

FALL BOOKS 2

America

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Called to Prayer

WHAT I LEARNED FROM MUSLIMS ABOUT GOD

PATRICK J. RYAN

HELEN ALVARÉ ON
"THE FEDERAL MYSTIQUE"

OF MANY THINGS

For people of a certain age the name Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama conjures an infamous image of his “stand in the schoolhouse door,” his failed attempt to literally block the entry of two African-American students to the University of Alabama. The stand-off marked the high-water mark of Mr. Wallace’s public campaign against integration, an effort he launched six months earlier in January 1963, when he promised Alabamans “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.”

Thankfully, Mr. Wallace’s pledge went unfulfilled, and the Jim Crow system of segregation that had prevailed throughout the South since the end of Reconstruction was largely dismantled by 1970. But that did not stop Mr. Wallace’s race-baiting politics, which he brought to the national stage in three failed runs for president in 1964, 1968 and 1972. It was during the ’72 contest, just as he was surging in the polls, that the governor was shot five times at a campaign event in Laurel, Md. This effectively ended that presidential campaign and left him paralyzed from the waist down, in excruciating and constant pain for the rest of his life.

People who knew Mr. Wallace say that the shooting fundamentally changed him. One of those who observed his conversion was Lynwood Westray, an African-American man who served as a butler at the White House for 32 years. “After George Wallace was shot you would think he was one of our buddies,” Mr. Westray recounted in an interview with Kate Andersen Brower, author of a recent book about the upstairs-downstairs world of the White House. “Every time he’d come down to the White House, the first thing he’d do was come back and want to be back there with us, back there in the butler’s pantry.” The assassination attempt “changed him completely.”

Governor Wallace’s final years (he died in 1998) suggest that the

conversion was genuine. He became a born-again Christian and in 1979 made an unannounced, unpublicized trip to the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, the church where Martin Luther King Jr. had served as a pastor. Mr. Wallace told the congregation: “I have learned what suffering means. In a way that was impossible [before], I think I can understand something of the pain black people have come to endure. I know I contributed to that pain and I can only ask for your forgiveness.”

In his final term as governor (1983-87), Wallace did even more than that. He appointed a record number of African-Americans to state offices and dramatically increased the number of African-Americans registered to vote. The Tuskegee Institute awarded him an honorary degree. The Rev. Joseph Lowery of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, one of the organizers of the civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965, then invited Governor Wallace to an event to mark the march’s 30th anniversary in 1995. Pastor Lowery told the frail former segregationist: “You are a different George Wallace today. We both serve a God who can make the desert bloom. We ask God’s blessing on you.”

Thus is the power of forgiveness. We need more of it everywhere but especially in our politics. It does not mean that we forget what has happened. “Forgiveness does not mean ignoring what has been done or putting a false label on an evil act,” Dr. King wrote in 1957. “It means, rather, that the evil act no longer remains as a barrier to the relationship. Forgiveness is a catalyst creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start and a new beginning.”

“The Lord works in mysterious ways. It took a bullet to straighten [George Wallace] out,” said Mr. Westray. The question remains: What will it take to straighten out the rest of us?

MATT MALONE, S.J.

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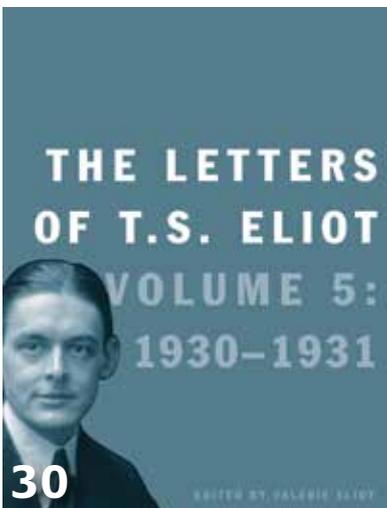
Cover: Muslims attend an Eid al-Adha mass prayer on a street next to the Dongguan Great Mosque in Xining, Qinghai Province, China, on Sept. 24. Reuters/China Daily.

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ON THE WEB

Thomas Ryan, C.S.P., asks why Christians are attracted to the idea of **reincarnation**, and **Rabbi Daniel Polish** talks about the anniversary of "**Nostra Aetate**" on "America This Week." Full digital highlights at americamagazine.org/webfeatures.



Help for Puerto Rico

How can a government survive when it faces mountains of debt? What obligation does it have to pay back what it owes in full when doing so would place a great burden on poor and middle-class families?

These questions, which have been discussed in Europe for some time, now confront lawmakers in the United States. The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is \$72 billion in debt and missed its first debt payment this summer. Much of the debt is held by U.S.-based “vulture” funds, which are demanding full payment, while the archbishop of Puerto Rico, among others, is advocating debt restructuring in order to provide a measure of relief for the Puerto Rican people. Poverty rates are high on the island, and many people are choosing to leave for the United States rather than face job layoffs and cuts in social services.

Democrats in Congress have proposed a bill that would allow Puerto Rico to file for bankruptcy, but Republicans are hesitant to back it. On Oct. 21, the White House proposed an ambitious plan to create a new bankruptcy process for U.S. territories, but it too would require Congressional support. With the support of Jubilee USA, Archbishop Roberto González of San Juan is pushing for international bankruptcy protections. A U.N. committee is also working on a global bankruptcy process, which could provide stability for financial markets and help developing countries focus on reducing poverty rather than paying down onerous debt. It is a sound idea that deserves U.S. support. Puerto Rico is not the only place in the Western hemisphere that would benefit, and a fair system of debt repayment would help drive down economic inequality worldwide.

American Born

In May attorneys from Texas RioGrande Legal Aid Inc. filed a civil rights case on behalf of six mothers who attempted to obtain birth certificates for their children from the Department of State Health Services Vital Statistics Unit by presenting their foreign passports and matriculas (a type of identity card). They were denied the documents. The attorneys say this violates the constitutional rights of the children. On Oct. 16, U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman ruled in favor of the department.

In his decision Judge Pitman wrote that Texas has “a clear interest in protecting access” to birth certificates. He added that other agencies, including the Department of Justice, have doubted the authenticity of the matriculas. The Mexican government has criticized Judge Pitman’s decision, saying that it undermines the dignity of these families.

This judicial discord comes at a time when Congress seems to have given up on immigration reform. In 2013, the Senate approved a bipartisan bill. Two years later the number of detention centers and deportations has risen, but there has been no reform. Most recently, Representative Paul Ryan, in a bid to become speaker of the House, said he would not bring an immigration bill to a vote. Decisions like the one in Texas marginalize our immigrant brothers and sisters and demonstrate how crucial immigration reform is for the United States. Unfortunately, President Obama’s executive orders on immigration remain tied up in court.

Privacy and Profit

Early in October, transfers from European to American data centers, which had been a standard practice for companies like Google and Facebook, fell into a legal limbo. The European Union prohibits the export of personal information unless it is protected according to E.U. standards, and U.S. privacy laws fall short. For the last 15 years, this privacy gap has been bridged by a framework called Safe Harbor, by which companies could self-certify that they abided by an enhanced set of protections in order to move data across the Atlantic.

On Oct. 6, the European Court of Justice invalidated this framework, in part because it did not establish any limit on the U.S. government’s ability to access personal data. European privacy regulators have set the end of January as a deadline for cracking down on data transfers if no new agreement is in place. Brad Smith, Microsoft’s chief legal officer, has called for a new agreement and updated regulations, saying, “Privacy rights cannot endure if they change every time data moves from one location to another.” In other words, data needs to be protected in relation to persons rather than geographical location.

While we can and should clarify the legal landscape, such reforms will not be enough by themselves. One reason our government invests such extraordinary resources into surveillance is that technology companies collect such an extraordinary amount of data in order to profit by personalizing advertisements. In addition to an upgrade of our legal regime for protecting privacy, we also need an evolution of the market structures that make collecting all this data so attractive in the first place. Technology companies could take the lead by running cloud services that collect less data to begin with and should try to demonstrate that sufficient profit is possible without exposing us all to Big Brother’s gaze.

Christian Exodus

Three men kneel before the camera, their neon orange jumpsuits striking against the muted desert landscape. Each gives his name, year of birth and village, but not before stating why he is there: “I am an Assyrian Christian.” The video, released on Oct. 8, is another in a growing library of execution films recorded by militants of the Islamic State. More than a year after Americans watched with horror the beheading of the journalist James Foley, three deaths may no longer shock or grab headlines. But their stories belong to one of the most alarming narratives of the 21st century: the mass exodus of Christians from their biblical homelands in the Middle East.

A new report from the English charity Aid to the Church in Need, titled “Persecuted and Forgotten?,” documents the oppression of Christians in 22 countries between October 2013 and July 2015. The group found that while religious persecution continues in states like China and Saudi Arabia, the rise of extremist Islamic groups represents an existential threat to Christianity in parts of the Middle East and Africa. In many countries well-publicized killings, torture, rape and kidnapping have driven entire communities of Christian and other religious minorities to flee for their lives, in what A.C.N. considers “human rights violations tantamount to full-scale religio-ethnic cleansing.”

The report’s findings on Iraq are especially disturbing. Since 2003 the Iraqi Christian population has declined from roughly 1.4 million to an estimated 275,000, almost half of whom are internally displaced. After the Islamic State’s conquest of Mosul and Nineveh in the summer of 2014, Christians were given the choice to convert, pay a religious tax or be killed. Thousands fled. The current rate of decline suggests that if conditions in the country do not improve, it is quite possible that the Christian community will be “all but extinct” in five years.

The U.S. State Department’s annual “International Religious Freedom Report,” released on Oct. 14, echoes the A.C.N.’s warnings. Nonstate actors have exploited ineffective or nonexistent government security structures to spread their violent and religiously intolerant ideologies. In his remarks at the rollout of the report, Secretary of State John Kerry acknowledged that this development carries with it daunting challenges for those committed to the protection of religious freedom worldwide. “By issuing this report,” he said, “we hope to give governments an added incentive to honor the rights and the dignity of their citizens.” This

raises the question: How can the United States and the international community respond to a threat that operates beyond the reach of sanctions and diplomatic shaming?

One place to start is with the language we use. In early October, the International Religious Freedom Roundtable sent a letter to President Obama asking that he formally declare the Islamic State’s systematic destruction of Christian, Yazidis and other religious minority communities a genocide. “Such a declaration,” the roundtable statement reads, “will give a stronger voice to the long-suffering victims while furthering and sharpening ideological engagement against those currently at the forefront of this campaign.”

Practically, the designation could speed up the provision of humanitarian aid and processing of refugees in the United States. And at the global level, acknowledgment by the United Nations of genocide has the potential to trigger the oft-invoked but ill-defined “responsibility to protect.” If ever there were a situation crying out for an international constabulary force, surely the civilizational collapse in Iraq and Syria is it (see our editorial “Opportunity for U.N. Reform?” 10/26).

Five years after the Arab Spring, it is tempting to conclude that propping up dictators is the only way to preserve what’s left of Christianity in the Middle East. This year’s winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, however, suggests an alternative. The Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet, a coalition of workers, business leaders, lawyers and human rights activists, was recognized for its decisive role in translating the country’s revolution into a constitutional government that guarantees “fundamental rights for the entire population, irrespective of gender, political conviction or religious belief.”

While Tunisia is not Syria or Iraq, its experience demonstrates the crucial role that civil society plays in a pluralistic society. Between bullets and the ballot box there is a complex social fabric that the hyper-individualistic West has too often neglected in its interventions in the Middle East. The people who are fleeing the heinous crimes of the Islamic State are victims, yes; but they are also doctors, lawyers and teachers. We must think creatively about how these vital human resources can be marshaled not only to make life in exile endurable but also to strengthen the communal bonds that will be crucial to building a society that respects all faith communities, if and when they are able to return.



SYRIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN SCREAM NEAR MACEDONIAN RIOT POLICE AT GREEK-MACEDONIAN BORDER. GNS PHOTO/YANNIS BEHRAKIS, REUTERS

REPLY ALL

Islam in Review

I was deeply troubled by Bill Williams's review of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Heretic* ("At a Crossroads," 10/19). Neither the book nor the review sheds light on Islam; rather, they play into Americans' fears and misunderstandings. In calling for "Islamic reformation," Ms. Ali cherry-picks Quranic verses and interprets them out of context, focuses solely on violent episodes and ignores the ordinary events that outnumber them, and treats real injustices—like honor killings—as "Islamic" problems, though they occur in non-Muslim contexts and have cultural or political causes. She neglects to mention that Islamic reform has been underway for centuries, birthing a range of interpretations.

I wish Mr. Williams had more deeply explored Ms. Ali's work and positions. She has made unacceptable statements about Islam (Islam is "a destructive, nihilistic cult of death" that should be "defeated"). As a religious publication, *America* has a particular responsibility to provide quality information about other faith traditions, especially during a time when Muslims (like Catholics in earlier decades) face increased suspicion, prejudice and even discrimination.

JORDAN DENARI
Washington, D.C.

Not Just Young Catholics

I am not sure that the problems described by Kaya Oakes ("Church-Shopping," 10/19) are unique to young Catholics. I'm an older Catholic, but a new Catholic. I went through R.C.I.A. at my parish in Texas but then moved a year or so later. I attended the church near my house, and even though I went out of my way to introduce myself to people and attend adult religious education classes, I just was never able to "break in." I really think it had a lot to do with the fact that although I am 50 years old, I was still much younger than most of the people; among the younger people, I didn't have a kid

in the school; and I'm single with no spouse. It's really hard being a single, older Catholic, in my opinion.

JANET SEVER
Online Comment

True Purpose

Kaya Oakes's article saddens me because it is completely understandable. In this day and age of 40-person choirs, hand-holding, 10-minute signs of peace and the sanctuary being treated like a stage, it is easy to forget why we are really there. Community is important, quality sermons are important, music is nice, but you should be able to go to any church and fulfill its true purpose: to actively and attentively sit at the foot of the cross.

CHARLES MONSEN
Online Comment

Voting Catholic

I enjoyed reading "Everyone's Entitled to Dignity," the conversation between Joseph R. Biden Jr. and Matt Malone, S.J. (10/12). While I find Vice President Biden to be very heroic on many issues both in his professional and personal life, I was disappointed with his position on abortion. Mr. Biden says he accepts what the church says about abortion "as a matter of faith," but he is not willing to impose that belief on "other God-fearing, non-God-fearing people." This has to raise the question, when are beliefs worth defending?

In the 1850s there was a politician who did not hesitate to force his views on others who were God-fearing and non-God-fearing people, who did not have the same view as he when it came to a very controversial subject at the time: slavery. Abraham Lincoln was willing to follow and live or die by his moral conviction.

Whether the issue is abortion or immigration, homelessness or genocide, Catholic voters need to insist on greatness from Catholic politicians. As voters, we need to stop supporting party lines. We need to vote our Catholicism. I encourage all who do not believe they

should insist on this from their elected officials to spend a day feeding the homeless at a soup kitchen or praying outside an abortion clinic. If an issue of the Catholic Church doesn't affect you, then make it affect you, and see if your political tolerance of an issue remains the same. Once we have lived an issue, we will become more demanding of our elected officials on all Catholic issues we see in our country and world today.

GERARD KANE
Crownsville, Md.

Sins of Inaction

I am saddened that Richard G. Malloy, S.J., did not mention the inordinately high level of suicide among gay and lesbian teens and young adults in his article "Still Seeking Hope" (10/5). When a "different" sexuality is discovered and there is little or no help from family, other loved ones or the church, suicide is sometimes the result. The church must bear the cross of inaction and rejection of those of us who are the "other."

CARLTON KELLEY
Online Comment

Autonomy and Conscience

Re "The Hour of Our Death," by John J. Paris, S.J. (10/5): I am troubled by Father Paris's eagerness to dismiss what he calls "patient autonomy" in his article on end-of-life care. If we regard patients as human beings endowed with dignity and reason, rather than as mere flesh to be acted upon, we might instead call the same thing "conscience." Why is he so afraid of this?

Both spiritually and scientifically, patients are as much participants in their health as medical professionals are; and I, for one, would feel much more confidence in the chances of living out my Catholic faith with a healer who sees healing as a collaboration rather than an opportunity to impose certain philosophical commitments. Further, in the context of the pluralistic societies in which our Catholic hospitals serve, we would do well to understand our Catholicism as a call

to the challenge of being at once expansive and coherent rather than imperial. When Jesus healed, he listened first to what those who came to him were asking for. He responded as best he could—not as a client or a master but as a friend.

NATHAN SCHNEIDER
Boulder, Colo.

Christian Failure

I think that the issue raised by Michael Simmelink in “A Deeper Mission” (9/28) deserves contemplation. A number of thoughtful people throughout recorded history, including missionary saints of the church, have talked about the difference between virtuous effort and tangible effect. One of the luminaries in our wonderful Christian past said something like, “We are not called to be successful but to be faithful.” Some of our most revered missionaries were failures from a worldly point of view, especially if that view was limited to the lifetime of the saint in question. I am sure that the more prudential judgment we can combine with selfless charity the better, but we still probably will never know the whole worth of our efforts at charity in this life.

CHARLES ERLINGER
Online Comment

Data Usage

I found “Data-Determinism,” by Bill McGarvey (9/28), troubling. I work in the field of analytics and Big Data, and it is the attitude of people like Eric Schmidt and those at Amazon who believe data and analytics are the end-all solutions and that “purposeful Darwinism” has a place in the workplace—they are the ones who are misguided. But putting one’s intelligence and ability at the service of the other is where Big Data will shine. Combining data and analytics with an understanding of Catholic social justice can be a form of triage for the field hospital to know where and how to best deploy mercy and compassion in whatever form it takes. The combination

STATUS UPDATE

Readers respond to “The First Canon: Mercy,” by the Rev. Kevin McKenna (10/12).

