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AMERICAN LIBERTY AND THE JEWS

MIKE COSPER

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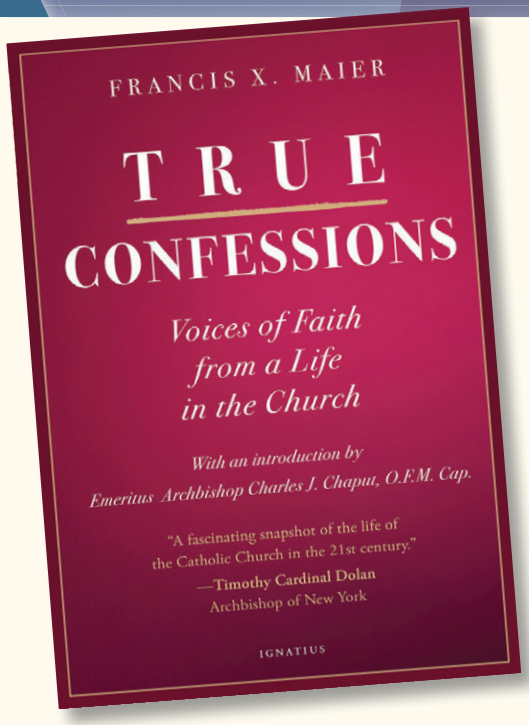

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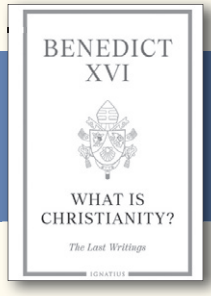

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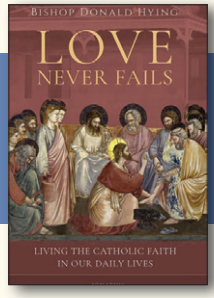

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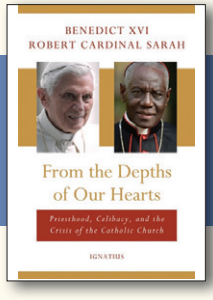

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THE ISSUE THIS TIME BY ANTHONY SACRAMONE

"Men are not born with hatred in their blood. The infection is usually acquired by contact." So begins a forgotten book, *The Foot of Pride* by Malcolm Hay. Published in 1950, it's a short history of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism in Europe, one Hay begins with the Nazis' "Final Solution," as if to address immediately the most grotesque, and familiar, example. But anti-Semitism extended far beyond Germany's borders and had been brewing for far longer than the 1930s. Many non-Germans were complicit in the Holocaust, or at the very least remained bystanders. "Even after the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, every frontier remained closed against Jews fleeing from German terror."

Many histories have been written of the genocide since, and eyewitness accounts recorded, culminating in the great documentary epic *Shoah*, directed by Claude Lanzmann. Over nine hours long, *Shoah* includes interviews with survivors and visits to extermination camps in Germany and Poland. If we can say anything happened in history, we can say the Holocaust did.

And yet there are deniers. Some no doubt ignoramuses whose "education" consists of toxic online forums whose participants are anonymous for fear of losing their job or custody of their children. They sit alongside flat-earthers and those who insist Stanley Kubrick faked the moon landing. Then there are those, much greater in number in my opinion, who know the truth but are eager to inflict further harm on the Jewish people. They no doubt seek to exonerate Germany from one of the worst crimes against humanity on record. And is there a more noxious mix than pride and hate?

Pride we understand, but the hate? And why the Jews? Hay, a Catholic, lays the blame on centuries of preaching against the "Christ killers," even from those who would one day enter the canon of saints:

> The violence of the language used by St. John Chrysostom in his homilies against the Jews has never been exceeded by any preacher whose sermons have been recorded.…these homilies filled the minds of Christian congregations with a hatred which was transmitted to their children, and to their children's children, for many generations.

But thank goodness that's over. Only it's not. As we have seen, fresh bursts of anti-Jewish hate are exploding right before our eyes—and not in the shadows of the Dark Web or among grade-school dropouts but on Ivy League campuses, in city streets around the world, and on social media with legal names attached. And this time it's not being fueled by the far right but by the far left, whether in the cause of anti-Zionism, a ceasefire in Gaza, or pushback against "Islamophobia." Yet why do these explanations appear to be mere cloaks, pretexts, for something far more sinister?

> Many have pointed out that this eruption of anti-Semitism is final proof of the "horseshoe theory" of political polarization, which posits that as ideology polarizes into opposing political factions, the most extreme elements of either will bend toward each other and converge around common, radical ends. That anti-Semitism is what has fused this coalition evokes another political theory—that Jews are the canaries in the coal mine of culture.

So writes Mike Cosper in our cover story, "There Shall Be None to Make Him Afraid: American Liberty and the Jews," which looks back at our first president's appeal to small Jewish congregations in the earliest days of the Republic and the hope they held for an America in which particular communities could be formed that nurtured "a telos" that transcended politics. This may remain our only hope. And so, "May the One who brings peace to His universe bring peace to us and to all Israel. And let us say: Amen."

In addition …

In the last issue, we explored the local bookstore in search of Religion & Spirituality in the hopes it had not been shunted aside by Diet & Health. It seems the more we diet, the more we…diet. Nothing exceeds like excess, and a surplus of advice on how to eradicate unwanted pounds is an indulgence our culture enjoys without apology.

Whence the concept of the "diet"? We can blame Italian cuisine. Or at least an Italian: Luigi Cornaro. Born in the 14-somethings (dates vary), he was a nobleman who found himself at the venerable age of 40 exhausted and sick. He took the advice of his physicians and restricted his diet to a mere 350g of food daily (about 12 oz. in American math). His health not only rebounded, but at age 83 he wrote *The Sure and Certain Method of Attaining a Long and Healthful Life*, and the first Mediterranean diet was born. He died at either 98 or 102. He was old.

Fast-forward to the 19th century and William Banting, an undertaker (no snickering) who devised the first low-carb diet as a cure for his diabetes. His *Letters on Corpulence, Addressed to the Public* became sufficiently popular that the question "Do you bant?" became a thing. Around this same time, a Presbyterian minister, Sylvester Graham, waged war against the leaven of the bakeries—namely, yeast. An advocate of temperance in all its forms, the Rev. Graham is remembered for both his cracker and as the "Father of Vegetarianism." (Many familiar with Eastern cultures will no doubt balk at that honorific.)

The list goes on: keto, paleo, carnivore, vegan, liquid, Mayo, MIND, NOOM, DASH, detox, mono-meal, mono-food, mono mia, you name it—it's been tried and found wanting, if not of flavor then of variety, if not of variety then of satiety.

So why one more? Maybe the answer is to think of a diet not as something with an expiration date—at which point you keel over famished, searching for vagrant M&Ms in old shirt pockets—and to see food not as the enemy but as gift. The C.L.E.A.N. Diet is presented here in the context of the church, not because only Christians will benefit, which would be cultish, but because such a reset of a mindset can best be accomplished within community, one that seeks the total well-being of its members.

An "ideal" weight is only one metric of health, which itself is only one metric of "quality of life," a term of art enjoyed by the growing (euphemism alert) assisted-dying industry. But one person's quality is another person's tax burden. Countries like Canada, Belgium, and the Netherlands and 10 U.S. states have decided they have a fix for life unworthy of life: death. Not only does it guarantee an end to suffering, of the physical and even mental kind—it's also cost effective.

Christians have other ideas, one Christian in particular, as we will see. To be freed from pain, even the pain of loneliness or despair, should not demand freedom from life itself.

This issue of *R&L* has much more to offer, especially on notions of freedom—both from and for—as well as the joy of laughter, the hope of politics, and John Dewey. (I know, I know…I just had to ruin it.)

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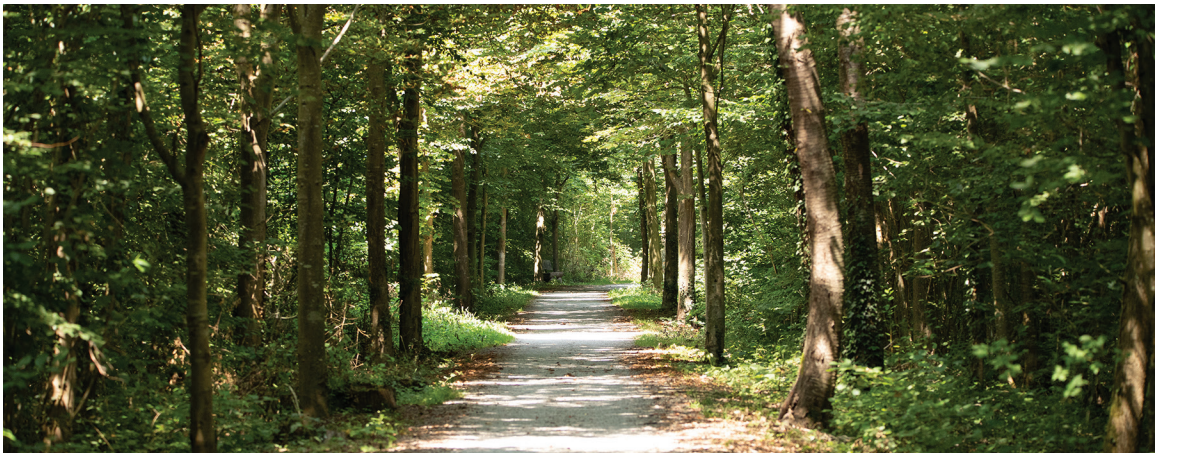


THERE SHALL BE NONE TO MAKE HIM AFRAID

AMERICAN LIBERTY AND THE JEWS

by **MIKE COSPER**

We know what we want freedom from. But do we have a vision of what freedom is *for*? Perhaps it's time to look at the hope and goodwill our first president held out to fledgling Jewish communities, and to the promise of a thriving particularity.

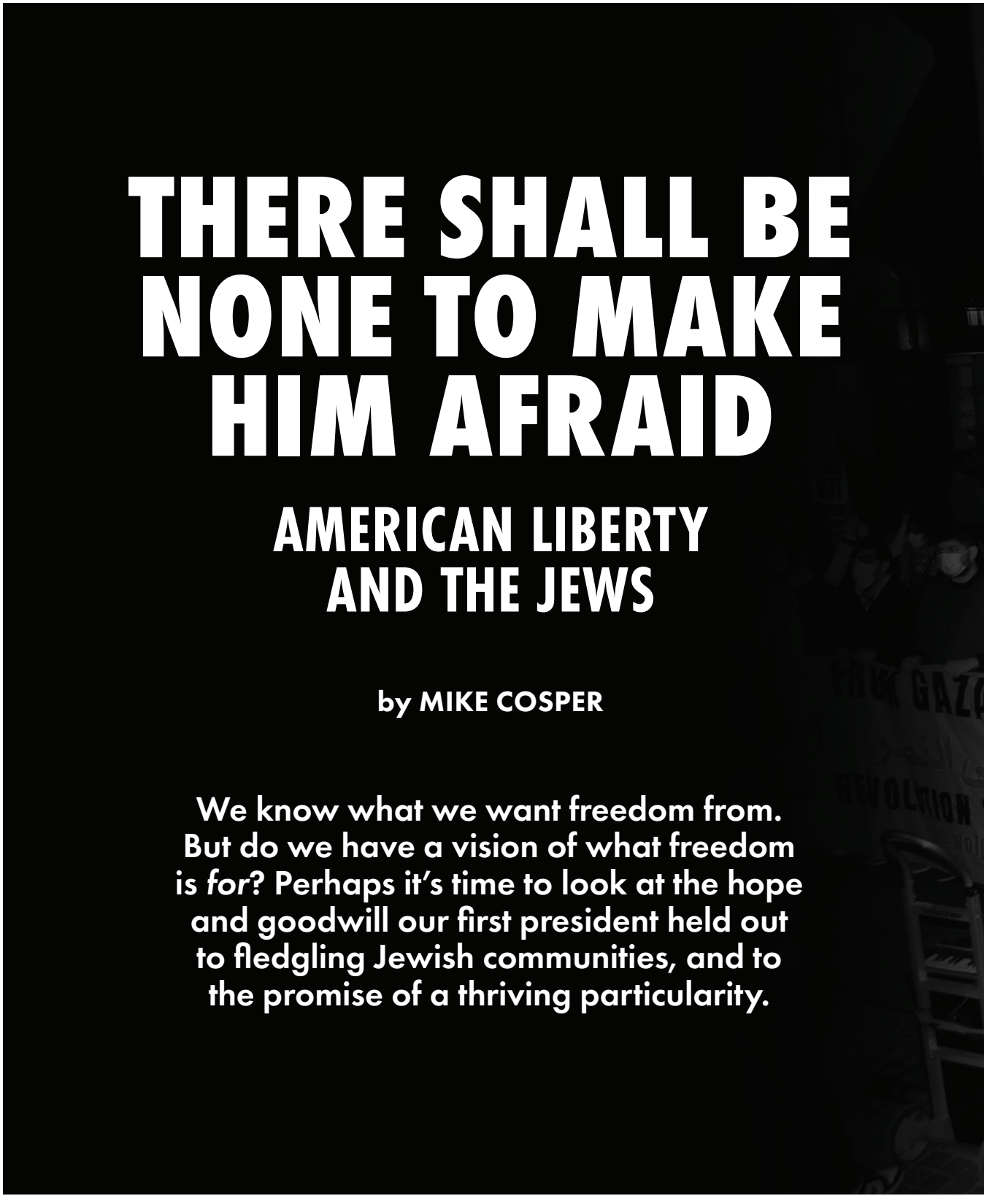


Photo by Sipa USA /AP

A BLM banner on display in Seattle (2022)

THIS SUMMER MARKS the 10th anniversary of the death of Michael Brown. It is a decade marked far more by heat than light. One could even say that, as time has passed, events have confirmed the worst suspicions each side held for its opponent.

Michael Brown, a Ferguson, Missouri, 18-year-old, died after being shot multiple times in an altercation with a white police officer named Darren Wilson. Early reports indicated that Brown was shot while holding his hands up or while fleeing Officer Wilson. But the facts complicated this narrative. On the one hand, multiple investigations exonerated Wilson, corroborating his claims that Brown charged him and engaged him in a physical altercation. On the other hand, there was abundant evidence to suggest that the Ferguson Police Department had a serious problem with racial bias. And so, while Wilson himself was innocent of any crime in the incident, it took place within an ecosystem in which injustice and bias was the norm.

These facts turned Brown's death into a kind of Rorschach test, allowing anyone to see what they wanted to see. Those inclined to think of America in terms of systemic injustice can see Brown as one more young black man unjustly killed by the police; those who tend to think in terms of individual responsibility can see only that Officer Wilson was guilty of no crime.

The result was a firestorm of protests that reignited and reshaped debates over race in America. Ferguson solidified the Black Lives Matter movement as a powerful influence in politics and media, and gave rise to a new generation of civil rights leaders as well as new language and a new issue set.

The impact is easy to trace. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) departments were opened in academic, corporate, and government institutions. The *New York Times* published "The 1619 Project," a Pulitzer Prize–winning work of revisionist history that reframes America's founding myth around the institution of chattel slavery and not the personalities and ideas of the founding. A new race consciousness permeated Hollywood, reshaping unwritten criteria for casting and awards.

The Black Lives Matter organization, however, has not been without controversy. Along with accusations of grift and corruption, it was roundly criticized for making the nuclear family a target for

Unrest in St. Louis in November 2014 over the shooting death of Michael Brown, after a grand jury decided not to indict Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson

deconstruction, and it stirred new ire in the fall of 2023 when chapters around the country joined the Democratic Socialists of America in celebrating the Hamas massacre of Israelis on October 7.

Meanwhile, the American right, which largely objected to narratives of systemic racism, embraced Donald Trump in 2015 and remade their party in his image. Trump's entry into politics actually came several years earlier, as one of the most vocal and prominent purveyors of the "birther" conspiracy theory accusing Barack Obama of not being a natural-born citizen. During his campaign and in the years since, Trump has trafficked in racist and xenophobic rhetoric about Muslims, immigrants, and refugees, and he helped mainstream alt-right figures like Steve Bannon, militant white nationalists like the Proud Boys, and white supremacists like Nick Fuentes.

These two currents in American culture were a sort of Hegelian nightmare, each one reaching further into radicalism to match the rhetoric and ambitions of the other. By May of 2020, the country was ready to explode. An incident in Minneapolis lit the fuse.

While arresting a black man named George Floyd for a petty crime, a white Minneapolis police officer named Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck. Floyd's injuries were catastrophic, and he died shortly thereafter. Video of the arrest, shot by a bystander, went viral online, and the outrage erupted in violent street protests from New York to Portland.

This case ended very differently from Wilson's. Here, a jury of Chauvin's peers found him guilty of 2nd-degree unintentional murder, 3rd-degree unintentional murder, and 2nd-degree manslaughter. It marks the first conviction of a white police officer in the death of a black man in Minnesota history.

Somehow, both ends of the ideological spectrum still saw the event as evidence of injustice. On the left, Floyd's death proved (again) that police have a license to brutalize black men, and Chauvin only faced consequences because he was caught on video. On the right, Floyd was framed as a petty criminal and drug user who resisted arrest and suffered the consequences, and Chauvin was seen as the subject of a witch hunt.

Top: Oprah Winfrey and Nikole Hannah-Jones attend the premiere for Hulu's *The 1619 Project* (2023). **Bottom:** A Washington, D.C., kiosk displays MAGA hats for sale (2019).

RADICAL BINARIES

That summer was one of the most polarizing of my lifetime. It marked a new era of tolerance for protests and street violence. Police were ambivalent about escalating their efforts at restraint, given the nature of the protest, and the progressive leadership of the local governments were sympathetic to the protesters' cause.

Much of the mainstream media shared these sympathies, which led to now-infamous moments, as when CNN used a chyron reading "Fiery but mostly peaceful protests after police shooting" while airing footage of burning buildings in Kenosha, Wisconsin, or when NPR ran an interview in defense of looting.

In June, *New York Times* Opinion editor Bari Weiss published an op-ed from Tom Cotton, a sitting U.S. senator, suggesting the deployment of the military to squelch the riots. Younger and more progressive staffers were outraged. The internal dissent and lack of support from the executive leadership of the paper led to Weiss' resignation, as well as that of James Bennet, the Opinion Page editor. Their exit was seen by many as a sign that a generation of young, progressive activists were willing to weaponize HR departments, social media, and other means of protest to reshape institutions like the *Times* in their image.

In August, Kyle Rittenhouse, a 17-year-old who shot three protesters, killing two, became the embodiment of white privilege for the left and a folk hero for the right. In September, Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg died. Ginsberg was an icon for progressives, and her replacement, Justice Amy Coney Barrett, was in many ways her ideological opposite. The swap secured a conservative supermajority on the Court just as Donald Trump's presidency was ending, and ramped up a sense of loss and despair among progressive activists.

These are just a handful of the polarizing events of that summer, and of course I've made no mention of the COVID pandemic and shutdowns—events that colored all the above and became racially charged in their own strange ways. Likewise, I've made no mention of the presidential campaign that was taking place at the time, which would climax not in the American tradition of a peaceful transfer of power, but in a right-wing riot instigated by the Proud Boys and encouraged by Donald Trump on January 6, 2021.

It is a story without heroes. There are only constituencies gathered around oppositional ideologies whose radicalism and corruption continually prove

their opponent's worst accusations. It seemed like an unbridgeable divide, as though these two poles would repel one another further and further until they tore the nation's social fabric. And then came October 7, 2023.

When 1,200 Israelis were slaughtered by Hamas on that black Saturday, the worst elements of left and right found a common cause: anti-Semitism. For the left, it was the ideological anti-Semitism of identity politics and anti-colonialism. For the right, it was historic anti-Semitism in the form of conspiracy theories, social Darwinism, and religious contempt. The result was a bizarre unity of opinion from the likes of the Squad, Candace Owens of the *Daily Wire*, Ivy League political science departments, and Tucker Carlson.

One can hardly imagine the anti-Semitism of Ilhan Omar or the terrorist apologia of Rashida Tlaib being tolerated in the party of Daniel Patrick Moynihan. It's equally hard to imagine the party of Reagan embracing Vivek Ramaswamy, Steve Bannon, or Matt Gaetz. And yet here we are. For a decade now, political parties have allowed their constituencies to expand in ways that would have been unimaginable in previous generations. Parties no longer practice the kind of institutional hygiene that keeps the most radical elements out.

Jonah Goldberg has often lamented that this is a reflection of the political party's inherent weakness—which I think is true. It's a reflection of the coalition's fragility that it won't practice any sensible discipline against its most radical members.

But it also reflects a lack of vision. The left and right share a reactive and nihilistic spirit. For the progressive left, it's focused on the deconstruction of social institutions and centers of cultural power. For the right, that spirit is focused on undoing the agenda of progressives, which is summed up perfectly in the slogan "Make America Great Again." In spite of the positive tenor of the phrase, the agenda it represents is almost entirely reactionary, from building the wall to tearing down portions of the administrative state. Even the more mainstream elements of our political parties are defined negatively. Most "old school liberals" among Democrats will argue that the coalition needs to stick together in spite of the more fringe elements because Donald Trump is a unique threat to the republic. Most "old school conservatives" among Republicans will argue that whatever Trump's faults may be, the left is a greater threat.

Americans who are less ideologically motivated, whose lives are not fueled by politics, arrive at the polls with nothing greater to ask themselves than "Whom do I dislike more?"

More than 800 damaged cars from the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks on Israel at a collection site in Tkuma

THE CANARIES IN THE COAL MINE

Many have pointed out that this eruption of anti-Semitism is final proof of the "horseshoe theory" of political polarization, which posits that as ideology polarizes into opposing political factions, the most extreme elements of either will bend toward each other and converge around common, radical ends. That anti-Semitism is what has fused this coalition evokes another political theory—that Jews are the canaries in the coal mine of culture.

Historically speaking, the emergence of anti-Semitism is always a sign of something poisonous taking root in a society. It doesn't just spell danger for Jews; it spells danger for everyone. As Bari Weiss has put it, "What starts with the Jews never ends with the Jews." The rise of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, and half a dozen Middle Eastern states was quickly followed by other forms of violence, tyranny, and authoritarianism.

As a Christian, I recognize something spiritually dangerous at the root of anti-Semitism. As Robert Nicholson, president of the Philos Project, has put it, anti-Semitism isn't simply ethnic hate, though it certainly isn't less than that. It is a hatred of the God who revealed himself to the world through the Jewish people, whose revelation declared the value of human life and human dignity, values that are the basis of Western civilization.

Christians of different traditions hold conflicting views on the Jewish people in the present age, and the age to come. While I'm not strongly compelled by any particular theory of the end of days (I've long said I'm an adherent of "meh"schatology, since no single theory strikes me as particularly convincing), I am thoroughly convinced that God is not done with his covenantal promises to them. History itself seems to testify to this. The Nazi regime is gone. So is the Soviet Union. So is pretty much every tribe and nation that set as a goal the destruction of the Jewish people. As Walker Percy noted, you'll be hard pressed to meet a Hittite or an Assyrian walking the streets of New York or London. And yet, here are the Jews, in almost every city and nation, bearing witness to God's covenant with Abraham by the mere fact of their existence.

That remarkable fact ought to serve as another kind of warning. Rejecting anti-Semitism isn't just good manners or principled pluralism; cultures that pursue the persecution or eradication of the Jewish people tend to vanish. If nothing else, resisting anti-Semitism is an act of cultural self-preservation. Theologize it or don't; the historical record speaks for itself.

Anti-Semitism's reemergence here and now ought to serve as final, damning proof of the corruption of the political ideologies that have come to dominate our culture. It reveals a nihilistic, even suicidal impulse at the heart of our politics and ought to invite sober reevaluation of what drives it.

> "ANTI-SEMITISM'S REEMERGENCE SERVES AS FINAL, DAMNING PROOF OF THE CORRUPTION OF THE POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES THAT DOMINATE OUR CULTURE."

A SPIRIT OF LIBERALITY AND PHILANTHROPY

If Jews are the canary in the coal mine of culture, and a threat to them signals a threat to all, is the opposite true? Is it a sign of civic and social health when Jews are treated with dignity and equal rights? I think so, and one need look no further than the American founding to understand why.

In 1790, a year after George Washington was sworn into office, he received three letters of congratulation from Jewish congregations around the new nation. Washington replied to each one, expressing his gratitude not only for their words but also for the safe harbor they'd found in the new nation. His hope was that, in this way, America would be a model to the nations of healthy liberalism. To the Hebrew Congregation in Savannah, Georgia, he wrote:

> I rejoice that a spirit of liberality and philanthropy is much more prevalent than it formerly was among the enlightened nations of the earth; and that your brethren will benefit thereby in

Engraving of "every man under his vine and fig tree," published in *Forty Coming Wonders,* 4th Edition (1880)

> proportion as it shall become still more extensive. Happily the people of the United States of America have, in many instances, exhibited examples worthy of imitation.

He ends the letter with a remarkable benediction:

> May the same wonder-working Deity, who long since delivering the Hebrews from their Egyptian Oppressors planted them in the promised land—whose providential agency has lately been conspicuous in establishing these United States as an independent nation—still continue to water them with the dews of Heaven and to make the inhabitants of every denomination participate in the temporal and spiritual blessings of that people whose God is Jehovah.

As Rabbi Meir Y. Soloveichik, in a recent *Commentary* magazine essay, describes it, Washington "was making American Jews feel as if they truly belonged.…The God Who performed miracles for Jews in the past is the same Deity Who performed miracles for America in the present. The God Who saved Israel from tyranny saved America from tyranny as well. The Jews were to be welcomed in America not only because of the ideals of equality, but also because of the way in which the Jewish story inspired America itself."

Washington wasn't saying these things in an effort to secure Jews to his coalition; at the time, there may have been a total of 1,000 Jews in the entire fledgling nation. Rather, he recognized that the success of the principles of liberty by which the new nation was founded would be measured by the flourishing of its marginal communities. For Jews, liberty wasn't an abstraction. Their ability to maintain their communal identity depended on their ability to thrive as outliers, to be as insular as they required, and to enjoy the rights and protections of citizenship when needed.

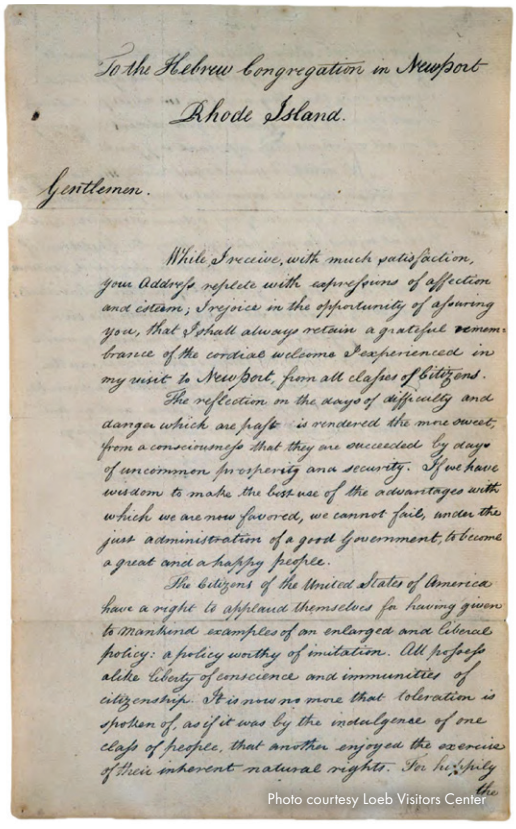
Washington expressed that understanding beautifully in the letter he wrote to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island:

> May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.

Here, he references Micah 4:4, a passage that would appear more than 50 times in his speeches and correspondence, including his Farewell Address. "But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his

***The Flight of the Prisoners* by James Tissot, depicting the exile of the Jews from Canaan to Babylon (1896)**

George Washington's letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island (1790)



To the Hebrew Congregation in Newport
Rhode Island.

Gentlemen.

While I receive, with much satisfaction, your Address replete with expressions of affection and esteem; I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you, that I shall always retain a grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced in my visit to Newport, from all classes of Citizens.

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past is rendered the more sweet, from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security. If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good Government, to become a great and a happy people.

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to Mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the

Photo courtesy Loeb Visitors Center

fig tree, and none shall make them afraid." Micah the prophet writes these words to Jewish exiles, promising them a future restoration of their nation in which they will no longer live under the thumb of Babylonian oppression. Washington saw a similar liberation in the American story and hoped for the nation to be an example to the world of the kind of prosperity and moral beauty that could emerge from pluralism and liberty.

As he saw it, a healthy nation would give birth first not to national unity but to thriving particularity. The litmus test for liberty was whether or not Jews, a marginal community in the new nation at best, could thrive and flourish *as Jews first* and as citizens second.

LIVING UP TO FOUNDING CREEDS

While Washington's letters to these Hebrew congregations are a remarkable testament to his vision of liberty, praise here deserves an asterisk. Because of course, not everyone was invited to sit under their own vine and fig tree in the new nation. According to the 1790 census, there were almost 30,000 slaves in Georgia and 1,000 in Rhode Island when these letters were exchanged, which was just a fraction of the nearly 700,000 slaves in America at that time. There is something right about calling slavery the nation's "original sin," as it stains the legacy of our founding.

But our nation's better angels emerged when its leaders called us to fidelity to its first principles, not when they rejected them. This was the message of Fredrick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln, and it was the message of Martin Luther King Jr.

