retired I was burnt out. They threw me a party. But then I got depressed. A psychologist said, ‘You need to get passionate about something.’ That’s when I rediscovered my passion for this place.”

She asked, “Is there something you’re passionate about?”

Later, when I mentioned God’s Love to Bishop Thomas, he knew all about it. They do wonderful work, he said, and yes, she’s just like that. Before I left, this woman—her name is Ann Miller—said, “Do you want to hear a joke? I think everyone should laugh at least once every day. An old man was walking along and heard a voice saying, ‘Pick me up.’ The voice came from a frog. ‘If you kiss me,’ it said, ‘I’ll turn into a beautiful princess.’ So the man picked the frog up and put it in his pocket. ‘Hey,’ said the frog, ‘aren’t you going to kiss me?’ The old man replied, ‘At my age, I think a talking frog might be more fun.’”

I laughed. “Pick me up. Yes.” They were my words, the words of the poor, and the words of Christ himself.

Ann said: “You’ll do good.”

I hope it’s true. ■

Timothy P. Schilling *lives in Utrecht, the Netherlands.*

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