Mercy does not mean denying the truth. People that don’t understand Catholic teaching think that to be merciful or nonjudgmental means not acknowledging sin for what it is. When Jesus met the woman caught in adultery, he showed her mercy, saying: “I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.” We too, will be shown mercy by God for acknowledging our own sins, repenting and sincerely trying to sin no more.

of analysis and understanding of the context creates meaningful use of data. Analytics is after all only a tool. Like a hammer, it can be used for good, for self or for evil. It is all in the hand and heart of the carpenter.

STEPHANIE THOMPSON
Online Comment

Interchurch Family

“One in Spirit,” by Gregory Hillis (9/21), really spoke to our family’s experience of Christianity. I am a cradle Catholic, and my wife was raised Presbyterian. We met while working on an Indian reservation in the 1970s. As the local church was Catholic, I never realized my wife’s longing for a church more familiar to her upbringing. When we moved to Missouri, we attended the Catholic parish as a family, and she took the children to a Methodist church. It took me a long time, I must admit, to realize how harmful her support of me and my lack of support for her was.

For years I’ve done better supporting my wife, and we generally attend the Catholic

Those hoping for big changes in the church are not hoping for mercy, because that already exists. They are hoping the church will declare that sin does not exist and they can go on living their lives as they please.

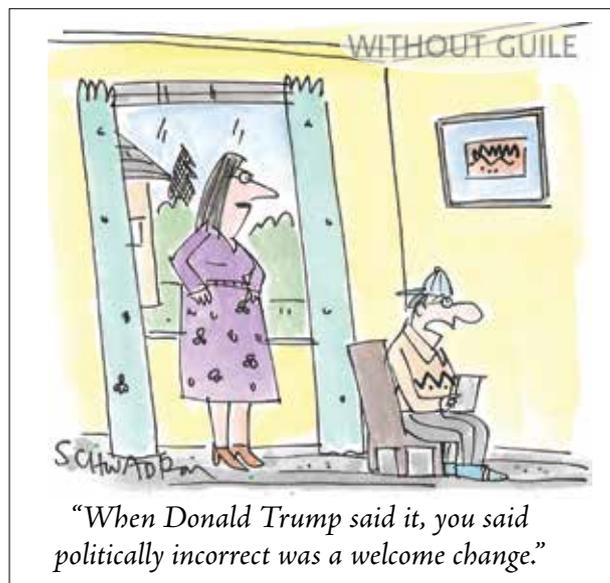
TIM CONSTANTINO

I have been a canon lawyer for 30 years and have always found great comfort in the last canon of the code: the salvation of souls is the highest law. This pope is taking us in the right direction. Mercy is at the heart of the Gospel and mercy must be at the heart of canon law.

JAMES J. FLAHERTY

service on Saturday and the Methodist service on Sunday. Our children have developed their own beliefs. Though they were baptized Catholic and went for 12 years to Catholic schools, they are less motivated to regularly attend church than we have prayed for. We became an interchurch family at the outset of our life together. We (especially me) stumbled trying to share together and with our children our unique Christian perspectives. There has been so much gained by both of us in seeing the beauty of Christian expression from the other’s eyes.

DENNIS J. DOYLE
DeSoto, Mo.



CARTOON: HARLEY SCHWADRON

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Bishops Join New Momentum For Reduced Incarceration

‘It’s a moment of sanity.’ That’s how Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami characterized a confluence of mid-October events promoting criminal justice reform in the United States.

On Oct. 21 a new campaign urging reduced incarceration was launched by a surprising source, the group Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime and Incarceration, a new association of more than 130 of the nation’s police chiefs and other top law enforcement officials. In Washington on Oct. 22, President Obama passionately endorsed efforts to reform the U.S. criminal justice system during an hourlong panel discussion with many of those same law enforcement officials, and on the same day a congressional subcommittee cleared the Sentencing Reform and Corrections bill for a vote in the U.S. Senate.

That measure includes a reduction in mandatory minimum prison sentences for low-level drug offenders, allows federal judges more flexibility in sentencing and calls for limits on the use of solitary confinement for juveniles in federal facilities. The act’s impact on mandatory minimums for inmates convicted in federal courts would be retroactive, so some federal inmates now serving time could see their sentences reduced.

The legislation was endorsed by Archbishop Wenski on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in a letter to Congress with Donna Markham, O.P., president and chief executive officer of Catholic Charities USA. “We welcome this modest bipartisan first step to reform our nation’s broken criminal justice system,” the two Catholic leaders wrote on Oct. 19.

The U.S. bishops have been “enthusiastically behind this,” the archbishop told *America* on Oct. 22, “and we are very pleased to see both Republicans and Democrats getting behind it.”

Archbishop Wenski argues that it is high time for the nation to take a more critical look at the economic and social impact of its decades of tough-on-crime policies, noting that with 2.2 million people incarcerated, there are more U.S. citizens and residents per capita currently behind bars than were jailed in the old Soviet Union.

“Prisons are being treated as de facto mental health hospitals,” he said.

The archbishop called that a very expensive and inhumane way to treat mental illness. Prisons are overcrowded and rates of incarceration are breaking up families and communities, he said, adding that they have been especially hard on African-American families and neighborhoods.

The national situation “cries out for some correction,” the archbishop said.

Though the outlook for the passage of even this measured reform bill is far from sure, Archbishop Wenski said, “The best thing about this particular proposal, so far anyway, is that it’s got broad bipartisan support.”

Criminal justice reform, he suggests, could represent a breakthrough for a Congress that has given little evidence it can address the nation’s biggest challenges. “If you want to do something to break down the paralysis in Washington and in Congress,” Archbishop Wenski said, “this would

A BLESSING BEHIND BARS. Pope Francis visits the Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility in Philadelphia on Sept. 27.



be a significant issue to do it on.”

Restoring a sane approach to criminal justice, the archbishop acknowledged, will not happen unless states join the federal government in re-evaluating the fairness and reasonableness of state-level sentencing policies. “But the federal government and Congress can lead the way,” he said, especially if they begin to apply reform conditions to disbursements of federal cash to the states’ criminal justice systems. He does not think, given the rising costs of incarceration, that reform will be a hard sell at the local level.

“If we can’t persuade them with the humanitarian argument, maybe they’ll hear the practical” appeal, he said. The United States spends an estimated \$80 billion a year on incarceration. That means each U.S. resident is paying about \$260 per year on corrections, a figure way up from the \$77 per person in 1980.

KEVIN CLARKE



SYNOD ON FAMILY

An Opening For Mercy?

“Today is a time of mercy!” This was the parting message Pope Francis gave to the 270 synod fathers from some 120 countries at the closing Mass for the meeting of the Synod of Bishops on the family in St Peter’s Basilica on Oct. 25.

He has made this same declaration several times since his election as pope on March 13, 2013, but it took on special significance on this Sunday, the day after the synod approved by a two-thirds majority a final document centered on the theme of mercy.

While reaffirming traditional church doctrine on marriage and the family, as expected, the synod significantly closed no doors, despite a

strong push to do so. Instead it cleared the way for Pope Francis to respond to the synod’s unanswered questions in a future magisterial text.

The approval of this document has greatly strengthened the hand of Pope Francis in his effort to build a church whose “first duty,” as he said in his speech after the vote, “is not to hand down condemnations or anathemas, but to proclaim God’s mercy, to call to conversion and to lead all men and women to salvation in the Lord.”

He said this synod experience “made us better realize that the true defenders of doctrine are not those who uphold its letter, but its spirit; not ideas but people; not formulas, but the gratuitousness of God’s love and forgiveness.”

The approved text is “a document of consensus,” Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Austria told the press in a briefing at the Vatican before the synod voted. That is already an achievement, given the hard discussions during the three-week assembly.

The most heated discussion in the synod revolved around one theme: the controversial question of whether Catholics who have divorced and civilly remarried could under certain circumstances receive Communion. A number of synod fathers sought to exclude this possibility completely from the text, but in the end they failed.

“Discernment” is the key word to understand the synod’s approach to this question, Cardinal Schönborn told the press. He said the synod gives “great attention” to their situation, which is so diversified that “there is no black and white answer, no simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’” as some insisted; instead “it’s

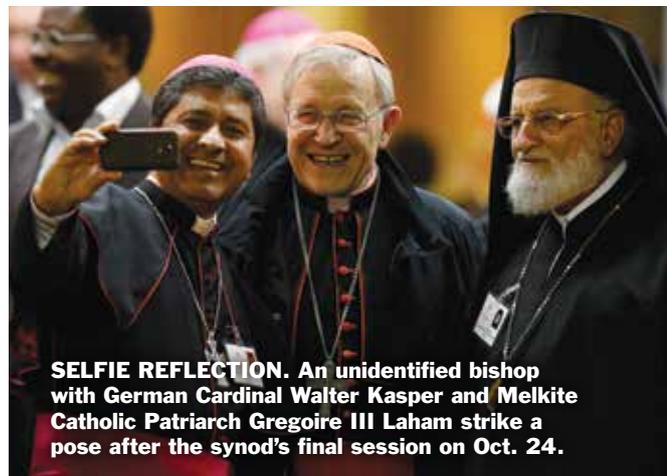
necessary to discern in each case.”

In his closing speech to the synod, Pope Francis hit hard at those who sought to hinder his efforts to get the church to reach out in a merciful and tender way to wounded families. He began by saying what the synod was not. “It was not about settling all the issues having to do with the family,” nor was it about “finding exhaustive solutions for all the difficulties and uncertainties which challenge and threaten the family.”

Instead, it was about seeing the difficulties and uncertainties facing families “in the light of faith, carefully studying them and confronting them fearlessly, without burying our heads in the sand.” The synod was “about listening to and making heard the voices of the families” and their pastors.

During the past three weeks, he said, “different opinions” were freely expressed at the synod but “at times, unfortunately, not in entirely well-meaning ways.” In any case, he said, all that happened during the synod “certainly led to a rich and lively dialogue” and offered the world “a vivid image of a church which does not simply ‘rubberstamp,’ but draws from the sources of her faith living waters to refresh parched hearts.”

GERARD O’CONNELL



SELFIE REFLECTION. An unidentified bishop with German Cardinal Walter Kasper and Melkite Catholic Patriarch Gregoire III Laham strike a pose after the synod’s final session on Oct. 24.

Border Crisis

While all eyes are on the continuing drama of Syrian migrants at the borders of Europe, a representative from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops was in Washington on Oct. 21 reminding Congress that the United States has a similar humanitarian crisis unfolding at its southern border. “Children and families are facing life-threatening violence and refugee situations and are falling prey to human smuggling and trafficking to escape,” said Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Tex. “While the volume of unaccompanied children and families arriving into the United States has decreased from last year,” he said, “the numbers are still high and the protection needs for these children and families are as apparent and important as ever.” The nation’s bishops believe that the migration of unaccompanied children and families is a “humanitarian and international protection situation” that must be viewed regionally, he said in testimony before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

Peacemaking In Central Africa

Religious leaders in the Central African Republic have predicted that the pope’s upcoming visit could reconcile opposing factions, three years after a Muslim-led rebellion plunged the country into civil war. “This will be a key event for all Central Africans, whatever their religious affiliations,” said Imam Omar Kobine Layama, president of the Islamic Council, on Oct. 22. “We’re hoping the Holy Father will bring a clear message about the unity of believers, interfaith dialogue, human rights and peace, which could really liberate us and help rebuild social links the various armed groups have destroyed.” Pope Francis will visit the capital, Bangui,

NEWS BRIEFS

Visiting with Syrian refugees near the Macedonian border on Oct. 19, **Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle** of Manila, Philippines, president of Caritas Internationalis, wondered why European powers could not make the continuing exodus “easier” on people who “already have escaped horrible, horrible experiences.” • Police in the St. Louis area are stepping up patrols and trying to develop a profile for a suspect in as many as **seven fires outside churches** in predominantly black neighborhoods since Oct. 8. • Federico Lombardi, S.J., the Vatican spokesman, said an Italian newspaper’s claims about the **pope’s health** were “entirely unfounded,” adding on Oct. 21 that the news report was “a serious act of irresponsibility.” • **Basic principles of human dignity** are being violated repeatedly in the Middle East as conflict continues, particularly in Syria and Iraq, but also in Jerusalem and other areas of the Holy Land, said the members of the Synod of Bishops on the family in a statement released on Oct. 24. • Accusations of physical, psychological and sexual abuse by leaders of Sodalitium Christianae Vitae, a Catholic movement founded in Peru in the 1970s, led the group’s current leadership on Oct. 18 to issue a communique **asking forgiveness** and to pledge an internal investigation.



Cardinal Tagle with Refugees

on Nov. 29-30, after visiting Kenya and Uganda. Included in his itinerary is a meeting with Muslims in the city’s central Koudoukou mosque. The imam said Muslim leaders had asked Pope Francis to call on rebel groups to give up their weapons after U.N.-sponsored disarmament efforts had failed “to get the message across.”

Hindu Extremism

Mohammad Akhlaq, a Muslim, was murdered on Sept. 28 by a mob of Hindus angered by reports that he had eaten beef, in Dadri, India. The incident “should not be considered a spontaneous act of isolated violence, but planned barbarism by persons who enjoy impunity.” That’s the opinion of Cedric Prakesh, S.J., who spoke of increasing intolerance in India, recall-

ing the series of episodes of violence against Christian and Muslim minorities. According to Father Prakesh, who runs the Prashant Centre in Ahmedabad, in the State of Gujarat, India’s ruling Baratiya Janata Party cannot abandon extremist Hindu groups, its allies in a strategy which “presents the other face of the same alignment, one hard-line and the other more liberal. He said, “Everyone knows that practically nothing will happen to the perpetrators of these atrocious crimes,” recalling the slaughter in Gujarat in 2002. “This form of intolerance is now seen as the main current all over the country.” Father Prakesh fears the “destruction of multiculturalism, pluralism, tolerance, respect for diversity, values which are the heritage of our land.”

From CNS, RNS and other sources.

'Brexit' Begins With a Whimper

The shot, meant to be heard round Europe, was muffled. The opening salvos have now been fired in the campaign for another referendum to be held in Britain, but they were far from deafening.

We have had recent experience of a constitutional referendum, on independence for Scotland, when all were astonished at the level of voter engagement and turnout. This time the proposed referendum is about whether the United Kingdom should remain in the European Union or leave it: the so-called Brexit. This vote will be a straightforward binary choice; so for each option an official campaign grouping was recently formed, and each began to make an initial pitch to a so-far unimpressed electorate. It feels dull already.

Opinions are as strong as interest is weak. Some British views on Europe are so entrenched that even a multi-megaton explosion would not shift them. One gets the sense that for quite a few of us, the European question is deeply connected to the problem, as some see it, of immigration. Syllogistically expressed, it goes like this: Unrestricted (as some have convinced themselves) immigration is bad; immigrants come from, or at least through, Europe; therefore Europe is bad. There has been a surge of good will, as elsewhere in Western Europe, toward the great numbers of refugees in recent months, but how long that benevolence might last is less certain. Furthermore, not everybody shares it.

The lack of interest most likely is

linked to the lack of a date for the referendum. We don't really have a year yet for the vote, let alone a month or a day. We do know that it will happen in the lifetime of this Parliament, because Prime Minister Cameron's ruling Conservatives made this a clear electoral promise. The best we can project for now is that it will take place before the end of 2017.

Advance warning: This could all

The British voting public's perception of Europe remains unenthusiastic at best.

get very confusing. In these early days of the campaign, it appears that *yes* means the wish for Britain to leave the European Union, whereas *no* expresses the desire for it to remain. But both sides in the campaign would like to use the word *yes* if they can because, amazingly, they have found that the word sounds more positive in publicity than *no*. The risk is that *yes* could be understood by some voters to mean "yes to Europe" rather than "no to Europe"—if you are still following me. And vice versa. Or perhaps not.

The "no" side, advocating continuing British membership in the European Union, announced themselves with a campaign title that immediately caused hilarity. The abbreviation for Britain Stronger in Europe is B.S.E.—the same acronym used for bovine spongiform encephalitis, or mad cow disease, which hit Britain some years back with tragic consequences for a number of people here.

At the time, some latent xenophobia or at least anti-European sentiment got aroused, as there were allegations that only beef imported from Europe carried the infection. This was then countered by bans by many European countries on beef exported from Britain. Those advocating Brexit have formed into two groups, "Vote Leave" and "Leave. EU." Each group won endorsement from the U.K. Independence Party leader, Nigel Farage, whose party failed to gain a predicted significant number of seats at the most recent U.K. general election, despite taking a large share of the popular vote.

It is too early to tell what will become the main battle lines in the campaign. The voting public's perception of Europe remains unenthusiastic at best. Next to nobody nowadays remembers the genesis of the European Union, which began from a desire to avoid any repetition of the 20th century's two catastrophic wars. That simply does not matter to Europeans anymore. The threat to peace and stability is perceived to come from elsewhere; intra-European armed conflict is unimaginable.

Still less is there any awareness of the roots in Catholic social doctrine, like the notions of solidarity and subsidiarity that animated such early 1950s advocates of a united Europe as Robert Schuman, who was deeply influenced by Leo XIII and Pius XII. Not only are such values almost invisible in what the European Union has become, but neither do they speak much to today's thoroughly secularized society. Perhaps if these less extrinsic values were now heard again, European neuralgia and ennui might dissipate, and the looming, lengthy debate might provide inspiration.