In a 1967 speech to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, King lamented a nation that had "a high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds." Our problem was not a failure of moral imagination or vision, but of action; we weren't living up to the promise of our founding creeds. "Let us be dissatisfied," he continued, "until that day when the lion and the lamb shall lie down together, and every man will sit under his own vine and fig tree, and none shall be afraid."

The civil rights movement King led was birthed from America's Black churches. His demand for a better, more just world was inextricably linked to that spiritual community, both in how it formed him as a person and how it informed his vision of that more just world. In this we find a link between his vine and fig tree to that of America's earliest Jewish citizens and to Washington: a purpose beyond politics and the freedom to pursue it without fear.

This strikes me as the missing element in our contemporary conversations about race and justice in America: a vision of liberty. Because the orientation of our parties and their accompanying ideological movements is negative and destructive, it is easy to find an articulation of what people want freedom from: theocracy, woke ideology, white supremacy, drag queens, or religious zealots.

What is missing is a vision of what that freedom is *for*. The Israelites were freed from bondage in Egypt so they might worship their God. The exiles longed to flee Babylon so they might live under their vine and fig tree unafraid. Jews in the newborn United States wanted freedom to embody their faith without fear. Black leaders of the civil rights movement wanted access to the promises of the founding.

Those who are animated by the scandals du jour of contemporary politics need to be asked about their own vine and fig tree. What do they hope to go home to after they've achieved victory in their culture war? What will give them meaning when the battle is over? What stops them from pursuing that meaning now?

For 20 years, American intellectuals have lamented the erosion of our social infrastructure and the collapse of our institutions. The world is increasingly a hard place in which to find friends or purpose, and lonely people are turning to politics

U.S. postage stamp depicting Martin Luther King Jr.

as one of the few energetic spaces in American life that purports to offer meaning. But contemporary politics, so driven by grievance and nihilistic in spirit, can only animate them to become more polarized and more destructive.

The decade since Ferguson has proved that again and again. At every turn, whether confronted by questions about race, the rise of extremism, political violence, the COVID pandemic, or global conflicts in Ukraine and Israel, the impulse of our culture is to react in ways that leave us more polarized and less united than before.

It may simply be that the problems of our politics will not be solved in the realm of politics. Instead, those who wish to interrupt the suicidal momentum of our culture need to find other spaces in which to invite people into a sense of meaning, purpose, and belonging.

My hope is that American Jewry can provide a vision for that as a community with a sense of identity and a telos that transcends politics. Failing to find that, I fear that they'll provide a more terrible example—as canaries in the coal mine, foreshadowing the collapse of our experiment with liberty. RL

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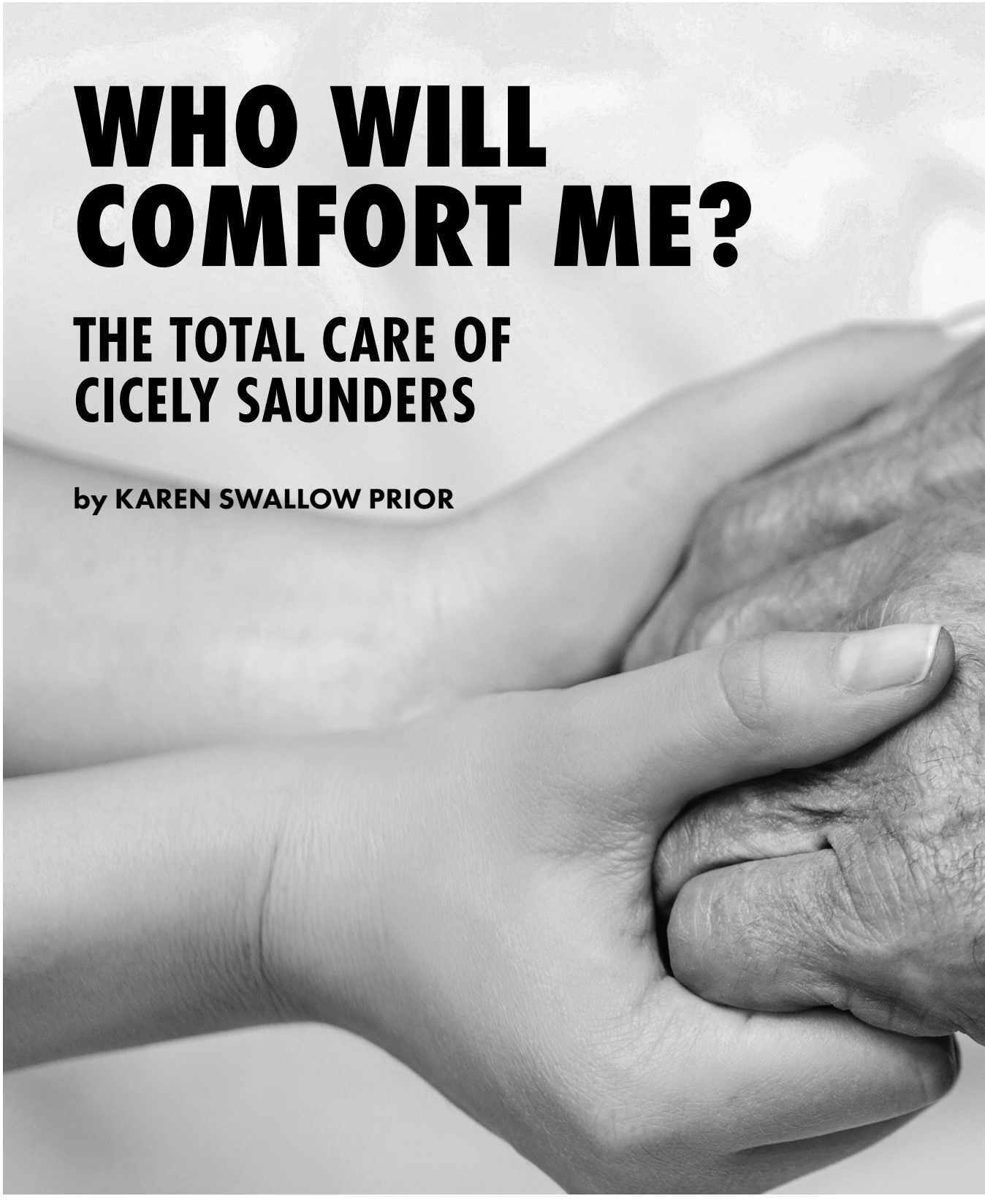
WHO WILL COMFORT ME?

THE TOTAL CARE OF CICELY SAUNDERS

by KAREN SWALLOW PRIOR



In a time when medically assisted suicide is on the rise, and the conditions that qualify for its application broaden, we should remember the vocation and accomplishment of the doctor who gave birth to the modern hospice movement.

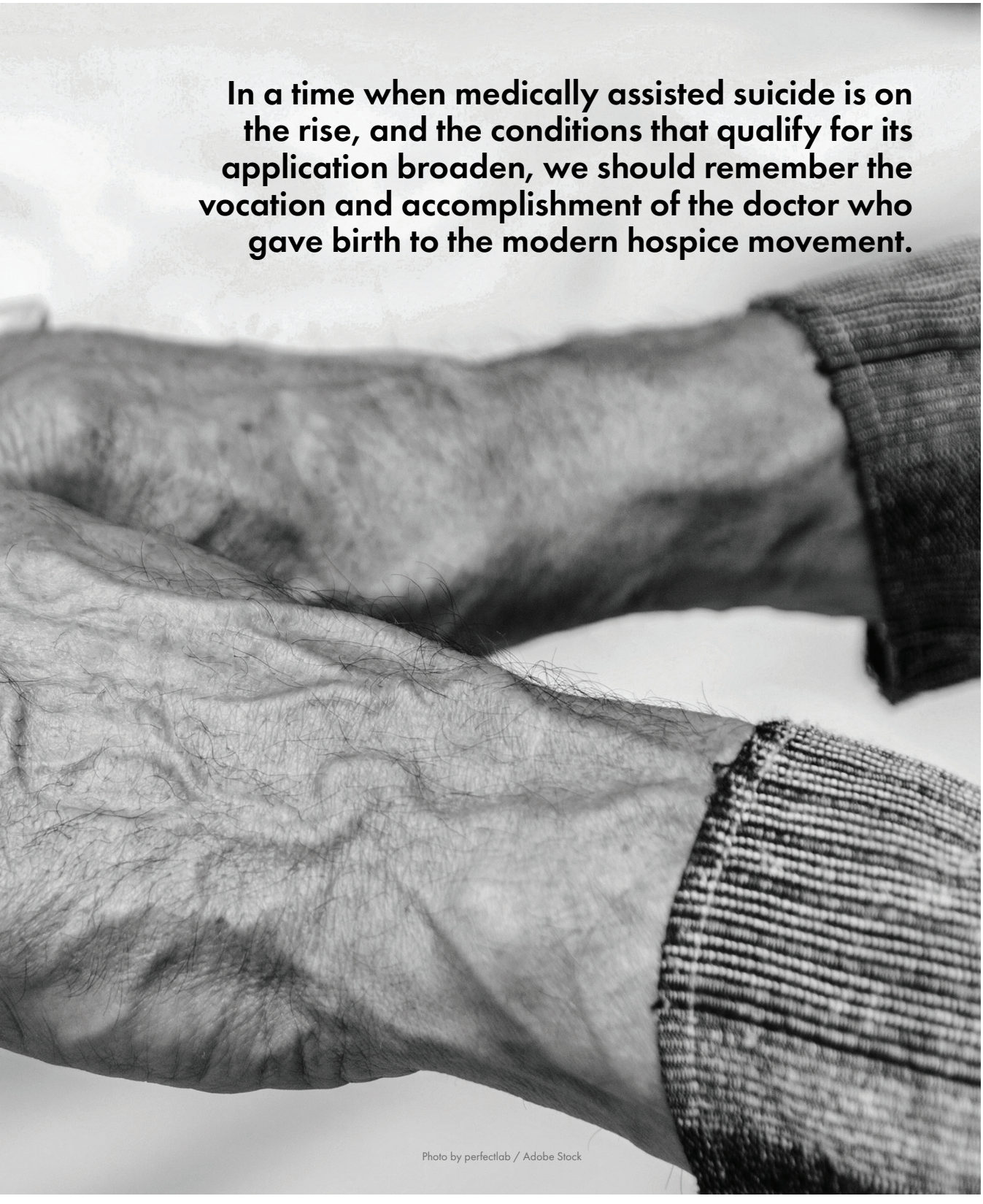


Photo by perfectlab / Adobe Stock

Cicely Saunders (1918–2005)

FINDING BETTER ANSWERS means asking better questions. Nowhere is this truer and more consequential than with questions surrounding matters of life and death. By asking better questions about care for the terminally ill, Dame Cicely Saunders (1918–2005)—a British nurse, social worker, and physician—founded the modern hospice movement.

It was, in fact, a question asked by a dying patient under Saunders' care early in her career that led her to some of these better answers. In 1948, a 40-year-old patient with an incurable cancer named David Tasma asked Saunders during a bout of sadness as he faced impending death, "Can't you say something to comfort me?"

Comfort: That was the question. It was also the answer.

Through her experience with this patient—along with the years of education, research, and practice that followed—Saunders came to understand that those who are dying need comfort, not only to alleviate their physical suffering, but also to meet their unique emotional, spiritual, and social needs. The terminally ill need total care for what Saunders called "total pain."

Such an understanding is axiomatic today. Yet this was not the case when, merely decades ago, Saunders challenged and changed the medical profession's approach to end-of-life care. To appreciate the significance of Saunders' legacy, it helps to understand the state of medicine in her lifetime, particularly as it was practiced when confronted with the terminally ill.

A CURE THE ONLY "SUCCESS"

The rise of modern medicine occurred alongside the growth of the Industrial Revolution, which began in the late 18th century. Modern medicine was

marked by rapid advances in medical technology and pharmaceutics, along with increasingly effective prevention and treatment of infectious diseases and other illnesses. But like modernity itself, modern medicine was founded on an underlying presumption of continual progress. Indeed, advances in medicine have proceeded at a dizzying pace over the past two centuries. But medicine cannot, in the end, eradicate death. And within a paradigm in which "success" has almost always meant "cure," an illness or condition that can't be fixed signifies failure. Research, energy, and resources devoted to cases that represent "failure" have simply not been a priority for most of the history of modern medicine. In order for "success" to include those for whom treatment would not bring a cure, the definition of success had to change. Saunders helped make that change.

She did so, not coincidentally, during the years in which public debates around euthanasia were on the rise. Euthanasia, suicide, and medically assisted death have taken place since ancient days, of course. But late modernity saw new and seemingly more sophisticated approaches to these age-old questions.

The origin of the modern-day euthanasia debate is usually marked with a speech given in 1870 at the Birmingham Speculative Club in England by a man named Samuel Williams, a schoolteacher, not a doctor, but who sparked vigorous debate within the medical profession. The year 1935 brought the founding

Voluntary Euthanasia Legalisation Society (c. 1936)

of the Voluntary Euthanasia Legalisation Society in Britain. Just a few years later, in 1939, an infant born with severe disabilities was killed in Germany in what was later characterized as the first state-sponsored act of euthanasia, the first of many such acts under the Nazi regime. It wasn't long before the United States entered the debate with a proposal to legalize euthanasia in New York in 1947. It proved unsuccessful but garnered enough support for the cause to gain momentum.

It was in such a climate that Cicely Saunders entered the world stage, transforming the medical profession's understanding of what it means to treat patients successfully who will not live. To look back

on Saunders' life is to see that, perhaps, such an accomplishment could be done only by someone like her, a woman not working within the academy or in the laboratory, but in the trenches of end-of-life care, a woman who brought her whole life and personality to her work and to her patients.

AN OUTSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE

Those who knew her describe Saunders as relentless, passionate, intense, and intimidating. Standing nearly six feet tall, she carried the fierceness of her personality bodily as well as inwardly. Yet she was also known to be naturally and deeply intuitive and empathetic. This empathy is attributed to her own experiences early in life feeling like an outsider, lonely and unpopular. Sent to boarding school, she would later describe herself in an interview with the BBC as being unhappy while away at school and just as unhappy at home.

Saunders stubbornly refused to follow the path of least resistance, a quality made obvious early on when she left Oxford University after her first year of study to enter the nursing profession. At Oxford, she had been enrolled in a politics, philosophy, and economics program. But then the Second World War broke out, and Saunders wanted to help the effort in a practical way. To enter nursing, however, would directly defy the wishes of her parents, an unhappily married but well-to-do and upwardly mobile couple who wanted greater accomplishments from their firstborn than mere laboring like a commoner, which is how they viewed nursing. Saunders would also be disappointing her school. One biographer records that an administrator at Oxford, upon learning of Saunders' plan to drop out and her reason for doing so, declared it was "a great pity" for Saunders to abandon her university studies "to take up work which, although extremely useful, can at the present be adequately fulfilled by a large number of people."

> "'IT'S THE DOCTORS WHO DESERT THE DYING.'"

Saunders would not be deterred. Instead, she would make history.

Upon leaving Oxford, Saunders undertook her nursing training at St. Thomas' Hospital in London in the historic program established by Florence Nightingale in 1860. She worked as a "Nightingale nurse," as they were called, until 1944, when the spinal problems that had plagued her most of her life resulted in a back injury that made nursing, with its rigorous physical demands, an impossible pursuit. What seemed at first to be a terrible misfortune, however, led to a path Saunders would never have anticipated or planned.

She returned to Oxford and took a degree as an almoner (or social worker), allowing her to continue caring for people in a hospital setting without the toll nursing would take on her body. It was during her work as an almoner that Saunders met Tasma, the man who opened her eyes to the needs of the dying—and opened her heart, for the first time, to romantic love, albeit briefly and chastely. As a Jewish Pole—a refugee from the Warsaw Ghetto—Tasma was an outsider, too. The personal connection the two shared seemed both unexpected and inevitable. Tragically, Tasma died just six weeks after the two met. But in that abbreviated time, Saunders and Tasma not only came to love one another but also staked out a vision for better meeting

Florence Nightingale (1820–1910)

Photo by Henry Hering / National Portrait Gallery, London

Dame Cicely Saunders receiving her Doctorate of Medicine from Dr. Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury (1977)

the needs of the terminally ill. Upon his death, Tasma bequeathed to Saunders 500 pounds, seed money that would bear fruit years down the road.

But first Saunders had more work and more learning to do. She volunteered at St. Luke's Home for the Dying, where she observed techniques for pain control that were novel then but are standard today. These practices included giving analgesics at regular intervals rather than making the patient wait until the pain was too much to endure. They included giving medicine orally rather than through injection as much as possible to offer greater ease for both patient and caregiver. And it was while working at St. Luke's that Saunders received advice that made the fullness of her legacy possible. Saunders' brother Christopher noted in a biographical essay that she had been trying to figure out what path to take in medicine when a highly regarded surgeon told her, "Well, you've got good ideas, but you won't get anywhere unless you become a doctor. It's the doctors who desert the dying."

If Saunders was going to change the way doctors treated the dying, she would have to become one.

Once more she returned to school. By then she was 33. With classmates far younger than she, Saunders was an outsider again. She was also among a tiny percentage of female medical students. She finished her training and qualified as a doctor at age 38.

In 1958, as a newly minted physician, Saunders quickly staked out her ground in end-of-life care. As the *British Medical Journal* reports, Saunders published an article complaining, "It appears that many patients feel deserted by their doctors at the end." She proposed instead that medical teams "work together to relieve where they cannot heal, to keep the patient's own struggle within his compass and to bring hope and consolation to the end." Right out of

the gate, Saunders made her mark, striking against the status quo within the medical establishment.

A SHELTER FOR THE DYING

Saunders is considered the founder of the *modern* hospice movement because hospice itself was not new. She pioneered in bringing modern understandings of not only medicine but also psychology, education, and research to bear on care for the dying. But places for the dying, the original sense of "hospice," had long existed. The word *hospice* comes from a Latin root that means "host" (with etymological connections to "stranger," "guest," "visitor," and "sojourner"). It is believed that the earliest hospices were places where those making the arduous pilgrimage to the Holy Land could stay to receive shelter and care if they fell ill (often fatally) along the way. The Middle Ages saw the rise and decline of these rudimentary institutions formally devoted to care for those who were dying, a movement that paralleled the growth and decrease in the number of the religious orders that first established them. With the development of modern medicine in the 19th century, a number of modern hospices were opened in the United Kingdom (and elsewhere) to house those dying of tuberculosis or other incurable diseases.

As the history of the word reflects, the concept of hospice care since its inception had always signified a shelter for the dying. Shelter in this sense was literal: it was a place—with a bed, a roof, food, and water—where a dying person could take last breaths, a place to relieve that physical body from as much suffering as possible. The shift that Saunders brought to hospice moved this narrower concept from that of merely a place to a broader mode of care. Today hospice refers to the holistic end-of-life care Saunders advocated, whether administered in a hospital, care facility, or at home. "Not everybody has buildings," Saunders explained upon being awarded the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize in 2001. "Hospice isn't just a building. Hospice is attitudes and skills. Hospice is a philosophy of care."

> "'HOSPICE ISN'T JUST A BUILDING. HOSPICE IS A PHILOSOPHY OF CARE.'"

St. Christopher's Hospice in London (2005)

Thus, Saunders opened St. Christopher's Hospice in southwest London in 1967, following years of research, planning, and financing. She insisted on building the hospital from the ground up because she didn't want simply to house and care for the terminally ill, though such places were certainly worthy and needed. But these already existed. St. Christopher's was the world's first hospital devoted not only to serving the terminally ill but also to teaching and research in end-of-life care. More than a place, hospice would become, according to Saunders' visionary plan, a way to live while facing death. The architecture of St. Christopher's made real Saunders' vision for what the end of life could and should be like. The facility featured spaciousness, light, gardens, and room to accommodate patients' family members, so they, too, could be cared for while being with their loved ones. It was the first facility in the world built to accommodate teaching and research in the field of end-of-life care.

St. Christopher's also helped birth the field of medicine now called palliative care. Balfour Mount, a Canadian physician who coined the phrase in 1974, visited the hospital to research Saunders' work and to apply it to the work he had already been undertaking in the area of pain management, which includes but is not limited to cases of terminal illness. Thus, in founding the modern hospice movement, Saunders helped bring about a field of medicine that would offer even more comfort to those facing death.

FLIPPING THE CHRISTIAN SWITCH

Just as the first hospices were religious in nature, so, too, Saunders' religious faith played a key role in her life's work. Saunders' childhood home and upbringing were not at all religious. Nor did Saunders seem to be seeking any kind of religious experience at first. In fact, du Boulay notes in her biography that, after reading George Bernard Shaw in grade school, Saunders declared herself an atheist. But in 1945, after she'd returned to Oxford to become an almoner, Saunders befriended Christian classmates who also happened to be evangelicals. It was also around this time that Saunders' parents were going through a painful separation. When she accompanied these evangelical classmates on a holiday, Saunders found herself reluctantly taking them—and their faith—seriously. As she later described it, "The switch was flipped." Saunders went all in. According to du Boulay, she read C.S. Lewis and Dorothy Sayers, met Charles Williams, and joined the Socratic Society at Oxford, C.S. Lewis' gathering of atheists and Christians. Eventually, she became a member of John Stott's church, All Souls, in central London. Saunders would also broaden her Christian views—particularly by the time, late in life, she met and eventually married a Polish artist and professor who was Roman Catholic.

But even as far back as her friendship with David Tasma, whose background, as already noted, was Jewish, Saunders never sought to proselytize her patients, whether those under her direct care or

The Radcliffe Camera at the University of Oxford

Photo by RyanKing999 / iStock

"SAUNDERS RECOGNIZED THE REALM OF SPIRITUAL NEEDS AND INCLUDED THESE IN HER UNDERSTANDING OF TOTAL CARE."

those within the care of her hospital or within the movement she launched. When Tasma asked her for comfort, she looked to his Jewish background and recited Psalms to him, and Tasma later reported that he felt at peace with God. Among the needs of the dying, Saunders recognized the realm of spiritual needs and included these in her understanding of total care. But she knew those needs could be met only on the terms of the patient—just as was true of their individualized physical, emotional, and social needs.

This was what Saunders meant by the concept of "total pain," an approach to suffering that takes into consideration its physical, psychological, social, and spiritual elements. Saunders developed this understanding under the influence of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's research on the stages of grief. And grief, Saunders recognized, is a significant source of the pain that accompanies dying. Understanding the role of grief in dying, and all its sources, helped Saunders speak clearly and prophetically against the growing push toward physician-assisted death taking place in her lifetime. In one television interview, she argued that legalized euthanasia

> …would pull the rug out from under a great many vulnerable people who would so easily feel, "Well, I have a right to shorten my life. Now, I have a duty to do it because I am a burden on others and because my life as part of society is now worthless." And I feel very strongly that we need to say to people, "You matter because you are you. And you matter to the last moment of your life. And we will do all we can to make that life as good as we can."


Photo by Darwin Brandis / Wikipedia

MAID IN CANADA

Saunders' recognition of "total pain" is essential for today's discussion of end-of-life care, especially when those discussions turn to the willful ending of life as part of medical practice, as they are increasingly today.

Canada is a current focal point of these discussions. Now offering assistance to both terminally ill and chronically ill patients, Canada has some of the most liberal assisted death laws in the world. As reported by multiple news outlets last year, medically assisted deaths accounted for 4% of all deaths in Canada in 2022. The total number of these deaths beginning in 2016, when physician assisted death was legalized there, through 2022 is 44,958.

What is happening in that nation sheds light on what is happening or is likely to happen in many places throughout the world. While laws and terminology vary, active euthanasia in some form is currently legal in five countries: Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Canada, and Colombia. Passive euthanasia is legal in these five countries as well as the following: Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Norway, Sweden, Spain, Mexico, Argentina, and Chile. Physician-assisted suicide is legal in seven countries: Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Germany, Finland, Canada, and Japan. In the United States, medically assisted suicide is legal in 10 states and the District of Columbia.

Although terms differ across the globe and are ever-shifting as laws change, Canada's government-sanctioned program for medically assisted death is called MAID—Medical Assistance in Dying. The Canadian government defines it this way: "Medical assistance in dying (MAID) is a process that allows someone who is found eligible to be able to receive assistance from a medical practitioner in ending their life." Among other requirements, to qualify for MAID, a person must "have a grievous and irremediable medical condition, make a voluntary request for medical assistance in dying," and "give informed consent to receive medical assistance in dying." Canada offers two forms of assistance in dying:

> **Method 1:** a physician or nurse practitioner directly administers a substance that causes death, such as an injection of a drug. This is sometimes called clinician-administered medical assistance in dying.
>
> **Method 2:** a physician or nurse practitioner provides or prescribes a drug that the eligible person takes themselves, in order to bring about their own death. This is sometimes called self-administered medical assistance in dying.

What the Canadian government calls "Method 1" is, in fact, euthanasia. "Method 2" is medically-assisted suicide. The term "medical assistance in dying" draws attention away from these other words that carry moral weight and social stigma. The moral actions themselves haven't changed, even if the techniques, vocabularies, and popular acceptance of them have.

MAID became legal in Canada in 2016 under certain conditions. Those conditions were broadened in 2021 and will be further loosened this year to allow those who suffer only from mental illness (unaccompanied by other illness) to seek medically assisted death.

In a story covering this development last year, the *New York Times* interviewed Dr. John Maher, a psychiatrist in Barrie, Ontario. Maher specializes in treating complex cases of mental illness, the kinds of cases that can be improved but often only over the course of years and intense treatment. It is easy for such patients to lose hope. Maher told the *Times* that he

is concerned that these kinds of patients will look to assisted death rather than pursuing extended treatment. "I'm trying to keep my patients alive," he was reported as saying. "What does it mean for the role of the physician, as healer, as bringer of hope, to be offering death? And what does it mean in practice?"

Hopelessness has many causes, some more possible to fix than others. In 2022 a Canadian man named Amir Farsoud sought medical assistance in dying because of his poverty and impending homelessness. Because Farsoud suffers chronic back pain, he is eligible for MAID, but it was not the physical pain from his chronic condition that was the source of his most intense suffering. Rather, Farsoud's overwhelming pain came from the failure of any social support system to meet his basic living needs. He faced losing his home. This led him to feel death was the only way out. But when the story of his plight made headlines, Farsoud received such an outpouring of public support, including more than $60,000, that his outlook on life (and death) changed. But it wasn't just the money. "There has been this amazing outpouring of love and support, emotional support," he told *City News*.

Cicely Saunders knew the intensity of the kind of pain that Farsoud suffered. And she knew how such pain could be comforted and how that comfort could revive the desire to live. By showing how the pain that comes from dying can be identified and alleviated, Saunders' work bears significant application to individuals who choose to hasten their deaths because their pain is unbearable.

Wherever medical science is oriented entirely toward cures, those who suffer from incurable conditions will become extraneous or even expendable. Wherever medical care focuses solely on physical suffering, other forms of human suffering will be inadequately addressed. Of course, human suffering can never be entirely eradicated. But wherever scientific knowledge sees no purpose in suffering, then those who suffer can be understood as having no purpose as well.

Medical science, care, and knowledge are all rooted in human actions and understanding. Humans do not have total power over death or dying. But humans have power over how we care for one another, whether or how we comfort pain, whatever its source, and over the meaning and purpose we assign to our living and to our dying.