DAVID STEWART



The Federal Mystique

It's been more than four years and 100 lawsuits since the federal government's Department of Health and Human Services first proposed requiring religious institutions to include "free" contraception and early abortifacients in their health insurance coverage.

Only God (and the Government Accountability Office) know how much this administration has spent on this crusade. Almost certainly more than it would take to provide contraception to every woman and girl affected by its mandate.

Because it appears that the Supreme Court is about to write the concluding chapter to this story, it's a good time to reflect upon the controversy and distinguish between what is at stake *legally* and what is at stake *culturally*. The latter is rarely considered.

If you read the briefs and opinions thus far produced in the lawsuits you will see two prominent legal questions. First, whether it is a "substantial burden" on religion—sufficient to trigger the Religious Freedom Restoration Act—to require religious institutions to communicate to their insurance providers that they must attach free contraceptives and early abortifacients to their health insurance plans. The government contends that the state gets to decide what does and does not burden religion; religions counter that the substance of religious conscientious objection is a theological matter outside governmental competence.

Second, if a court finds that the mandate burdens religion, RFRA re-

quires it to decide whether the government can demonstrate a "compelling interest" in forcing these employers to insure for these drugs and devices. On the evidence, the government should fail this test. In its hundreds of briefs, it has never been able to show that the middle-class women and girls affected by the mandate (remember that poor women already get billions in free contraception) need free contraception for their health. I have read and analyzed every study the government has cited and relevant studies they have omitted. The former are either completely inapposite, incomplete or unwilling to draw the conclusions the government cites them for. The latter indicate that the government's case is fatally flawed. Furthermore, not only do women fail to rank free contraception on their lists of "top 10 things women want," but they can regularly be found complaining about the side effects of hormonal contraceptives, suing manufacturers or lamenting the government's mistaking sex-divorced-from-kids for a women's agenda.

Obviously, the legal effects of the mandate cases are important for the future of religious freedom. What is too little considered, however, is their cultural significance. In its briefs, and even more in its public messaging, the state continually claims that free contraception is synonymous with women's freedom. Perhaps the low points were presidential campaign postcards urging women to "Vote like your lady parts depend on it! Because they kinda do!" and Colorado's health exchange ads featuring a young woman saying: "OMG He's

Hot! Hope he's as easy to get as this birth control." And who can forget the federal government's histrionic "war on women" rhetoric?

Religious employers are insisting only that the state allow the survival of competing visions of what promotes women's well-being in the realm of sexuality. Could it possibly be the case—as the government claims—that it is better for every woman in America that there be no institutions left standing who hold that sex has weight largely because it is the place where every human being begins? And that the place where every human being begins—his or her family structure—is so very, very determinative of the chances in life a person will have?

At a time when The Washington Post editorial section is worried

that women are suffering because of a lost understanding of what sex even means, when *Vanity Fair* asks whether we have begun the Dating Apocalypse (instant sex but no relationship), when the chairwoman of the Federal Reserve can write that contraception changes the mating market to women's disadvantage—how could it possibly be true that the government should forbid other voices considering the welfare of women and children?

Whether or not you like the Catholic Church's position on contraception doesn't matter. The question is whether the state will leave standing any voice but its own on the question whether divorcing sex even from the *thought* of children is good for sex, good for women or good for children.

The state
claims free
contracep-
tion is
synonymous
with
women's
freedom.

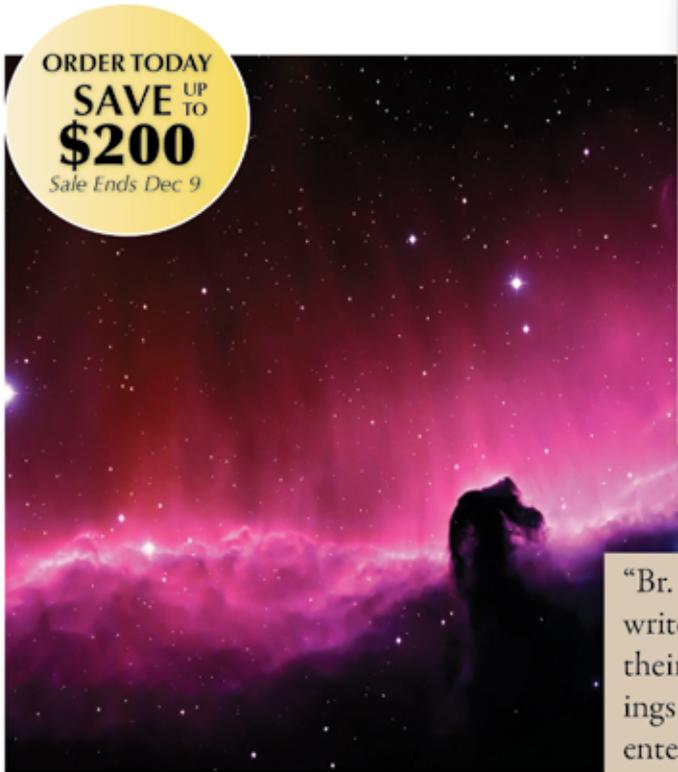
HELEN ALVARÉ is a professor of law at George Mason University, where she teaches law and religion and family law. She is also a consultant to the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

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WHAT I LEARNED
FROM MUSLIMS
ABOUT GOD

Called to Prayer

BY PATRICK J. RYAN

Five times a day in Muslim urban centers around the world, the call to worship (*adhan*), chanted by muezzins of greater or lesser skill, echoes through the streets. Public address systems attached to the minarets of local mosques magnify the sound. I have listened to those words many times since I went to live and work in West Africa 50 years ago. I have heard them over the years since then in the Middle East and North Africa: Morocco, Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Turkey. From a seaside mosque in Tunisia in 1970, I heard the call to worship late one afternoon, but the muezzin seemed to be repeating one phrase over and over again. It then dawned on me that there was no muezzin at all; the needle had become stuck in the groove of a vinyl record. I doubt a similar mosque in Tunisia today, a country more religious now than it was back then, would leave the invitation to worship to be broadcast by a machine.

What the first two words of the call to worship evoke is a whole approach to God, one from which I as a Catholic and a Jesuit have learned a great deal over the past five decades. The translations of the call to worship I have seen in various scholarly and journalistic publications strike me as inadequate to convey the deepest significance of the invitation issued.

GOD IS GREATER.
Muslims celebrating
Eid al-Fitr, which marks
the end of the month
of Ramadan, in Madrid,
Spain.

PATRICK J. RYAN, S.J., *the McGinley Professor of Religion and Society at Fordham University in New York, lived and worked in Muslim settings in West Africa for 26 years.*

Let me render the Arabic myself, in all its repetitiveness, inspired in part by the skillful translation of Michael Sells of the University of Chicago. I give the basic call minus certain variations for the time of day or the sectarian affiliation of particular mosques:

God is greater than anything!
 I testify: no god, only God!
 I testify: no god, only God!
 I testify: Muhammad God's messenger!
 I testify: Muhammad God's messenger!
 Attend to worship!
 Attend to worship!
 Attend to flourishing!
 Attend to flourishing!
 God is greater than anything!
 God is greater than anything!
 No god, only God!

What I have rendered in English as "God is greater than anything!" is the justly famous short exclamation of praise for God that devout Muslims throughout the world utter many times daily, whether in liturgical settings or less formally. These two words in Arabic are usually referred to as

the *takbir*, the magnifying of God: *Allahu akbar*. The phrase is commonly translated as "God is greatest" or even (incorrectly) as "God is great," but I prefer the translation "God is greater than anything!" In Semitic languages the borders between comparative and superlative are blurred. Modern-day paranoia has propagated the notion that this verbal magnifying of God is foreboding or even threatening, suggestive of a declaration of militant jihad. But the *takbir* issues no threat; it can even claim respectable parallels in the Hebrew Bible, like the account of David's liturgical praise of God's magnificence uttered in the presence of the Lord: "You are great, O Lord God; for there is no one like you, and there is no God besides you" (2 Sm 7:22). The New Testament similarly puts such words of praise in the mouth of the Virgin Mary visiting her kinswoman, Elizabeth: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Lk 1:46-47).

Akbar and *takbir* as words in Arabic both derive from the triconsonantal root *K-B-R*, signifying greatness; in these forms they imply more than ordinary greatness, in fact the most exalted greatness, an attribute of God alone. Surprisingly, the phrase *Allahu akbar* never appears in the Quran, and the verbal noun *takbir* occurs only once, although related verbs do occur, if rarely. The cry *Allahu akbar* and verbs related to *takbir* suggest that those to whom they are addressed must proclaim God's unsurpassable transcendence, God's utter differentness from anyone merely human

or anything that is only created. Thus one of the 114 basic segments of the Quran, the Surah of the Night Journey, ends with such a resounding proclamation of God's otherness: "Say: 'Praise be to God Who has taken no child. No partner exists for Him in majesty, nor has He any kinsman as his lowly dependent. Magnify Him magnificently!'" (Quran 17:111). Not only is the Incarnation, understood much too physically, criticized in this passage, but also, and perhaps more appositely, pagan Arab devotion to daughters ascribed to God as well as any other form of *shirk*, a term in Arabic that points to partnering God with what is less than God.

There are many other short prayers, not unlike the *takbir*, in Muslim liturgical and individual devotional practice, usually described as acts of recollection of God. But use of the *takbir* outnumbers all the other acts of recollection; it accompanies moments of exaltation and moments of desolation alike. In the shortest of the five daily services of Muslim worship, a series of two cycles of rit-

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ual action (standing, bowing, prostrating), the *takbir* occurs 11 times in the call to worship and its responses as well as in the worship itself. In a worship of three cycles it occurs 17 times; in a worship of four cycles it occurs 22 times. When meat is slaughtered, the *takbir* is uttered. When battle begins or a victory is won, the unsurpassable greatness of God is invoked with the *takbir*. The medieval scholar and mystic Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111) prescribes three utterances of the *takbir* when the new moon of any lunar month is sighted. The simple funeral service of Muslims is characterized as a worship in which the *takbir* occurs four times. The famous 1966 film of Gillo Pontecorvo, "The Battle of Algiers," captures some of the awe the *takbir* evokes as the Algerian prisoners of the French colonial forces, witnessing one of their comrades being led out to execution, send that cry to God echoing throughout the prison.

The Name of God

The equivalent of these acts of recollection in the Western Christian tradition is called either an "aspiration" or an "ejaculation," the latter term comparing such short prayers to javelin thrusts aimed at heaven. In his letter to Proba (written in 412), Augustine attributed the practice of such prayerful javelin thrusts to monks of the Egyptian desert wishing to assure through brevity the intensity of their concentration on God, "so that wide-awake and sharp attention, which is necessary for anyone who prays, may not fade away over lon-

ger periods of prayer."

Certain famous aspirations derive from the New Testament itself. The unique Aramaic name with which Jesus addressed God as his father, *Abba* (Mk 14:36), seems to have been passed on to Paul, who thought of the ability to use that intimate name for God as a gift of God's Spirit for the faithful: "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal 4: 6). This term of direct address used by Jesus in addressing his heavenly father lives on in Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer: "Father, hallowed be your name" (Lk 11:2). Another liturgical and private aspiration in Aramaic, spoken in the name of the church, was preserved by Paul in the conclusion to the First Letter to the Corinthians: *Maran atha* ("Our Lord, come!"; 1 Cor 16:22). A somewhat longer aspiration, the Jesus Prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner"), has been much revered in the hesychastic traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy and has transported countless people to the throne of God. It even helped to focus the lives of J. D. Salinger's fictional siblings, Franny and Zooey Glass.

To utter the words *Allahu akbar* is to praise in a brief and intense form God's limitless greatness, the utter transcendence of God. Like *Abba* and *Maran atha*, the two words of the *takbir* can serve as an almost quintessential summary of the Islamic doctrine of God. Properly understood, God exceeds all comparison (great, greater, greatest). God far exceeds us, eludes our grasp, draws us toward God but

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never sates us, never submits to our petty imaginings. Any god that we could grasp completely would be nothing but an idol, not God who utterly transcends us and yet graciously discloses the divine selfhood to us, unveiling and yet still veiling the divine reality.

Jews symbolize this utter transcendence of God by verbal avoidance of the name disclosed by God to Moses in the burning bush, "I am who I am" (Ex 3:14), substituting instead the word "Lord" (*Adonai*). In spoken Hebrew, the Orthodox prefer to use *Ha-Shem*, "the Name," to denote the name of God or even *Ha-Maqom*, a mysterious term apparently meaning "the Place" but actually meaning something much less tangible: "God is the world's place, but the world is not God's place," to use the eloquent rendering of my long-term friend Rabbi Daniel Polish.

Some Muslims are almost as careless as some Jews and Christians in their invocation of God: *W'Allahi* ("By God!") competes for inanity with "Oh my God!" in American teen-speak, reduced to "OMG!" on Twitter. But formal Muslim speech generally exhibits a sense of the privilege involved in being able to pronounce the divine name. Fourteen times in the Quran and innumerable times in subsequent Muslim writing, the name of God or a pronoun referring to God is followed by a parenthetic single verb, *ta'ala*, best understood as another example of *dhikr*: "Be He exalted!" Usage of a verb based on the same three-consonant root ('-L-W) sig-

nifies that the one just referred to utterly transcends us and is not to be degraded to the rank of just one of many gods, many mundane realities about which we might speak. The Quran puts it pungently: "The Judgment by God is coming—do not try to hasten it! Be He exalted above anything with which they may partner God!" (Quran 16:1).

Someone told me recently that she is angry with God because her brother died young in a car accident, angry enough not to pray any more. We all have reasons why we might be tempted to be angry with God, to hate God. No one of us gets a perfect hand to play in the game of life. The problem with such anger with God, such rejection of God, is that the God with whom we are enraged is not God at all, only a small-g god, and a god of very small things indeed. Like any idol, a small-g god may seem to be an insurance policy against family tragedy, personal loss and the disappointments of life, a bit like a rabbit's food suspended from a rear-view mirror. That god is not God with a capital G.

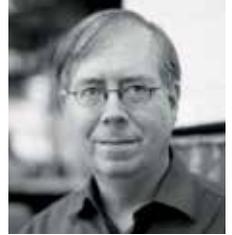
Muslims have taught me that lesson over and over again whenever I hear them exclaim the first words of the call to worship: *Allahu akbar!* The First Epistle of John puts it almost as succinctly: "God is greater than our hearts" (1 Jn 3:20). When I am tempted to rely on my own strengths, when I wonder how I can do more than I can really manage, the *takbir* brings me back to letting God be God, and God alone—"Be He exalted!"



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Defining Neediness

Most people agree that the government should help the needy. That consensus falls apart only when we realize that we must *define* the needy. Not being able to feed one's family certainly qualifies, but how about not having a car?

Does a lack of access to the Internet constitute neediness? A few years ago, social media started filling up with outraged complaints about "Obama phones," a supposedly new program in which welfare recipients got free cell-phones. (This was actually an update of an old program that helped subsidize phone service for low-income households.) We can easily think of food and clothing as necessities, but we can be stingier about providing "modern conveniences" to all, even though it can be impossible to find and then keep a job these days without being constantly tethered to the Internet.

A more recent controversy involved 25,000 public-housing tenants whose incomes had risen above the level that qualified them for government subsidies. Some federal housing officials initially defended keeping upwardly mobile tenants in public housing. One wrote, "There are positive social benefits from having families with varying income levels residing in the same property."

But the political consensus is that families who move up the ladder must be evicted. They are no longer needy, and they don't deserve a break on their rent. But if they become homeowners, they can get a tax break in the form of the mortgage interest deduction. By the rules of American politics, any

family that discovers homeownership to be more expensive than anticipated is considered highly needy.

Is someone needy because he or she cannot afford to attend college? Lots of Americans think so, including President Obama and Hillary Clinton, the presidential candidate who said, "College is supposed to help people achieve their dreams" as she announced a \$350 billion plan to help reduce tuition—and, thus, student debt—at public colleges and universities.

We would quickly run out of compassion in this world if we tried giving it to everyone who couldn't achieve their dreams. And while a college degree greatly widens employment opportunities, a massive program to reduce student-loan debt may not be the most direct or efficient way to lift people out of poverty.

Even a confirmed big-government proponent like the former labor secretary Robert Reich is dubious about the value of such an effort, writing on his blog: "America clings to the conceit that four years of college are necessary for everyone, and looks down its nose at people who don't have college degrees. This has to stop. Young people need an alternative. That alternative should be a world-class system of vocational-technical education."

Mrs. Clinton is unlikely to suggest shifting resources to trade schools, nor are many other presidential candidates. The most reliable voters and campaign contributors are in the middle class, and they are not looking for alternatives to a college education.

Holding down tuition costs and student-loan debt would certainly benefit many Americans who are seeking a way out of poverty, but this would be a spillover (trickle-down?) effect. The political objective is to help people who express a need (lower college costs) but are not necessarily the neediest in our society.

The neediest have trouble just showing up on political radar, and, to be fair, government policies are not the only way to provide them with assistance. This fall, Danny Meyer, a New York restaurant owner, banned tipping at his restaurants, instead paying staff entirely through menu prices, and his private-sector innovation has a lot to do with relative neediness.

Not being able to feed one's family certainly qualifies.

Mr. Meyer told *The New York Times* that over the past three decades the income for waitstaff has gone up by 200 percent while the income for kitchen workers has risen by only 25 percent. Adam Gopnik of *The New Yorker* explained, "All the big tippers buying overpriced Bordeaux and giving the waiter twenty per cent, in other words, is of no help to the kid in the kitchen chopping onions for (relative) pennies." The visibly needy—the tired-looking, perspiring waitstaff running around to please customers—get our notice, while those toiling in the back for less pay don't cross our minds.