It has not been even 20 years since Cicely Saunders' death. (Poignantly, fittingly, it was at St. Christopher's that Saunders herself spent her own last days, dying of breast cancer on July 14, 2005.) But her life and work deserve to be remembered and retold not only for the changes she effected in the past but also because her wisdom, her practical solutions, and her sheer faith in human potential—even at the natural end of life—can still inform discussions today. RL

***Karen Swallow Prior, Ph.D.**, is a writer and speaker. Her most recent book is* The Evangelical Imagination: How Stories, Images, and Metaphors Created a Culture in Crisis. *She is a regular columnist at Religion News Service.*

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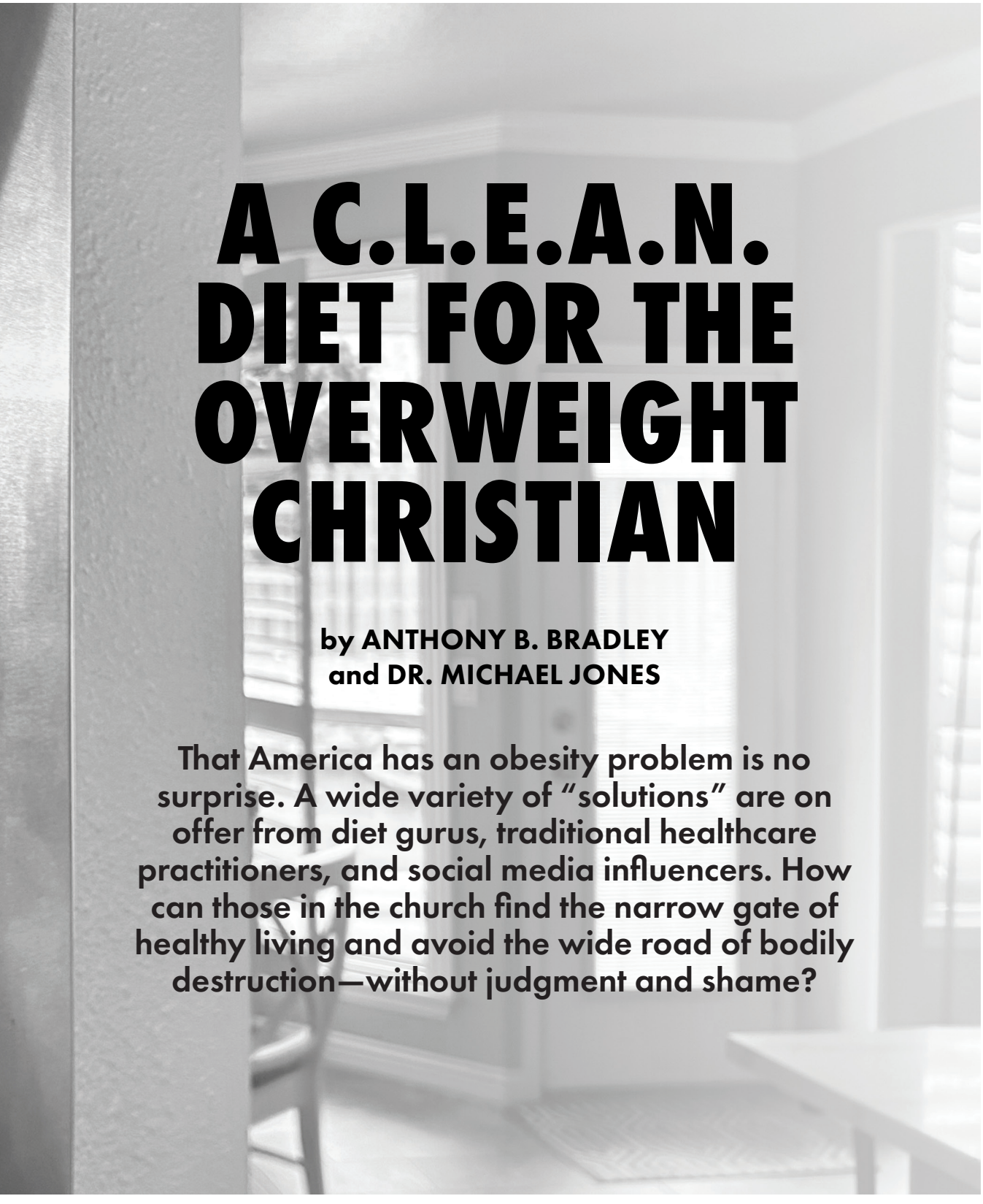
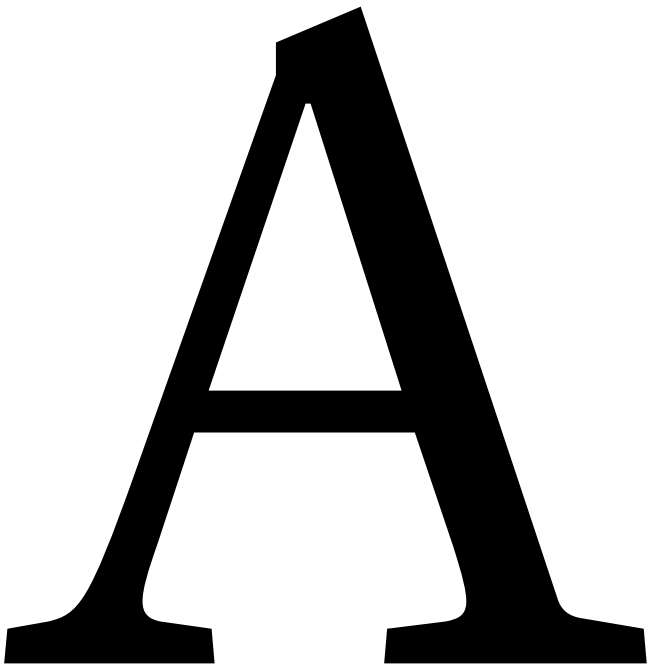
Grocery List
salmon
avocado
spinach
whole wheat bread
nuts
lentils
My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
Psalm 73:26
FEARLESS
because He is faithful



A C.L.E.A.N. DIET FOR THE OVERWEIGHT CHRISTIAN

by ANTHONY B. BRADLEY
and DR. MICHAEL JONES

That America has an obesity problem is no surprise. A wide variety of "solutions" are on offer from diet gurus, traditional healthcare practitioners, and social media influencers. How can those in the church find the narrow gate of healthy living and avoid the wide road of bodily destruction—without judgment and shame?



AMERICANS GRAPPLE WITH chronic obesity, according to recent figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention spanning from 1999–2000 to March 2020. The prevalence of obesity in the U.S. surged from 30.5% to 41.9% during this period, raising significant concerns given its association with Alzheimer's, heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and various cancers. In 2023 fiscal terms, the annual estimated medical costs linked to obesity in the United States neared $173 billion, making obesity-related health conditions the primary instigator of adverse health outcomes among Americans. Research also shows that obesity rates are often higher in low-income communities due to government subsidies of unhealthy food additives like high-fructose corn syrup and less access to nutrient-dense foods. A potential remedy for obesity could not only foster a healthier nation but also lead to a substantial reduction in healthcare expenditures and economic mobility for the truly disadvantaged.

Regarding obesity prevalence within the American Christian population, Christina Marini correctly identifies the crucial role played by the consumption of nutrient-deficient, high-calorie foods in substantial quantities, the intake of sugary beverages, and insufficient physical activity in contributing to obesity development. Yet, does the Christian lifestyle in America serve as a protective factor against these contributors? The data paints a disheartening picture. A study conducted by the National Institutes of Health, spearheaded by Matthew J. Feinstein, discovered that young adults who regularly participated in religious services were 50% more likely to experience obesity by middle age.

While Christians conscientiously address vices that undermine the stewardship of their bodies, churches often neglect the community norms that contribute to obesity. This prompts a crucial question: How should Christians respond to this phenomenon?

WHAT IS OBESITY? WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Paraphrasing the definition offered by the Obesity Medicine Association, obesity is a disease state resulting from maladaptive alterations in normal physiologic, biochemical, and neurohormonal function. In short, much as with diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and many other conditions, obesity is a chronic disease whose cause and progression lay somewhere in the intersection between abnormal unconscious processes and personal decisions. Interestingly, in obesity much of one's volition is directly under the influence of self-propagating, abnormal biology. Unfortunately, rampant mischaracterization of this condition has led to a long history of inappropriate advice ranging from ineffectual to detrimental. If we are to see radically different results, we are going to need a radically different understanding in our approach to this devastating and costly epidemic.

Some generalities can be discussed as we consider the causes of obesity. On an individual basis, we now know this to be a very heterogeneous disease with interplay to varying degrees between genetics,

A selection of soft drinks for sale at a South Carolina Food Lion grocery store

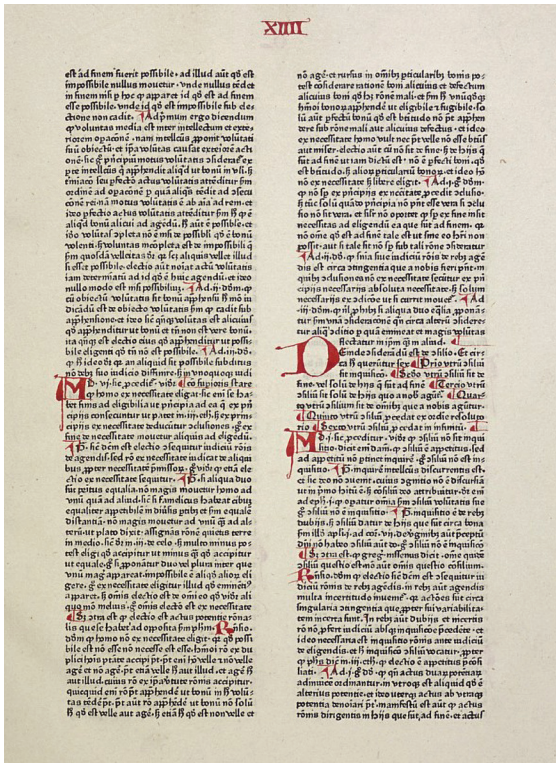
nutrition, sleep, hormones, environment, and, often, prescribed medications. Of these, all but genetics are modifiable factors. While all these factors need to be addressed, the area most ubiquitously discussed is nutrition—particularly as it relates to the "Western diet." By this we are typically referring to the relatively inexpensive, ultra-processed, highly palatable, highly convenient, high glycemic index foods—think chips, fries, sodas, cookies, etc. Add to this the more natural starchy staples like potatoes, white rice, white breads, and cereals, and there is little wonder we are swimming in insulin resistance.

> "GLUTTONY DOES NOT ALWAYS MANIFEST AS OBESITY."

IS OBESITY THE SAME AS GLUTTONY?

In ethical terms, it is essential to distinguish between obesity and gluttony. Western food production and processing methods often lead individuals to remain overweight despite adhering to the recommended dietary guidelines issued by the U.S. Department of Agriculture or those advised by numerous physicians. Even a diet that cut down on less-healthy foods might not guarantee the shedding of unwanted stored fat. Obesity frequently results from poor nutritional choices rather than mere overconsumption, setting it apart from the concept of gluttony.

Thomas Aquinas, in *Summa Theologica* (2.2 Q. 148), clarifies that "gluttony denotes, not any desire of eating and drinking, but an inordinate desire." The Christian scriptures explicitly condemn the inordinate desire for food and drink (Deut. 21:20; Prov. 23:1–3, 19–21, and 28:7). Notably, gluttony does not always manifest as obesity; factors like metabolism, food types, and other elements can prevent weight gain despite excessive food consumption. This implies that one can maintain a slender physique while displaying gluttonous behavior, even following



From a 1471 edition of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*

a raw vegan or vegetarian lifestyle. Gluttony pivots more on the usage of food rather than solely correlating with obesity. Additionally, certain medications can induce weight gain, complicating the definition of obesity and necessitating a nuanced approach involving knowledge and empathy in addressing it.

Throughout the history of God's people, overconsumption has always been denounced. Jesus faced allegations in the Gospels of being a drunkard and glutton (Matt. 11:19). Paul's teachings to the churches highlight the perils faced by a community whose lifestyle revolves around their appetites, noting that "their god is their stomach" (Phil. 3:19). Complicating matters, excessive consumption often emerges as a coping mechanism for discomfort, pain, past trauma, or as a means to control a chaotic life. Early habituation of children to use overconsumption as a solution to emotional distress can pave the way for addiction. The act of eating triggers dopamine release in our brains, forging associations between pleasure centers and certain activities, whether virtuous or encouraged by vice. Research suggests a significant correlation between adult overeating and childhood trauma, revealing profound and intricate reasons behind a lack of self-control. Addressing these fundamental issues forms the cornerstone of a wise dietary approach in harmony with God's intent for nutritional sustenance and enjoyment.

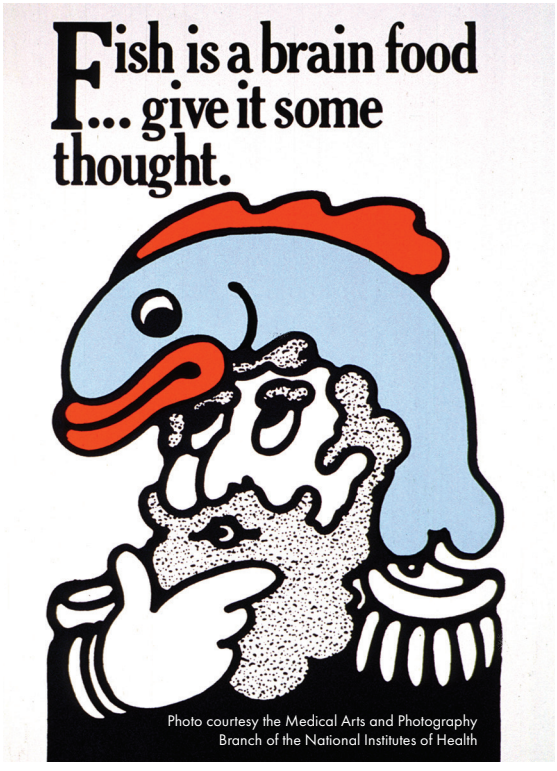
WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT HOW CHRISTIANS SHOULD EAT?

While there exists a general consensus within the Christian tradition regarding God's provision of food for humans to enjoy (Gen. 1:29), the production of food to satisfy their needs and fulfill the task of "ruling and subduing" the earth (Gen. 1:28), and the responsibility to "work and take care" of creation (Gen. 2:15) in order to cultivate food, significant disagreement arises concerning specific dietary practices. For example, Leviticus 11 outlines dietary laws categorizing animals as "clean" or "unclean." Creatures with scales and fins (such as fish) and mammals possessing split hooves and that chew their cud (e.g., deer, cattle, goats) were deemed clean (Lev. 11:7–9), while crustaceans (like shrimp, lobsters), rabbits, pigs, and similar animals were considered unclean. These prohibitions aligned with the directive for God's people to be "set apart" (Lev. 20:26) from the surrounding pagan nations that did not worship the one true God. Thus, they were instructed not to consume foods offered to idols but to recognize that food consumption held spiritual and sacramental significance. Their dietary practices aimed to demonstrate their distinctiveness to neighboring nations.

The resurrection of Christ nullified the use of these dietary restrictions that distinguished between Jews and Gentiles (Acts 10–11; 1 Tim. 4:4).

> "PAUL'S TEACHINGS HIGHLIGHT THE PERILS FACED BY A COMMUNITY WHOSE LIFESTYLE REVOLVES AROUND THEIR APPETITES."

World War II–era USDA poster with seven food groups



1920 NIH poster promoting the consumption of fish

The sanctification and distinction of God's people now stem from their faith and trust in the work and person of Jesus Christ, not their dietary preferences. Jesus himself declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19), emphasizing the importance of the condition of one's heart rather than the specific foods consumed in relation to union or disunion with the Triune God. In other words, holiness no longer hinges on adherence to the Old Testament dietary laws but rather on the spiritual nourishment of the heart in union with Christ, providing the freedom to exercise discernment and wisdom.

Christians across various traditions hold differing opinions on the persistence of Old Testament dietary restrictions, not in terms of holiness but regarding wise and healthy living. Some argue that the dietary laws outlined in the Bible also represent the healthiest dietary choices. Drawing from Genesis 1 and 2, certain individuals might advocate for vegetarianism, while others could support a more generalized pescatarian diet. Conversely, some might argue for the permissibility of all types of meat consumption. After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Bible underscores that dietary directives assume a secondary role. What is crucial now is the application of knowledge and prudence rather than strict adherence to dietary laws. Therefore, this article can only offer insights based on the best available information regarding our food options and their alignment with our bodily needs.

WHAT'S A WISE DIET?

What constitutes the optimal diet for promoting good health? Is it keto, paleo, Mediterranean, or vegan? They all can have potential health benefits, particularly concerning weight loss among individuals with obesity. For many, the Mediterranean diet boasts the most compelling evidence, specifically with respect to cardiovascular advantages. All these dietary approaches possess the potential to enhance health; however, they can also be misused, resulting in adverse health effects. In the absence of more definitive research, I (Jones) have come to believe that amid these theories, the most beneficial nutritional guidance entails integrating these dietary plans into what I refer to as a C.L.E.A.N. dietary pattern.

C.L.E.A.N. signifies foods that are Clear of most, if not all, additives and preservatives, have

a Low glycemic index, are Eclectic in variety, Anti-inflammatory, and Nonprocessed—as much as possible. In essence, these foods are composed of ingredients that are easily pronounced—such as fish, avocado, spinach, whole grains, etc. While not all processed foods need be off-limits, a diet primarily reliant on packaged foods likely forms an unsound dietary foundation. If you lack culinary skills, it is essential to learn some, as good health doesn't come prepackaged. Additionally, water plays a crucial role in a healthy diet. If you are not naturally inclined toward drinking water, it is important to develop that habit. Considering that almost 80% of your body consists of water, embracing it is pivotal for good health. Transforming your perspective can be as simple as adding the word "yet" to your vocabulary, as in, "I do not like water, yet!"

The key to enhancing health, including reducing excess body fat, lies in improving the quality and chemistry of the fuel nourishing your organs. Anything consumed gets either absorbed into your bloodstream and distributed to every cell or eliminated as stool. As critical as food volume/caloric intake and exercise are, nothing surpasses the significance of ingesting fuel that enhances physiological function. It's often said, "You cannot outrun a bad diet." While one can be slim despite an unhealthy diet, there are countless unhealthy, slim individuals. If your aim is to shed weight and achieve sustainable good health, you must build a dietary foundation that supports normal organ function while minimizing dysfunction—the essence of the C.L.E.A.N. dietary pattern.

Knowing what to do is not sufficient, however. Merely possessing knowledge about healthier living usually results in, at best, temporary weight loss followed by regained pounds, and often additional weight gain. In reality, over half of those who lose weight regain most of it within four years or less, and up to 90% regain at least some weight without rigorous, long-term management. Frequently, our desires drive us toward detrimental behaviors while deterring us from beneficial ones. While our bodies benefit from certain practices, our desires lead us in conflicting directions. Since we cannot alter what is beneficial for us, our only recourse is to change our desires. Thankfully, although it demands time and effort, desires, habits, and patterns can be learned and cultivated. Rather than dedicating energy to shedding a few pounds, we should focus on adopting

An exit sign along Interstate 75 in Georgia showing nearby fast food restaurants

Photo by krblokhin / iStock

Crisco advertisement in *Good Housekeeping* (1953)

A New York City billboard for Kentucky Fried Chicken (1980)

healthier habits with the ultimate goal of transforming our desires. Obesity is not fundamentally a *weight* problem; it's a *want* problem—we possess a "broken wanter."

Cultivating changes in our habits, routines, and even desires may begin by rectifying our lack of knowledge concerning healthier living, but this alone will not suffice. Repeatedly integrating these practices into our daily routines should aim not merely at dropping some weight but gradually normalizing these healthier behaviors, eventually making them desirable. Falling in love with the process leads to lasting results; loving the end results often yields fleeting outcomes. Indeed, the ongoing treatment for obesity resembles the gradual, methodical learning process of mastering a musical instrument more than the traditional approach to curing a disease.

I AM OVERWEIGHT—WHAT SHOULD I DO?

What are some things we can begin doing today to stop "throwing gas on the fire" of this disease? Even though the calories-in, calories-out (CICO) model and lack of exercise are not the causes of the underlying pathophysiology of the disease of obesity, these are the most readily available points at which we can avoid fanning the flames and even help douse the fire. The following recommendations do not consider portion sizes, specific macronutrient proportions, or caloric intake, as these need to be individualized based on health goals, current health concerns, and individual preferences. Of course, it is also important to avoid even the recommended foods in cases of intolerance, allergy, or specific instructions from your healthcare provider.

We can start with a few nutrition recommendations. First, and perhaps most important, is eliminating or at least avoiding ultra-processed foods as much as possible. These are industrially manufactured food products that contain considerable amounts of additives and are often high in sugar, potentially less healthy fats, and salt. Mounting evidence suggests the detrimental effects of these types of foods comes largely from significant increases in the glycemic index (degree and speed with which a food causes spikes in blood sugar and insulin levels) and promotion of inflammation—your body's immune

Photo by Candice Bell / iStock

response, which when overexcited can damage the body—resulting from the processing as compared to the same foods in their whole, natural state.

Other foods known to have inflammatory effects include processed and refined carbohydrates such as white bread, pasta, and sugar. Foods such as french fries and fried chicken are often fried in less healthy oils that can be pro-inflammatory. Processed meat such as bacon, sausage, and hot dogs have additives and preservatives that can cause inflammation. High-fructose corn syrup found in many processed foods and sweetened beverages can also promote inflammation; there is even convincing evidence for its role in the development of fatty liver disease that can progress to fibrosis, cirrhosis, and even cancer. Dairy products can trigger inflammation in some people, especially those who are lactose intolerant or have a dairy sensitivity. Alcohol can increase inflammation in the body, especially when consumed in excess. Vegetable oils (seed oils) such as corn oil, soybean oil, and safflower oil have high levels of omega-6 fatty acids, which can promote inflammation if consumed in excess.

Unfortunately, many of the foods in the preceding two categories have become exceedingly difficult to eliminate, as over the past four to five decades they have become foundational to the Western diet.

All this raises the question, "What *should* we be eating?" Some important types of foods to consider—remember, tastes are learned and based largely on repeated exposure—are those with a low glycemic index that are high in fiber, high in protein (particularly those high in the essential amino acid leucine in its natural form, not supplemented by a capsule), higher in heart healthy fats, and preferably with anti-inflammatory properties, or at least those to which inflammation has not been attributed. Finding foods that meet all these criteria can be a bit challenging, but here are some options that come close: chia seeds, lentils, salmon, and almonds. (A quick Google search can give you more options.)

Now that we have some idea of both ends of the healthy vs. less healthy food spectrum, what are some foods that fall more in the middle that we will need in a healthy diet for improved variety as well as necessary nutrients perhaps not found in the preceding list? The following recommendations focus on different nutritional characteristics. You will notice

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> **ANY MOVEMENT—HOUSEWORK, YARD WORK, GARDENING, COOKING, ROLLING ON THE FLOOR WITH THE DOG, STANDING WHEN YOU COULD BE SITTING—IS BENEFICIAL AND PREFERABLE TO BEING SEDENTARY.**

that there is significant overlap among these lists, as some of the healthiest foods are considered healthy precisely because they contain elements of a variety of desirable characteristics.

Here are some low glycemic index foods that are known to have anti-inflammatory properties or are noninflammatory and should be at the top of your list: leafy greens, fatty fish, nuts, berries, turmeric, ginger, and green tea. High-fiber, low glycemic index foods are great choices for supporting stable blood sugar levels and promoting overall health. Examples include some legumes, vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, and avocado.

The importance of exercise for health improvement and maintenance is vital. For many with obesity, however, some exercise recommendations range from lofty to downright undoable. It is important to note that these are goals to be worked toward. We should not take from this that anything less is worthless. It used to be said by many healthcare professionals that if you were not breathing hard and sweating you were not doing any good. More recent evidence from clinical trials and retrospective analyses has convinced most of us working in this space

that this notion is utter bunk. While achieving the activity targets is recommended, any movement over nonmovement is good. Any movement—housework, yard work, gardening, cooking, rolling on the floor with the dog, standing when you could be sitting—is beneficial and preferable to being sedentary.

Finally, we should also briefly consider what are known as anti-obesity medications. There are several used under this heading, but most notable of late are the injectable therapies. Ozempic has been the most widely discussed by various media; however, it is actually a brand specifically indicated for use in diabetes. At this time, those approved for obesity include Saxenda, Wegovy, and the most recently released, Zepbound. Utilized properly, these can be a very beneficial part of a comprehensive obesity treatment plan. Despite much negative press, the risk of their use in the right patient population is fairly minimal and greatly exceeded by their benefits. It should be noted that they should not be used by those who are not obese but who would simply like to "lose a few pounds."

One may reasonably ask, why would we consider the use of medication at all if radical, long-term lifestyle modification is the key to successful treatment? The answer is twofold. First, as previously established, there are physiological abnormalities present in obesity that, for many, no amount of good nutrition or exercise will overcome. Second, the tools used in obesity, including medications, in my opinion, should not be used for "weight loss" per se. Rather, they should be used in support of the needed changes. Consider the use of a jack to change a car's flat tire. The person who desires to get the tire changed cannot do so without jacking up the car. But the jack cannot change the tire. Anti-obesity medications are simply part of the "jack" that can be used to bear some of the burden so the needed lifestyle changes can be undertaken, but ultimately the burden of the changes still lays with the individual.

HOW CAN CHURCHES ENCOURAGE HEALTHY LIVING?

In 1 Corinthians 6:12, Paul writes, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything." While our church community should strive to promote "love and good works" (Heb. 10:24), we must also exercise caution not to lead our fellow believers into perilous situations needlessly (cf. Rom. 14:20, 1 Cor. 8:9). While spiritual well-being holds ultimate importance for the redeemed, Paul nevertheless instructs Timothy that there is "some value" in attending to the physical body (1 Tim. 4:8). It appears that the church generally heeds Paul's advice concerning spiritual health; however, we often overlook our responsibilities concerning the physical well-being of our fellow believers' earthly temples (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16, 2 Cor. 5:1).

> "WE MUST CONFRONT THE PREVALENT CULTURE OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP AND COMMUNAL MEALS."

Members of the body of Christ, although set apart, remain influenced by our culture. Addressing the obesity epidemic on a grand scale will necessitate reeducating and transforming our cultural norms regarding its causes and remedies. Yet, within the church, the goal might be more achievable. Contrary to some suggestions, we disagree that obesity is primarily a spiritual issue. Nonetheless, we do believe it holds spiritual implications to varying degrees in different individuals, whether as a causative factor or in its effects. We are not implying that all individuals grappling with obesity in the church struggle with gluttony, but some might. Perhaps a fair assessment could refer to Paul's assertion in 1 Corinthians 6:12 regarding being "dominated." Are you controlled by food in general or specific types of food? Remember, it is not merely about enjoying a particular food but whether that food exerts control over you. Where the issue carries spiritual weight, be it causative or consequential, compassion, understanding, accountability, repentance, restoration, and, significantly, acknowledgment of forgiveness through divinely appointed means of grace should be extended, as with any other spiritual struggle, rather than dismissing it as insignificant.

Moreover, practical steps must be considered to engage with the issue of obesity within our church community. Here are a few initial suggestions. First, rather than ignoring obesity, we must be willing to

Photo by cabecademarmore / Adobe Stock

gently acknowledge its existence. Only then can we identify the church's role in propagating and even enabling the problem. This acknowledgment paves the way for considering how we can aid those in need within our congregations.

Additionally, we must confront the prevalent culture of church fellowship and communal meals. Reflect on the various food lists mentioned earlier. If you examine the typical offerings at a church social event and compare them to these lists, would you assume that those partaking are more likely to be healthy or unhealthy individuals? You might argue, "We don't eat like this all the time." On average, however, the reality suggests otherwise. Why? Primarily, because we inhabit the same culture where unhealthy eating is commonplace. Simply claiming that many of those consuming the same food are not overweight is not proof of their good health. Rather than most of our non–Sunday service activities being largely sedentary, to help reduce our food focus perhaps we should consider types of gatherings that promote movement, from church-wide social and ministry gatherings to community-service projects.

CONCLUSION

The act of sharing and savoring food represents a beautiful, divine blessing. But our reality is fraught with the complexities of modernized food production, conflicting dietary information, and shifts in traditional eating habits. It's an overwhelming web of confusion—today's dietary villain was yesterday's health hero. Frustration is inevitable. However, as a community bonded by faith, we cannot endorse excessive consumption or unwise eating. We grapple with the solution, but acknowledging obesity as a critical concern is our first step. Normalizing healthier communal living and supporting those battling obesity within our midst is essential. Let's shift our focus during gatherings away from unwise eating habits and toward healthier options without stigma or judgment. Encouraging gratitude for those who provide these choices is a start. Addressing obesity not only improves our health but also diminishes healthcare costs and enhances economic opportunities for the most vulnerable among us. This journey toward healthier living is one we must embark upon together, shaping a brighter, more nourished future for all. RL

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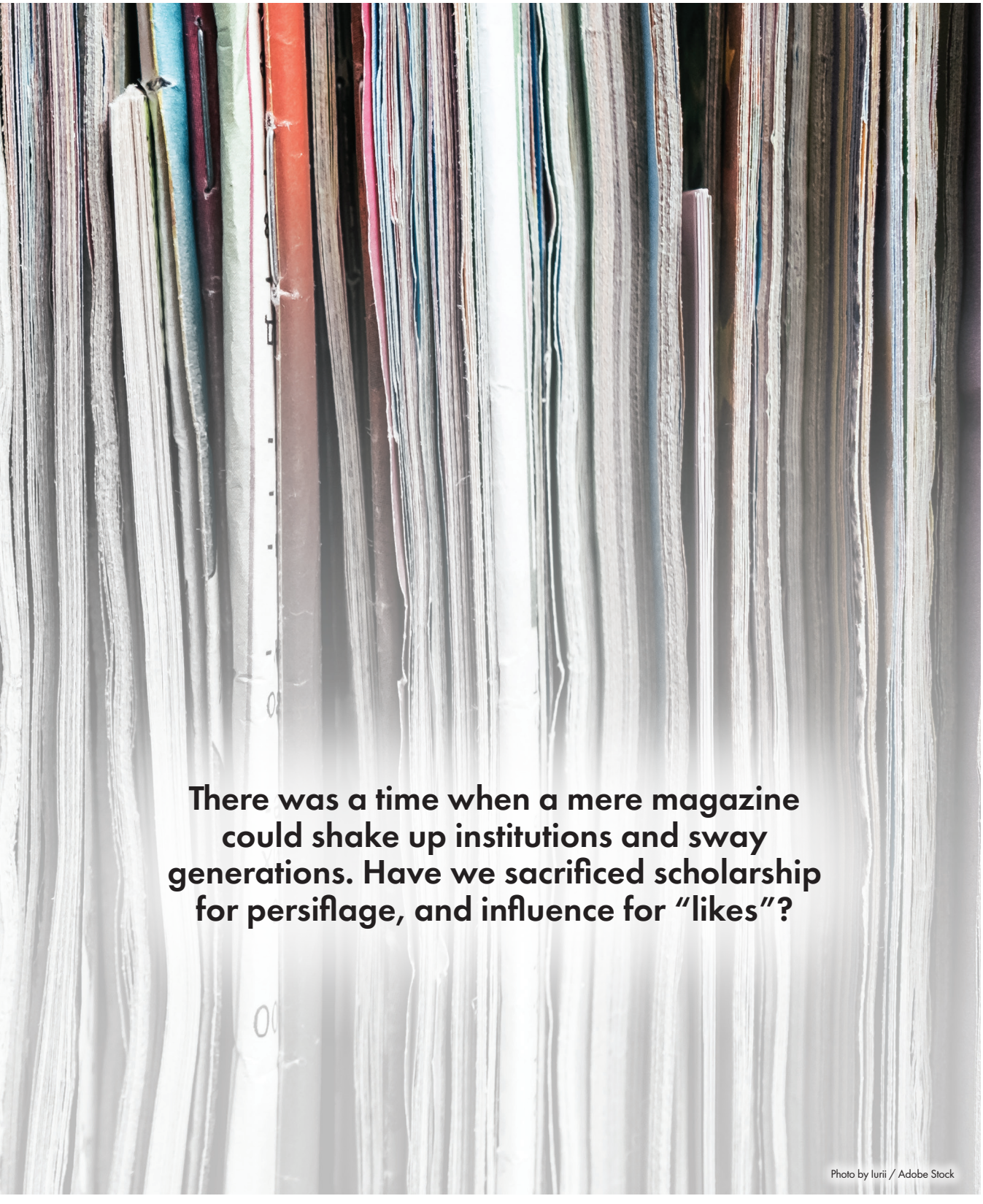
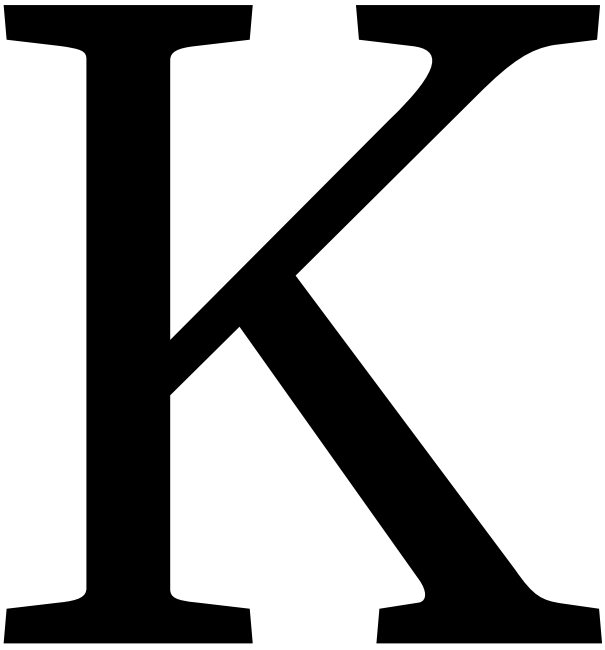
THE RAMBLER AND THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF MAGAZINES

by DAN HUGGER



There was a time when a mere magazine could shake up institutions and sway generations. Have we sacrificed scholarship for persiflage, and influence for "likes"?