Helping the needy should be a major issue as we head toward the next election. Our biases about who qualifies as needy should also be part of that debate.

ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

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Gospel for a Middle Class

Can Christians live comfortably and follow Jesus?

BY STEPHANIE PACHECO

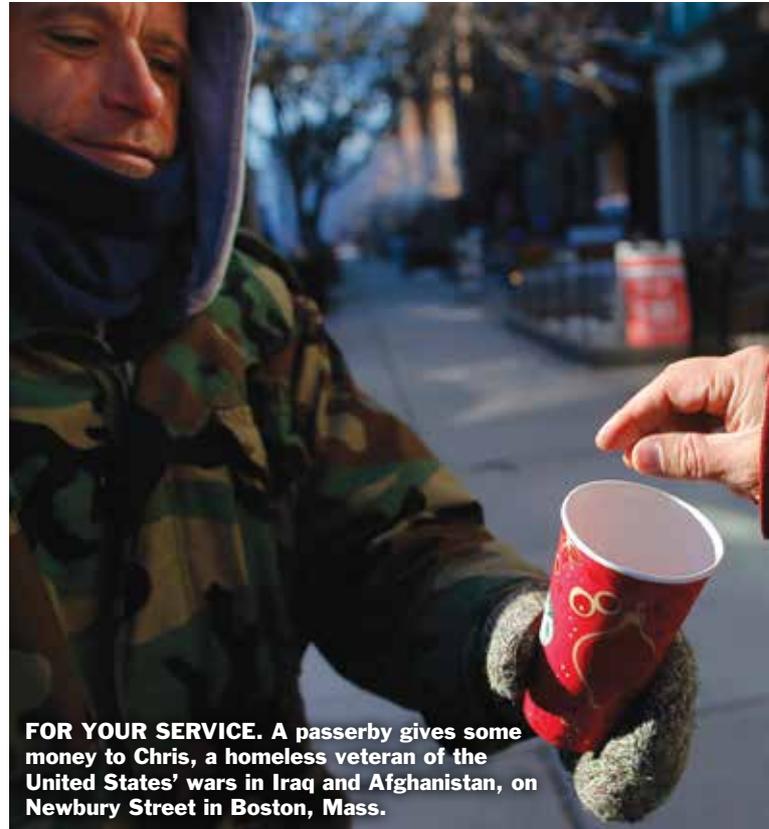
I have always admired St. Francis, free as he was from ties to place or possessions, and I have liked the idea of giving up all but the most basic material goods. But when my husband and I had our first child, we bought a house. It is a simple rambler, but even so, as our little one grew and a little sister joined him, we began to acquire more and more “stuff.” A minivan began to seem necessary. My love for these little people and the urge to care for them responsibly seemed, on the one hand, to be the fulfillment of a deep calling but, on the other hand, to be pulling me further and further away from the ideal Christian life I saw in the examples of St. Francis, Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and the hidden saints among us living simply and serving others.

Indeed, the Gospels are filled with Jesus’ warnings about material wealth. In Matthew’s Gospel (19:23), Christ counsels: “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.” These words reasonably strike fear into the heart of the well-to-do listener. Even those who live relatively comfortable middle-class lives might be inclined to ask: “Is it possible to live in the United States with a full pantry and still be true to the radical call of Jesus?” Can we answer this question in a way that does not water down Jesus’ message or promote what is often called the “prosperity gospel,” the idea that God rewards the faithful with earthly wealth?

Consider the parable of the barn in Lk 12:16-20. After a man stores up many years’ worth of grain and crops in a big, new barn he is very pleased, content to “take life easy, drink and be merry.” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with those who store up things for themselves but are not rich toward God.” To middle-class modes of thinking, which many of us presuppose, storing up supplies and food is a sound decision any responsible person would make. Does this parable mean we ought not prepare for the future at all, have no savings account, no pantry or freezer?

Likewise in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his disciples not to worry about what they will eat, drink or wear.

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FOR YOUR SERVICE. A passerby gives some money to Chris, a homeless veteran of the United States’ wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, on Newbury Street in Boston, Mass.

The Father feeds the birds of the air, he says; “Are you not much more valuable than they?” (Mt 6:26). Jesus advises us to not to be overly concerned with food or clothing because God knows we need these things. Does this mean we have only to glance around us and pick up our food for the day?

Again, all those who live comfortable lives in the United States could be the rich young man who asks Jesus what he must do to gain eternal life and is saddened by the answer he receives: “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven” (Mt 19:21). Yes, we too can “keep the Commandments” easily enough. But are we willing to give everything to God, to let go of our money, our plans, our status? Are we willing to wave farewell to these things joyfully, out of love?

Answering yes to any of these questions would seriously challenge the way most Americans live today. If God demands all our worldly possessions, it seems that only the materially impoverished have any chance at reaching the kingdom. It is certainly true that the poor often live in a very

PHOTO: REUTERS/BRIAN SNYDER

radical way, on hope and faith alone, without vast preoccupation or preparation.

Living for Today

In her classic book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, Ruby K. Payne describes the “hidden rules” that govern life



Can those in the middle class hear this good news as clearly and live the Gospel as authentically as the poor?

and even patterns of thinking among different economic classes. She considers time a central principle for organizing one’s life and notes that for those in poverty the “present is more important. Decisions [are] made for [the] moment [and are] based on feelings or survival.” For the middle class the “future is most important. Decisions [are] made against future ramifications.” And for the wealthy, “traditions and history are most important.” Reading this, the Sermon on the Mount springs to mind: “Do not worry about your life.” Many of the materially poor do not have the luxury of dwelling on the past or planning for the future; their lives are lived in the present.

Russell Saltzman, a Lutheran pastor in Riverside, Mo., describes this reality in his blog post “The Poor Are Not Middle Class” (9/11/14) on the website of First Things. To the poor and homeless who come to the church door he often gives small, precise amounts of money, just what the recipients have calculated they need for the next meal, the next medical prescription, the next tank of gas. “I en-

countered people, families, living in and out of motels,” he writes, “...watching the daily rate with absolutely no means of paying it and needing, I remember this, exactly \$32.48 for one more night.” In his account, we see folks following the Gospel in a sense; they are not storing a penny up in barns for tomorrow.

There is indeed a wide subset of the population who lives for the present day with little to no concern for future planning. Jesus Christ truly came to ones such as these. In Lk 4:18, Jesus cites the words of Isaiah’s prophecy and establishes himself as their fulfillment: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.”

Whose Good News?

A nagging question then arises: Can those in the middle class hear this good news as clearly and live the Gospel as authentically as the poor? As with many big questions, the answer is nuanced.

The Gospel is indeed a message of liberation from earthly suffering aimed at all people, especially those who suffer the most. This naturally comes as welcome news for men and women living with the hardships of poverty. In contrast, for those in the middle class this present life may be so good that they see little need to hope for something beyond what this world has to offer. A “good life” can easily become centered on accumulating more goods, which can distract from eternal realities.

Still, Jesus’ message is for everyone, and everyone includes homeowners and wage earners. As St. John Paul II put it in his encyclical “Centesimus Annus”: “It is not wrong to want to live better; what is wrong is a style of life, which is presumed to be better when it is directed toward ‘having’ rather than ‘being’” (No. 36). To put it another way, having a full refrigerator and dresser is not itself problematic. What ails the Christian life is instead an avaricious desire that places ultimate value in possessions, status and acquiring. Ultimate value stems from God alone.

Christ teaches us about the proper ordering of values later in the Sermon on the Mount. Directly following the exhortation “Do not worry,” Jesus says: “For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt 6:32-34). The key here is in that last sentence. God must come first in our lives, but he knows we need worldly goods, so he provides them as well. Regarding this passage, St. Augustine says in his “Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount” (2.16.53):

When he said that the one is to be sought first, Jesus clearly intimates that the other is to be sought later—

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not that it is to be sought at a later time but that it is to be sought as a thing of secondary importance.

Jesus is not saying that we ought not to work to supply our human needs of food, clothing and shelter. That would be irresponsible if we have the means to provide for ourselves and others. What it means is that our efforts to meet our physical needs must be subordinated to our highest good, which, Christ tells us, is to seek God's kingdom. When that is our primary motivation and ordering principle, everything else will fall into its rightful place.

It would be easy here to misread this as a version of the prosperity gospel answer, "If you're a good Christian, God will reward you with worldly wealth." But that would be twisting the message. In concrete terms, if the Christian is truly following God, he or she will be able to discern how much food and savings he or she needs and will also be able to steward those resources for the good of God's kingdom.

Worldly goods are not dismissed—they are just not the highest good, and they should not be treated as such. The man who built and filled the barn thought that he was securing all the welfare that mattered in his life. It was not necessarily wrong of him to reap and store crops; his error was that he neglected his eternal soul because he thought that bread alone was enough. He was not "rich with God."

Preparing for the future is not bad or un-Christian. The church, the living body of Christ, comprises members of all walks of life, and those with more resources are poised precisely to help those with less. Though, "the poor will be with us always," we can and should continue to work in the present to alleviate human suffering in this world. When those living comfortable middle-class lives ask themselves honestly about how well they are stewarding their resources and are willing to humbly serve their families, communities and God, then the Gospel can dwell as naturally with them as it dwells with the poor. **A**

Was Virgil Catholic?

An old book teaches some new literary lessons.

BY DAVID G. BONAGURA JR.

Theodor Haecker's *Virgil, Father of the West* (1934), once so influential that T. S. Eliot based an entire lecture upon it, has now passed its 80th anniversary almost without notice. Yet, as if the Fates commanded it, the recent publication of *The Last Trojan Hero* by the renowned Virgilian scholar Philip Hardie swept the dust off Haecker's great essay on the Roman poet's seminal contributions to Western civilization. Theodor Haecker, Mr. Hardie points out, was the first to apply Tertullian's epithet *anima naturaliter Christiana*, "a soul naturally Christian," to Virgil. The audacity of this claim—not even Dante made it for his beloved master—is in itself enough to invite a fresh look at this provocatively titled work. Doing so suggests something more than measuring the seismic changes that have occurred in literary studies since the interbellum period. It suggests how the past can heal the wounds of the present.

Virgil's poems, especially the *Aeneid*, the national epic of the ancient Romans, became instant classics and school texts upon their initial publication. As the Roman Empire adopted Christianity, schools continued to read Virgil to teach both grammar and morals. In his *Confessions* St. Augustine recalls that on reading the *Aeneid* as a schoolboy, he delighted in the sack of Troy and wept over Dido's suicide. In Philip Hardie's retelling of Virgil's reception over two millennia, Lactantius (d. 320) was the first to read Virgil's "Fourth Eclogue," with its promise of a boy who would bring forth a golden race and rule the world in peace, as a prophecy of Christ's birth. Even the emperor Constantine would come to share this reading and presented it to the Council of Nicaea in 325. Since then, this 63-line "Messianic

Eclogue" has inspired analyses and reflections through the centuries, including a commentary by Pope Benedict XVI, who, in his *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, describes Virgil's mysterious prediction as an expression of "the archetypal images of human hope, which emerge at times of crisis and expectation."

Theodor Haecker understood Virgil as an "adventist pagan," a sort of pre-incarnational apostle to the Gentiles—much like St. Paul after the resurrection. In the "Fourth Eclogue," in particular, "Virgil was not a prophet as Isaiah was," yet the poet "gave form to a myth which had direct kinship with the angels, patriarchs, and prophets. And he did so at the moment not he but Providence had determined" because he "was chosen to foreshadow the coming of Christ." Hence in Mr. Haecker's estimation, "Virgil is the only pagan who takes rank with the Jewish and Christian prophets," for "in the last hour before the fullness of time he fulfilled the

**"Building of a City," from *Vergilius Vaticanus*,
The Aeneid of Virgil, Book I, ca. 4th century.**



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measure of what was good in the ancient paganism.”

To grasp this argument, we must understand that Virgil’s public stature and reception by the public have fluctuated over the centuries. Whereas the Renaissance viewed Virgil as the apotheosis of poetry, Theodor Haecker saw him as the divinely ordained bridge between classical antiquity and the greater Christian West: “The essential unity and continuity of the human and natural foundations of the Greco-Roman and the Christian occident are laid bare to us at the critical moment in the person and work of a great poet.” Haecker urges that we also read Virgil in light of the bridge’s destination; for “without some reference to the oncoming faith,” we simply miss too much. The greatest storyteller must be evaluated in light of the greatest story ever told.

Reading Virgil’s work in light of Advent still makes for striking reading. Why is it, Haecker asks, that Rome, civilized conqueror that she was, surrendered to Christianity? It is Virgil who provided nature’s final preparation for the coming of grace. One personage who facilitated this final tilling of the soil is Virgil’s character Aeneas, the archetype of the ideal Roman. Aeneas above all is a man distinguished by *pietas*, which for the Romans meant filial devotion toward the gods and toward family. Despite the disasters he endures and despite his desire to remain in Carthage with the woman he loves, Aeneas anticipates the Christian virtue of humility by yielding to the will of the gods. Aeneas, an exile driven by fate in search of a new land, is best compared not to Odysseus but to Abraham, who also left “the homeland of his heart, and for the sake of the faith and obedience to an inscrutable will, a *fatum*.” Aeneas was the model of *Romanitas*, yet, as Virgil recognized, “the true leader is not he who makes himself leader, but he who is called and dedicated to that end by Fate.”

This fate, a major theme of the *Aeneid* and of the classical world, takes on new import in light of revelation. Virgil, Haecker declares, never defines the mystery that is fate because “he does not know; he is too great and too honest to pretend to know more than he does.” Etymologically, fate comes from *fatum*, meaning “a thing spoken, an utterance”—but, he asks, “by whom and to whom?” For the poet Homer, fate was an impersonal force that not even Zeus could control or thwart. Writing some seven centuries later, Virgil makes “fate identical with the chief of its gods, with Jupiter,” who “is at once the utterer and the utterance.” For Haecker this conception of fate “is the summit and perfection of Virgil’s theological ideas,” for it points to “the divine



“Aeneas in Dido’s Cave,” from *Vergilius Romanus*, *The Aeneid* of Virgil, Book IV, ca. 5th century.

Person who not merely gives effect to the utterance, the Fate, but who Himself utters it.” This divine person, the coming Advent would reveal, is the Word, the eternal utterance of God the Father.

Now, since Haecker, a World War, a Cold War and a cultural revolution have intervened; and few—if anyone—in the academy would share this adventist reading of Virgil. Today the ideas that dominate schools and universities proclaim tolerance for all groups and perspectives, yet many have not been especially welcoming of Christianity or biblically informed opinions. “The West” has lost its once vaunted place among other civilizations, and for some the word *father* has become a metonym for sexism. Virgil’s stature within the academy has decreased because of his imperialism (“You, Roman, remember to rule the people with power, to impose the rule of peace, to spare the conquered and to crush the proud”) and his cold treatment of women (“Woman is ever fickle and changeable”).

This attitude toward Virgil is an example of the way reading literature in schools and universities has changed since Theodor Haecker. No longer is literature believed to convey truths about the human condition. Instead, since the universal existence of objective truth is no longer valid; literature can do no more than express the prejudices and opinions of a particular group at a particular time. Too often, it seems, classics are pushed aside in favor of works devoted to more current topics or causes. Imagination is accordingly improv-

erished when literature serves only a fractured view of reality and of human beings, the result of an astonishingly aggressive relativism that denies the whole and exalts the part.

Theodor Haecker's adventist thesis, stark challenge to postmodernity that it is, offers two benefits for us today. First, it reminds us of the breadth and depth of the Catholic intellectual tradition which, because of its insistence upon the existence of objective truth that can be known by all, still possesses vitality and virtue that can open minds and hearts. Truth abides—and compels. For this reason alone, a “Catholic reading” of Virgil—or of other authors—should have its own legitimate place in the multicultural university. Such a reading raises fundamental questions about human existence and reminds us of the power inherent within literature itself.

Inevitably we are led to consider whether the Catholic reading has more to offer than just another perspective, which brings us to the second benefit of Haecker's reading of Virgil, a reading that we, too, would do well to imitate. It recalls that in the midst of our diverse backgrounds and viewpoints there exists an underlying human nature that we all share. “The immense differences which exist between man and man in time and space are infinitely less than the essential likeness, in the domain of being, between man and man.” For Haecker, and for us, the limits of the self and the limits of politics, which all too often pit us in “turf wars” against each other, can be transcended by the healing and restorative powers of literature. This essential insight illuminates much about our current sickness and explains our need for change, even rebirth.

This approach to literature invites us to look outward again, not just to the heavens but to the heavens' maker. The common secular narrative about Christianity and tradition—that they stifle and oppress, that humans freed from these constrictions are unlimited—is precisely backward, and the uninspired state of contemporary literary studies is the proof. Haecker was right: “A humanism devoid of a theology cannot stand.” Secular humanism, by banishing God, by ignoring humans' spiritual needs and by denying the existence of truth, has limited the scope of human potential and achievement to the effects of bias and ethnicity. We are called to see our stories in light of the whole, but to do so we first “must see that man realizes his wholeness only in the fact that he

is wholly creature and cries out unceasingly for his Creator when He is not near.”

In this approach to literature, Virgil above all deserves a fresh look. It is time to move away from the oppressor-victim binary narrative that cannot see beyond the limits of our own age and again see Virgil as a humanist who, in Tennyson's verse, “seest Universal Nature moved by Universal Mind.” Virgil foreshadows the Christian humanist, who begins from the premise that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. When we read Virgil as a humanist in this sense, suddenly many avenues worth exploring in his corpus reopen, including themes of nature, work, obligation, service, friendship, courage, love and loss.

St. Ignatius Loyola counseled those whom he directed to find God in all things. Theodor Haecker's essay reminds us that not only can God be quite present even in Virgil and pagan literature but also that everything “must stand in some relationship, whether favorable or inimical, to the greatest aspiration of mankind, which is to find salvation.” Through the *Aeneid* in particular, Virgil expresses this deeply human aspiration in a manner that has not yet been surpassed. Virgil may not have been Catholic in the strict sense, but he was certainly *catholic*. He sang of the universal characteristics that make human beings who they are. It is no wonder, then, that this *anima naturaliter Christiana* has earned his title of Father of the West. ▲



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Manna in the Desert

Hillsong brings religion to a new generation.

BY MICHAEL CHARBONEAU

It is not yet 10 a.m. on a Sunday morning, but already two long lines of people trail down 34th Street from the Manhattan Center building in New York City. They chat amongst themselves while a corps of volunteers passes out cookies and coffee, welcoming everyone and making small talk. Many of the people in line are young professionals or students, but a few middle-aged adults also mingle among the crowd. Ethnically speaking, the group assembled here is a model of diversity. There are blacks, whites, Latinos and Asians, people from as close by as New York University and as far away as Denmark. Suddenly the doors open, and everyone shuffles inside. We ascend seven flights of stairs and emerge into a large ballroom, where the crowd fans out to find seats.

After the long wait outside, the sensory experience of the ballroom is overwhelming. An empty stage bathed in colored light commands the room from one end. Music blares from the speakers, and the pulsing bass throbs in my chest and mixes with the din from a crowd that now numbers well over 1,000 people. Giant video screens flank the stage on either side, featuring clips of young people dancing, skateboarding and surfing, along with messages like “He is using us all.” That’s He with a capital “h,” also known as God. Until I read that, I almost forgot I was going to church.

The crowd around me at the Manhattan Center has come to worship, and this is their Sunday service. This is Hillsong. The church has made a name for itself by packing auditoriums around the world with young urban worshipers and, through its record label, Hillsong Music Australia, creating a music empire that spans the globe.

Like any great empire, however, Hillsong had humble beginnings. It started in Australia with Bobbie and Brian Houston, who founded the church in 1983 as a Pentecostal Sunday night outreach with 45 members. Seven years later, however, their congregation had grown enough to fill a large concert hall, and by 1999 the church was holding conferences in the Sydney Opera House. Meanwhile, its reach expanded far beyond Australia, and satellite churches opened in cities like London, Paris and eventually New York and Los Angeles.

It is no accident that the Sunday services at Hillsong

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New York bear a strong resemblance to a night out at the club. The church has won hearts and minds—and made a fortune—from its music. At the Manhattan Center ballroom, I find my seat on the balcony overlooking the stage just as the house band starts to play. The crowd rises to its feet and sings along, hands raised, voices joined in unison. The lyrics are projected onto a screen above the band, but nobody seems to need any hints. After about a half hour of music, the pastor of Hillsong Copenhagen, a guest for this weekend, strides onstage to deliver a sermon. His speaking style is engaging and fluid, and he talks to the crowd as if they are a group of friends lounging in his living room. He expounds on the importance of having a relationship with Jesus, as opposed to following the dogmatic strictures of organized religion—ideas that are key tenets in Hillsong’s brand of Christianity.

The reactions of those around me vary. A few people thumb through Facebook on their phones; most listen attentively. Daniel, a young culinary student from Dallas, scribbles notes in a small notebook, hanging on the pastor’s every word. The feel-good vibes continue during the group activity after the sermon, which involves hugging your neighbor. After an exhortation to sign up for next year’s three-day Hillsong conference—individual tickets go for \$179—and another song, the service ends, and I join the crowd filing back down the stairs. As we burst into the autumn sunlight, I’m surprised to see 34th Street looks exactly as I left it: two long lines of people fill the sidewalk, attended by volunteers with cookies and coffee, already waiting for the next service.

Searching for Zion

Long before he ever set foot inside one of its services, José Matos got his first taste of Hillsong from a CD. I meet Mr. Matos in a café on the campus of Fordham University in New York, from which he graduated in May. Tall with tanned skin and short, wiry black hair, he moved to the city from Venezuela to attend school. He grew up as a Protestant in what he calls “a very religious family” and went to Catholic schools. He also grew up with Hillsong’s music. Despite being thousands of miles away from the closest Hillsong outpost, easy access to its music gave Matos an introduction to the church. “I actually knew a lot about them,” he says.

Hillsong United is the church’s main group. Their last album, 2013’s critically acclaimed “Zion,” ranks as their biggest



ON THIS ROCK. Hillsong United concert in Budapest.

success so far. It went gold in Australia and hit the number one spot on the U.S. Billboard Christian chart. The album's sound is expansive yet comfortably mid-tempo, and it supports lyrics that center around finding hope and strength in God. Growing up, Mr. Matos developed a deep appreciation for the positive messages in United's music. "At any point in my life, any situation, every day I can just listen to it," he says, adding that it gives him the "strength" he needs to overcome life's challenges.

José Matos is not alone—Hillsong has mastered the practice of gaining followers through its music. Its record label releases music for three other groups besides United, and it has also put out albums featuring the most popular Hillsong tracks sung in nine different languages. It is difficult to overstate the influence this music wields. Michael Paulson writes in a recent *New York Times* article that Hillsong's bands "pervade the Christian charts and have transformed the Christian songbook." To date, Hillsong has sold more than 16 million albums globally. According to its 2012 annual report, over 25 million people sing the church's songs in services around the world each week. Their concerts are a big draw as well. Last winter United headlined the Winter Jam Tour through the United States, where thousands of fans filled stadiums normally reserved for Beyoncé or professional sports teams.

The inside of a Hillsong church is a clear reflection of the marketing savvy that turned the Houston's quaint Sunday

outreach into a global empire. Ed Stetzer, author of multiple books on modern Christianity and a pastor himself, notes that "in sensory stimulation, Hillsong's productions rival any other contemporary form of entertainment." If Christian values are what's most important for the church, production values are a very close second.

A Different Scale

When José Matos moved to New York, a friend of his brought him to his first Hillsong service, and he attended services there 10 more times over the next year and a half. The intensity of the experience impressed him on his first visit. Recalling his initial reactions, he notes that the style of worship at Hillsong was "very enthusiastic, very passionate" and that the music was "the most attractive thing" about the service. "That is one of the reasons I really like Hillsong," he says.

Placing the church in a wider religious context helps shed light on what exactly makes Hillsong so unusual. Philip Francis is a professor of religious studies at Manhattan College in New York; he specializes in the relationship between religion and aesthetics, including music. By creating audiovisual feasts for Sunday worship and marketing its music around the globe, Hillsong has gained a great deal of attention in the past few years. Professor Francis, however, argues that the church's aesthetics spring from traditional Pentecostalism, where music has always been central to worship. "It's not categorically different from other Pentecostal

traditions,” he says. “I think it’s just on a different scale.”

But it’s the kind of people Hillsong attracts that really makes the church unique. Its satellite outposts are thriving in major Western cities, locales with a notoriously harsh climate for religion. A 2012 WIN-Gallup poll reported a “notable decline across the globe in self-description as being religious.” Take France, for example, where Hillsong operates two churches: 34 percent of French respondents identified as not religious, and well over a quarter identified as convinced atheists. Since 2005, average religiosity across surveyed countries has dropped 9 percent. The trend is even stronger in Australia, Hillsong’s home turf. In his overview of the church, Stetzer points out that nearly one in three Australians do not identify with a religion.

“Having 30,000 people on a weekend in Dallas is noteworthy,” he writes. “Having 30,000 people in Australia was inconceivable—until Hillsong.”

A Personal Connection

Unearthing the source of Hillsong’s widespread appeal requires deeper sleuthing. Pope Francis says that Pentecostalism may hold a particular attraction for young Western urbanites. In his view, the key factor is that Pentecostalism is “more visceral, more emotional” than other religious traditions. Whereas the Catholic services I grew up with focused on tradition and ritual, Pentecostal churches emphasize feeling the power of the Holy Spirit and showing it through outward signs of religious ecstasy, like singing and speaking in tongues. For Pentecostals, the goal is to cultivate a fervent personal love for Jesus. “And if I was going to say that there was one reason that it’s so powerfully spread, I would say it’s that,” Francis says.

Pentecostalism’s focus on a personal connection with the divine may appeal specifically to millennials, who live in an interconnected world thanks to smartphones and social media. Even as secularism increases in many places around the globe, Pentecostalism might even have the power to win over atheists, who sometimes are included among the larger category of the nones, people who mark “none” as their religious affiliation on surveys. “This kind of movement can appeal to the ‘nones’ in that it’s a little counter to that [secular] trend within a generation,” Francis says.

Evangelical religions like Pentecostalism also have a strong appeal for some Catholics. According to a Pew Forum poll in 2011, about half of all those who have left the Catholic Church later joined a Protestant church, and of those, most joined an evangelical church. Seventy-four percent of those who joined evangelical churches say they felt “called by God” to do so. Their motives for switching are highly personal—they sought a distinct relationship between themselves and God, a relationship they felt they could not fully pursue in a Catholic Church. In an evangelical church, however, that

relationship takes on new levels of importance.

For Matos and others who have made Hillsong a part of their lives, all this is true to varying degrees. In their words, however, the appeal boils down to the message. Like the lyrics in its music, the themes in Hillsong’s services are straightforward but compelling: the redeeming power of Jesus’ love and finding strength in God. The theology here is pretty “vanilla”; what is important is that it is tailored to Hillsong’s unique audience. Speaking about the church’s success in *The Christian Post*, Hillsong’s New York pastor, Carl Lentz, remarks: “I think the way that Hillsong does worship is appealing to people. And the way we teach the practicality of this Gospel is helpful to people.” For him and the other Hillsong pastors, making the Gospel practical means applying it directly to the lives of their flocks. At Hillsong services, congregants hear how Jesus understands their lives and the problems they face—the breakup, the lost job, the cancer diagnosis—and are given Bible interpretations to prove it. The direct, personal approach has caught the attention of millennials and more than a few adults worldwide.

“They base their message on the Bible, of course,” Matos says. “They just try to break out the points according to what the Bible says, but put it in a way that all people can understand it.”

“The messages are very relevant,” says a regular at Hillsong. She appreciates the way Lentz connects faith to the lives of his flock. “He talks about things that everyone can relate to.”

Its relevance is perhaps Hillsong’s most striking aspect, and its most important lesson for the Catholic Church. Even amid the afterglow of the Second Vatican Council and the dynamism of Pope Francis, the church has a long way to go before it can meet millennials on their terms. But Hillsong has found a winning formula. By making faith personal and palatable, it has gained a following that is large, young and growing.

A Real Presence

The sky has long been dark outside the cafe where Matos and I are chatting, and we sit now amid empty tables. Our conversation has turned to his own faith, which he explains to me between bites of pizza. He seems to have taken the Hillsong message to heart: God has a very real presence in his life. He prays frequently and notes that “at least once a day” he takes time to “really think about God.” I press him for more detail, and his eyes light up as if he were describing a prized possession. Matos explains how his faith provides him with comfort, hope and a way of relieving stress. He takes another bite of pizza and pauses, deep in thought. Then, he looks at me and sums up his faith life very simply, in a way that would make any pastor proud: “I just leave it all to God.”

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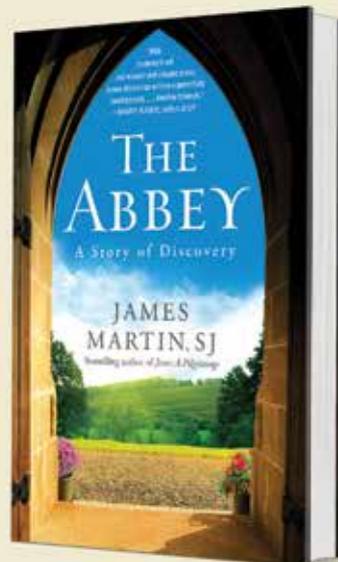
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FALL BOOKS 2 | JON M. SWEENEY

WOMEN WHO MADE THE MEN

THE LETTERS OF T. S. ELIOT, VOLUME 5: 1930-1931

By T. S. Eliot

Edited by Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden

Yale University Press. 928p \$85

THE COLLECTED LETTERS OF ROBINSON JEFFERS, WITH SELECTED LETTERS OF UNA JEFFERS, VOLUMES 2 AND 3

By Robinson Jeffers

Edited by James Karman

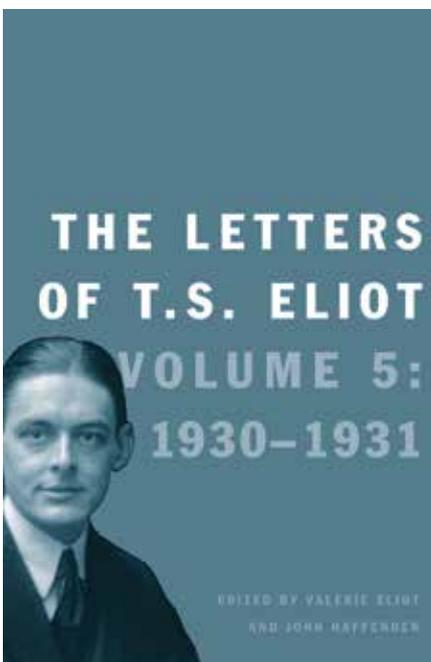
Stanford University Press. 1024p \$95

Bernard of Clairvaux once wrote to a friend, “being absent from you...I must satisfy myself with the second best alternative of a letter.” One rarely if ever writes an email in that sort of spirit. We have lost the kind of friendship sustained by epistolary contact—and no one under the age of 50 even knows what he or she is missing. For this reason alone, I find collections of letters worth close consideration; but this time, there is something more important to consider.

T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) and Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962) were, during the time these letters were written, the two most important American poets. They were exact contemporaries, and these volumes overlap nicely. Eliot’s letters are from 1930 and 1931 and Jeffers’s, in the first of the volumes considered here, date from 1931 to 1939.

Since the first appearance of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” Eliot has never gone out of style. He probably remains the most emulated poet in English, briefly eclipsed by Dylan

Thomas in the 1950s, then Seamus Heaney in the 1990s. Not so Jeffers; widely acclaimed in the 1930s—his editor James Karman tells us that the April 4, 1932, issue of *Time* featured Jeffers on the cover and called him “the most impressive poet the U.S. has yet produced”—he became an outspoken critic of U.S. participation in World War II and fell rapidly out of favor.



His reputation never recovered and he remains an enigma.

Jeffers self-published a collection, *Tamar and Other Poems*, in 1924, that shows a rugged, free-verse form he learned from Walt Whitman and never abandoned. The attention that book received quickly led to mainstream literary publishing success. As for the more familiar Eliot, his collections *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men* and *Ash Wednesday* were all published by 1930.

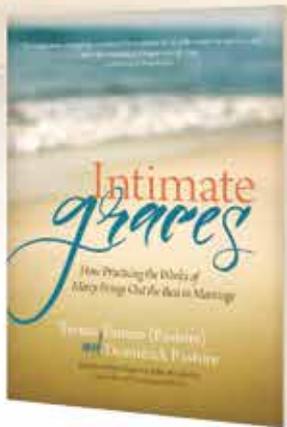
But most striking about these letters is how they demonstrate that each man’s reputation is incomplete without serious consideration of his wife. In different respects and to varying degrees, the wives of Eliot and Jeffers are the reason their literary reputations are what they are.

In Jeffers’s case, this extends to the actual writing of his correspondence. Una (his first and only wife) was Robinson’s mouthpiece more often than not. In *Letters Volume 2*, I counted 53 letters penned by Una to 47 by the poet among the first 100. This pattern continues throughout that volume. In *Letters 3*, one has to turn to the 15th letter to find one written by Robinson, and that then becomes the pattern. Una was not his secretary; she was writing from the household but also frequently as from the mind of her husband. In the 14 letters that open *Letters 3* (all from January to March 1940), Una gives news of her children to friends, critiques new work of a poet, describes attending a Good Friday service at the Carmel Mission (“extremely impressive.—But between ourselves, some of the Catholic manoeuvres are pretty hard for me to watch”) and expresses the isolationist doctrine that would fill her husband’s late poetry—before we ever hear him seeing anything. Even on occasions when Robinson wrote a letter himself, he would often pen mistakes of fact and Una would correct them by hand before mailing it.