Photo by Iurii / Adobe Stock



"KRIS, I NEED TO KNOW HOW MANY BOOKS."

Vehicle, boxes, packing materials, hand truck (I wasn't going to make that mistake again—always bring a hand truck). Books. To a librarian, their names and forms are important, but before they become part of a collection, they must be numbered. I had known the generous donors, James and Mary Holland, as long as I had worked at the Acton Institute: 15 years. Well, not "known"—known *of*, never met. I knew their work and by extension something of their books. Collections live and breathe, expand and contract. Expansion was coming, and for a librarian that is thrilling, but as with breathing, it could also be terrifying not knowing how deep or shallow it would be.

Two days later, Kris Mauren, president of the Acton Institute, had some rough numbers for me.

After two hours in the air and two hours on the road, I found myself in the Hollands' driveway. James and Mary are retired academics who have made outstanding contributions to the intellectual history of Catholicism. My first introduction to Lord Acton was a slim volume published by the Acton Institute titled *The History of Freedom*, which collected two of Acton's finest lectures with a historical introduction by James C. Holland, whom I now, finally, had the pleasure of meeting.

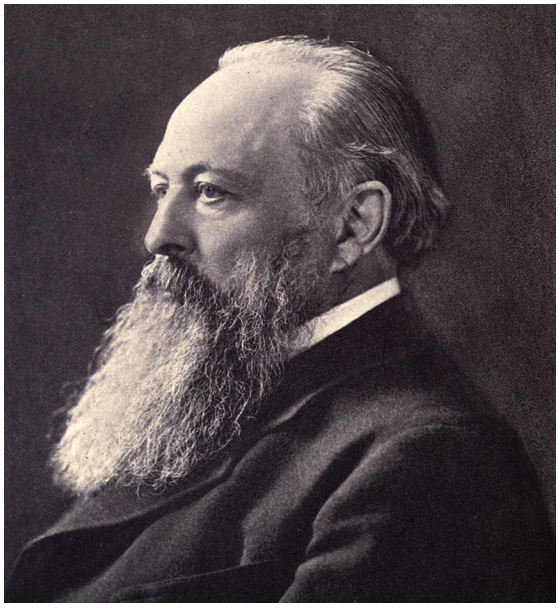
James and Mary were both delights, their home charming. We spent the afternoon packing their donation, their books, their treasures, to take back to the Institute, mostly historical works, and of those mainly British history. Many were volumes featuring Lord Acton's closest allies and leading adversaries, including a few figures who could rightly claim to have been both. Shelves were emptied and the truck filled and then Mary reminded James not to forget about the basement. The basement!

In the basement was the greatest treasure of all—*The Rambler*. A complete bound set of the Catholic magazine so intimately associated with Lord Acton, annotated by James and Mary themselves. The annotations are incredible. A guide through the vagaries of its composition. Bylines, so often absent in Victorian periodicals, carefully penciled in the margins! I loaded *The Rambler* set last, and loaded it best. Riding in the passenger seat, shotgun, all the way back to Grand Rapids.

From the perspective of the 21st century, this may all seem rather strange. Why would scholars carefully pour over and study a *magazine*? Why would a librarian (myself), even one most eccentric, give pride of place to a *magazine* over so many significant and rare books? The answer is twofold: the times and the man. The times were Victorian, and the man was Lord Acton.

A MAN OF MANY VOCATIONS

Few live as synchronically with their times as did Lord Acton. He was three years old when Queen Victoria assumed the throne, and lived only a year after her passing. Acton's heritage was aristocratic, Catholic, and cosmopolitan. Five years before his birth, the Catholic Emancipation Relief Act of 1829 was enacted allowing for his full participation in



John Dalberg-Acton (1834–1902)

Portrait of Queen Victoria by Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1859)

England's public life. In 1850, when Acton was just 16, Pope Pius IX would issue the papal bull *Universalis Ecclesiae*, "restoring in England the ordinary form of ecclesiastical government, as freely constituted in other nations." Acton's was thus the first generation of English Catholics since the Protestant Reformation to live their adult lives with full rights as citizens and ordinary church governance as Catholics.

The legacy of civil marginalization and ecclesial irregularity, however, could not be erased by a mere stroke of a pen by parliament or even pope. English Catholicism had become deeply isolated and inward looking, as the French historian Élie Halévy observed: "Catholics by nature or choice were something of an interior emigration, and the history of their advance cannot be considered as forming an integral part of English history."

"ACTON RIGHTFULLY SAW JOURNALISM AS A POWERFUL VENUE FOR BOTH SCHOLARSHIP AND INFLUENCE."

Acton's early education, both Catholic and cosmopolitan, gave him a broader perspective than most English Catholics of his day. He studied in France with Mgr. Felix Dupanloup, in England at Oscott with Cardinal Wiseman, and finally in Munich with Europe's foremost Catholic historian, Ignaz von Döllinger. It was from Döllinger that Acton developed his vocation as a historian and was schooled in the latest historical methods. Despite his emerging vocation as a historian, his stepfather began to apprentice Acton in Liberal Party politics.

His brief parliamentary career almost immediately took a back seat to his emerging passion for journalism. Why would a historian want to be a journalist? The journalism of mid-19th-century England was very different from the journalism of today. Librarian W. F. Poole describes the scene well:

> The best writers and great statesmen of the world, where they formerly wrote a book or a pamphlet, now contribute an article to a leading review or magazine, and it is read before the month has ended in every country in Europe.…Every question in literature, religion, politics, social science, political economy…finds its latest and freshest interpretation in the current periodicals.

Magazines and journals were the podcasts of their day, so Acton assumed the editorship of *The Rambler* in 1859. He rightfully saw journalism as a powerful venue for both scholarship and influence. This description, given in *The Rambler*'s final issue, echoes Poole's description of the scope and energy of Victorian magazines, while also relating Acton's aspiration to shape and give voice to a newly liberated English Catholicism:

> *The Rambler* was commenced on 1st of January 1848 as a weekly magazine of home and foreign literature, politics, science and art. Its aim was to unite an intelligent and hearty acceptance of Catholic dogma with free enquiry and discussion on questions which the Church left open to debate and while avoiding, as far as possible, the domain of technical theology, to provide a medium for the expression of independent opinion on subjects of the day, whether interesting to the general public or especially affecting Catholics.

The contributors to *The Rambler* shared with (now) St. John Henry Newman, himself a contributor and briefly editor, the conviction that the Church should fear no knowledge, "for all branches of knowledge are connected together because the subject matter of knowledge is intimately united in itself, as being the acts and work of the creator."

"THREAT OF ECCLESIASTICAL CENSURE LOOMED CONSTANTLY OVER *THE RAMBLER*."

This was more controversial than one might imagine. English Catholicism at the time was either deeply insular and narrow or belligerent and triumphalist. Acton recounted a vivid example of this triumphalism from his studies at Oscott, recalling how Cardinal Wiseman paraded recent converts to Catholicism from the Church of England around the school: "The converts used to appear amongst us, and he seemed to exhibit their scalps." Acton thus saw the role of *The Rambler* to fight on two fronts:

Ignaz von Döllinger (1799–1890)

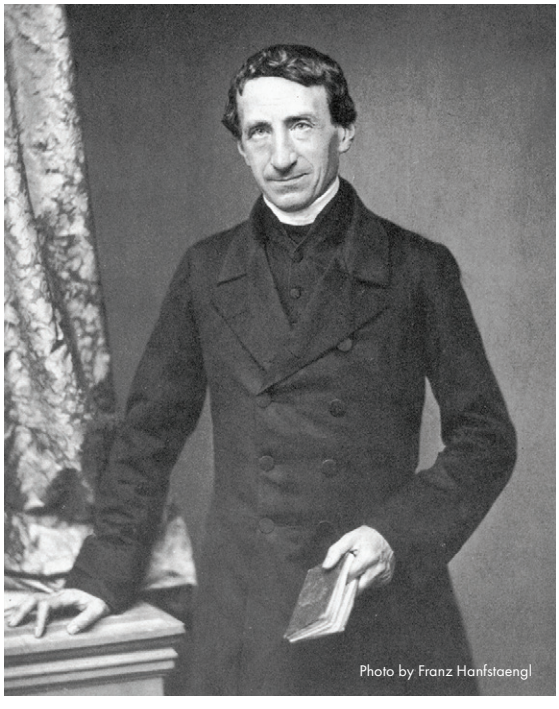


Photo by Franz Hanfstaengl

Nicholas Wiseman, Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster

"with those who are of little faith and with those who have none at all—with those who for the sake of religion fear science, and with the followers of science who despise religion."

OBEDIENCE VS. PRINCIPLE

Threat of ecclesiastical censure loomed constantly over *The Rambler*. Bishop William Ullathorne wrote to Cardinal Alessandro Barnabò, then prefect of the Congregation Propaganda Fide in Rome, "The *Rambler* demands the greatest and most prompt attention" for "if these writers are not themselves sceptical, and I believe they are not, but only delight in being bold, daring and provoking, from pride of intellect, yet the result may ultimately be to awaken scepticism in minds that are ill-instructed, weak and pretensious."

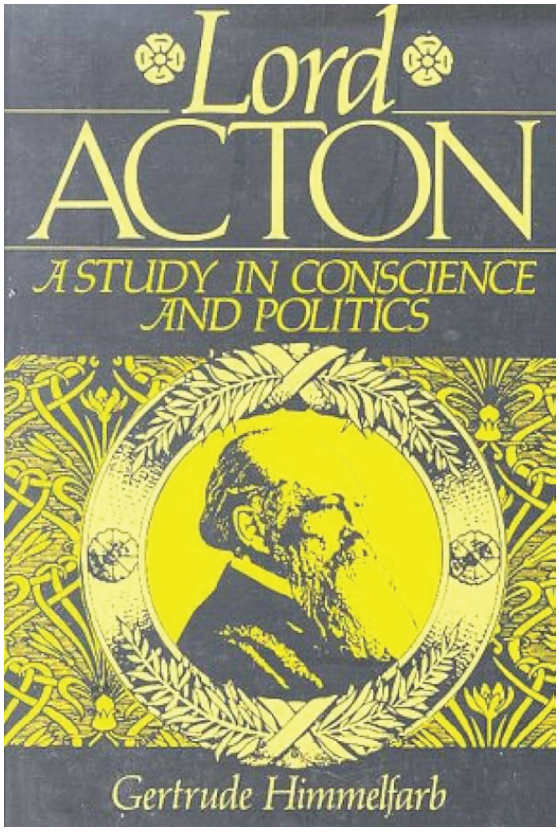
At one point, Newman assumed editorship to conciliate *The Rambler*'s critics. When his article "On Consulting the Laity on Matters of Doctrine" was published in its pages, it was delated to the Congregation of the Index in Rome. Acton had to resume editorship to take the heat off Newman. One of its most prolific contributors, the Catholic convert Richard Simpson, was even denied absolution after confession because of his work for *The Rambler*.

The field of controversy was over all *Wissenschaft*—the systematic body of facts and knowledge. *The Rambler*'s editorial policy was open to knowledge from all academic disciplines, and its contributors freely drew on them in a disinterested pursuit of truth. This alarmed ecclesial critics who feared science unconstrained by religious authority. In a letter to his fellow contributor Simpson, Acton wrote:

> In politics as in science the Church need not seek her own ends. She will obtain them if she encourages the pursuit of the ends of science, which are truth, and of the State, which are liberty. We ought to learn from mathematics fidelity to the principle and the method of inquiry and of government.

There were conflicts over philosophy, theology, politics, art, and, most consistently and constantly, history. Today's dominant narratives of the supposed "conflict between religion and science" are centered on natural science in general and biological evolution in particular, but the past is another country altogether. John Lyon, writing in a 1972 article in *Church History* titled "Immediate Reactions to Darwin: The English

Westminster Cathedral in Central London



Catholic Press' First Reviews of the 'Origin of the Species'" finds surprising points of consensus between the reviews by Simpson in *The Rambler* and by Canon W. Morris in its ultramontanist rival the *Dublin Review*.

> They were able to point out what seemed to them to be Darwin's unwarranted jump from facts supporting an evolutionary viewpoint to natural selection—simple chance—as the sole *logical* explanation of the observed phenomena.

For Lyon, *The Rambler* review is a marvel as so much Catholic reaction to Darwin at the time was simply "inarticulate horror": "Richard Simpson saw the issues, faced them as best he could, made what distinctions were possible, and then wrote forcibly of his perception."

Many leading conservative Catholic churchmen failed to appreciate such constructive engagement. They cultivated a deep suspicion of modern civilization, which they viewed as fundamentally antagonistic toward the Church. Reflexive hostility to so much of the development in the sciences across disciplines was embraced as a strategy in that struggle—a misguided attempt to undermine the Church's enemies by cutting them off from the source of their strength.

Lord Acton, with Döllinger and William Gladstone, in Tegernsee, Germany (1879)

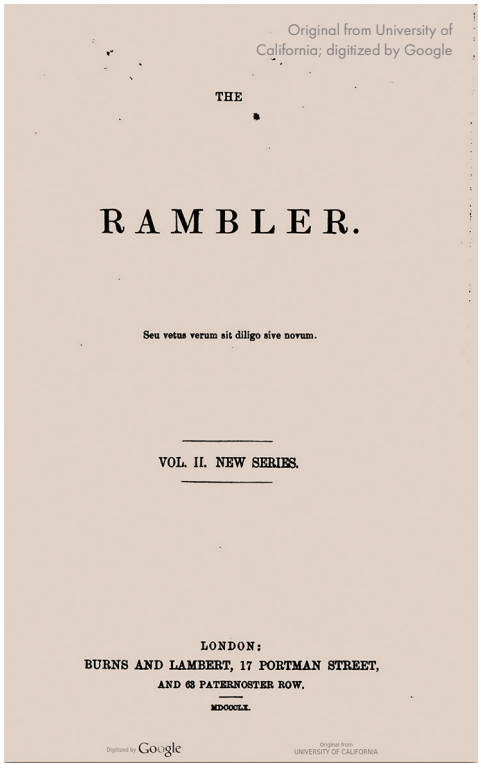
Acton was finally pushed into a corner he felt he could not escape by any means other than ceasing *The Rambler*'s publication. Newman suggested a clerical board of censors be adopted to convince hostile bishops they had nothing to fear. He drew up a list of four priests who could make up such a board, including himself and Acton's teacher Döllinger. Acton dismissed the idea because all the named priests were *also* suspect in the eyes of hostile bishops.

There was still some fight in Lord Acton, however. First he cheekily approached the *Dublin Review* with a merger proposal. Upon being rebuffed, he made a final defiant stand by founding a new magazine that Gertrude Himmelfarb describes deliciously in her biography *Lord Acton: A Study in Conscience and Politics*:

> With the old staff and old ideas, the new title and format deceived no one, and the *Home and Foreign Review* inherited the ill-will formerly directed against the Rambler. From the first issue, when it insisted upon speaking of Pope Paul III's "son" rather than the conventional euphemism of "nephew," until the last stormy issue just two years later, the journal carried on an incessant feud with the hierarchy.

Bishop Ullathorne's observation that some of *The Rambler*'s contributors took "delight in being bold, daring and provoking" was certainly true of its successor, *Home and Foreign Review*. Acton's closing article, to which he affixed his own name, "Conflicts with Rome," reveals no "skepticism" or "pride of intellect," but rather a resolute faith and commitment to the service of truth:

> It would be wrong to abandon principles which have been well considered and sincerely held, and it would also be wrong to assail the authority that contradicts them. The principles have not ceased to be true, nor the authority to be legitimate because the two are in contradiction.…I will not challenge a conflict which would only deceive the world into the belief that religion cannot be harmonized with all that is right and true in the progress of the present age. But I will sacrifice the existence of the *Review* to the defense of its principles, in order that I may combine the obedience which is due to legitimate ecclesiastical authority, with an equally conscientious maintenance of the rightful and necessary liberty of thought.



THE

RAMBLER.

Seu vetus verum sit diligo sive novum.

VOL. II. NEW SERIES.

LONDON:
BURNS AND LAMBERT, 17 PORTMAN STREET,
AND 63 PATERNOSTER ROW.
MDCCCLX.

Cover page of *The Rambler* (1860)

Lord Acton would continue to write learned and influential articles in the leading journals of his day, but he would never play the leading editorial role for any publication as he had for *The Rambler* and its successor the *Home and Foreign Review*. His vision of an English Catholicism that embraced both faith and science alongside legitimate authority, and human freedom over and against insularity and triumphalism, was one not realized in his lifetime. It was one that much of Catholic Europe failed to attain in the 19th century.

Is such a vision perhaps too bold and daring for the world this side of paradise? Or was it simply too much to expect a magazine to secure intelligent and hearty acceptance of Catholic dogma alongside a spirit of free enquiry?

WHAT SHOULD A MAGAZINE COST?

Six years after the shuttering of the *Home and Foreign Review*, Lord Acton was still thinking about the power, promise, and peril of Catholic magazines, this time not in England but in Rome.

Writing for the *North British Review* in 1870, Acton penned "The Vatican Council," a fascinating study of

The First Ecumenical Council of the Vatican in 1869

> **“ACTON’S VISION OF AN ENGLISH CATHOLICISM THAT EMBRACED HUMAN FREEDOM OVER AND AGAINST INSULARITY AND TRIUMPHALISM WAS ONE NOT REALIZED IN HIS LIFETIME.”**

the First Vatican Council and its leading personalities. Early on, Acton references the profound influence of the Jesuit magazine *La Civiltà Cattolica*, which was founded in 1850, the same year Pope Pius IX returned to Rome in the wake of the French Army’s restoration of the Holy See’s temporal power, which had been contested since the Garibaldian revolutionary upheaval of 1848.

Acton argued that the editors of the new magazine did not identify themselves primarily with their religious order, since “their General, Roothan, had disliked the plan of the Review, foreseeing that the Society would be held responsible for writings which it did not approve, and would forfeit the flexibility in adapting itself to the moods of different countries, which is one of the secrets of its prosperity.”

La Civiltà Cattolica and its editors were taken under the pope’s protection instead:

> The Pope appointed them on account of that devotion to himself which is a quality of the Order,

> and relieved them from some of the restraints which it imposes. He wished for something more papal than other Jesuits; and he himself became more subject to the Jesuits than other pontiffs. He made them a channel of his influence, and became an instrument of their own.

Acton is clearly unsympathetic with the editorial line at *La Civiltà Cattolica*, but the attention he paid to it and the importance he placed on it in shaping Catholic opinion in Rome and the wider Catholic world in the 20 years leading up to the First Vatican Council is revealing. He clearly still believes in the transformative power of magazines, especially if its readers include the pope.

Acton was right in understanding magazines as a path to influence in his own day. That he lost the battle does not mean that the field on which it was contested wasn't the high ground. Acton's great teacher Döllinger once said that he didn't believe his student would ever write a book unless he wrote one before he was 30. The *Home and Foreign Review* published its last issue in 1864, just a few months after Acton's 30th birthday. His biographer Roland Hill titled the chapter on this period of Acton's life "Editor in Chains." Was his bondage to the magazine medium worth it—to him or to those who try and carry on his legacy?

Gertrude Himmelfarb, writing in 1952, said,

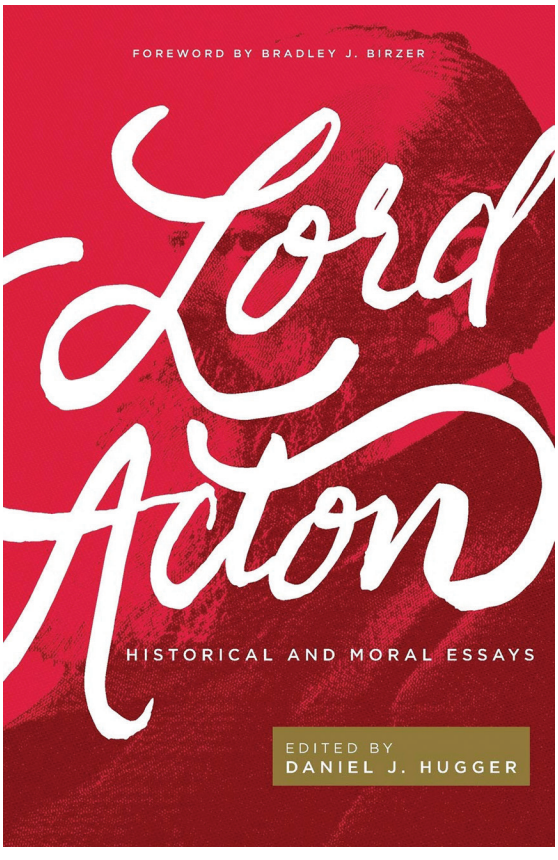
> It is only now, while his background recedes even further from sight, that Acton himself is beginning to come, for the first time, clearly into view. It appears that we are privileged to see and understand him as his contemporaries never did. He is of this age more than of his. He is, indeed, one of our great contemporaries.

Himmelfarb attributes this to the post–World War II confrontation with the horrors of German Nazism and Soviet Communism that left little room for crass optimism or materialism that dominated so much of Acton's century. That naïve, reductionistic liberalism finds a realist alternative "religious in temper, which is able to cope with the facts of human sin and corruption…because Acton was never taken in by history, he can speak with authority when history runs amok."

This is most certainly true. Acton's moral vision has never been more resonant. The ideological evils he identified, such as radical egalitarianism, socialism, and nationalism, cannot be confronted by those of little faith or none at all. Much of that moral vision, however, is literally bound to its time—regular intervals of it—within periodical slices of Queen Victoria's reign.

This is the trade-off inherent in packaging ideas to be "read before the month has ended in every country in Europe." This has become more severe in the age of the internet. Information and influence today ride on algorithmic tides moving according to their own principles. These are obscure, devoid of the moon's constancy. There is no astrology for the information age.

Acton inspired many faithful students who repackaged so many of his insights that were first circulated in magazines. Biographies such as Himmelfarb's and Hill's place them in context. Anthologies such as Rufus Fears' three-volume *Selected Writings of Lord Acton* present them by topic. My own *Lord Acton: Historical and Moral Essays* is an attempt to arrange lectures, essays, and reviews written during his life into an intelligible outline of his understanding of the universal history of freedom. This sort of work



will be more difficult for students of future thinkers who write in digital media in our digital age. Link rot, the trend of hyperlinks over time to lose their referent file, page, or server, may make it impossible. Magazines, in all their 19th-century splendor, may still be the best trade-off an author can make to influence the future.

THE *RAMBLER* EFFECT

Twentieth-century editors of American religious magazines placed such bets and hit the jackpot. The intellectual development and popular imagination of Christians in the United States was shaped by magazine editors at *Christian Century*, *Commonweal*, and *Christianity Today*. These magazines centered on religious traditions that have since become the standard "identities" of American religious demography: mainline, Catholic, and evangelical.

Christian Century began its life under another name as a Disciples of Christ magazine in the late 19th century. With the new century, it adopted the new name and, in a few years, a nonsectarian identity. It became the flagship magazine of the mainline, espousing theological liberalism and the Social Gospel.

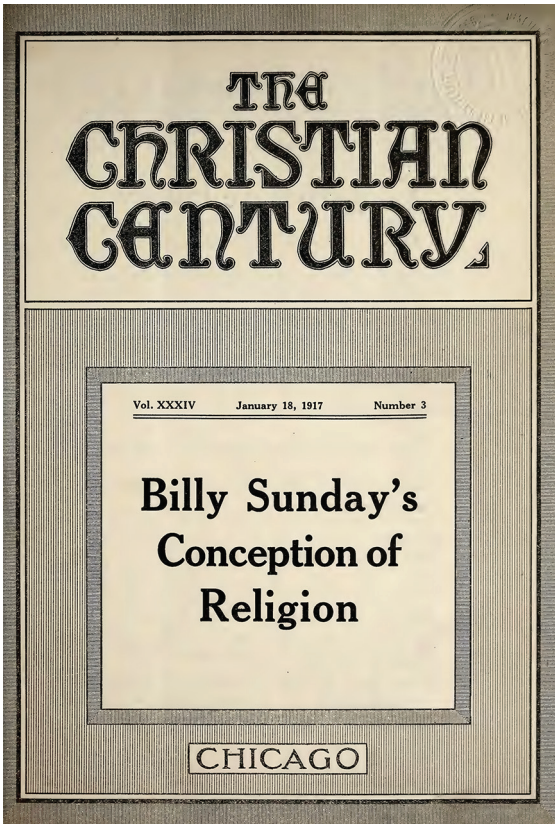
Christianity Today, established in 1956, played a similar role in evangelicalism. An early editorial explained its origin in "a deep-felt desire to express historical Christianity to the present generation. Neglected, slighted, misrepresented—evangelical Christianity needs a clear voice, to speak with conviction and love, and to state its true position and relevance to the world crisis." This neglect and misrepresentation were not primarily from secular elites but rather at the hands of the Protestant mainline establishment.

The Catholic magazine *Commonweal* was different. It did not foster the emerging trans-denominational religious identities as *Christian Century* and *Christianity Today* did. What it did do was contribute to an emerging identity of *American* Catholicism. A part of the larger Church but also a unique expression of it. Founded in 1924 as an independent Catholic journal, it was edited by laypeople. Its original board called themselves "the Calvert Associates" after the 1st Baron Baltimore and his descendants, who were instrumental in the founding of colonial Maryland. They understood Catholicism as compatible with the American experiment in ordered liberty and believed American Catholics had and should continue to make contributions to it.

All three of these magazines remain in print well into the 21st century. Each has continued to evolve along the trajectories of their constituencies and the sensibilities of their editors. In reaction to these dynamics, many imitators, rivals, and innovators sought out arbitrage opportunities. One entrepreneurial priest, Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, attempted a brilliant synthesis with the establishment of *First Things* in 1990.

First Things was ecumenical from the start, seeking to advance "a religiously informed public philosophy for the ordering of society." Fr. Neuhaus was uniquely situated to cultivate the best writing from mainline, Catholic, and evangelical contributors owing to a unique and remarkable career. He began his ministry as a Lutheran pastor in the conservative Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, transferred to ministry in the Lutheran mainline, and was finally received into the Catholic Church and ordained a priest. Coordinating the contributions of such diverse writers, including in the mix many Jewish contributors, remains an inspiring editorial feat.

Cover page for a 1917 issue of *The Christian Century*



***First Things* founder Fr. Richard John Neuhaus and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in New York (1988)**

Neuhaus' skills as a writer, editor, and networker were the secret to the magazine's success, but even he could not prevent tensions from boiling over. Lord Acton's biographer Gertrude Himmelfarb resigned from the board of the magazine after a symposium titled "The End of Democracy" published in November of 1996. She described the situation in the pages of *Commentary* a few months later:

> The editors of the religious journal *First Things*, citing the "judicial usurpation of politics," put into question the very "legitimacy" of the American democratic system and invited a number of writers to consider the steps, not excluding force, which a citizen might be morally entitled to take against "the existing regime." The symposium, with its explicit invocation of the analogy of Nazi Germany, and its echoes of 1960's-style radicalism, prompted the outraged resignation of a number of prominent conservatives from the magazine's board.