Who, then, is the real Robinson Jeffers? Jeffers made his home by the sea in California with stones brought up the hill in his own wheelbarrow. In his rebellion against religion (he was the son of a biblical scholar-Presbyterian pastor), lone independence, asceticism of physical habits and love for the

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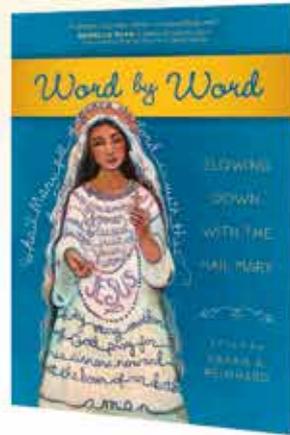
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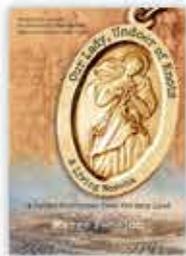
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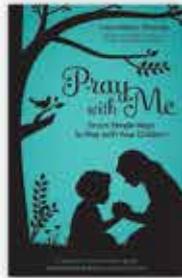
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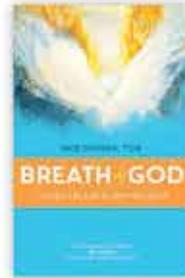
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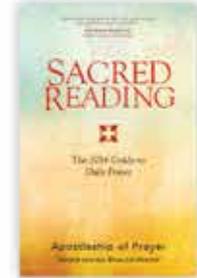
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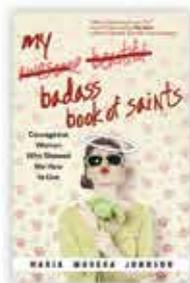
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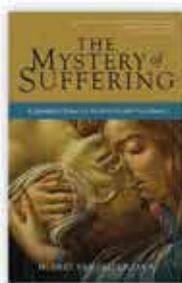
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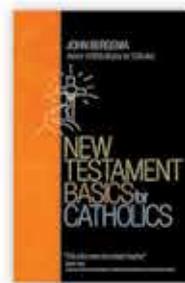
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American West, he was often compared to D. H. Lawrence. He admits his deficiency in letter-writing again and again. "I'm constitutionally unable," was a frequent complaint, and the letters usually demonstrate this. "Think of me as one of those friendly natural objects like a tree outside the window, that hasn't much means of communication but all it has is well intended," he penned to another poet in 1931. But most often, what Robinson writes, rather than Una, reveals a man who is uninteresting and uninterested in most of the world around him. Sometimes he and others label this a kind of mysticism. I would be less generous.

One wonders how he spent his time. Intensely solitary, he seems to usually be in his tower (literally: he built one and worked in it) thinking deeply while Una runs his world, trying not to bother him much. The great poet apparently lived to be mostly silent and to write his verse all alone. In early fall 1940, Una writes to a friend that she must refuse his offer of a review copy of his new book because Robinson hates to write reviews and between the poem he's working on and preparing for a one-hour reading that will take place two months later in New York City, he is simply too busy.

This is also, simultaneously, what can be attractive about Jeffers. Even in his abrupt letters, we occasionally glimpse the interior process and its potential beauty. He wrote to a friend, for instance, in early January 1938: "I'd like to be buried for six years under deep forest by a waterside, not think, not remember, know nothing, see nothing but darkness, hear nothing but the river running for six years and the long roots growing, and then be resurrected. How fresh things would look." Any writer (or anyone?) can relate to that in spades.

And there are moments when he does engage, usually with another writer who is analyzing his work, and it is startling, as in this instance from 1932:

"I think it is quite possible to 'fall in love outward' without hating inward. It seems to me the Jesus of the gospels, perhaps, and many mystics have done so. But it is hard if not impossible to make a story or poem about it...."

He was also able to write a heartfelt, long-form letter when arguing with his publisher out of delaying his new book beyond the following spring. He needed the income, and "because it seems to me the best thing I have written." When the publisher responded with gracious agreement, plus an advance against future royalties, Robinson wrote back, also kindly, "My recent letter seems to me to have been a little petulant."

The contrast with Eliot, in terms of industry, energy and mood, could not be greater. Eliot's letters are full of the details of work he loved, and he lived at the epicenter of a golden time in English literature, in the heart of the English-language's literary capital (London), writing daily to people like Leonard Woolf, E.

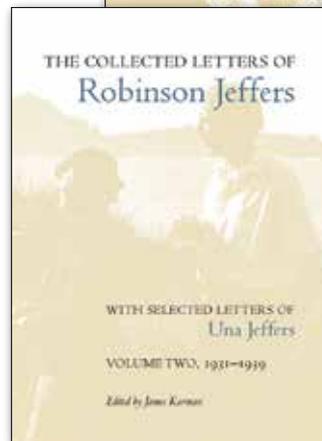
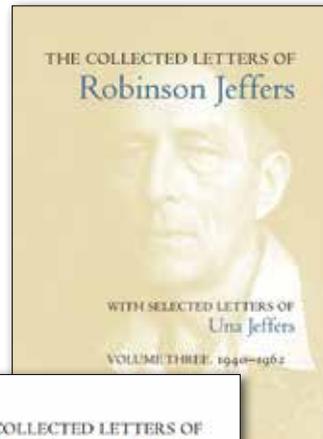
M. Forster, Clive Bell, Virginia Woolf, Stephen Spender, James Joyce and Ezra Pound. He was a director at the young, but already venerable, publishing firm of Faber & Faber as well as the editor of one of the great literary journals of the day, *The Criterion*. He was constantly encouraging, recruiting, promoting and critiquing the work of other writers—in his correspondence—and keeping up with writing essays, new poems and books of his own. He was also nursing and worrying about his first wife, Vivienne, who struggled throughout adulthood with

health problems and depression. Eliot would formally separate from her in 1933, and she was committed to an asylum by her brother five years later.

It is Eliot's second wife, Valerie (they married in 1957; she was 30, he was 68), the primary editor of all the volumes so far published of her husband's correspondence, who concerns us here. Valerie Eliot was devoted to Tom even before they wed. She read him as a teenager and was a secretary at Faber & Faber when they began dating. Once they married, Valerie's assistance went a long way toward making possible Tom's reputation as the most influential literary figure of the century. All of the volumes of his letters (this is the fifth in what are bound

to be 10) are astonishing for the breadth and depth of Valerie's scholarship. "Labor of love" doesn't begin to express it.

For instance, spanning pages 87 and 88 of this one, she provides a footnote of more than 600 words on the life, personality and career of one of her husband's colleagues at Faber, Frank Vigor Morley. F.V.M. would have earned an entry in the massive "Biographical Register" at the back had the letter been written to him, but since it only mentions him, this footnote. Valerie spent nearly half a century of full-time devotion and industry tracking down her late husband's correspondence, solving literary puzzles, purchasing letters at auction at great personal expense, finding those that she knew possessed material central to understanding his poems and various other writings and deci-





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phering his myriad relationships and avenues of interest and influence. As her co-editor writes in an essay about her work in the frontmatter to this volume, "The scale of Valerie's success in reconstituting the story of T. S. Eliot's life through his letters, which is in so many ways the history of modern literature and modern times, is seriously impressive." Had she not done this (she died in 2012 before this volume went to press), Eliot's reputation would be scanted.

Eliot was never able to thank his widow for what she did for his oeuvre. Jeffers, in contrast, outlived Una. He often used a line from William Wordsworth that Wordsworth wrote of his sister, Dorothy—"She gave me

eyes,—she gave me ears"—to describe Una. Una's partnership was essential to his work, not just his life, and theirs was really a joint authorship. In the preface to *Letters 3*, Karman quotes from an unpublished poem of Robinson's written after Una's death from cancer: "I used to write for you, and give you the poem / When it was written, and wait uneasily your verdict...but now, to whom?" For all of these reasons and more, these letter collections beg us to reconsider the authorship of both men.

JON M. SWEENEY is an author and critic. His books include *Inventing Hell*, *The Pope Who Quit*, optioned by HBO, and *When Saint Francis Saved the Church*, winner of a 2015 Catholic Press Association award, now in paperback.

RENE SANCHEZ

BREAKING STORIES

SEYMOUR HERSH, SCOOP ARTIST

By Robert Miraldi
Potomac Books. 448p \$34.95

In the fall of 1969, as the Vietnam War raged, America convulsed with political and cultural turmoil so searing that we still invoke much of it with just a few words.

Woodstock. Chappaquiddick. The Chicago 7.

One other term soon would overshadow them all: My Lai.

As the nation's press corps focused on the year's extraordinary events, one tenacious young reporter earning a mere \$8,000 a year had another untold story in his sights. His name was Seymour Hersh. He worked alone. And he was chasing a tip that U.S. soldiers had massacred hundreds of unarmed civilians in a Vietnam village.

The hunt led Hersh on an epic search for the Army lieutenant reputed to be at the center of the atrocity, William Calley. He was stationed at

the Army's sprawling Fort Benning base in Georgia. Hersh had no idea how to find him. Military officials were no help. But he refused to give up. After long days of dead ends, Hersh knocked on doors around the base for hours. Still no luck. Then he went to the extreme of standing in a parking lot, stopping cars and asking drivers if they knew Calley.

Finally, one officer agreed to talk, over drinks. A few rounds later, he introduced him to Calley, who agreed to an interview. Hersh had his shocking story. The nation's perception of the war in Vietnam would never be the same.

That remarkably relentless tale is among many bursting from the pages of Robert Miraldi's *Scoop Artist*, an illuminating biography of Hersh, who

is unquestionably one of the world's most important—and controversial—journalists of the past 50 years.

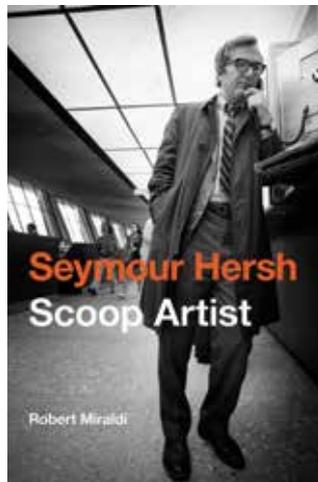
Miraldi, a longtime professor of journalism at the State University of New York, New Paltz, does exceptional work bringing Hersh to life as an archetypal character of his trade: his always-loosened tie, his round-the-clock calls to sources, his endless battles with aggravating editors as he fearlessly pursues the truth.

Even at the height of his fame, Hersh kept all his phone numbers listed publicly—ever ready to receive his next blockbuster tip. Then there's his astonishing work ethic: for his book on Henry Kissinger, Hersh conducted more than 1,000 interviews.

But *Scoop Artist* is not hagiography. With a critical eye, Miraldi also scrutinizes Hersh's signature reporting style, like his constant and at times questionable reliance on anonymous sources, which has been widely emulated in investigative journalism. He also portrays Hersh as at times a self-promoting egotist, hard-charging to the point of parody. This Hersh cravenly calls a Pulitzer Prize judge to probe whether he's going to win. He also refuses to cooperate with *The Columbia Journalism Review* when it dares to try to examine the accuracy of his work.

The roots of Hersh's pugnacity are on vivid display, too. Hersh, the son of Jewish immigrants, grew up on Chicago's tough South Side, flunked out of law school, bailed quickly from business school and worked as a drug-store clerk selling liquor to the likes of novelist Saul Bellow before stumbling into journalism.

One of the best parts of *Scoop Artist* is early in the book, as Miraldi





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shows Hersh rising as a reporting grunt through the romantic, rough-and-tumble world of Chicago journalism, roaming the streets and pounding out daily stories on deadline. He eventually finds his way to a job at the Associated Press in Washington, D.C., where he gets a taste of covering the Pentagon beat and national security issues. A short, strange detour into politics follows, as Hersh becomes a public-relations man for the insurgent 1968 presidential campaign of Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota—a stint that ended acrimoniously. Then Hersh shifts to the single-minded pursuit of uncovering secrets and deceit at the highest levels of government power, first as a prominent reporter for *The New York Times* through the 1970s (that ends in acrimony, too) and later for *The New Yorker*.

Incredibly, for decades, from his Pulitzer-Prize winning revelations about the Vietnam My Lai massacre to his exposure of the brutal Abu

Ghraib prison abuses of the Iraq War, Hersh's investigative reporting is at the center of almost every big national story. He stalks Nixon on Watergate, at times scooping the *Washington Post's* duo of Woodward and Bernstein, and for years he scorches Kissinger on Vietnam. He exhaustively exposes domestic and foreign abuses by the Central Intelligence Agency, and he probes the seamy underworld behind the regal glow of John F. Kennedy's Camelot.

Hersh's career is so compelling that it easily overcomes a few shortcomings in *Scoop Artist*. Miraldi sometimes awkwardly interrupts his narrative to note the perspective of scholars on Hersh's reporting, which is instructive but a tad too academic. The author's writing also occasionally drifts into cliché (Hersh and Calley, he writes, seemed "like oil and water") or the incessant use of the same phrasing, such as Hersh "smelling" yet another scoop or another Pulitzer.

True to form, it also appears that Hersh, now 78 and still a working journalist, never came around to fully cooperating with Miraldi. Maybe he's still too busy or just not the type to spend much time on self-reflection. Near the end of *Scoop Artist*, Hersh does offer brief and eloquent testimony about the need for the news business to hold the nation's leaders accountable.

"That's my soul," he says.

But it is left to Miraldi and others to assess Hersh's legacy, how it helped alter the course of American history and how it offers lessons—and cautions—to a next generation of journalists.

Never follow the pack. Never become the story. And always remain, in the words that the former *New York Times* editor Max Frankel uses to extol Hersh, "a reporter first of all."

RENE SANCHEZ is the editor of the *Star Tribune* in Minneapolis, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Local News in 2013.

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THE ETERNAL QUESTION

THE RANSOM OF THE SOUL Afterlife and Wealth in Early Western Christianity

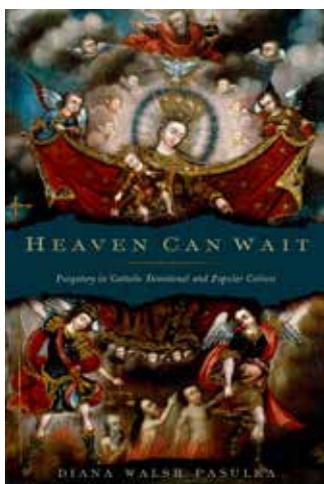
By Peter Brown
Harvard University Press. 288p \$24.95

HEAVEN CAN WAIT Purgatory in Catholic Devotional and Popular Culture

By Diana Walsh Pasulka
Oxford University Press. 224p \$29.95

If one of your dear friends is dying, what would you do to comfort him or her at the prospect of approaching death? Perhaps the last thing you would think of is writing a book, but that is precisely what Julian, bishop of Toledo, did. In A.D. 688, to help his dying friend Idalius, bishop of Barcelona, Julian decided to compose an anthology of the great writers of the Latin Church on the subject of the afterlife. Entitled *Prognosticon Futuri Saeculi (A Medical Report on the Future World)*, the three-part work, about 100-pages long and destined to become a best-seller in the Middle Ages, sets out to explain the origin of death and describe the three possible destinations of the soul after death—heaven, hell and the “purifying fire.” It is with this story that Peter Brown, an eminent historian of late antiquity, opens his book *The Ransom of the Soul: Afterlife and Wealth in Early Western Christianity*.

As is intimated by its subtitle, the book is not a study of patristic eschatology as such. Rather, adopting Prv 13:8 (“The ransom of the soul of a man is his wealth”) for the title of his book, Brown studies



the impact of the belief in the afterlife on the wealth of the early church, a topic he has broached in his hefty 760-page book *Through the Eye of the Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550*. The issue under consideration is twofold: First, how can the living help the dead who dwell in what Brown calls the “twilight zone”; and, second, what can the living do for themselves so as to avoid—or at least shorten—the stay in the twilight zone after their death. Obviously, those who have gone to heaven immediately after death, including the martyrs, as Cyprian (d. 258) has pointed out, do not need any help, and those who have gone to hell are beyond helping. But martyrs are the few and far between elite who enter into paradise immediately after death. The majority of Christians have to settle in a waiting period—what Tertullian (ca. 225) calls a *refrigerium interim*—a refreshing period of rest awaiting for the “Big Future of the Resurrection.”

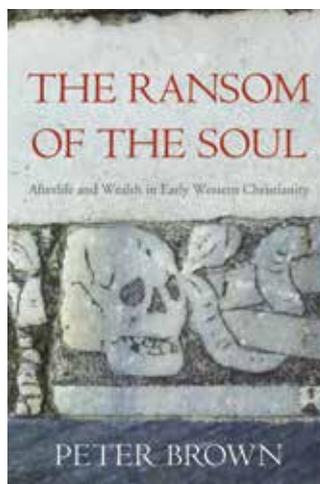
It is Augustine (354-430) who supplies the clearest categorization of types of eternal destiny with his threefold division of souls into the *valde boni* (the altogether good), the *valde mali* (the altogether bad) and the *non valde boni* (the not altogether good). (Augustine includes his mother Monica among this last group.) For the first group help

from the living is not needed; for the second it is impossible; for the third, it is necessary. But how can the living help souls of the third group? Augustine mentions three ways: prayer, remembering the dead during the Eucharist and almsgiving. Of course, the first two ways, while efficacious, do not bring wealth to the church, but the third does; and about how much and for what purposes Brown gives ample information throughout his book.

There is also another way in which the belief in the afterlife dramatically brought wealth to the church, this time by actions on behalf of not the dead in the twilight zone but the living themselves. Since the majority of Christians are the *non valde boni*, they need to ensure that they escape the twilight zone after death, or at least shorten their stay in it. This is done by “ransoming

the soul,” or transforming the wealth on earth into “a treasure in heaven,” a sort of celestial investment, which is achieved by giving things of monetary value to the church, and the more the safer, since it is rare if not impossible to bypass the twilight zone altogether, and the oftener the better, since we all sin daily. This kind of “almsgiving,” according to Augustine, can expiate sins. The wealth thus accumulated for the church is—in principle—used for the care of the poor, support for the clergy and the building and maintenance of churches.