First Things continued under Fr. Neuhaus until his passing in 2009 and continues today. Its quest for a religiously informed public philosophy remains but with a narrower set of voices than in its earliest days. The 21st century has seen much great writing in religious magazines of varying vintages, but the editorial vision seems small when compared to the ambitions of the 19th and 20th centuries. What is needed in the future are magazines that reach beyond our sects, our religious "identities," and partisan politics. To take a page from Lord Acton, they must be dedicated to the disinterested pursuit of truth and human freedom in all its dimensions.

THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON

After the books were all packed and *The Rambler*'s seatbelt securely fastened in the passenger seat, I had dinner with James and Mary Holland. It was lovely, saturated with engaging conversation. I thanked them both for their wonderful gift and their generous hospitality, drove a short distance to my hotel, and went to bed.

I couldn't sleep.

I went out to the truck and grabbed the box containing *The Rambler* set. I opened it and leafed through a volume. Exhaustion settling in, I packed them back up but left them in the room for the night. It didn't feel right to leave them out in the cold.

The next morning, I woke up and checked my email. There was a message with an attachment from my editor. It was notes for revisions for a magazine article I had sent him before leaving Grand Rapids. I accepted all changes and made a few tweaks to the manuscript before emailing him back. I closed the laptop and looked across the room to the box containing *The Rambler*.

"There's articles left in you yet." RL

***Dan Hugger** is librarian and research associate for the Acton Institute.*

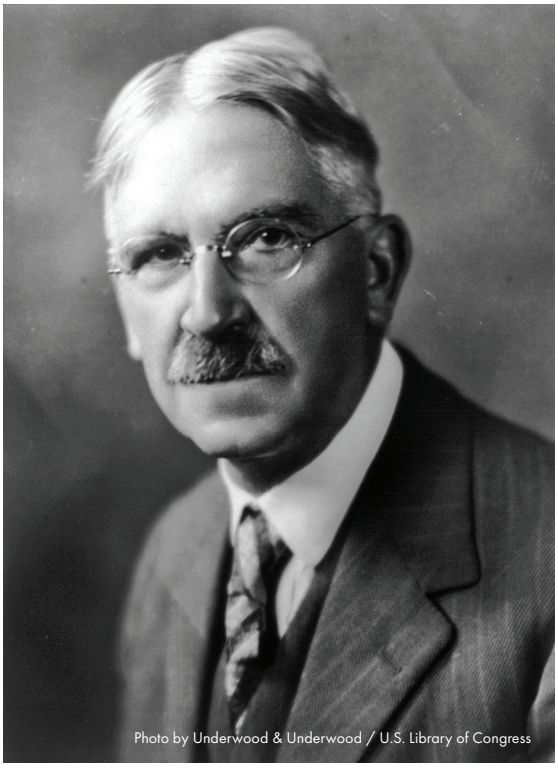
THE TEACHER AS PROPHET

JOHN DEWEY'S LIBERATING EDUCATION

by **JEFFREY POLET**

The education reformer believed a good education meant freedom from authority, curriculum, and convention. And especially parents. We're seeing the fruit of this approach today.

Photo montage using stock photography by Thomas Kloc / iStock, Naypong /iStock, and Slonme / iStock



John Dewey (1859–1952)

THE LANDMARK 1983 STUDY of American education, titled "A Nation at Risk," warned that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people." It continued: "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war," a claim one critic of the report suggested "came perilously close to defining teachers and administrators as enemies of the United States." Whatever the reliability of the data, the overall thrust of the findings seemed largely correct, but the proposed correctives would receive an F. America's schools have not improved.

The report's recommendations failed in no small part because the authors did not provide a sound analysis of how things had gotten to such a state. Nor did it ask the question of central importance: Were the problems the schools faced a bug or a feature of the design of the system? And if the latter, who were the designers and where did they go wrong?

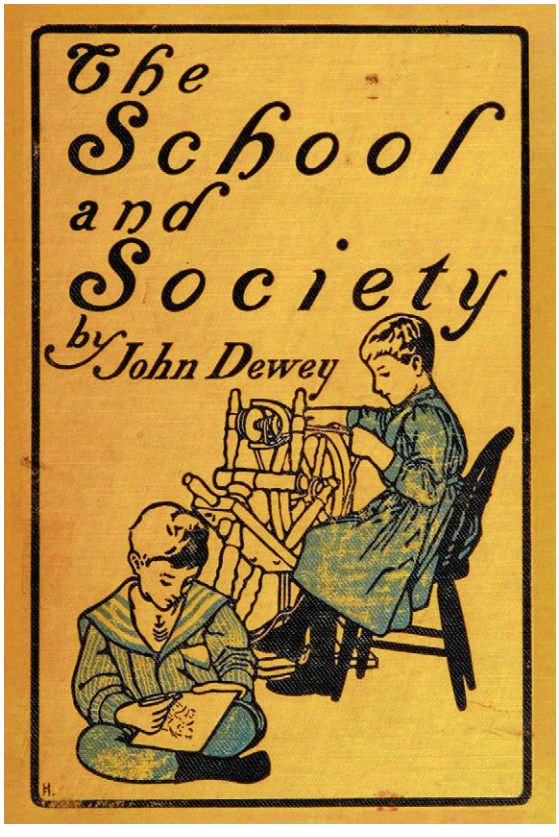
Most social institutions don't have "designers"; they're the result of generations of trial and error. This does not mean, however, that extant institutions cannot be suddenly altered by those convinced they have found the status quo wanting and, within themselves, the unquestioned principles of reform. In the case of America's schools, the great transitional period was the later 1800s and early 1900s, and the main reformer was John Dewey.

Independent of the decimal system that bears his name, many Americans have heard of him, and almost all Americans have experienced in some fashion the consequences of his ideas. The scope of his influence tends to result from assigning him too much credit or blame for our current state of affairs. Defenders

of Dewey may still insist that his ideas were sound but never fully realized, while critics will credit those ideas for destroying our schools.

Conservatives have long been critics of Dewey's reforms. Flannery O'Connor and Russell Kirk's one interaction with each other involved both expressing gratitude that Dewey and his acolyte William Heard Kilpatrick had recently died. Kirk blamed Dewey's *Democracy and Education* for some of the deficiencies in his own education, while O'Connor advised parents to "beat your children moderately and often; and anything that Wm. Heard Kilpatrick and Jhn. Dewey say do, don't do." Dewey himself observed that "I seem to be unstable, chameleon-like, yielding one after another to many diverse and even incompatible influences; struggling to assimilate something from each and yet striving to carry it forward." This quality of not being able to pin him down, of his contradicting himself, of the sheer vagueness or unintelligibility of his language, combined with the vast volume of what he wrote, strains the ability of any interpreter. Hannah Arendt wrote about Dewey's writings that "it is equally hard to agree and to disagree with it," and Oliver Wendell Holmes observed that Dewey was what one would read if one wanted to know what God thought if God was incapable of expressing Himself clearly.

1900 edition of John Dewey's *The School and Society*



Dewey is one of those rare figures whose influence is impossible to over- and understate. Given the central importance of schooling, this would be the fate of any person responsible for large-scale changes. But we might also suspect that a good part of the reason we misunderstand his legacy is that many people study Dewey's ideas without actually studying Dewey's writings.

For this one can hardly be blamed. Dewey wrote both voluminously and clumsily. He never put a premium on precision, clarity, and consistency of thought; or, if he did, he never accomplished these things. Even native speakers find his writings hard to decipher, both for the turgidity of expression and the often-contradictory web of ideas. He borrowed liberally from other thinkers, which at times makes his original contributions difficult to discern. His influence as a thinker, however limited, results from the central insight that all thought must resolve itself into action.

DEMOCRACY AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Dewey was born in 1859, the same year as the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, and Karl Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, which would become the groundwork for his subsequent *Das Kapital*. These three books significantly influenced Dewey: on the positive side from Darwin and Marx, and on the (mainly) negative side from Mill. All three works put individual existence into relief against larger historical and cultural forces, and all three suggested that the past and tradition not only offered no sure guide for action but were to be discarded remnants of a now gone and discredited world. Life needed to be recast on an entirely new basis, a new mode of understanding. While Mill focused on cultural and intellectual forces, Darwin and Marx both inclined to see the social world as an epiphenomenon of fundamental material forces. Even though Darwin was the biggest influence on Dewey, Mill's articulation of liberalism and Marx's critique of industrial capitalism both played a large role in setting the parameters of his work.

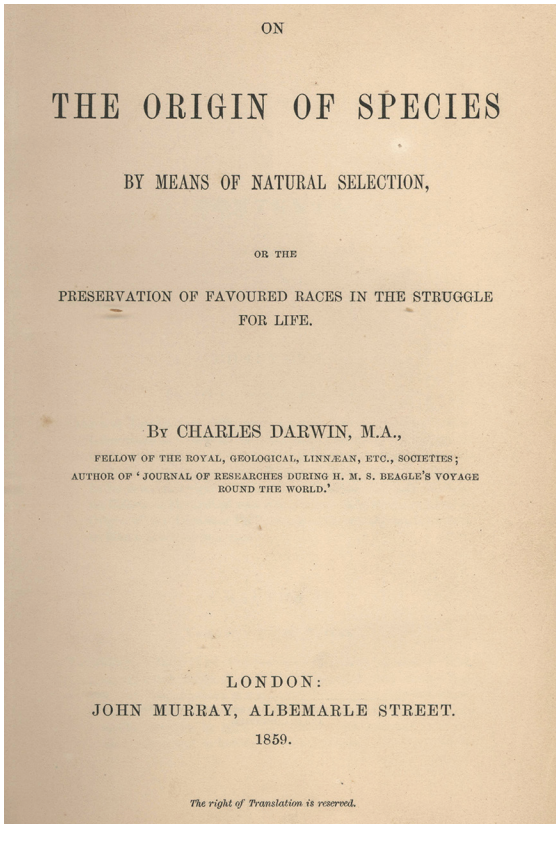
The Origin of Species, like many of Dewey's own books, is mostly unread but has exerted enormous cultural influence. And, like many thinkers, Dewey experienced that book as a paradigm reset: it put faith and science in conflict with each other, to the disadvantage of the former; it stressed that development occurs only in interaction with the surrounding environment; and it seemed to stipulate that this development was melioristic. While Dewey cannot be accused of being a social Darwinist, mostly because his egalitarian impulses wouldn't allow it, he did believe that the interaction between persons and their environments would result in the betterment of the species. The key would be to control and manipulate the environment, and obviously the earlier in a member's life you can control that environment, the greater the benefit that would redound to the species as a whole.

Given the importance of interaction between species and environment, Dewey naturally became concerned with the preeminent social environment of his day—namely, industrial capitalism. He may not have shared Marx's determinism, but he did share his concerns about economic inequality. In Dewey's rendering, the "socialized intelligence" in the controlled environment of the schools (for the art of teaching was not referring to a subject matter but managing the environment) would make "the abuses and failures of democracy [and any vestiges of plutocracy] …disappear."

Like Darwin with biology and Marx with economics, Dewey approached both democratic and educational theories as if they were science. The common impulse may in part account for why, when he visited the Soviet Union in 1928, Dewey and his ideas were greeted enthusiastically. But in his hands the idea of science took on a decidedly moral sheen, for he argued that science could solve the fundamental problems attendant to human nature, and thus bring about endless moral progress. For Dewey, the advancement of science and democracy went hand in hand, in no small part because the procedures of science mirrored those of democracy.

In many ways, however, the central figure in

Title page of the 1859 edition of Darwin's *Origin of Species*


ON

THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES

BY MEANS OF NATURAL SELECTION,

OR THE

PRESERVATION OF FAVOURED RACES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

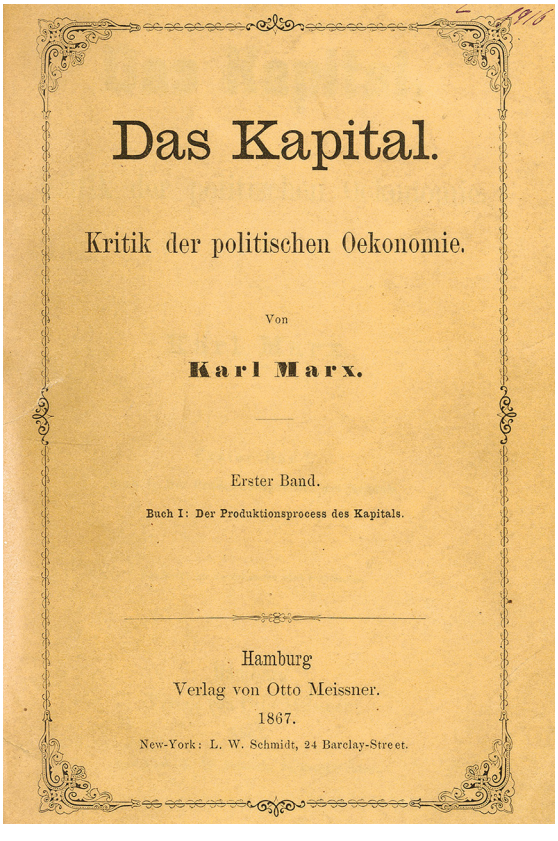
By CHARLES DARWIN, M.A.,

FELLOW OF THE ROYAL, GEOLOGICAL, LINNÆAN, ETC., SOCIETIES;
AUTHOR OF 'JOURNAL OF RESEARCHES DURING H. M. S. BEAGLE'S VOYAGE ROUND THE WORLD.'

LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.
1859.

The right of Translation is reserved.

Title page of the 1867 edition of Marx's *Das Kapital*


Das Kapital.

Kritik der politischen Oekonomie.

Von

Karl Marx.

Erster Band.

Buch I: Der Produktionsprocess des Kapitals.

Hamburg
Verlag von Otto Meissner.
1867.

New-York: L. W. Schmidt, 24 Barclay-Street.

> **PROGRESS REQUIRED THE NEGATION OF TRADITION, OF PRIOR WAYS OF THINKING, LIVING, AND BELIEVING.**

Dewey's development was the German philosopher Georg W.F. Hegel, who argued that historical progress occurred when opposites were reconciled into a higher synthesis. Perhaps the most brilliant synthesis in Hegel's work was to balance the claims that all knowing was historically and culturally conditioned with the belief that, nonetheless, absolute knowing was achievable. The key was stipulating that knowledge conditioned by the end point of history, what in Christian theology might be thought of as the Kingdom of God, was a kind of relativism one could live with. While Dewey did not share Hegel's yearning for absolute knowledge, he did retain the identification of the Kingdom of God with his own historical moment.

Having been raised in a Puritan New England household with a religiously strident mother, Dewey rejected faith in 1891 and stopped going to church in 1894, claiming that religion was little more than "intolerance and fanaticism." But the residuals of Christian faith remained with him, partly in the claim that sectarian churches would collapse into a secular democracy. Dewey may be credited for mainstreaming Hegel's ideas into American political thinking. Dewey himself admitted that his encounter with Hegel had "left a permanent deposit in my thinking."

Dewey enthusiastically took up Hegel's challenge that the modern world uniquely combined a new science with a form of social organization that could synthesize the moral unity of the ancient world to the individuality of the modern world. Moral progress was contingent on cultural progress, which in turn required the sheltering and coordinating power of the modern state—"the March of God through time." Democracy, in its continual unfolding, became for Dewey the realization of the Kingdom of God here on earth. But such progress required the negation of tradition, of prior ways of thinking, living, and believing. The past was no longer a heritage to be passed along but an obstacle to be overcome. Politics and law—and especially education—had to become dedicated to such overcoming.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831)

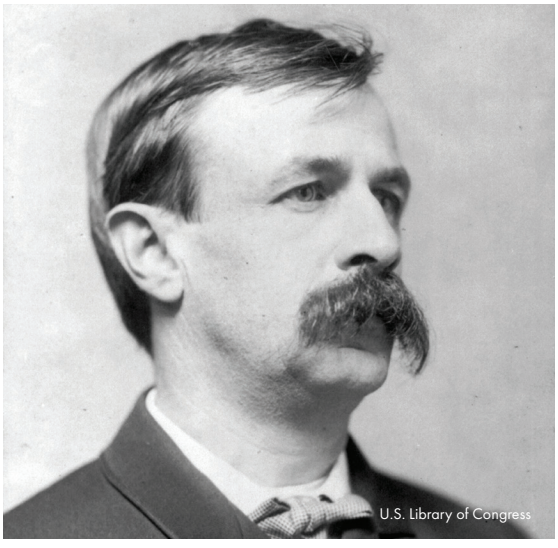
But how to catechize democratic citizens, with their chaotic willfulness and nettlesome individuality, into a secularized kingdom wherein alone they could find their true freedom? The obvious answer was state-mandated and -controlled educational apparatuses. Dewey was long enamored of 19th-century America's greatest effort at socialist catechesis: Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, which Dewey ranked only behind *Das Kapital* as the most important book of that century. In April of 1934, as the Great Depression descended on America, Dewey wrote an appreciation for Bellamy's bloodless revolution, where human activity was directed toward a common good and all wealth was held in common. Dewey saw Bellamy as the great defender and prophet of American democracy. Perhaps the most important educational idea that Dewey got from Bellamy was that the traditional systems of education were

predicated on and perpetuated an unjust class system. Dewey, like Bellamy, vehemently opposed any vestiges of hierarchy and old class structures in education. The democratic purpose was to facilitate communication and to involve everyone in a great society founded on mutual sharing and responsibility, while also identifying the tasks for which each person was uniquely fitted.

SCHOOLS AS TOOLS OF THE STATE

The idea of progress as the central organizing principle of social life is the key idea of the 19th century. Given the tremendous acceleration of the rate of social change, reformers were inclined to see progress as leading to perfection in the here and now. Dewey connected the schools to this central philosophical or quasi-religious belief. Dewey claimed America was the historical bearer of a special truth, and that there are no deep truths. What made Americans so special in this regard was their ability to live comfortably with this knowledge. What gave them comfort was a faith in progress as a secular process. Like his later disciple Herbert Croly, Dewey believed that America existed more as Promise than as Fact, and the reforming of social institutions was required to achieve that promise, with the schools being the most important institution to reform. The key to reform was dismantling the curriculum and putting the interests of the student at the center.

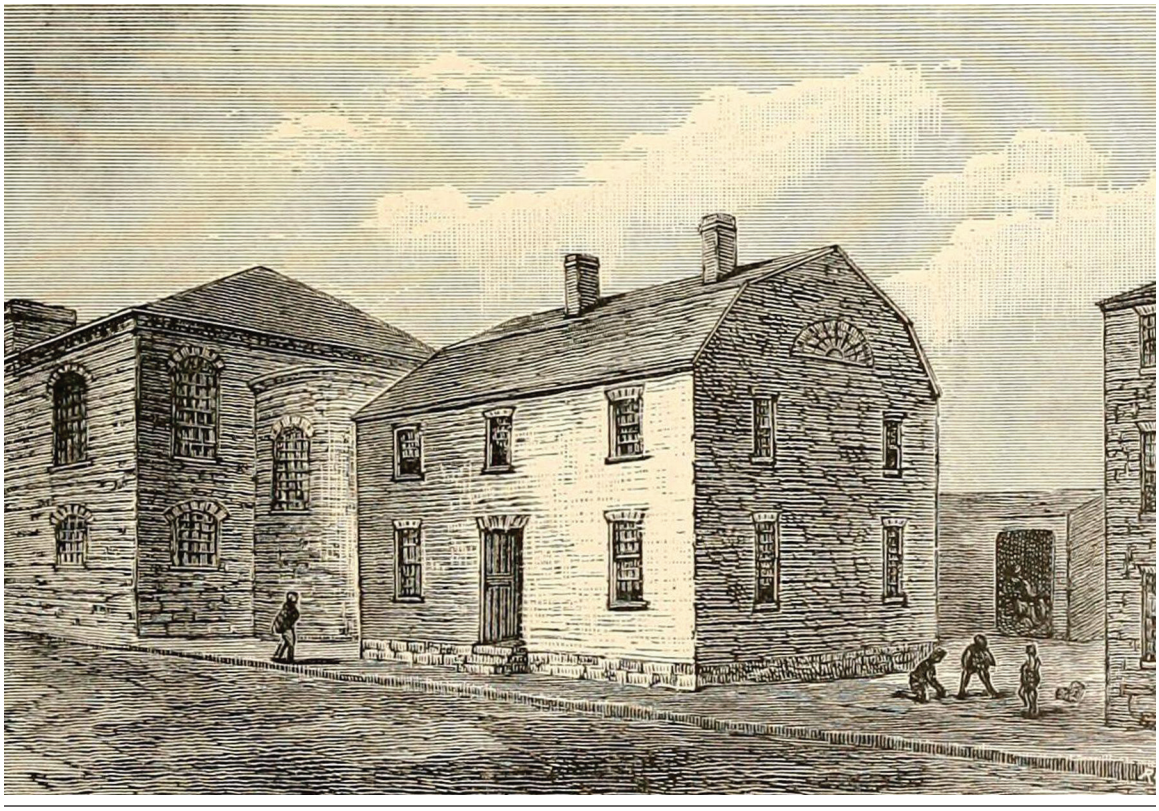
To accomplish this, students should be told as little as possible and enabled to discover as much as possible. "The child's own instincts and powers furnish the material and give the starting point for all education," the central purpose of which is to adjust individual activity to the needs of society. The schools must be transformed into tools of the state dedicated to the purpose of reforming society along the lines of progress. This adapting of human power to social purposes is "the supreme art" that brings an end to all want, social division, and violence—not just in theory, but in actual practice. Thus the schools take on utopian tasks that require no limits to the "resources of time, attention, and money which will be put at the dispense of the educators." And why would that be? Because "the teacher always is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true Kingdom of God."



Edward Bellamy (1850–1898)

> "STUDENTS SHOULD BE TOLD AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE AND ENABLED TO DISCOVER AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE."

Dewey saw the purpose of education as liberating the student from the past toward full membership in a democratic community, thus "letting the child's nature fulfill its own destiny." Education in a democracy "repudiates any principle of external authority" and rejects any understanding of the past except as it meets present needs. "The segregation which kills the vitality of history is divorce from present modes and concerns of social life. The past just as past is no longer our affair. If it were wholly gone and done with, there would be only one reasonable attitude toward it. Let the dead bury their dead. But knowledge of the past is the key to understanding the present. History deals with the past, but this past is the history of the present." This freedom from the past tracked well with "the great advantage of immaturity," which is that "it enables us to emancipate the young from the need of dwelling in an outgrown past." He believed that "the business of education is rather to liberate



Boston Latin School, the oldest existing public school in the United States, opened in 1635

the young from reviving and retraversing the past than to lead them to a recapitulation of it."

This rejection of tradition reflected Dewey's central concern that education should meet social needs and solve social problems. The mechanism for ensuring such is his notion of growth. Many commentators have observed how nebulous and frustratingly unclear Dewey's notion of growth is, one simply referring to it as a "mischievous metaphor." Like Darwin, Dewey saw growth both as a process without an end and resulting from the interactions of any organism with its environment. It is constant forward movement, intrinsically related to the progressive creed that "it is better to travel than to arrive, it is because traveling is a constant arriving, while arrival that precludes further traveling is most easily attained by going to sleep or dying." Probably the closest he comes to defining it is when he wrote, "This cumulative movement of action toward a later result is what is meant by growth."

But that's a fairly vapid definition and one that results from his rejection of all a prioris or any appreciation for tradition. Most of us will distinguish between good growth (muscle) and bad growth (fat), but that requires that we have some sort of criteria we can apply, and Dewey is adamant in rejecting any absolute or transhistorical criteria. Relatedly, his disciple Richard Rorty observed that there is nothing in or about human beings that would transcend the

> **"THE SCHOOLS TAKE ON UTOPIAN TASKS THAT REQUIRE NO LIMITS TO THE 'RESOURCES OF TIME, ATTENTION, AND MONEY.'"**

> **DEWEY BELIEVED THAT THE LIBERAL ARTS SIMPLY REFLECTED THE INTERESTS OF A CORRUPT OWNERSHIP CLASS WHO USED THE SCHOOLS TO PERPETUATE ITS OWN INTERESTS.**

truth of the historical moment, so if the secret police knock on our door, there aren't any external criteria to which we might appeal to resist them other than to suggest, weakly, that we ought not be cruel. If National Socialism is the truth of our day, Rorty wrote, then so much the worse for us. But most of us would be inclined to take up the question at that point and ask *why* it's worse, but this gets us into the realm of philosophy. For Dewey and Rorty, philosophy is merely a description of how people actually live and offers no normative criteria.

Furthermore, the "movement of action to a later result" tells us nothing about the desirability of that result. A man might enter a bar, talk to the woman sitting next to him, buy her a drink and then another, and eventually commit adultery with her, and each action is understood in terms of its relation to a later result, but many might find this all morally condemnatory. In other words, we would want to be able to distinguish between good and bad results by employing criteria that are not themselves part of the process, and to that Dewey is stridently opposed. Dewey never really had a plan to replace what he discarded, which must inevitably happen when you jettison respect for the past in favor of endless futurity. For the past can be known; but the future, since it does not yet exist, cannot be known except by faith—this "democratic faith" being the crux of Dewey's thinking. Allow democracy its rein, discipline it with a system of education, and the result is "the great community." And, like many progressives who dreamed of a great community, the greatest barrier was any principle of division.

This aversion to division accounts for his attitude toward the states and local governments as centers of education, to churches as sectarian enterprises, and to families as independent entities, the idiosyncrasies of which required undoing by mandatory, universal, state-run schools.

> The school has the function also of coordinating within the disposition of each individual the diverse influences of the various social environments into which he enters. One code prevails in the family; another, on the street; a third, in the workshop or store; a fourth, in the religious association. As a person passes from one of the environments to another, he is subjected to antagonistic pulls, and is in danger of being split into a being having different standards of judgment and emotion for different occasions. This danger imposes upon the school a steadying and integrating office.

The schools, to repeat, are microcosms of the desired community. Because modern societies are irrational and inefficient, the schools must become rational and efficient. They must be purged of all the problems that plague society, and this results from Dewey's belief that human nature can be perfected if it is placed in the right environment. Currently extant environments were clearly not doing their job, and so students had to be emancipated from them. They had to be "gradually weaned from their homes" and the emotional ties that connected them to their parents in favor of "an *impersonal* intellectual and social diet." This symbiotic process of liberating the child from home and church would result in the child being the instrument that would liberate society from its past. Traditional society has spoiled the "plasticity" of the child and his or her "power to change prevailing custom" by having mastered "the art of taking advantage of the young" by substituting static adult interests for dynamic juvenile ones. A healthy society does not transmit its achievements to the young but allows them to shape a vision of the future.

Dewey opposed the liberal arts, which are relics of a feudal past, in favor of the liberating arts, those which prepare students for life in the great community. A good education is liberating in that it is "freedom from authority, freedom from the curriculum, and freedom from convention." Dewey believed

that the liberal arts simply reflected the interests of a corrupt ownership class who used the schools to perpetuate its own interests. The schools, as they existed at Dewey's time, celebrated the leisure of the liberal arts, that is, an education that had no purpose beyond itself, but had "their origin in the fact that the reflective or theoretical class of men elaborated a large stock of ideas" that maintained an unequal society. And in that present moment, "Our economic conditions still relegate many men to a servile status. As a consequence, the intelligence of those in control of the practical situation is not liberal."

THE IRONY OF A "CLASSLESS" EDUCATION

Many current ideas are part of Dewey's legacy, but one of them is the idea that a classless or nonhierarchical society is an inclusive society. Clearly the schools have become the major drivers of the push for inclusion. Nor ought we lightly to dismiss the impulse. Dewey may have started the idea, but it picked up steam in the 1990s with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the creation of classrooms that could serve the needs of students who traditionally, because of either physical or mental handicaps, could not succeed in the schools. Undoubtedly the parent of such a child might have some positive things to say about inclusion. But the term is not self-justifying, nor is it fully coherent. As in any egalitarian enterprise, Dewey's schools tend to have a leveling effect. His classrooms are not friendly places for bookish or introverted students. Instead, schools require that "methods of instruction and administration be modified to secure direct and continuous occupation with things" in opposition to the traditional schools that "substitute a bookish, pseudo-intellectual spirit for a social spirit." His focus on external action negated the importance of contemplation, especially as regards to what it meant to live a good life. Dewey believed that the virtues were nothing more than "working adaptations of personal capacities with environing forces." As a result, he wanted schooling to have nothing to do with character formation, since that would predicate itself on normative (adult) modes of conduct; instead, schools should focus on citizen formation.

Dewey had already set up a laboratory at the University of Chicago to test his educational theories, and then later help set up the nation's first school of

George Bush signs the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

education. One of the problems with these schools of education, whether free-standing or embedded in a university, is that people who study there are not required to master a subject matter. Dewey insisted that the job of the teacher is not to communicate a subject matter but to produce the right kind of learning environment, one where the interests and desires of the student determine the educational project. As a result, schools of education tend to be populated by people who don't know a whole lot but are coached in techniques of management. (I will testify to that—on the whole, education majors were my worst students.)