In the fifth century, with the rise of monasticism in southern Gaul, especially at Lérins, and with the selection of bishops from the ranks of monks (for example, Honoratus of Arles, Hilary of Arles, Faustus of Riez and Caesarius of Arles), there was a strong emphasis on conversion and



public penance, made all the more urgent by the alleged imminent coming of the end of the world. The fear of hell and of the Last Judgment, which is much in evidence in the widespread “Apocalypse or Vision of Saint Paul” (“Visio Pauli”), acts as a powerful stimulus to repentance and, as a result, generous donation of wealth to the church. In the following century, the apocalyptic cast of mind was heightened by Gregory of Tours (538-94), who, like Salvian of Marseille (d. 470s) a century earlier, believed passionately in the “judgment in the here and now.” Gregory still holds that almsgiving to the poor is the best preparation for a happy afterlife; and those who appropriated church lands or withheld legacies made to the church were regularly denounced as, in an arresting phrase, *neccatores pauperum* (murderers of the poor).

Brown concludes his book with an epilogue on Columbanus (590-615), the Irish abbot who brought an ex-

tremely ascetic form of monasticism and the system of private confession to northern Gaul (Francia). Thanks to him, within a century there were over 100 monasteries and convents all over Francia. By the end of the seventh century, Brown notes, “many convents had endowments of up to 20,000 hectares of some of the richest and most intensely worked farmland in Europe.” There also arose a new kind of devotional literature about the afterlife narrating the “journeys of the soul” to the next world—precursors of today’s “near-death experiences”—during which the soul encounters not the proverbial soothing light at the end of the tunnel but demons and angels, who examine and determine in the minutest and most precise details its sins that have not been purged during its life on earth.

The most famous of these are *The Vision of Fursa*, set in distant Ireland, and *The Vision of Barontus*. For Brown, these theological, spiri-

tual, monastic and economic practices marked the end of late antiquity and the coming of the Middle Ages: “When the bond between the living and the dead, constantly cemented by the rituals of the church, became a cosmos of its own—a subject of deep preoccupation, the stuff of visions, and the object of regular prayers and donations of millions—then we can say, around 650 AD, that the ancient world truly died in Western Europe.”

This new world is laid out in Diana Walsh Pasulka’s book *Heaven Can Wait*, whose title is also that of a movie from 1978. It is, however, the subtitle that best reveals its approach: *Purgatory in Catholic Devotional and Popular Culture*. The operative word is *purgatory*. This term—with the attendant theology of sin (mortal and venial), penalty, purgatory as a space and punishment of the souls by means of physical pains, satisfaction, indulgences, devotions, prayers and Masses for the “holy souls” in purga-



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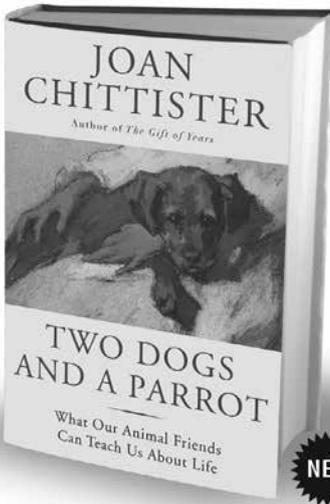
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tory, artistic representations, visions and private revelations by saints and sinners, reports of visits to purgatory and of apparitions of the souls in purgatory, privileged altars, holy sites, pilgrimages and lots and lots more of “Catholic Devotional and Popular Culture”—was not coined until the 12th century. Note that I say the term, not the beliefs and practices associated with it, since many of these are already found, and abundantly, as Brown has documented, in the first seven Christian centuries, especially the seventh.

Pasulka traces the loss of what has been called “material Christianity” in contemporary understanding of purgatory, that is, its reality as a physical space and its nature as physical punishment, and the eclipse of narratives of purgatory “featuring souls scorched by fire, suspended in blocks of ice, and engaged in epic battles with demons.” Her narrative begins with “when purgatory was a place on earth,” allegedly located on Saints Island and Station Island in Lough Derg, known as St. Patrick’s Purgatory, and the various devotional practices and pious literature surrounding it. It moves on with an account of the fate of Lough Derg and the development of medieval theology of purgatory, the loss of the “physicality” of purgatory and the emergence of a more spiritual interpretation of it as a “state,” “condition” or “process” of purification in Bishop John England, and the disappearance of the “sensible neighborhood to hell” in John Henry Newman and William Faber.

The last chapter, “The Ghosts of Vatican II,” documents the rise of the “Purgatory Apostolates”—especially by Susan Tassone—to revive the belief in purgatory as “a punitive and often physical place of punishment” in opposition to the view of St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI of purgatory as a nonspatial and noncorporeal process, which devotees of the Purgatory

Apostolates dismiss as “statements as individual theologians, not as popes.” *Heaven Can Wait* is a curious blend of historical scholarship (most of it, fortunately, already available), theological shoddiness (its tendentious interpretation of “Vatican II,” whatever they mean by this capacious term, adopted from the Purgatory Apostolates) and the bizarre. (Read Pasulka’s story of her listening to “Box of Rain” by the Grateful Dead and finding a skull-like shell on a beach and Tassone’s insinuation that Pasulka’s dead father “is there with you.”)

So “purgatory” or “purgation”? Far from being a *lis de verbo*, a distinction without a difference, the two terms represent radically different conceptions of God and the human person. To understand this point, let us return to the bishop of Hippo, whose notion of *non valde boni* plays a key role in the medieval formulation of the theology of “purgatory.” Augustine’s African

Christianity was awash with dreams and visions of the dead (Bishop Evodius’s reports of visions of his deceased young stenographer).

There were attempts to secure the protection of the saints by burying the dead near their tombs (Bishop Paulinus of Nola buried Cynegius near the shrine of St. Felix). Augustine was firmly convinced that the *non valde boni* need purgation (note the term!) by the *ignis purgatorius* (purging fire); but, as Brown carefully notes, “Augustine did not see purgation in terms of the pain that its fire might inflict, he saw it in terms of time.” As for dreams and visions of the dead, Augustine warns Evodius to be extremely careful, since there is no way to know “what distinguishes [from true visions] the visions of those who are deluded by error or impiety, as many events are described in them that are the same as those seen by pious and holy people.”

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As to the benefits of burial near the tombs of the saints, Augustine was blunt, as Brown summarizes his view: “Burial beside the saints did nothing whatsoever to aid the soul.” Finally, what is most important is that for Augustine and Gregory of Tours, devotion for the dead in the twilight zone is practiced primarily through helping the poor. Thus the rejection of the “physicality” of purgatory in favor of social concern is not, *pace* the ministers of the Purgatory Apostolates and perhaps Pasulka, an

invention of “Vatican II” or now of Pope Francis, but is deeply rooted in the Catholic tradition (which is not the same as “Catholic Devotional and Popular Culture”). So if you are on a tight budget, go with Brown’s book—its breath and depth of scholarship, judiciousness in theological judgment, verve and humor and elegance of style, not much in evidence in the other book, are worth its price.

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KENNETH R. HIMES

SKY WARS

SUDDEN JUSTICE America’s Secret Drone Wars

By Chris Woods
Oxford University Press. 416p \$27.95

Chris Woods claims there have been about 2,500 drone strikes carried out by the United States and Britain during a 12-year period. Approximately 1,900 of these attacks took place on the conventional battlefields of Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. The remaining number were carried out by U.S. Special Forces and the Central Intelligence Agency in Yemen, Somalia and, most significantly, Pakistan. It is these latter drone attacks that are the “secret” element of America’s counterterrorism strategy.

Woods is a British investigative journalist with particular expertise in armed conflict and national security issues. At one time he was senior producer of “Panorama,” a BBC show similar to PBS’s “Frontline” in this country. Woods also worked for a time with the London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism, an organization known for its research into civilian casualties resulting from drone strikes. That background is evident throughout the volume.

The book is an extensively re-

searched exercise in investigative journalism. There are more than 2,000 reference notes cited. A good number of these allude to “interview with author” and cite a place and date. Sometimes not even locale and date are supplied. This is because Woods interviewed numerous individuals who cannot speak on the record—former military, intelligence and political figures who must remain anonymous. There are, however, other interviews on the record as well as a trove of reports and documents from governmental and nongovernmental bodies. In addition, the author spent time in Yemen and Pakistan, including some of the most inhospitable areas for Westerners. The result is that Woods provides more background information on the development and practice of drone strikes than any other book with which I am familiar. At times, the amount of material is overwhelming—the acronyms, statistics, military jargon and dates abound. A bit more

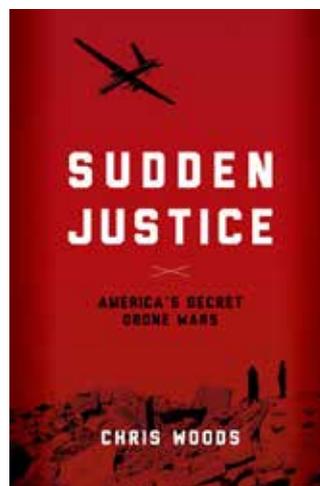
selectivity about what to include might have improved the presentation.

Chapter Two traces the development of drones, including the story of the brothers James and Linden Blue, owners of General Atomics, which produced both the Predator and Reaper drones. There is also background on Abe Karem, the “Moses of modern drones,” who designed the earliest prototypes. The narrative continues with the early use of drones in the Balkan conflict and their evolution from purely intelligence and surveillance aircraft to armed attack vehicles.

Middle chapters treat the use of drones in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen and Pakistan. I found Chapter Seven, on the Obama administration’s policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan, particularly well done, with a clear explanation of the differences between drone operations in the two locales. The material on “double-tap strikes” was also compelling. These are strikes targeted at first responders who rush to the scene of an initial attack. The Central Intelligence Agency apparently presumes that these rescuers are accomplices of those attacked, without considering the possibility that there might just be decent neighbors

and humanitarian actors on the scene. Woods reports that one humanitarian agency implemented a policy of waiting six hours before going to an attack site because of the C.I.A. practice.

Another chapter presents an underreported aspect of drone use, the impact upon the pilots and intelligence analysts involved in drone operations. Through his interviews with a number of these people, Woods shows that the popular caricature of “video game warriors” is far from accurate. He helps



readers see the human cost of U.S. policies on both American personnel and on those on the receiving end of our military prowess.

A central thread running through the book is the loss of civilian life because of drone attacks, and Chapter Eleven is devoted entirely to this controversial topic. One cause of the controversy is that no official report on casualties is provided by any government source, U.S. or otherwise. Indeed, there is no agreed-upon figure for the total number of persons killed, nor even the status of the dead as combatant or civilian. Estimates vary widely because the major sources for information on casualties depend upon information from locales that are hard to reach and use various approaches to interpret the data.

The three main sources for casualty data are the B.I.J., where Woods worked, the New America Foundation and the Long War Journal, both in Washington, D.C. All three sources

rely upon local news, so the casualty figures are based on reported, not actual deaths. Journalists are not always adept at distinguishing civilians from combatants, and some reports combine known militants with alleged militants determined by age and gender. Other news reports do not provide firm figures, using vague words like “some” or “many” that then are translated differently into specific numbers by the various sources. And there have been reports of terrorist groups preventing access to attack sites until they have removed bodies of their colleagues.

Woods works through these issues in a careful way, and whether his preference for the B.I.J. figures means they are always the most accurate is not the crucial point. Rather it is convincingly clear that the number of civilian deaths is considerably greater than the Bush and Obama administrations have admitted. At the same time, Woods acknowledges that drone strikes have decimated terrorist networks, particu-

larly the original Al Qaeda, and have done so with less loss of civilian life than if manned aerial assaults or special operations forces had carried out the strikes. Drones have the promise of far more precise and proportionate targeting, but they are hardly a means of warfare that spares all but the bad guys.

Woods is neither a polemicist nor a firebrand. I found his portrayal to be appropriately critical of U.S. policy in his final chapter without making judgments beyond the facts that he presents. He is a fine reporter who has done a lot of homework. Yet the reportage could have been enhanced with more careful analysis. For this reviewer, a distinct fault is the author’s equation of all targeted killing with assassination and his report, without qualification, of those who see targeted killing as extra-judicial execution.

Nowhere does Woods define what he means by assassination, and his explanation of the term in U.S. law

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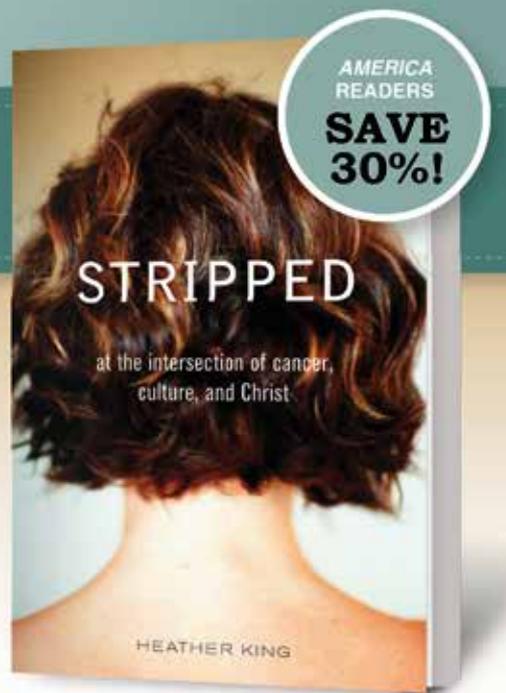
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is not consistently employed later in the book. The term assassination has many usages, and without clarifying what he means by it the author fails to bring clarity to his assessment. That some targeted killings by drone strike were extra-judicial executions for past terrorist activity may be true. Yet both John Brennan, the C.I.A. director, and President Obama have been explicit that drone attacks are not launched in revenge for past deeds; they are launched in order to disrupt present and future terrorist threats. If that is so, there is a critical distinction between U.S. policy and extra-judicial execution.

AMY UELMEN

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

THE VICE OF LUXURY

**Economic Excess
In a Consumer Age**

By David Cloutier
Georgetown University Press. 336p
\$59.95

DISTANT STRANGERS

**Ethics, Psychology,
And Global Poverty**

By Judith Lichtenberg
Cambridge University Press. 285p
\$29.99

Leaving Mass after hearing the Gospel admonition about moths and rust destroying earthly treasures, my 10-year-old self was reflecting on our suburban Los Angeles existence. Why don't we try to unplug from everything electric? My less enthusiastic parents grilled me on my plan for sanitizing the dishes. I did not have a good answer.

But that desire to simplify increased, especially as I opened my mind to the realities of economic injustice. I wondered: to what extent am I personally responsible for exacerbating or remedying these ills? When I worked as a lawyer at a large law firm,

I do not mean to fault Woods for not writing an ethical analysis of U.S. policy. That was not his intent, and his work ought not be judged on that basis. My point is that this richly informative work would be even better had the author been more careful in his terminology, because some of his language is fraught with moral evaluation. Despite that reservation, this is an informative book based upon much valuable research.

KENNETH R. HIMES, O.F.M., *teaches ethics in the theology department of Boston College. His most recent book, Drones and the Ethics of Targeted Killing, is published by Rowman and Littlefield.*

it just felt wrong to me to spend so much on lunch when other people did not have basics.

But I still struggled to answer with precision. When it comes to evaluating my own income and possessions, how much is enough? Do my tiny daily choices really matter? Will my reduced spending detract from healthy economic growth and jobs?

As Pope John Paul II exhorted in the encyclical, "On Social Concerns," solidarity is "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all." But what on earth might that mean in daily life?

Two new books, Judith Lichtenberg's *Distant Strangers* and David Cloutier's *The Vice of Luxury*, bring deeply probing contributions to these discussions. In different but complementary ways, both books "hit us where we live," in Cloutier's phrase, offering vivid accounts of moral responsibility for economic choices, not for the super-rich or ascetic hermits but for ordinary people.

Why are we sometimes paralyzed by the questions noted above? Both books trace such paralysis to the extreme form of some of the arguments. As Lichtenberg explains, according to the "consequentialist problematic," if we are obliged to treat all agents' interests equally and to do what is best overall, it may not be permissible to give preference to one's own interests, or of those near and dear. But most people are simply overwhelmed by the idea of trying to figure out how to treat the interests of everyone in the world with the same intensity and focus, so they simply disengage from the question.

Similarly, Cloutier hones in on how corrosive a "two-level" ethical dichotomy is, in which one must choose between complete rejection of the material world and total immersion in it. When pressed to make such a stark choice, many just back away from the difficult task of ongoing discernment. As long-standing theological critiques of luxury have simply dropped off the radar, at this point material self-indulgence is "not even seen as a problem," which makes it difficult to articulate any evaluative criteria for the use of material goods.

In contrast to these extremes, both Lichtenberg and Cloutier offer what Lichtenberg summarizes as a "relational approach," in which moral responsibility for economic injustice rests not on a vague and generalized capacity to help anyone and everyone but on an assessment of the actual harm that our economic choices cause and of the ways in which we are actually connected to one another.

But wait— isn't this a step back from universal concern for all humanity? No: this concern is actualized when it takes on concrete form. To focus on areas of more explicit moral engagement— including the extent to which in labor or other power relationships one may benefit from another person's difficulty because of inadequate regard for her interests—is not to undercut a

universal connection to humanity but to make it real.

Further, Lichtenberg argues, to mark certain kinds of interactions as areas for discretion—including how much time, effort or financial resources to expend—is not to underrate their importance or moral meaning. Instead, they open our eyes to “new harms”—the realization that “our most humdrum activities may harm people in myriad ways we have never thought about before.” It is precisely by acknowledging that space for discretion that we can encourage responsive, creative and realistic solutions.

As a theologian, Cloutier works with a relational interpretive key to bring love of God and love of neighbor back into the center of how we think about property and material goods. In an especially rich discussion of an analogy between sexual and economic ethics, he notes that, as with eros, the tendency has been to privatize consumption choices in a search for happiness unfettered by obligations and free of social constraints.