What's worse, even though Dewey insisted that the interests of the student be dispositive in establishing the practices and procedures of the school, he could not avoid the fact that teachers have to teach something, and this opened the door for teachers to engage in ideological promulgation. Indeed, schools of education have been described as "menaces" to the whole educational enterprise because of their tendency to indoctrinate students into a progressive ideology. In no small part this results from their "stand-alone" status and the fact that they can always hide behind certification agencies, which themselves are typically ideological. The stand-alone status of these schools means that the professors who work there are able to work outside the dialogue with and scrutiny of other university scholars, many of whom would blow the whistle on the shabby scholarship that takes place.

Again, the belief that the interests and desires of the student determine the educational enterprise is the linchpin of Dewey's theories. "It is as absurd," he wrote about parents and teachers, "to set up their 'own' aims as the proper objects for the growth of children as it would be for the farmer to set up an ideal of farming, irrespective of conditions." Granted, the teacher had a role to play in directing the child's impulses, but Dewey gave no guidance for how or when, other than asserting that it all had to be directed toward responsible action in the great community. Dewey's mind was fertile when it came to discussing means, but vague and abstract when it came to talking about ends. The important thing was to direct the schools toward the moral needs of democracy; but here, the teacher's own perceptions of those needs could hardly be discounted. Dewey himself advocated for a ripped-from-the-headlines approach to education that would lead to "the sober treatment of mundane problems." (He favorably quoted Hegel's line that "Reading the morning newspaper is the realist's morning prayer.")

The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools

The pragmatic impulse in Dewey relates to William James' claim that the truthfulness of an idea lies in its "cash value," meaning its ease of exchange as well as its ability to purchase results—in other words, its usefulness. For that reason, Dewey believed that education mainly involved "problem solving." Teachers had to help students identify the problems, but again with reference to the interests of the child. From there, Dewey believed, children should devise their own experiments, build their own equipment, cooperate in designing their own results, and to be accountable to authority for the results. This destruction of the curriculum, whose sole purpose, Dewey thought, was to be a carrier of tradition, does have a point to it.

The traditional schools that Dewey was such a critic of typically lived up to his dismissive prejudices. Rote memorization, lesson plans, passive instruction, and spending a day sitting still and listening is unlikely to stir the hearts and minds of many children, especially boys. That one-sized-fits-all approach to educating has, I think, been definitively rejected, at least in theory. But Dewey substitutes for it another "one-sized fits all" approach, one where

the student is directed by utility and interest alone. This is because Dewey's theory largely reverses the traditional model: instead of taking its cues from the interests of the leisured classes, it takes them from the working classes. Dewey thus shifts the default of the classroom so that the bright child and not the dull one becomes the problem. The irony is obvious: our brightest children are poorly served by our schools unless their parents have the means to put them in private schools, thus perpetuating the very class system that Dewey worked so hard to dismantle. In the 100 years since his reforms became the standard for education, our schools have become less egalitarian, not more so.

GIVING THE DEVIL HIS DUE

Nonetheless, Dewey's emphasis on hands-on and practical learning ought not to be lightly dismissed. Matthew B. Crawford, author of *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, has written intelligently about the atrophying of the mind that takes place when we think of ourselves as pure mind. He insisted on the holistic "satisfactions of manifesting oneself concretely in the world through manual competence," which make "a man quiet and easy," for this competence seems

> to relieve him of the felt need to offer chattering interpretations of himself to vindicate his worth. He can simply point: the building stands, the car now runs, the lights are on. Boasting is what a boy does, who has no real effect in the world. But craftsmanship must reckon with the infallible judgment of reality, where one's failures or shortcomings cannot be interpreted away.

I, for one, am convinced that all the mental health problems epidemic among our young people would largely disappear if we got them more actively engaged in the physical world. And I think Dewey knew that, too.

He also correctly cast suspicion on our tendencies to quantify learning, especially through the grading system. The push for "high marks" would introduce competition into the educational enterprise, contrary to the communal spirit of education. Dewey insisted that the schools were microcosms of the larger community and should reflect the values thereof, and since community was a cooperative and not a competitive enterprise, the schools should eliminate traces of competition. Students were not learning for the purpose of development and growth but to satisfy artificial criteria created by adults, and this, too, was a perversion of the educational enterprise.

Dewey worried that his prescriptions would be turned into rigid dogma, and by the 1930s he expressed concern with the implemented reforms that reflected his own ideas and experiments. He did not openly recant of his errors, and one suspects this is mainly because he didn't think he had made any. Rather, the problem was one of either misinterpretation or misapplication. One can hardly be blamed for the former, given how turgid and often contradictory is Dewey's prose. As to the latter: what he would regard as an abuse of his thinking strikes the observer as simply a logical outworking of it. The rejection of external authority, the assumptions about the purity of the interests of the child, the declaration of parents and churches as agents of division, the notion that the efficacy of education can be determined only by its practical application, the belief that the fundamental purpose of education was to solve social problems, and the egalitarian leveling of the enterprise could only produce some deleterious results, no matter how noble the aspirations. It's not that Dewey was simply wrong about everything, but where he was wrong he was *spectacularly* so, and where he was right the insights were often compromised by their one-sidedness.

But we largely live in his world now, where students know very little of their own history; where teachers know very little about what it is they are supposed to teach, and also burn out quickly because the demands of controlling the environment are so burdensome; where, because Deweyan schools are so expensive, the taxpayer pays a lot of money for poor results; where the space has been opened to the worst kinds of ideological machinations and indoctrinations because the purveyors believe they are solving social problems and creating the great community; and where schools and parents and churches are in perpetual antagonism with each other because parents will no sooner give up their children than churches will their beliefs. In that sense, "A Nation at Risk" might well have simply repeated what Flannery O'Connor once observed: Whatever John Dewey said do, don't do. RL

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THE SIN OF WIT

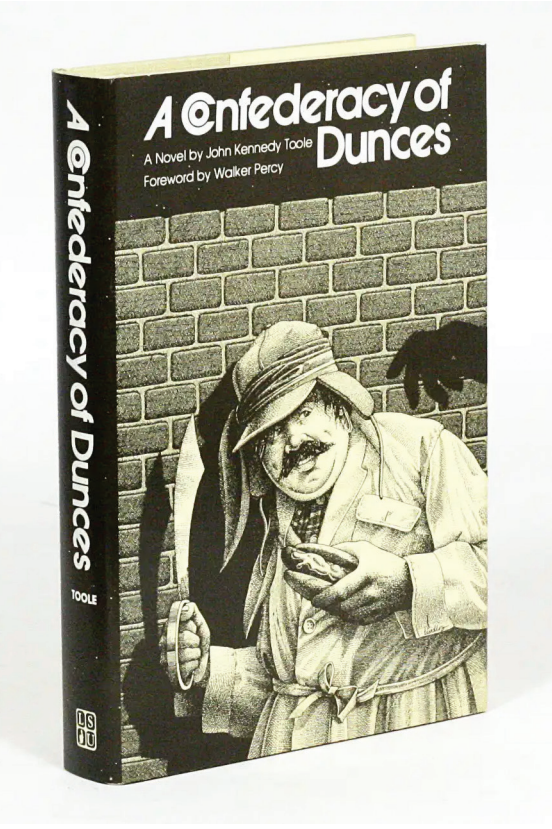
by LEE OSER

What does an 18th-century High Church Anglican wrecker of intellectual pretensions and a 20th-century Roman Catholic professor lost in the cosmos have in common? The eternal struggle against dunces.

Photo by cogdogblog / wikipedia

"When a true genius appears in the world, you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him."

Jonathan Swift
Various Thoughts, Moral and Diverting



I

IN THE WINTER 2023 issue of this publication, I addressed briefly the impact of *Don Quixote* on the author of *A Confederacy of Dunces*. In that essay, I referred to the latter novel as "a miracle of art, conceived and constructed by genius but founded on scholarship that is still largely unrecognized." We know as a fact that, during the academic year 1958–59, John Kennedy Toole took a graduate seminar at Columbia University on Augustan satirists. But while the titular and epigraphic connection to Swift is easily acknowledged, little has been said about what else Toole might have learned from him. In this essay, then, I want to explore and comment on Swift's impact on Toole, for the purpose of advancing Toole's reputation as a learned author and correcting some convenient misunderstandings. This effort will require some stamina on the reader's part, and some interest in the finer points of scholarship.

Jonathan Swift's *Various Thoughts, Moral and Diverting* (1706) is a loose collection of maxims written in the style of La Rochefoucauld. When he penned the sentence that would become the epigraph to *A Confederacy of Dunces*, Swift was linked in the English mind to the statesman and adviser to Charles II Sir William Temple. The famous quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns was going strong in the 1690s, when Swift was serving as Temple's secretary. Swift took offense at the rough treatment that Temple, a leading Ancient, received from two Moderns, William Wotton and Richard Bentley. An Ancient himself, he ridiculed them in *The Battle of the Books*. Wotton, eager to return fire, dismissed *A Tale of a Tub* (bound in the same 1704 volume as *The Battle of the Books*) as "irreligious" and "crude." The exchange occurred after Temple's death in 1699, so it is natural to associate William Wotton and Richard Bentley with the dunces of Swift's maxim.

Swift reserved the word *genius* for a select few, including his friend Alexander Pope and, in his 1714 poem "The Author upon Himself," himself:

> By an old red-pate, murd'ring hag pursued,
> A crazy prelate, and a royal prude;
> By dull divines, who look with envious eyes
> On ev'ry genius that attempts to rise…

Confessing to "the sin of wit, no venial crime," the Ireland-exiled Swift continued to fire back at the vicious, the mad, the prudish, and the dull.

The conflict of genius and dunce returns in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), in Gulliver's visit to Glubbdubdrib, the sorcerer's island where the ghosts of Homer and Aristotle "appear at the Head of all their Commentators." Gulliver describes the conversation:

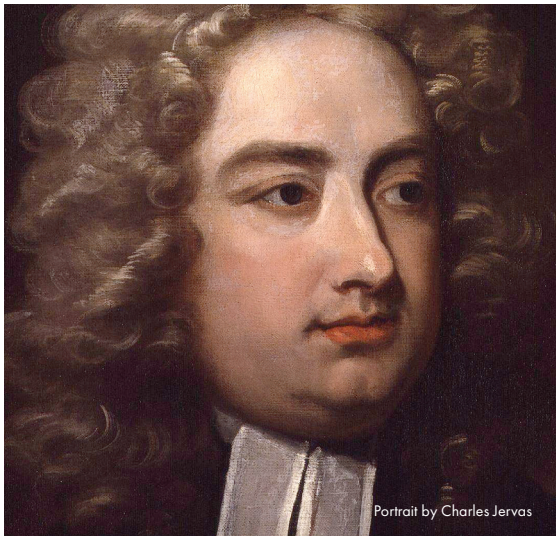
> I introduced *Didymus* and *Eustathius* to Homer, and prevailed on him to treat them better than perhaps they deserved, for soon he found they wanted a Genius to enter into the Spirit of a Poet. But *Aristotle* was out of all Patience with the account I gave him of *Scotus* and *Ramus*, as I represented them to him, and he asked them whether the rest of the Tribe were as great Dunces as themselves.

"Genius," as used with respect to Homer, establishes the "Spirit" of a true poet, which none of the commentators can "enter into." Adding to the humiliating spectacle, the notion of the man who wrote *Nicomachean Ethics* losing "all Patience" is a master stroke, heightened by an equal-opportunity swipe at two "Dunces": the Protestant Ramus and the Catholic Duns Scotus.

As a master ironist, Swift might be compared to an all-star pitcher who commands an overwhelming arsenal of pitches. He can throw you the straight heat at 100 mph, or he can uncork a slow sweeper that catches you off-balance and makes you fall down swinging. To describe his ironic game with readers, critics have used such terms as "entrapping" and "vexatious," the latter following from a well-known letter to Pope, dated September 27, 1725, in which Swift confided that he wanted to "vex the world rather than divert it." For all its variety, though, Swiftian irony is invariably linked to the wisdom of Ecclesiastes and informed by a keen Protestant ear for how we rationalize unspeakable behavior. It is a constant trial, all rather humbling and humiliating.

For Swift, then, the opposition of genius and dunce rarely survives the strain of experience. The mathematical geniuses of Laputa are, in Swift's view, dunces of the highest order, estranged from their own senses. Likewise, the choice of Yahoo or Houyhnhnm is a vexatious and false choice. The epigraph to *A Confederacy of Dunces* carries with it a similarly vexatious air. Ignatius J. Reilly sees himself as a "genius," but the gap between Ignatius' image of himself and the world's response to him tells a different story. It suggests that Ignatius, like Gulliver, is a bit of a dunce.

Jonathan Swift (1667–1745)



Portrait by Charles Jervas

John Kennedy Toole (1937–1969)

THE SCHOLAR OF FORTUNA

A Confederacy of Dunces is a vexatious, satirical parody of Kennedy-era America, written while Vatican II was in full swing, by a Southern Catholic who was far more of an outsider than the middle-class novelists who triumphed in New York—Mailer, Roth, Updike, etc. Toole's novel is so vexatious in its vast scope that we may be mystified, or, as Rabelais would humorously suggest, metagrobolized. Where Swift suggests a frame or standard in our powers of reason (in the famous letter to Pope, he redefines man from *animal rationale* to *animal rationis capax*), Toole, in exposing the American mania for political causes and "virtue signaling" (as we call it today), verges on discarding the frame or standard altogether. In his antics, Toole diminishes the middle-class realism that connects Swift to Defoe and turns, instead, to Rabelais, to Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, to Shakespeare's clowns and fools, and to Eliot's *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*.

The madmen, dreamers, and outcasts in this constellation are instruments of profound moral insight, the kind that cuts through seemingly inviolable conventions, including, say, the illusions of middle-class realism. Ignatius J. Reilly is a literary descendant of J. Alfred Prufrock (like Toole, Eliot was a transplanted Southerner), but Ignatius is adrift on a grander scale. As an oddball "celebrity," he recalls Toole's lost heroine, Marilyn Monroe, "who," Toole wrote, "could find no bearings in the society which had formed her." Toole's nautical metaphors—the wheeled hot dog stand is often referred to as a ship—convey this sense of lost "bearings," of a vessel that has gone hopelessly off course. In consequence, Toole's moral defiance loses Swift's indignant edge. To be sure, the moral hideousness of Lana Lee is plain to see, but hers is, relatively speaking, an underplot. Throughout Ignatius' voyages into that hostile, Hobbesian state that Swift called "the Republick of *Dogs*," Ignatius is always the center of attention.

From *Nursery Novelties for Little Masters and Missess* (1820)

> **"IN *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*, THE OPPOSITION OF GENIUS AND DUNCE RARELY SURVIVES THE STRAIN OF EXPERIENCE."**

The literary question that provoked this essay is: What does Toole's comic genius mean to us? As the Victorian critic Walter Pater might suggest, how can comparison with Swift reveal Toole's unique and special virtue? A good passage to consider, in this regard, is Ignatius' recognition scene, one of the funniest payoffs in all literature, which occurs when his mother, Irene Reilly, returns his copy of *The Consolation of Philosophy*:

> "Oh, my God! This has all been arranged," Ignatius screamed, rattling the huge edition in his paws. "I see it all now. I told you long ago that that mongoloid Mancuso was our nemesis. Now he has struck his final blow. How innocent I was to lend him this book. How I've been duped." He closed his bloodshot eyes and slobbered incoherently for a moment. "Taken in by a Third Reich strumpet hiding her depraved face behind *my* very own book, the very basis of my worldview. Oh, Mother, if only you knew how cruelly I've been tricked by a conspiracy of sub-humans. Ironically, the book of Fortuna is itself bad luck. Oh, Fortuna, you degenerate wanton!"

As a goddess of late antiquity, Fortuna does not lend herself to immanentizing the eschaton. She militates against the millenarian fantasies that, as Lionel

Trilling tried to warn us in *The Liberal Imagination*, occupy the unreal, academic mind. Like the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance, Ignatius does not make progress. He comes full circle as the punchline of fate: the scholar of Fortuna is now her stunned sacrifice. But he is, at least, self-conscious regarding his worldview and his predicament.

As Toole's epigraph seems to have prophesied, the dunces closed their eyes to this great American anagnorisis. "It isn't *really* about anything," Simon and Schuster editor Robert Gottlieb informed the hopeful young author in December 1964. "The book could be improved and published. But it wouldn't succeed; we could never say that it *was* anything." The *point* was apparently lacking. It is perhaps doubtful whether Gottlieb made the association between Ignatius Reilly and Saint Ignatius of Loyola—I shall return to this concern.

Swift reminds us that literary justice can be severe. The ugly likelihood, it must be acknowledged, is that Gottlieb recognized, on some level, that his own culture was being skewered. When "a young Female *Yahoo* standing behind a Bank" is "enflamed by Desire," the human race receives a slap in the face. It may seem an unfair blow, directed at a defenseless female, but it has stood the test of time. In Gottlieb's judgment, Myrna Minkoff is "a pain in the ass." Myrna is a sexually enflamed, post-religious Freudian Jew whose conscience has splintered into a thousand progressive causes. In response to his editorial predicament, Gottlieb turned for guidance to the ethnically conspicuous "Candida Donadio, a young woman who is probably the best literary agent in town (one of my closest friends)." Ain't that nice, Ignatius? Gottlieb has a friend who's a Catholic! In the end, after his two-year ordeal, when Toole is finished apologizing, suffering, revising, and diminishing himself, all that remains is the original manuscript in its shoebox, and Manhattan's normative skyscrapers. Small surprise the *New Yorker* eventually made Gottlieb editor.

THE SWIFTIAN TOUCH

"The prime significance of Swift's sin of wit," Geoffrey Hill observes, "is that it challenges and reverses…the world's routine of power and…considers all alternatives including anarchy." Likewise, the prime significance of Toole's anarchic sin of wit is that it challenges and reverses the philistine norms of political orthodoxy and social control that have ravaged American intellectual life like a cancer. Michiko Kakutani, a more recent enforcer of New York's cultural authority, prefers Toole's morally simplistic juvenilia, *The Neon Bible*, to his magnum opus. Another writer at the *New York Times*, Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, fell to mocking the "myth" of Toole's "lonely genius" and doubting that the book merited a Pulitzer. Early in 2021, Tom Bissell made sure the beat went on, a beat more militant than musical, publishing "The Uneasy Afterlife of 'A Confederacy of Dunces,'" an essay so antiseptically, self-consciously, and provincially *New Yorker*, it felt like a bespoke suit tailored for a man allergic to cloth. It is notable that none of these critics notices the depth of Toole's erudition. Because to discuss Toole's relation to Swift would be to elevate Toole's stature, this line of critics is not interested.

"Lilliputians Examining the Man-Mountain's Possessions," a reprint of an 1865 illustration by Thomas Morten

The sense of protesting too much haunts these proceedings. Self-justification has eclipsed literary justice. Toole's death is a kind of landmark, an unwanted war memorial. I will say it: if you want to understand American culture, then you must

confront the reality of Toole's suicide at the age of 31. One must understand, as well, that, beyond the maternal persistence of Thelma Toole (who kept at it through numerous rejections), beyond the heroic generosity of Walker Percy, it was the reading public that saved *A Confederacy of Dunces*; we owe the immortality of *Gulliver's Travels* to the same mortal tribe.

Gulliver's "Travels into Several Remote Nations" are adapted, in Toole's New Orleans, to Ignatius' colossal and Lilliputian state of alienation. The Reilly house in New Orleans is "a Lilliput of the Eighties," where the elephantine Ignatius resides with his "huge feet." Mr. Levy, the reluctant owner of a Levy Pants and husband to the fiercest shrew in American literature, asks in a moment of sympathy (despite the damage done to him by Ignatius), "Could the huge kook live in such a dollhouse?" Technicolor visions at the Prytania movie theater compare to a tiny Gulliver's observing the Maids of Honor in Brobdingnag: "She smiled in a huge close-up. Ignatius inspected her teeth for cavities and fillings. She extended a leg. Ignatius rapidly surveyed its contours for structural defects." Miss Trixie, the octogenarian assistant accountant, is Toole's version of the immortal Struldbrugs. The mock Eucharist at the Academy of Lagado is a precursor to Lana Lee's mock Eucharist in the Night of Joy. The Battle of the Books, the culture war of Ancients versus Moderns, is restaged as the battle of Boethius and Hrosvitha versus television and Lana Lee, in whose pornography, which is intended for teenage consumption, the final logic of the cash nexus stands revealed.

In *A Tale of a Tub: Written for the Universal Improvement of Mankind*, Swift mischievously includes a Rabelaisian list of treatises "which will speedily be published." These include *A Panegyrical Essay upon the Number THREE, Lectures upon a Dissection of Human Nature*, and *A general History of Ears*. The *Tale* is written in the persona of an anonymous Grub Street hack. Its target is the mind of the age. That mind and the hack's mind are, if you can gain the perspective, very close of kin. Ignatius' *Journal of a Working Boy* is likewise the work of a conceited and brilliant hack, a "sociological fantasy" loaded with digressions that realize and instantiate the "failure to make contact with reality." Such failure is Ignatius' chief criticism of our age, and his own failure to make contact with reality does not invalidate his criticism. We find that both authors, Swift and Toole, are carnival maskers, writing in persona to revel in the sin of wit.

A late-1950s postcard of Canal Street in New Orleans

PARADISE LOST

Utopian schemes abound in both authors. Tracing the transformations of matter into spirit, both dwell on the biology behind our ideals and aspirations. The "Wise Aeolists," the hack writes, "affirm the Gift of BELCHING, to be the noblest act of a Rational Creature." It is a noble act that Ignatius cultivates in the high tradition. When Swift, with a schoolboy wink, has Gulliver refer to the death of "my good Master *Bates*," the author is clowning around but also alerting the attentive reader that Gulliver is Gulliver (cf. *gullible*) and therefore not to be entirely trusted. The bed sheet on which Ignatius scrawls *Crusade for Moorish Dignity* bears the yellow stains of his onanistic "hobby," the source of "flights of fancy and invention." When Toole describes Ignatius exercising his rubber glove, he is satirizing Ignatius' "Rich Inner Life" by exposing its *fons et origo*. As for the female of the species, her saving this strange soul is one of Myrna's "most important projects." Her public lecture in New York is conducted in the spirit of the Aeolists' female priests, "whose Organs were understood to be better disposed for the Admission of those Oracular Gusts, as entering and passing up thro' a Receptacle of greater capacity, and causing also a Pruriency by the Way." Despite Toole's reliance on Swift and Freud, the author of *A Confederacy of Dunces* manages somehow to retain a romantic affection for human sexuality. Ignatius is polymorphously perverse, and Toole presents sex in any terms as an expression of human folly. And yet it brings lonely individuals together (unlike Lana Lee's pornography), and it makes Myrna and Ignatius a pair. The scene where Irene Reilly and Claude Robichaux join hands has a pathos unique in literature: it possesses a special virtue, something akin to Act V of *Midsummer Night's Dream* but romantically serious and dignified in a working-class milieu unknown to Shakespeare's stage.

Swift, by contrast, scours all Edenic traces from the earth. Eden is irretrievably lost, and his salvos against the utopian visions of science underscore this point—in fact, C.S. Lewis saw Laputa as an "attack" on science itself. Let us accompany Gulliver to Lagado, the residence of impoverished scientists:

> The Projector of this Cell was the most Ancient Student of the Academy. His Face and Beard were of pale Yellow; His Hands and Cloths dawbed over with Filth. When I was presented to him, he gave me a very close Embrace, a Compliment I could well have excused. His Employment from his first coming into the Academy was an Operation to reduce human Excrement to its original Food, by separating the several Parts, removing the Tincture which it receives from the Gall, making the Odour exhale, and scumming off the Saliva. He had a weekly Allowance from the Society of a Vessel filled with Human Ordure, about the bigness of a *Bristol* Barrel.

This particular Projector is recognizable as a latter-day alchemist, and Gulliver notes that "none of these Projects are yet brought to Perfection." But Swift is surely within his rights as a satirist to mock them (much as Erasmus satirized bad theology) without our leaping to the conclusion that he was anti-science *tout court*.

Ignatius and Myrna are both modern-day Projectors, and the ironical sound of *project* echoes through Toole's novel to form a leitmotif. At the same time, Toole's departure from Swift's excremental vision correlates to a lack of savage indignation on Toole's part. Folly and humanity are so inextricably bound that no moral intelligence can unravel them. Morally, the enemy for Toole is not folly, irrationality, or social vanity, since they are all inevitable and often incite us to laughter, but the "negation of all human qualities." This is what Ignatius astutely recognizes in Lana Lee, the character most lacking in human sympathy—though Ignatius himself is far from being a model of sympathetic feeling. Her powers of reason, in its instrumental mode, are strong, but cold pride undoes her because she is overly confident that she can spot an undercover cop. Her arresting officer, Patrolman Mancuso, is honest but incompetent. His sergeant gives him the business. "Mongoloid Mancuso" (as Ignatius calls him) does not succeed at last by virtue of his merits. He is not a middle-class success story living the American dream. Lana gets what she deserves, and Fortuna is simply kind to him, at long last.

Swift, in his growing concern for the poor in Ireland, remains a realist. Toole's portrait of working-class New Orleans has the angular realism of great caricature. It is closer in this respect to Marlowe, Jonson, and Rabelais than to Swift: it is not out to reform the school of hard knocks and its cast of suffering humanity. "Life's hard" is the choric plea of Irene Reilly. Santa Battaglia remembers her own mother: "It was hard in them days, Irene. Things was

tough, kid." But Swift, compared to Toole, is more severely impersonal. Denis Donoghue comments on *Gulliver's Travels*: "Gulliver is not, strictly speaking, a character at all. He is someone to whom things happen." Ignatius, by contrast, establishes a powerful sense of self and an independent imagination, however adrift and incongruous. He remains the glorious, personal center of the action, even if he is also "someone to whom things happen." His grotesquerie fits with his tragic-comic nature, which is the source of our sympathy for him, as opposed to Gulliver, who, like the Robinson Crusoe of Virginia Woolf's alert criticism, "has a way of snubbing our enthusiasms."

ANOTHER, VERY DIFFERENT ST. IGNATIUS

In their different approaches to character, we glimpse the tribal and religious affiliations that separate the two authors. Swift is an Irish Protestant; Toole an American Roman Catholic of strongly marked Irish descent (his Creole ancestry lends a romantic backdrop to the potato famine lineage). When Swift was given the Deanery of Saint Patrick's in Dublin in 1713, he saw it as a defeat, long having coveted a position in England. Ireland was exile. But in the years after the death of the "royal prude," Queen Anne, in 1714, with the fall of the Tory ministry and the rise of the Whigs under Sir Robert Walpole, Swift more than fulfilled his administrative and priestly duties as a high-ranking official of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy.

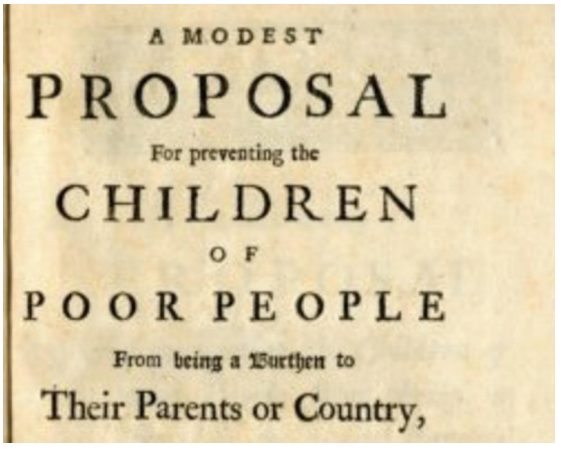
GULLIVER'S TRAVELS SHOWS AN ABIDING CONCERN FOR BOTH THE MEANING OF THE WORD *CHRISTIAN* AND THE MORAL OBLIGATIONS THAT A CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE ENTAILS.

Over time, he became the Drapier Dean, the author of *A Modest Proposal* (1729), patriotic champion of a conquered people for whom he felt little affinity but whose suffering roused his Christian conscience.

While Toole's childhood was neither poor nor culturally famished, his Irish heritage was summed up by his mother, Thelma Toole, when she remarked in 1981 to TV host Tom Snyder, "Someone told me that in Ireland perception extends to the working classes!" The "someone" in question may have been her son, the young professor who in 1961 wrote on his blackboard at Hunter College, "Anticatholicism is the antisemitism of the liberal" (*sic*). "The WASPS were routed," he wrote his friend Joel Fletcher in February 1961, in the wake of JFK's victory over Richard Nixon. Tribalism is intrinsic to his work, because it animates his self-consciousness. But it is not a matter of provinciality: it is a particular tribalism with a universal message, such as we find in the Harlem Renaissance.

Swift was obviously a serious Christian. *Gulliver's Travels* shows an abiding concern for both the meaning of the word *Christian* and the moral obligations that a Christian conscience entails. He confronts the limitations of deism and the corruptions of the Church. But Swift belongs to that period in English literature when England was recovering from the religious enthusiasm of the Civil War. He has read Hobbes, who described imagination as "nothing but decaying sense." He takes a good deal from Locke, whose materialist psychology informs *The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* (1704), a satire on religious enthusiasm. He despised spiritual and stylistic pretension, and in this respect his religious and literary outlook were unified.

But where Swift satirizes spiritual enthusiasm to exterminate it, Toole transforms spiritual enthusiasm into what I am tempted to call "pyloric" enthusiasm, fueling a kind of endless carnival masque or Mardi Gras. Swift is the administrator. He prefers an efficient style (when he isn't adopting a *persona* or mask), an efficient nation, and an efficient Church. He wants to set things to rights and make them work. Sergeant Toole was himself an administrator—at a U.S. Army outpost in Puerto Rico called Fort Buchanan, where he ran the English-language program for undereducated recruits. Tribally, though, Toole was never in power. He had very little faith in modern administrative or bureaucratic solutions. Swift had no great faith in government but he had a country to care for. Toole was beyond all that. Ignatius is incapable of improving anything. He identifies with impoverished African Americans,



A detail of the title page of Swift's 1729 *Modest Proposal*

except when they voice middle-class aspirations. His native Roman Catholicism is active only in prayers to obscure saints. It cannot be modernized, despite Vatican II. It cannot be progressive.

And yet, Toole is never misanthropic. His comedy concludes on a note of gratitude, a curious note of self-penetrating grace as Ignatius makes his miraculous escape:

> He stared gratefully at the back of Myrna's head, at the pigtail that swung innocently at his knee. Gratefully. How ironic, Ignatius thought. Taking the pigtail in one of his paws, he pressed it warmly to his wet moustache.

"The book could be improved and published. But it wouldn't succeed; we could never say that it *was* anything." Then again, the repetition of "gratefully" is striking—coming after Ignatius has been entombed alive in the prison of himself and declared mad by society. As I have suggested, the key reference may have been lost: "Ignatius," as described by Toole's friend Emilie Russ Dietrich (later Emilie Griffin), "a kind of latter-day Loyola at odds with sinful society." We may further note, with Toole biographer Cory McLauchlin, that Toole was "baptized in the Catholic Church at Loyola University."

Ideally (ironic adverb!), Ignatian spirituality leads to a synthesis of prayer and action, to the formation of active contemplatives. Ignatius J. Reilly is the alienated, dark-horse inheritor of this tradition, teetering on the "very rim of our age." He presents the strangest vision of the Church militant that the world has ever seen:

> My cutlass slapping against my side, my earring dangling from my lobe, my red scarf shining in the sun brightly enough to attract a bull, I strode resolutely across town, thankful that I was alive, armoring myself against the horrors that awaited me in the Quarter. Many a loud prayer rose from my chaste pink lips, some of thanks, some of supplication. I prayed to St. Mathurin, who is invoked for epilepsy and madness, to aid Mr. Clyde (Mathurin is, incidentally, also the patron saint of clowns). For myself, I sent a humble greeting to St. Medericus, the Hermit, who is invoked against intestinal disorders.

Rest assured these are real saints. Mathurin, also called Maturinus, was ordained by St. Polycarp in the fourth century. Medericus, also called Merry, is a seventh-century figure associated with St. Martin's monastery in Autun, France. Ignatius thus emerges as an absurd St. Ignatius, a parody, if you will, but a parody with heart and soul.

Returning to Swift, we can now see the difference between the two authors at its most absolute. Gulliver, with his solid vocational training, never joins prayer and action. After his final voyage, he is terribly cut off from grace. His reasoning leads him to recognize his abject insignificance. Swift ends his greatest work in negation: "and therefore I entreat those who have any Tincture of this absurd Vice [of Pride], that they will not presume to come in my Sight." By contrast, Toole's closing movement is sympathetic. He uses his extraordinary skill at plotting to give things a providential twist, concluding in a weird Edenic plenitude: "Taking the pigtail in one of his paws, he pressed it warmly to his wet moustache." If I imagine someone reading Toole's valedictory passage at his funeral, the word that seems to stick out is *innocently*. Ignatius and Myrna retain a saving vestige of their innocence. Our better angels must extend a similar grace to that dignified man, Robert Gottlieb, and even to those who have, as it were, gleefully danced on Toole's grave. We are all fools gone wrong, all in need of forgiveness, and possibly that is the point of the novel after all. RL

***Lee Oser** is professor of English at College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass. He is a former president of the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers (ALSCW). His most recent books are* Christian Humanism in Shakespeare: A Study in Religion *and* Old Enemies: A Satire.

IN THE LIBERAL TRADITION

Ramón P. Díaz: A Christian Champion of Economic Freedom

by ALEJANDRO A. CHAFUEN

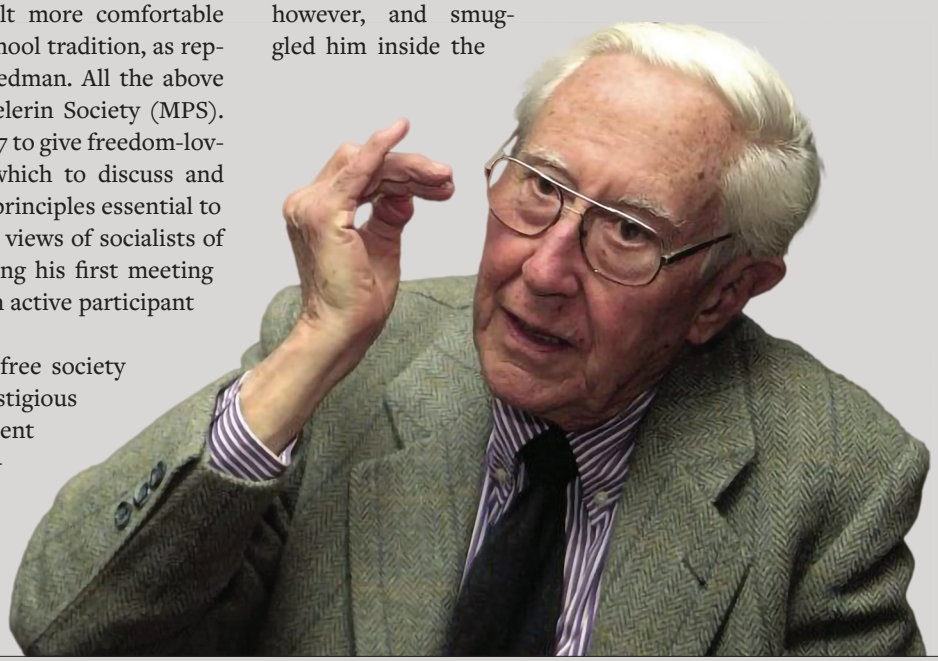
DR. RAMÓN P. DÍAZ (1926–2017) was from Uruguay, a country that, with the province of Buenos Aires, is part of what South Americans call "The River Plate" region. For decades, one of the only magazines in English was *The Review of the River Plate*, with headquarters in Buenos Aires. The region is back in the news today due to the electoral victory of Javier Milei, Argentina's new president.

Milei often credits Alberto Benegas Lynch Jr. (1940–) for some of his views on economics and liberalism. Through their writings and intellectual entrepreneurship, Benegas Lynch and his father, Alberto Benegas Lynch (1910–1999), disseminated lessons about the importance of economic freedom like few others. With different methods and talents, Ramón Díaz played a similar role in Uruguay.

While the Benegas Lynches followed the Austrian School of economics, Diaz felt more comfortable working within the Chicago School tradition, as represented mainly by Milton Friedman. All the above were members of the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS). F.A. Hayek founded MPS in 1947 to give freedom-loving intellectuals a forum in which to discuss and debate how to understand the principles essential to a free society and confront the views of socialists of different stripes. Since attending his first meeting in the late '60s, Díaz became an active participant and then president of MPS.

Díaz served the cause of a free society in many capacities: as a prestigious lawyer, professor, and government official (undersecretary of commerce and industry, president of the central bank, etc.). He was a lecturer on political economics at the Universidad de la República, founded in 1849 and one of the oldest state universities in the Americas. Díaz also taught at the Universidad de Montevideo, which is spiritually oriented by the Opus Dei prelature and ranks as the top university in Uruguay.

When I was 20, during my second year at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina, we invited Díaz to speak to our student association. The interventionist consensus at the time, shared by the right and the left, was very powerful. Although we wanted to invite liberal economists from Argentina to speak, we thought it might be safer to invite Díaz. As a Uruguayan, he might prove less "threatening" to the authorities. And yet, despite his gentlemanly demeanor and centrist views, Díaz's Chicago school economics was still too liberal for the status quo. We did not back down, however, and smuggled him inside the



building to conduct the program, with only word-of-mouth promotion.

At the time, I was a Randian, an agnostic who believed in Ayn (*Atlas Shrugged*) Rand's "virtue of selfishness." I knew nothing of Díaz's views on Christianity. As it turned out, he had found Christ as an adult and, a couple of years after our first encounter, I myself returned to Catholicism, the faith of my baptism. By providence, my vocation was the same as Díaz's. Both members of Opus Dei, our calling was to live knowing that, with the right intention, we can turn everything we do into prayer. The lay Christian tradition of seeking good in daily work has a long history. We can find this spirituality in the life and writings of St. Francis de Sales (1567–1622) but also more recently in that of St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, the founder of Opus Dei, who championed this view most vigorously.

On the 100th anniversary of St. Josemaría's birth, Díaz wrote a chapter for a book honoring the saint; his chapter was titled "Liberty and Authority." Díaz quoted St. Josemaría:

> "I have spent my entire life preaching personal freedom, with personal responsibility. I have searched for it and I search for it, throughout the earth, as Diógenes searched for a man. And every day I love it more, I love it above all earthly things: it is a treasure which we never appreciate enough."

In Diaz's view, Christianity and economic liberalism could go hand in hand. The often-quoted point 42 of John Paul II's encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, stating that, when operating under the rule of law and respectful of human dignity, capitalism was consistent with the teachings of the Church, seemed to settle the question for Catholics. Given some of the statements on economics from the Vatican today, it is clear that the work and teachings of public intellectuals like Dr. Díaz are always needed.

Díaz also wrote a chapter for a book honoring Alberto Benegas Lynch Sr., who helped found and led the Centro de Estudios Sobre la Libertad, which did similar work as the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) in the United States. Díaz thought it was essential to work in the field of ideas:

> The task of those who, for the love of truth, propose to generate and transmit ideas about freedom [is] essential to preserve the values that make the prosperity of people possible.… [The world] needs clear thinkers, and these in turn, in the moments of maximum darkness, [are] pioneers who show the path and make it possible to begin the march back to the light.

In addition to his work as a professor, Díaz founded *Búsqueda*, a weekly magazine/newspaper similar to *Barron's*, to disseminate sound economics applied to daily life. He also collaborated with think tanks at home and abroad and was president of the National Academy of Economics in Uruguay (2000–2005). Díaz spoke perfect English and volunteered as a teacher at the English Cultural Center in Uruguay, which added to his merits in earning the honor of a C.B.E. (Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire).

During the mid-'80s, Díaz was part of the select Michael Walker group of the Fraser Institute, convened to launch an effort to measure economic freedom. Some noted participants were Milton Friedman, Douglass North, Lord Bauer, and Arnold Harberger. During those discussions, Díaz highlighted one of the main problems of Latin America: a weak rule of law. Although his native Uruguay scores as the best country in this regard, it is an exception. Díaz saw that government officials should create secure environments for the actors who risk their property to produce and offer services. Secure contracts are essential to free economies.

Javier Milei of Argentina, the largest country in the River Plate, is like Díaz in that he, too, is an advocate for the free economy. Although closer to Judaism in his sentiments, Milei also is not shy about bringing religion into his struggle to build a free market economy. He frequently states that he relies on *Las fuerzas del cielo*—"Strength from Heaven" (1 Maccabees 3:19). The life and convictions of Ramón Díaz, as well as Milei's current efforts, clearly show that champions of economic freedom do not need to abandon their spiritual and religious beliefs to have a lasting effect. Unlike Milei, whose impact and religious journey are still in progress, Díaz persisted until the end of his days and left us a great example to follow. RL

Alejandro A. Chafuen *is managing director, International, of the Acton Institute, chairman of the Chase Foundation of Virginia, and a member of the Mont Pelerin Society since 1980.*

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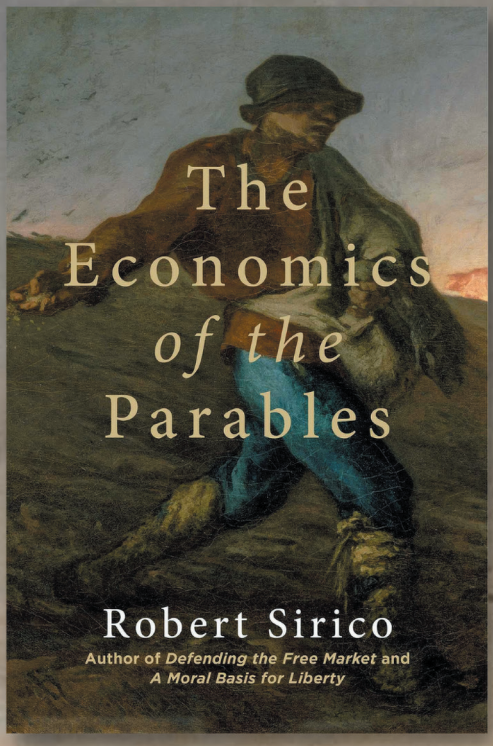

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Sheen and Maier: Broadcasting Theology

Using the powerful medium of radio broadcasting, Fulton Sheen and Walter Maier communicated the love of a gracious God and the never-changing Gospel of Jesus Christ to a national audience starved for hope in the midst of a depression and a world war. Is something similar possible today?

by **GENE EDWARD VEITH**

BROADCAST RADIO, AN INFORMATION technology that emerged in the 1920s, created America's first electronic mass medium. As Americans from across the country and from all walks of life had access to the same news, information, music, and entertainment, the nation was brought together in a common popular culture.

In fact, much of today's popular culture goes back to radio, as the national radio networks NBC, CBS, and ABC made the transition to the new technology of television by putting its programming (soap operas, variety shows, news reporting) and its stars (Jack Benny, Bob Hope, Lucille Ball) onto the screen.

Two of the most popular radio programs between 1930 and 1950 were *The Catholic Hour*, featuring (then) Fr. Fulton J. Sheen, and *The Lutheran Hour*, featuring Pr. Walter A. Maier. Some 15 million listeners tuned in every week to hear a sermon from this Catholic priest and this Lutheran pastor. (By way of comparison, today, with our much larger population, Fox News has 1.7 million viewers.) Both *The Catholic Hour* and *The Lutheran Hour* had a bigger audience than did Jack Benny, Bob Hope, Charlie McCarthy, or Frank Sinatra.

One might assume that America of the '30s to '50s, a time span that included the Depression and World

War II, was just more interested in religion than it is today. But this was also the time of what historians call the "American Religious Depression," when churches declined dramatically in membership and cultural influence.

So why were Sheen and Maier so popular, especially since they were both spokesmen for "foreign" churches that had been regarded with suspicion and bigotry?

In his book *Ministers of a New Medium: Broadcasting Theology in the Radio Ministries of Fulton J. Sheen and Walter A. Maier*, Kirk D. Farney takes up that question. In doing so, he makes his book a valuable resource for Christians interested in bringing America out of its current "religious depression."

Commercial radio had its start in the early 1920s, with local stations providing their own programming, often including religious broadcasts. Maier saw the potential of the new medium for proclaiming the Gospel from the beginning. With support from the Lutheran Laymen's League, Maier persuaded the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to build a radio station, KFUO, on the campus of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, where he was a professor. Broadcasting began on October 26, 1924, featuring a lineup of religious services and Maier's preaching.

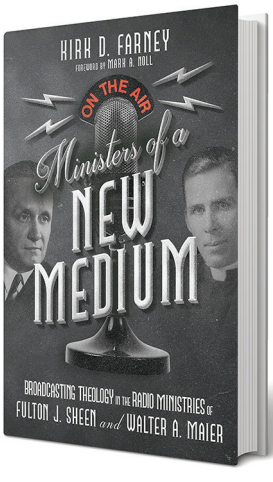
Radio became a nationwide medium with the advent of networks—such as the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), and the American Broadcasting Company (ABC)—that connected local affiliates throughout the country and provided them programming.

Photo by CBS Publicity / Fair Use

Lucille Ball and Richard Denning in *My Favorite Husband*

NBC decided to offer free airtime to representatives of America's major religions: Judaism, Protestantism, and Catholicism. The National Council of Catholic Men offered to provide *The Catholic Hour*, featuring several hosts through the year, including Sheen, already a well-known speaker in Catholic circles. Maier approached NBC in hopes of taking a Protestant slot, but the network decided to go to the organization that would become the National Council of Churches, which offered several spokesmen for theological modernism, such as Harry Emerson Fosdick.

So while Catholics, Jews, and liberal Protestants could go on the air for free, conservative Lutherans would have to buy air time at commercial rates. Undeterred, Maier raised the money for a year's worth of programming on CBS, which amounted to three times the budget of his entire seminary, and began broadcasting *The Lutheran Hour* nationwide on



Ministers of a New Medium: Broadcasting Theology in the Radio Ministries of Fulton J. Sheen and Walter A. Maier

By Kirk D. Farney

(IVP Academic, 2022)

> "CATHOLICS, JEWS, AND LIBERAL PROTESTANTS COULD GO ON THE AIR FOR FREE. CONSERVATIVE LUTHERANS HAD TO BUY AIR TIME."

October 2, 1930. *The Catholic Hour* had started seven months earlier on March 2, 1930.

Maier's program was popular, but it ran out of money after a year. After a year of fundraising, *The Lutheran Hour* moved to a new national network, the Mutual Broadcasting System, which offered cheaper rates. Broadcasting from the studios of KFUO, *The Lutheran Hour* soon became a huge hit, as did *The Catholic Hour*, turning Maier and Sheen into celebrities.

In his book, Farney shows that Sheen and Maier, as well as their programs, were quite similar. Both were supremely educated, with Boston-bred Maier earning a Ph.D. from Harvard and the midwestern Sheen from Peoria earning two doctorates from European universities. Both were highly accomplished academics, with Maier serving on the faculty of Concordia Seminary (then one of the largest seminaries in the nation) and Sheen on the faculty of Catholic University in Washington, D.C.

Thus, they were both intellectuals, but *public* intellectuals, unlike today's academic specialists who communicate mainly with each other. Both drew on their erudition while effectively communicating with ordinary folks.

Both were also spell-binding speakers. They differed in style, though. Sheen, who would become a bishop in 1951 shortly before leaving radio, was conversational, vivid, and intimate. (For example, note his reflection on the death of Jesus: "There is always a strange power in the eyes of the dying, which enables them to follow the ones they love, even when other senses are mute and dead. His eyes are now resting on the same object He rested on when he was born—His sweet and beloved Mother. She felt His eyes fixed on her.")

Maier's style was energetic declamation, using forceful rhetoric and penetrating language. (As in his first *Lutheran Hour* sermon: "Men can live without money, without fame, without erudition; they can eke out an existence without friends, without health, or without personal liberty and the possibility of the pursuit of happiness; but they cannot live in the fullness of a life that lives beyond the grave without God.")

The structure of the two programs, which despite their titles lasted for only half an hour, was also similar: a hymn (Maier used Martin Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God") followed by a 20-minute sermon, followed by another hymn and a prayer.

Although many would become Catholics and Lutherans through their ministries, Sheen and Maier sought to evangelize, not proselytize. Although they both came from traditions that could be very polemical, the priest and the pastor resolved not to criticize other denominations.

They did, however, consistently blast theological liberalism, the modernist theology that rejected

Fulton J. Sheen (1895–1979)

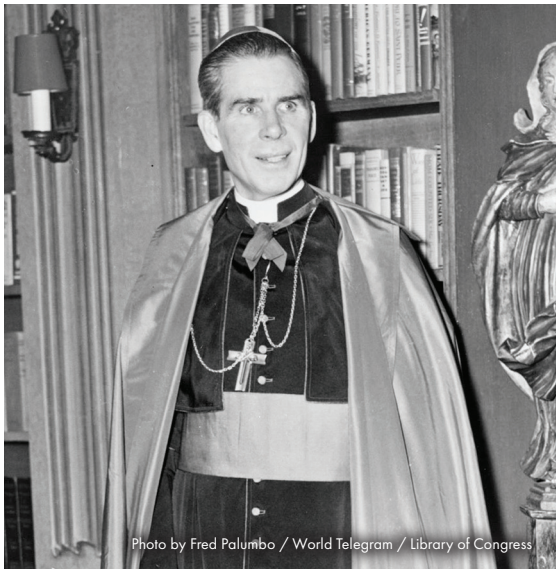
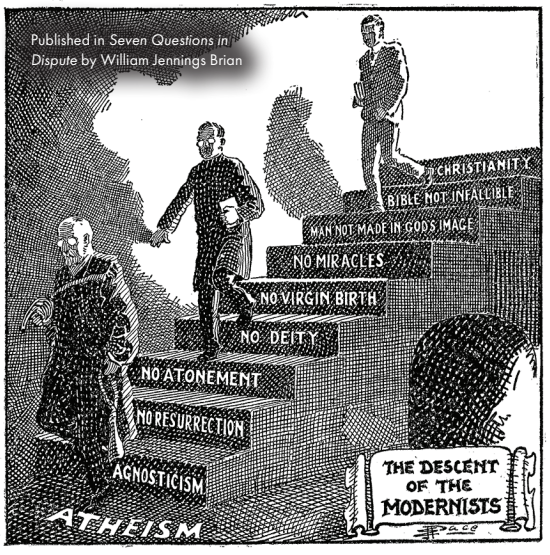


Photo by Fred Palumbo / World Telegram / Library of Congress

Walter A. Maier (1893–1950)

Photo courtesy the Lutheran Hour Ministries



A fundamentalist cartoon by E. J. Pace (1922)

miracles, critiqued the Bible, and played down the supernatural doctrines of traditional Christianity.

Instead, *The Catholic Hour* and *The Lutheran Hour* articulated a robustly orthodox Christian faith. They both emphasized the truth of scriptural revelation, Christ as God incarnate, and the salvation that He offers. Typically, each sermon began with a searing condemnation of sin, often occasioned by a current issue or event, which led to an application of God's grace to sinners and Christ's atonement for their salvation.

To be sure, the Catholic and the Lutheran drew on the resources of their respective theologies. Sheen would explain such Catholic teachings as the veneration of Mary and the need to co-operate with God's grace. Maier would stress such Lutheran teachings as the universality of Christ's atonement, so that no one is excluded from Christ's redemption, and the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, which kept his messages free from politics.

Their audiences extended far beyond their Catholic or Lutheran base (at the time, the LCMS had about 1 million members, whereas 15 million Americans were listening to the *Lutheran Hour*), so they were never just preaching to the choir. They were preaching, however, in the wake of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, which had torn American Protestantism apart. I would argue that this context explains much of their appeal. The modernists with their progressive theology were mostly victorious in the mainline Protestantism that was then dominant in American culture. The fundamentalists left those denominations to form smaller church bodies of their own, only to be caricatured as ignorant, backwoods fanatics.

But here on *The Catholic Hour* and *The Lutheran Hour*, radio audiences were hearing expositions of orthodox Christianity that had all but faded from many congregations. And it was being defended by men who, contrary to the fundamentalist stereotypes, were intelligent, learned, and sophisticated.

And yet the Catholic and the Lutheran were preaching a kind of orthodox Christianity that was also quite different from that of the typical fundamentalist preachers, many of whom also had radio shows. While Maier excoriated violations of the Ten Commandments, he had little patience for the fundamentalists who fixated on minor lifestyle issues. He said that there was nothing wrong with women using make-up, and he made headlines across the nation when he spoke at a conference at which he criticized Prohibition.

Maier said that one of the spiritual evils he wanted to address was "legalism," the notion that we are saved by our good works, which in practice often trivializes both sin and virtue. Even many fundamentalists, who supposedly believed in justification (being made right with God) by faith alone, had fallen into this syndrome. Maier countered it in a very Lutheran way by convincing his audience that they—and he—were sinners, but that their sins were covered by the blood of Jesus, a Gospel that is not just for conversion in a one-off altar call but a truth about Christ that nourishes every moment of our lives.

At the same time, Sheen was defying Protestant stereotypes about Catholic moralism with a strong emphasis on God's grace and the sinner's redemption through Christ.

Scholars writing later on about "America's Religious Depression" concluded that the malaise mostly affected mainline Protestantism, in which churches themselves seemed to be turning against Christianity. In contrast, Christians found *The Catholic Hour* and *The Lutheran Hour* encouraging and invigorating, while nonbelievers discovered a Christianity different from the one they had rejected.

America finally emerged from its religious depression—just as it came out of its economic depression—with World War II, and churches grew significantly in the postwar era. Surely *The Catholic Hour* and *The Lutheran Hour* played a part in that revival.

Catholicism and Lutheranism were often seen as foreign, ethnic religions, but both programs promoted American patriotism (a concept Sheen helpfully explained as a corollary of Christ's commandment to love our neighbors).

They praised the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and American liberties. This did not, however, prevent them from preaching against the nation's sins, such as greed, materialism, the breakdown of the family, sexual immorality, and—perhaps surprisingly for the time—racism. In one sermon, Maier castigated the enslavement and continued mistreatment of black people, denounced the way Americans stole the land of the Indians, and condemned anti-Semitism.

When World War II broke out, both speakers strongly supported the war effort and prayed for victory. But they both criticized the decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan. And both Sheen and Maier strongly opposed Communism, offering incisive critiques of Marxist economic theory, Soviet totalitarianism, and left-wing atheism.

The Catholic Hour did much to persuade Americans that Catholicism was an authentically "American" religion. Sheen tried to show American Protestants that Catholics, too, love Jesus and support America. This affected not only non-Catholics, with their legacy of anti-Catholicism, but also cradle Catholics, who often segregated themselves along ethnic lines. Sheen helped Irish Catholics, Italian Catholics, Polish Catholics, German Catholics, and Hispanic Catholics realize that they were all Catholics and all Americans.

During World War I, anti-German sentiment led to physical assaults on German Lutherans, and 34 states banned or restricted the use of the German language. That didn't happen during World War II, largely because German immigrants were more assimilated by then and had adopted the English language. But *The Lutheran Hour* was surely a factor.

The program also showed Americans that Lutherans were true Bible-believing, Gospel-preaching Protestants despite their sacramental spirituality and liturgical worship. And it showed Lutherans, who tended to be suspicious of American culture and ecumenical entanglements, that they had something to offer all Americans. After World War II, the LCMS grew dramatically, with congregations putting up signs proclaiming, "The Church of the Lutheran Hour."

> "THE CATHOLIC HOUR DID MUCH TO PERSUADE AMERICANS THAT CATHOLICISM WAS AN AUTHENTICALLY 'AMERICAN' RELIGION."

In 1950, Walter A. Maier died of a heart attack at the age of 56. In 1952, Fulton Sheen, now a bishop, left radio for the new medium of television, where he continued his successful ministry until 1968. He died in 1979 at the age of 84. The Vatican is currently considering his canonization (he has already been proclaimed a "venerable servant of God").

The Lutheran Hour continues on the radio to this very day and has had a series of speakers, all of them heavy hitters. Although the radio medium is in decline, the program still reaches an audience of 1 million.

While Catholics, Lutherans, and other Christian ministries are well-represented on the internet, today's electronic media is not so much broadcasting as narrowcasting, tailored to ever-more tightly defined niche audiences. So accomplishing what Sheen and Maier did with the medium of their time is now much more difficult. (Episodes of both programs are available on YouTube, ready to find new audiences.)

But what they did to address the "religious depression" of their day is instructive for today's "religious depression." While avoiding politics and moralism, Sheen and Maier made their listeners realize their need for God. And instead of revising Christianity to make it conform to secular culture, they proclaimed, in the words of a *Lutheran Hour* slogan, a "changeless Christ for a changing world." RL

Gene Edward Veith *is director of the Cranach Institute at Concordia Theological Seminary at Fort Wayne, Ind., and the author of over 25 books on the topics of Christianity and culture, literature, the arts, classical education, vocation, and theology.*

James Stewart and Kevin Spacey, each well known for portraying fictional characters shaped by Washington politics. Photo of Spacey courtesy Maryland GovPics / Wikipedia.

A Politics of Hope

We live in paradoxical times. Christians are chided for being both too ideological and not sufficiently politically engaged. Is there a way for people of faith to inform the body politic with a moral knowledge that encourages human flourishing and not merely party loyalty?

by **TREY DIMSDALE**

DESPITE MY VOCATIONAL proximity to politics as a think tank leader and public interest attorney, I must confess: I don't have much use for it. I'm rather put off by those smitten with the power that politics affords and have seen far too many friends and acquaintances go to Washington as Jimmy Stewart's Mr. Smith only to emerge as Kevin Spacey's Frank Underwood. But must politics always be morally and spiritually corrosive? Political strategist, former Obama staffer, and evangelical Christian Michael Wear says no.

"Politics is not uniquely challenging to faithfulness, even given the fact that there are unique challenges." Not only is it possible for Christians to pursue politics, Wear argues in *The Spirit of Our Politics: Spiritual Formation and the Renovation of Public Life*—they should be engaged in and even view politics as a force for human flourishing.

Given my confession above, I admit to some skepticism. First, I'm a conservative in the tradition of Alexis de Tocqueville. I believe there are more productive and durable ways to get things done than through politics. Second, Michael and I are on opposite sides of some important political issues. Needless to say, I would not have been on the short list for a position in the Obama White House. And third, my default is to think of "politics" not as too "dirty" for Christian engagement but as irretrievably tainted as a field most attractive to pragmatists enamored of power. I'm repelled by those who think of living

> **THOSE WHO CLAIM THAT FAITH IS SOMEHOW ABOVE POLITICS ARE ACTUALLY COMMITTING A 'FATAL ERROR' AND ACT IN REALITY AS IF FAITH IS *INSUFFICIENT* FOR POLITICS.**

in D.C. as consonant with their "personality" rather than a fact of geography or job proximity.