In contrast, a sacramental worldview, in which “the spiritual is participated in via the material,” opens our minds to a deeper understanding of holiness in the world. It heals the dichotomy at the root: “Like eros and agape in the sexual sphere, the point is not to separate the two but rather to have our ordinary material needs and wants become re-oriented and transformed toward their genuine telos: showing forth and bringing about love of God and neighbor.”

So how does this cash out? For starters, consider what James Nash terms the “damning drawback”—luxury goods sustain jobs; or John Maynard Keynes’s theory that thrift depresses the economy. A relational lens helps us

to see the contexts in which that drawback is inapplicable, or simply hogwash—as when a \$93 million endorsement contract for premium priced gym shoes amounts to 50% of the wholesale costs.

If “smart shopping” is defined as finding exactly what you want for the lowest price, the alternative “sacramental shopping” challenges us to reflect on “how to do the most good connecting ourselves with others through our purchases”—possibly even paying a premium in certain circumstances. So yes, go ahead and pay a little more for those peaches at the local food co-op or for an independent mechanic. In this way, Cloutier explains, “we notice the poor—which is to say we honor and give what is due to those who do this kind of good work.”

Finally, a relational lens can also help to smoke out the economic and social harms caused by the zero-sum game of “positional goods,” in which the value of a good is connected to how one is then socially situated as compared with the possessions of others. Here too, the argument is not for a withdrawal from the market but, as Cloutier explains, a strong critique of “certain kinds of consumption”—with attention to the social, emotional and spiritual damage caused by a kind of arms race in spending. No, we do not need to clamor all at once for the latest version of the flat-screen pad or phone or television screen. Enough is enough.

The language of luxury as a vice can

help us to discern the point at which we reach, to paraphrase Aquinas, inordinate consumption and fall into the trap of sacrificing higher goods in the search for ease, pleasure, novelty, convenience, status.

Lest anyone think that the upshot of either book is dour, it is also important to note the role that material goods can play in a celebration of God’s abundant love and abiding presence. Each of Cloutier’s evaluative criteria for these goods—the extent to which goods are shared, whether they foster a sense of one’s vocation, their “festival” role and the quality of fostering cultural enrichment—merits extended, personal and practical meditation.

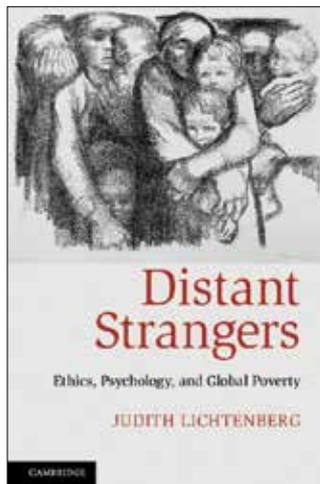
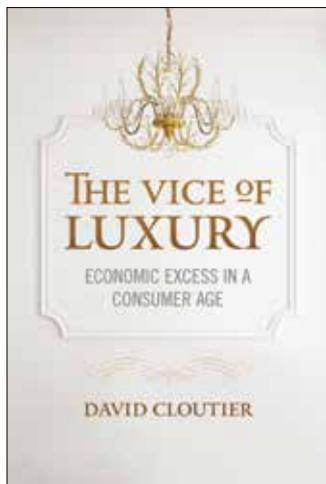
It is fascinating to read these books in conversation with each other. Cloutier’s analytical frame focuses for the most part on the habits and perspectives of people in the United States. While his proposals are anything but myopic, one does wonder whether the horizons of localized community discernment will be able to fully embrace

the challenges of global poverty and global citizenship. Lichtenberg’s discussion of similar categories against the backdrop of “distance” complements and complicates in helpful ways a more domestic focus.

Both books plumb the depths of some of my most vexing questions and leave me with a sense of hopeful commitment. Yes, my daily choices matter; yes, it

is possible to discern when enough is enough; and yes, there is something we can do individually and as communities to heal the wounds of economic injustice.

AMY UELMEN teaches Catholic social thought and economic justice at Georgetown Law School, Washington, D.C., and lives in the Focolare community house in Bethesda, Md.,



DEEP, DARK TRUTHFUL MEMOIR

How is it possible that one of the most interesting revelations in a memoir by a legendary rock star has nothing to do with sex and drugs at all but involves a Jesuit poet? When the artist in question is Elvis Costello, expecting the unexpected is simply part of the territory. His memoir, *Unfaithful Music & Disappearing Ink*, is an engaging, impressionistic glimpse into the life and work of a modern master who is arguably the greatest songwriter of his era.

Early on in Costello's massive, 670-page tome (he is nothing if not wordy) he expresses sympathy for the teachers in his all-boys Catholic high school, St. Francis Xavier's College in Liverpool. "I wouldn't have wanted to drill an appreciation of the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins into our unwilling heads," he says. "They taught us about 'sprung rhythm' and made us recite: 'Glory be to God for dappled things—/ For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow.'"

Hopkins himself briefly taught in the same school, and the fact that his ghost still loomed large 100 years later seems oddly appropriate. It isn't much of an imaginative leap in my mind to collapse time and envision Hopkins, the brilliant, sensitive, depressed young poet with a beautiful gift for language, being tortured in the classroom by the exceedingly clever and bold Declan Patrick McManus—Costello's given name—when he was there in the early 1970s.

A few years later the world was introduced to his own brilliant facility with words when his first album, "My Aim Is True," was released in 1977. He exploded onto Britain's punk and new wave

music scene in awkward horn-rimmed glasses and jacket looking like a cross between a nerdy literature major and a prickly, gap-toothed Buddy Holly. If Joe Strummer of the Clash was the fiery conscience of the movement, Costello was certainly its angry intellect.

During a five year period (1977-82) Costello—along with his incredible backing band, the Attractions—released seven legendary albums that ranged stylistically from hyperkinetic, punky rave ups and blue-eyed soul to torch songs and traditional country. He was Generation X's Bob Dylan: a chameleon whose ambition, intelligence and ability to confound audience expectations seemed boundless.

As *Unfaithful Music* makes clear, however, the awkward, punky misfit character he created at the beginning of his career was simply a convenient persona. Behind the disguise was an only child who—thanks to his father, a successful British dance band singer—possessed a nearly encyclopedic knowledge of vast amounts of music. Costello's passion for everything from Schubert and Louis Armstrong to the Beatles and Abba is disarmingly sincere and unabashed.

Since Costello's early brushes with pop stardom, he has gone on to collaborate with iconic stars like Paul McCartney and the country legend George Jones. He has written classical chamber pieces with the Brodsky Quartet, songs with Burt Bacharach and an album with the hip-hop innovators the Roots.

But such eclectic interests can have a shadow side. In *Cinema of Outsiders*, Emanuel Levy says of the Coen brothers: "Each of their films pays homage to a classic Hollywood genre, with a knowingness born of numerous hours spent in the dark. The Coens are clever directors who know too much about movies and too little about real life." The sheer volume and variety of Costello's musical output coupled with his facile gift for wordplay could make him susceptible to a similar charge in terms of music.

Unfaithful Music & Disappearing Ink, however, offers us a window beyond Costello's public persona that humanizes the "clever" technician. He spares us the utterly predictable rock star stories in favor of more substantial revelations. The punk poet who was once simply the smartest songwriter in the room has evolved. As a 61-year-old meditating

on his own deep failings and the recent loss of his beloved father, he seems to be pondering different questions and writing songs like "Stations of the Cross" and "Bedlam," the latter containing a verse that only a lapsed Catholic schoolboy could write:

*And everything that I thought fanciful and mocked as too extreme
Must be family entertainment here
in the strange land
of my dreams
And I'm practicing my likeness of
St. Francis of Assisi.
And if I hold my hand outstretched
A little bird comes to me....*

Costello spares us the rock star stories for more substantial revelations.



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Billy Bob Thornton as Pat Candy and Sandra Bullock as Jane in "Our Brand Is Crisis."

FILM | JOHN ANDERSON

BACK STORIES

Examine the meaning of truth in politics and broadcast news.

Long ago, in a galaxy far, far away, where the Congress knew how to pick a speaker of the House, the late Thomas O'Neill, known as Tip, was quoted as saying, "All politics is local," meaning that all politics is personal. Which means, taking it one small step further, that all politics is ego.

That has never seemed more true than in what we might call the quasi-reality-based American political scene of the present day, as we watch the various candidates strive to make their base voters as secure as possible in all their various presumptions, preconceptions and outright biases. And it is certainly true in the film world of **Our Brand Is Crisis**, which stars Sandra Bullock as an American political operative hired to save the campaign of a floundering Bolivian presidential candidate.

Bullock's Jane Bodine, an export of

dubious moral worth, lays it on the line: "The truth is whatever I tell the electorate the truth is," she says during the "interview" by which the director David Gordon Green bookends his movie (which was "suggested" by Rachel Boynton's 2005 documentary of the same name about the consulting firm Greenberg Carville Shrum and its successful work on behalf of a failing Bolivian candidate in 2002). Jane Bodine is not nice. Needless to say, she gets nicer.

Not so much Billy Bob Thornton, whose character, Pat Candy, is obviously meant to represent the ubiquitous James Carville. He is not actually as unlikable as he is unreliable, but neither is Bodine—"Calamity Jane," as she has come to be known. "I thought you retired, or gave up, or something," Candy says to Bodine, trying to provoke her, which he successfully does al-

most throughout a story in which the private, Machiavellian grudge match between two sharply intelligent, calculating individuals is allowed to trump (no pun intended) the welfare of an entire nation.

Like an old frontier gunslinger, Bodine has to be dragged out of retirement by a couple of former associates (Ann Dowd, Anthony Mackie), having exiled herself from politics in the wake of a campaign in which dirty tricks led to the suicide of a candidate's daughter. The facts are murky, and frankly they do not much matter: Bodine and Candy were both involved in the catastrophe, they each know more about the other than they should, and there is a resulting tension between them, romantic and otherwise, that enlivens the movie even at its most wonkish.

It is a political movie, of course, and as such has to dwell in the unlovely, and

one can see Green struggling to put some visual juice in it through wacky montages—the always reliable dance-club scenes, for instance, or Bodine’s night out with some local boys, which ends in a jail cell. But the thrust of the story is the manipulation of the voter (all too easy), the bending of facts and the infighting among parties who are supposed to be united in a cause, even when that cause is questionable.

The cause here is the relatively charm-free Senator Castillo (Joaquim de Almeida), who is enjoying Bobby Jindal-style numbers in Bolivia’s presidential polling. Bodine is supposed to save him, but she takes one look and concludes, “He’s not a winner.” She will make him one, by changing the upbeat narrative of the election to one of dire consequences—the “crisis” of the title, which becomes the “brand” of Castillo.

It is a cynical movie, naturally, being as it is about the dirty truths of politics. But it is a Hollywood movie, too, and is required to provide a certain degree of redemption. Not too much, though. It may not be a documentary, but it has to be believable.

Calamity Jane has her definition of truth, but in the movie **Truth**, it is something different—and possibly more slippery. Starring Cate Blanchett and Robert Redford, the film concerns the “60 Minutes II” scandal of 2004, in which the team of producer Mary Mapes and her longtime collaborator, the CBS anchor Dan Rather,

accused George W. Bush not only of draft-dodging but of being a no-show in the “champagne unit” of the Texas Air National Guard (so called because it provided an easy, Vietnam-era refuge for the sons of politicians and seven members of the Dallas Cowboys).

Directed with considerable energy by the fledgling director James Vanderbilt, it is based on Mapes’s memoir *Truth and Duty: The Press, the President, and the Privilege of Power* and follows its line of argument: that Mapes was the victim, not only of the conservative blogosphere and G.O.P. forces out to save Bush’s candidacy (he was polling slightly behind John Kerry at the time) but of CBS executives who, at the behest of their superiors at parent Viacom, wanted to make nice with the White House.

One of the things “Truth” is quite honest about is the oxymoronic ethos of the news business in general—i.e., always be right, always be first. It is actually a minor miracle that the news is as accurate as it is, given the competing interests at work and the evanescent nature of facts. Mapes (Blanchett) and her team (played by Dennis Quaid, Topher Grace and Elizabeth Moss) think they have the goods on Bush, even though the documents they are working with are photocopies and the guy from whom they got them—Lt. Col. Bill Burkett (Stacey Keach), formerly of the Guard—is a known Bush critic. Shortcuts are taken. When a spot for the story opens up on the weekday edition of “60 Minutes,” they rush it onto the air. The result is sensational.

And almost immediately, holes start getting punched into the reportage, initially online (it was the most significant story involving news and the Internet up until that time). Did anyone notice, for instance, that the document accusing Bush—which CBS’s experts had not been able to verify—could be very

easily duplicated on Microsoft Word?

It was a fiasco. The veteran Rather retired in the wake of the story/backlash; Mapes was fired and has not worked in television news again.

What is fascinating in the wake of the movie, however, is the way the two sides have lined up against each other once again. It is all about due diligence and documents and whether Mapes was inept (unlikely: she was awarded a Peabody, some time after the Bush segment aired, for having broken the Abu Ghraib scandal earlier in 2004). No one questions whether or not Bush shirked his duty. In fact, they seem to assume he did, since it would have been so in character. The argument still is all about the reliability of the documents and about CBS executives past and present being shocked—shocked!—that anyone would accuse them of allowing politics or profits to get in the way of their fealty to honest journalism.

Egos, just as in Sandra Bullock’s *Bolivia*, are what it’s all about. And like Bullock’s Jane Bodine, Cate Blanchett’s Mary Mapes says something far more profound than George W. Bush, though critics are unlikely to bring it up. Blanchett plays Mapes as a woman on the verge of hysteria (if one can be allowed to resort to a 19th-century diagnosis). Her scorched-earth policy for getting the story can be read as part of her character and the kind of personality that would succeed in network news. But she is also a woman. And one cannot escape the conclusion that Cate Blanchett’s Mary Mapes has always felt that she had to be twice as good to go half as far and that her career was living story to story. Turns out she was right: In the wake of “Rathergate,” and with all that blame to go around, she was the only one who lost her job.

JOHN ANDERSON is a film critic for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Time* magazine and *Newsday*.

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Now or Then

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), NOV. 15, 2015

Readings: Dn 12:1–3; Ps 16:5–11; Heb 10:11–18; Mk 13:24–32

“But about that day or hour no one knows” (Mk 13:32)

When Jesus outlines the apocalyptic scenario found in the Gospel of Mark, he warns “but about that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Patristic discussion of this verse focused on what this admission indicated about Jesus’ divinity and the relationship between Jesus’ divine and human knowledge, but in context the intent of this saying points to the need for vigilance and perseverance regarding the coming end, since no one knows when it will occur.

But Jesus also tells us in Mark that “this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.” The sense of imminence here is profound, though later Christians would argue whether Jesus meant the generation of his disciples or the generation of all human beings, while others discussed whether “all these things” referred to Jesus’ death and resurrection, the destruction of Jerusalem or “the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory,” which is the clearest meaning.

The themes of imminent preparation for the end, the *eschaton*, and the fact that no one knows when the end will occur, therefore, have been joined in Christianity from the earliest days, maintaining a tension between what has been accomplished (realized eschatology) and what is still to come (future eschatology).

Whether we understand, or believe we understand, much about the last things—not only when these things will occur but what sort of process we go through in death; what the interim period between our death and the resurrection is like, the process of purgatory; what the heavenly life is like, whether it takes place on a renewed earth or in a heavenly, otherworldly domain—these mysteries will in many ways remain mysteries on this side of death and appear to us as vague and incomplete.

We have the assurances of revelation, however, that there is a world to come and that it may come in fullness at any time. Daniel, in the most explicit verses of the Old Testament, tells us that there will be a general resurrection at the end of time and that the dead will rise, “some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” In a compact passage we are told of the reality of what is still to come.

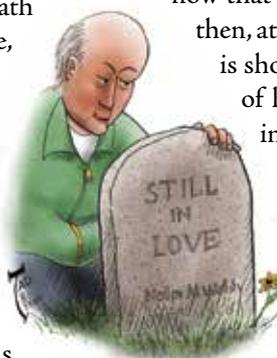
In an odd way, though, the dramatic and mythic apocalyptic scenarios of the coming end can be distractions from the realities to which they point: death, judgment, heaven and hell—the four last things. How? Calculating the end times and whether the apocalypse will play out now or then, in this way or that, can draw us away from preparation for our own end.

For death is coming for each of us, whether we will confront it in our own personal *eschaton* or in the cosmic

apocalyptic drama as described in the Gospel of Mark. Even if “the end” does not occur in our lifetime, and even if another group of end-time prophets falsely calculate Jesus’ return and offer precise dates, which do not come to pass, we will still come to our end. How are we preparing for it?

For this is not just a future reality. This is our life to live now and then. It is incumbent upon us to live for God, to begin the process of righteous living now that will be brought to perfection then, at the time of the end. Our time is short, even from the perspective of human history, but especially in the scope of eternity, and it can end at any time.

But as Jesus tells us, the time of the end is the coming of the Son of Man, the time of the fullness of rev-



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

something in particular you fear? Is there something confusing to you about the coming end? What comforts you as you reflect on Jesus’ teachings about the end of time?

ART: TAD DUNNE

elation—the time, that is, when God makes all things new. And though it is true that apocalyptic scenarios speak of persecution and torment, this is not the final story, though modern apocalyptic movies, books and video games give an inordinate and theologically unsound emphasis to darkness and desperation. Death can create fear for us, as do judgment and hell, but we were created for one last thing, heaven, to be like and to be with God. Jesus encourages us to prepare now, for this is the time to get ready for whatever happens and whenever it takes place.

JOHN W. MARTENS

Pray about the four last things. Is there

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