Despite these early handicaps and some small disagreements, I must admit that this is a compelling book. Wear remains focused on a uniquely Christian *posture* toward politics rather than policy issues per se. There's no finger wagging at Republicans or Democrats—only optimistic encouragement for Christians to approach politics in a way deeply informed by their faith and for the good of their neighbors.

An Australian professor once told me that American public discourse always devolves into sheltering in one of two trenches and firing at anyone in the middle as a hopeless compromiser.

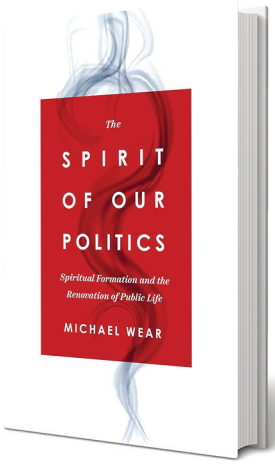
Every new social issue provides a new fault line, and we tend to choose our trench based on whose trench we've been in before rather than based on principled moral reflection. Unfortunately, this tendency is just as true for American Christians as it is for any other group of American citizens. As Wear notes, only 3.5% of Americans would vote against "their preferred candidate in response to undemocratic behavior." We apparently put up with a lot from those in our own trench that we'd never countenance from others.

The central argument of *The Spirit of Our Politics* is that those who claim that faith is somehow above politics are actually committing a "fatal error" and act in reality as if faith is *insufficient* for politics. Faith, Wear rightly observes, is largely understood to be private and personalized, which makes it inadequate for the challenges presented in the public square. Consequently, faith is viewed either as irrelevant or merely a tool for advancing a political agenda. In the first instance, our public discourse is impoverished by a lack of wisdom that the Christian tradition can offer. In the second, Christianity is valued only instrumentally. It is useful, as C.S. Lewis' Screwtape says, for "the excellent arguments it can produce."

Regardless of the reason, the result is what Wear identifies as political sectarianism, "the tendency to adopt a moralized identification with one political group and against another." More troubling is that an increasing number of Americans select their churches based not on doctrinal and ecclesial distinctives but rather on the pastor's politics—is the pastor sufficiently outspoken or silent on political issues? Is this a church that wears masks or not? What about the COVID-19 vaccine—pro or con? QAnon? Immigration? Positions on such issues become a litmus test for Christian faithfulness rather than firm belief in the Incarnation, the Resurrection, good works that should follow faith, or any number of matters that have historically defined Christian orthodoxy.

Portrait of Alexis de Tocqueville by Théodore Chassériau (1850)

Dallas Willard at George Fox Evangelical Seminary (2008)



The Spirit of Our Politics: Spiritual Formation and the Renovation of Public Life

By Michael Wear

(Zondervan, 2024)

The solution Wear proposes to this pervasive underestimation of Christianity and, by extension, of Jesus Christ Himself is relatively simple. Christians need to rediscover that who they are and what they do are inextricably intertwined aspects of the Christian life, and what they do in the political realm is influencing the type of person they are—and are becoming. Wear draws upon the wisdom of the late Christian philosopher Dallas Willard to explain the details of and the pathway toward this solution. Since Christianity is *emphatically* about all of life, as both Wear and Willard affirm, then Christianity is also relevant to politics and public life in ways that are concrete and substantive.

Christians on both the left and the right are guilty of both bracketing their faith off from politics and of using it as a tool to advance a very narrow political agenda. They've decoupled faith and reason, so they no longer understand faith as being a source of real knowledge. Faith is, as noted above, a matter of personal belief—sometimes an idiosyncratic and very personal belief—so whatever claims that flow from it are not, in fact, knowledge but instead personal assertions of preference, which can never be a source of confidence or courage no matter how sincerely held or articulated. Personal assertions of moral preferences can never translate into moral absolutes bearing on everyone.

> **"FOR CHRISTIANS, IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT THEY NOT ALLOW THE PENULTIMATE TO BECOME THE ULTIMATE."**

Wear is not, as I think some critics might argue, urging Christians to just "be nicer" and stop vilifying those who disagree with them. On the contrary, there are several instances where he not only acknowledges the reality of political conflict but describes it as necessary. For Christians, it is imperative that they not allow the penultimate to become the ultimate, however. The faith is not "merely part of the 'Cause,'" to borrow from C.S. Lewis again. Wear argues convincingly that they need a rediscovery of the *service* aspect of "public service" and to orient liturgies, spiritual disciplines, and religious practice toward an outward facing posture of love.

All this is fine as far as it goes, but Wear stops short regarding a few points. He's exactly right that American Christians have lost what he and Willard call "moral knowledge." This has had far-reaching negative implications for any number of aspects of both private and public life. This reality has eroded nearly every social institution upon which our society depends—the family, the church, the government, higher education, etc. The source of this erosion? Recent surveys have highlighted an alarming decline in basic knowledge about the faith. Orthodox Christian faith, regardless of denomination, has *always* been clearly defined by

nonnegotiable theological positions, but now more and more self-identified believers are confused about basic doctrines such as the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, and the nature of the Trinity.

This is not to say that there is a direct line that can be drawn between each phrase of the Nicene Creed and any particular political issue, but there is a truism that one's faith is only as good as its object. Rectifying the various troubling postures among American Christians toward the public square will require not just a renewed commitment to spiritual disciplines but also an institutional recommitment in the churches to catechize believers in ways formal and informal in what they claim to believe. Christian orthodoxy is a complex tapestry of inextricably intertwined doctrinal commitments. How many essential doctrines can be compromised or abandoned before the faith that animates and informs political engagement is no longer properly called Christianity? Rooted in 2,000 years of tradition and practice, orthodoxy provides a categorical bright line so we need never face the religious and doctrinal version of the paradox of the Ship of Theseus.

Further, Wear identifies the troubling trend of treating politics as a hobby, but what he means by this is insufficient regarding the present moment, at least among Christians. He identifies political hobbyists as those who don't really take politics seriously and view it as a form of entertainment rather than a vital aspect of life with serious consequences. This phenomenon certainly exists, but there are far too many Christian leaders who prefer the power of politics for its own sake to the burden of the prophetic, and confuse one for the other for the sake of a platform. Thus, even some professionals don't take it seriously.

A theological education, the presidency of a Christian institution, or the pastorate of a large church does not translate into omnicompetence. Social media has only exaggerated the tendency to break into supposedly infallible camps, such that the church is reliving a problem that Paul observed among the Corinthians. Now, however, to borrow the names of those Wear directly addresses, we hear "I follow Albert Mohler, or I follow John MacArthur, or I follow Serene Jones." Twitter (X) accounts and podcast microphones have been far too accessible

Fresco from Pompeii depicting Theseus and Ariadne escaping from Crete (c. AD 35–45)

Jaroslav Pelikan (1923–2006)

and resulted in building personal brands rather than the Kingdom of God.

Wear also takes to task those who understand the faith to be primarily about getting souls into heaven and abandoning all concern for earthly endeavors. This is certainly a concern of Dallas Willard and plenty of other thoughtful Christians. But Wear underestimates the value of cultural Christianity. To be fair, he does not accept the unqualified criticism of those who question the vitality or sincerity of the type of spirituality found in modern Europe that often appears merely to be ritualistic and rote.

Wear's defense of this formalistic expression of the faith, however, seems to be limited only to the personal piety of individual Christians and congregations. This tends to be a common theme in American Christianity. Where Christians have marked societies, they have sown the seeds that have blossomed into much of what is right and good about Western civilization. The very idea of "inalienable rights" owes itself to Christian faith informing politics. Many have attempted to sprint away from the influence of Christianity in the public square, but Christian thought has infused Western political and cultural institutions to the extent that it simply cannot be extracted without destroying much of what's agreed upon as valuable. "Tradition is," wrote Jaroslav Pelikan, "the living faith of the dead." Many Christians in the West have problematically traded tradition for traditionalism, which Pelikan calls "the dead faith of the living." But too many have also traded the living faith of the dead for liturgical spontaneity and ecclesial innovation and are surprised to find that political ideas rooted in the long history of the faith, like the notion of human rights and individual dignity, become unmoored and weaponized against them. When contrasted with the social, cultural, and political fruits of any alternative set of metaphysical commitments that have *actually been instantiated*, almost anyone would opt for a ritualistic or rote cultural Christianity whether or not accompanied by what appears to Americans to be personal piety.

Relatedly, I also think Wear is a bit too optimistic regarding some political actors in the public square. In the months since his manuscript went to press, we have seen a shocking resurgence of anti-Semitism even in polite society. Many of those who expound an identity politics and intersectionality can barely conceal their contempt for "the system" and do not come to the public square in good faith. How can we dialogue with those who have intentionally embraced the irrationality of critical theories whose goal is to destroy the foundations upon which reasoned debate can happen in the first place?

This is an outworking of Wear's discussion of the decline of moral knowledge and the rise of personal assertions of moral preference, but this reality presents far more serious threats than Wear acknowledges here. This phenomenon reveals a wider trend to reduce moral reasoning to intuition and preference, and moral disagreement to bigotry and bias.

We live in a world that was turned upside down by the coming of Christ and the altruistic obedience of His followers. Even many non-Christians recognize the force for good it has been over the past 2,000 years and the West's indebtedness to it for some of our most transformative political concepts. Wear's optimism and hopefulness are embedded in history. A resurgence among Christians of civility, service, and confidence in the relevance and sufficiency of their faith will make a difference, as Wear's final chapter asserts.

I still maintain many of the presuppositions that I brought to the book: I still think there are better, more durable ways to change the world than through politics. But I do share Wear's confidence that in such a time of deep division, the political world needs that which Christians can uniquely offer: hope. RL

Trey Dimsdale *serves as counsel for First Liberty Institute (FLI) and executive director of the Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy, an FLI initiative focused on education and cultural advocacy for freedom.*

Photo credit: Marcel / Adobe Stock

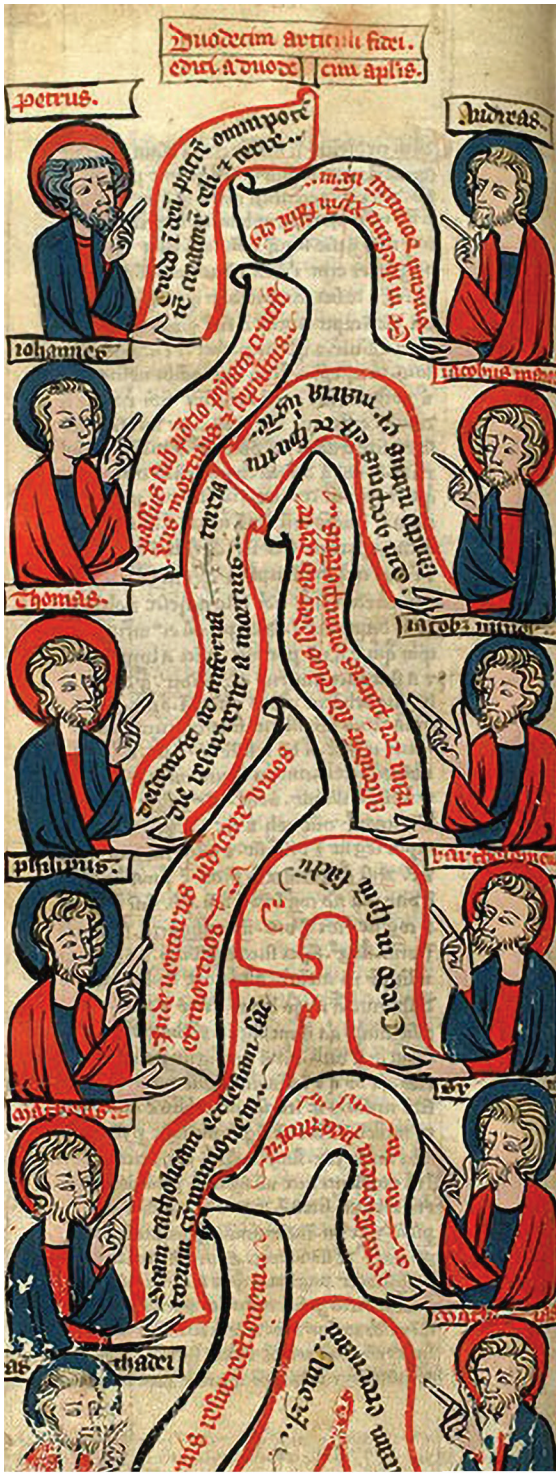
The Way, the Truth, and the Life in the 21st Century

Christianity is more than just a way of life. But it is not less. A preoccupation with precise doctrine can offer stumbling blocks to remembering this.

by JORDAN J. BALLOR

IN THE SECOND-CENTURY TEXT known as *The Didache or The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*, Christianity is presented as one of "two ways, one of life and one of death." The two ways are distinguished primarily by love and action. The way of life is characterized by the two great love commandments (love God and love neighbor) and ways in which these loves are to be actualized: through the Golden Rule and by obeying commands to "bless those who curse you, and pray for your enemies, and fast for those who persecute you." Early Christians were also known simply as followers of "The Way," echoing the stark presentation of apostolic teaching concerning the narrow way "that leads to life" (Matt. 7:14).

Kevin W. Hector's *Christianity as a Way of Life* presents the Christian faith in these kinds of terms, emphasizing practice, social flourishing, and spiritual formation as defining features of this ancient faith. The postliberal theological movement is now entering its fifth decade, and Hector's work can be understood as standing within that tradition, which downplays metaphysics and traditional scholastic doctrinal formulations in favor of narrative expressions of theological truths. Hector's distinctive approach could be considered a kind of postliberal orthodoxy, in that he does affirm the significance of right understanding and belief for achieving wisdom, which leads to right living. Hector's method, however,



Credo Apostolorum (c. 1300) by unknown artist

Didache manuscript

tends to deemphasize the significance of orthodox doctrinal formulations such as the hypostatic union of Christ's divine and human natures, the proper understanding of inter-trinitarian relations, and the efficacy of sacramental grace. Yet some of the issues the church has considered important enough to define as creedal orthodoxy do receive attention. But most often, doctrinal distinctives are couched within a larger aim of outlining a practical approach to Christianity as a lived reality.

The book might also be described as evincing a kind of postliberal orthopraxy, given Hector's intention to explore wisdom "about how to conduct one's life well in the face of success and failure, of risk and loss, of guilt and shame, of circumstances within and beyond one's control, and of loved ones and hard-to-love ones." A friend once described the more recent scholarly field of analytic theology as an approach shorn of the "rough edges" of traditional theological method. In this way, Hector's work can also be understood as a kind of practical analytical theology.

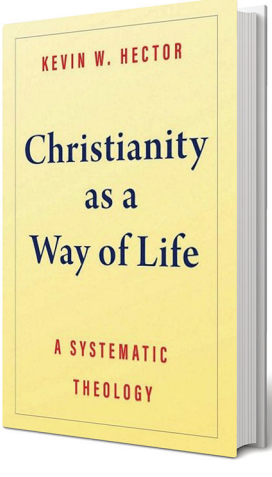
Christianity as a Way of Life is written within a distinctly post-Kantian frame. There are indeed doctrinal discussions, some of which rather extended, but they are consistently explored from a grounding in continuity with experience, perception, and practicality. Hector emphasizes particular beliefs insofar as they are necessary to make a practice efficacious or salient. Thus, his method is inductive or bottom-up. It starts with an assumption that is proved as it is worked out through the book. Christianity is "a way of life" in that it is "a set of practices designed to transform one's way of perceiving and being in the world." It would not

be fair to characterize Hector's approach or the substance of his study as anti-intellectual or anti-doctrinal. It is, in fact, quite learned and intellectually serious. But doctrinal formulations are important to him only to the extent that they have this kind of practical payoff.

The subtitle of *Christianity as a Way of Life* describes it as "a systematic theology," and it qualifies as one in the sense that there is a clear progression through Hector's discussion and exploration of topics such as repentance, sin, atonement, prayer, and vocation. But the work is certainly not anything like a conventional systematic theology. It functions instead more like a handbook of practical wisdom than a systematic presentation of theology.

One result is that the book's teachings can be difficult to map onto traditional theological categories. Topics or loci typically included in systematic theologies are often presented idiosyncratically or in many cases missing entirely. It would be fair to infer that Hector does not judge such topics as having sufficient practical relevance to warrant attention. In some instances, the omissions might also simply be a matter of the relentlessly inductive method and the resulting order of topics. If Hector's exploration does not provide a clear doctrine of scriptural authority or an account of angels, for example, it simply might mean that such topics are not judged to be salient for his account of Christianity as "three sets of practices: practices of being reoriented, of being in the world, and of being with others."

Another significant aspect of the book that is a result of this methodology and the larger situation within an academic theological context is Hector's variegated, and sometimes dizzying, array and



Christianity as a Way of Life: A Systematic Theology

By Kevin W. Hector

(Yale, 2023)

"ONE IS AS LIKELY TO ENCOUNTER A QUOTE FROM AUGUSTINE, AQUINAS, OR LUTHER AS FROM GUSTAVO GUTIÉRREZ, ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER, OR JAMES CONE."

deployment of sources. On any given page, one is as likely to encounter a quote from Augustine, Aquinas, or Luther as from Gustavo Gutiérrez, Rosemary Radford Ruether, or James Cone. To his credit, despite the scholarly throat-clearing about privilege and context that is required to acquire an imprimatur in academic publishing today, Hector does engage with a host of sources, and there is no chronological snobbery. The Cappadocian Fathers are just as prominent as John Calvin, Karl Barth as Theresa of Avila. There is much worthwhile to be found in these references, but sometimes it is unclear why one authority is cited as opposed to another. Why go to Gutiérrez for a quote about the moral mandate to love our neighbor as opposed to Augustine, or Joseph Butler rather than James Cone for the need to consider contextual factors in our loving, for example?

Besides the requisite analog to land acknowledgments that open so many conferences, conventions, and meetings nowadays, in which Hector admits his limitations as "a white, male, cisgender, educated, Christian, middle-class American," there are some other features of the book characteristic of scholarly modes of communication that can grate against common sensibilities, or even what Hector calls the "non-specialists." It is of course wonderful to have aspirations that one's work will be read by a wide variety of audiences, but the likelihood that such academic tomes, which casually drop references to Friedrich Schleiermacher, Albrecht Ritschl, and "being-oriented-to-God-even-in-not-being-so-oriented," will be

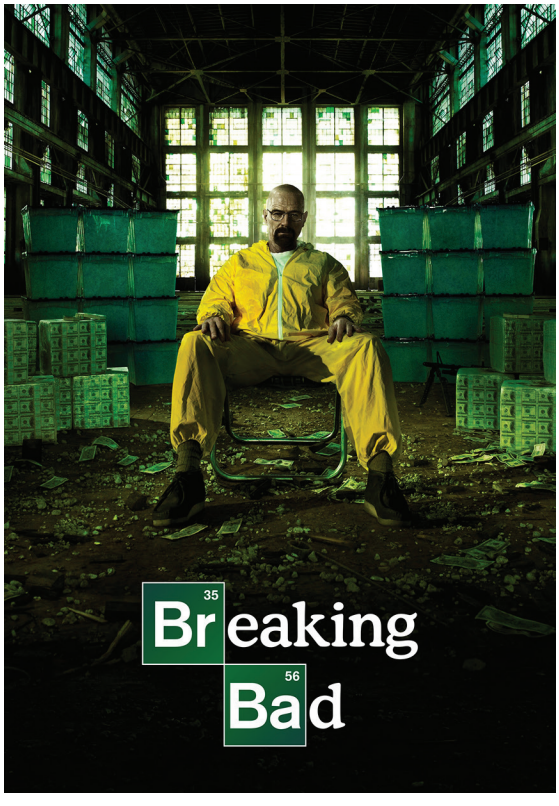
braved by nonspecialists is vanishingly small. The ratio of references to Rudolf Bultmann relative to *Breaking Bad* would need to change significantly to increase appeal beyond technical academic theologians. Nonspecialists are likely to tire as well from the scholarly habit-cum-pathology to constantly qualify and couch every claim with hedges like "might," "perhaps," and "if."

A few examples might suffice to provide a sense of both the wisdom and the limitations of Hector's project. There are undoubtedly few systematic theologies that spend much, if any, time on laughter. For Hector, however, laughter is joined with lament as significant practices that can help orient us toward being in the world with others as a way of life. As Hector puts it, "Laughter can function as a spiritual practice," almost as a coping mechanism to prevent us from losing hope in the face of loss and suffering. "In the face of incongruities that arise when our expectations are subverted," he writes, "or where people take themselves too seriously, or where the world is simply absurd, we can laugh in response, and so take these incongruities less seriously, precisely because we recognize God alone as ultimately serious." The contribution of laughter and humor to human flourishing, especially humor as truth-telling in an age of ideology, warrants greater attention.

Lament, likewise, is a spiritual practice with a rather more established scriptural and theological pedigree. "Lament can," writes Hector, "transform our experience of suffering, helping us to experience it as not having the final word about us and, so, helping us hold on in the face of that which might otherwise overwhelm us." So we can take Hector as recommending both laughter and lament as spiritual practices which *may*, when done rightly and in the appropriate context, help us to grow in our devotion to God.

But consider a scriptural instance where laughter and lament are joined in a less than laudable way. In Genesis 18, we have an account of three visitors coming to see Abraham and Sarah. During the course of conversation with their host, Abraham, one of the visitors says, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." As the narrative continues, Sarah is listening at the tent door, and due to her and Abraham's age, "Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?'" Here Sarah's laughter is a kind of lament. Having so desperately wanted a child that she encouraged Abraham to procreate with her slave Hagar, Sarah cannot respond otherwise than with incredulous laughter to the reality of her childlessness. But in this story, *laughter* and *lament* are joined together with *lying*. The Lord responds to Sarah's laughter and says to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is

***Breaking Bad* promotional graphic by AMC**



"THE CONTRIBUTION OF LAUGHTER AND HUMOR TO HUMAN FLOURISHING WARRANTS GREATER ATTENTION."

***Abraham, Sarah, and the Angel* by Jan Provoost (c. 1520)**

anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son." The narrative continues: "Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, 'I did not laugh.' But he said, 'Yes, you did laugh.'" Not all laughter, then, is spiritually beneficial, especially the kind that is a reaction of disbelief in the face of lament and suffering. Sarah and Abraham enjoy God's last laugh in this episode, however, as in Genesis 21, where we read that "the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised," and she gives birth to a son named Isaac, which means "he laughs."

Hector's treatment of forgiveness is curious and noteworthy, especially where he claims that not everyone is bound to forgive. Hector rightly distinguishes forgiveness from the voiding of all temporal punishments or material restitution. Forgiveness is, instead, something more like the "setting aside" or the dispelling of feelings such as resentment, hatred, and vindictiveness. While doing justice to important nuances and qualifications in his exploration of forgiveness, Hector considers that "it might be best if we were to think of forgiveness as an obligation, but an obligation of the sort that allows for exceptions—which would mean to say that Christians may have a general, but not exceptionless, obligation to forgive others." This is a hard saying. And while it is formulated in response to some especially hard cases, it is difficult to see that forgiveness, even as it must be qualified by context and temporal constraints, is something that can be limited in this sense, at least in terms of an aspiration or obligation. Perhaps we fail in our ability to forgive, but that inability does not impugn the absoluteness of the obligation itself. Are there sins so heinous that we are not called to forgive them? An affirmative answer seems to throw into doubt the Gospel itself.

One of the especially valuable discussions in *Christianity as a Way of Life* comes in Hector's treatment of eschatology. In examining the implications of a doctrine of the beatific vision with a more robust and active understanding of eschatological life, Hector connects the vision of God with the image of God in human beings. It is a wonderful thing to consider that one of the ways we might learn to contemplate God and enjoy him forever in the new heavens and the new earth would be to attend to the ways in which our fellow humans, in all their diversity, express God's image in their being and doing. In pursuing something like a new cultural mandate in the new creation, "through such ever-new cultivation of goods, the infinite goodness of God would be infinitely expressed in infinitely many ways." This is an understanding that would "provide us, in turn, with a different way of thinking about the beatific vision, a seeing of God not as a kind of blinding light but as an endlessly overflowing fountain of goodness in each as well as in all."

There is much wisdom in this book, and there is much to be learned by thinking carefully and seriously about Christianity not simply as a set of beliefs or an assent to a collection of propositions but as a way of life. The apostle Peter enjoins us to "live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Pet. 2:12). Hector's *Christianity as a Way of Life* provides much insight into what it might look like to live such good lives, even as we confess Christ himself as "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Christianity is more than a way of life, but it is certainly not less. RL

***Jordan J. Ballor** is director of research at the Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy at First Liberty Institute.*

New Harmony, Indiana, Robert Owen's attempt at Utopia. Drawn and engraved by F. Bate; published by "The Association of All Classes of All Nations," London (1838).

A Liberalism Not of This World

Samuel Moyn is angry with some of 20th-century liberalism's most celebrated thinkers for allowing reality to derail a commitment to endless Progress.

by JOHN G. GROVE

THE UTOPIAN MIND, Roger Scruton wrote in *The Uses of Pessimism*, is remarkable not merely for being detached from reality but for taking a certain pride in *consciously* rejecting reality. Utopians "see the world differently. They are able to ignore or despise the findings of experience and common sense, and to place at the centre of every deliberation a project whose absurdity they regard not as a defect but as a reproach against the one who would point it out." Being unrealistic is not a flaw but a marker of one who has cast off the ugly chains of the world and committed himself to a pure and righteous world—even if it doesn't exist.

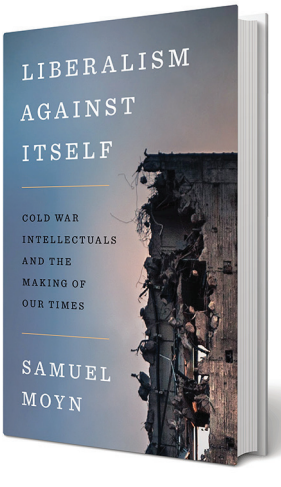
Samuel Moyn's *Liberalism Against Itself* is not exactly a utopian book. It is, however, what we might call an anti-anti-utopian book. And as such, it certainly exemplifies Scruton's observation, for its very structure is an extended "reproach" against certain liberals who, chastened by the experience of the early 20th century, abandoned liberalism's unbounded faith in Progress and continual emancipatory political projects. Moyn, a Yale law professor, has developed a reputation as a left-wing gadfly, critical of the standard liberal politics on offer in America today. Here, he tries to show where it all went wrong.

Each of Moyn's six chapters is devoted to a 20th-century thinker who embraced, in some form or another, what Judith Shklar (herself one of those featured) termed the "liberalism of fear." Shklar is the only intellectual profiled whom Moyn does not seem to loathe, and he uses her first book, *After Utopia*, as a conceptual guide. The others—Isaiah Berlin, Karl Popper, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Hannah Arendt, and Lionel Trilling—each come in for their 30 lashes with

a wet noodle for having turned liberalism into a more cautious and realistic approach to politics. (And, of course, much to the chagrin of Moyn, Shklar's thought also matured with age, coming to resemble the rest of the Cold War crowd.)

These thinkers witnessed gross atrocities, totalitarian government, and spiritual degradation all perpetuated in the name of progress and enlightenment. They responded by abandoning liberalism's belief in the limitless potential for human improvement and reframed it in a more defensive posture. This typically meant a more Augustinian understanding of human nature, a greater emphasis on individual liberty (Berlin's famous "negative liberty"), an appreciation of the institutions necessary to guard against concentration of power, and in some cases at least, a belief in the need for individual moral responsibility. Correspondingly, they abandoned ambitions for "collective emancipation" or global transformation through concerted political action, seeing firsthand how such aims could go awry.

As a simple account of this intellectual development, Moyn's book is useful if unspectacular. Each thinker is approached from a particular angle, often focusing on how he or she engaged with an important figure in the history of liberal ideas (Popper's rejection of Hegel, Himmelfarb's rehabilitation of Acton, and Trilling's engagement with Freud, for example). This helps develop one of the book's more interesting secondary themes: the adjustment of the liberal canon, and more importantly, the establishment of an "anti-canon" of modern thinkers seen to be forerunners of revolution or totalitarianism. Acton was in, and so was Freud.



Liberalism Against Itself: Cold War Intellectuals and the Making of Our Times

By Samuel Moyn

(Yale University Press, 2023)

> "SHKLAR IS THE ONLY INTELLECTUAL PROFILED WHOM MOYN DOES NOT SEEM TO LOATHE."

Hegel and Rousseau were out. If the book had been meant to be a straightforward intellectual history, this would have been an interesting line of examination with which much fruitful engagement could be had.

But it is abundantly clear that the purpose of this book was not simply to serve as an intellectual history but to pass judgment on that history. This reconceptualization of liberalism was a terrible development, Moyn tells us—"catastrophic" even. But *why*, exactly, were the Cold War liberals so wrong? And why was it so catastrophic? That is less clear. Despite maintaining a scolding tone throughout, there is little substantive defense of Moyn's judgment on these thinkers. For the most part, as Scruton suggests, he seems simply to assume that it is self-evidently good for a political thinker to maintain a detachment from reality and to continue to engage in what Moyn calls

Front page of the *Chicago American* (1935)


CHICAGO AMERICAN

SECOND SECTION
NEWS, FEATURES

SIX MILLION PERISH IN SOVIET FAMINE

Peasants' Crops Seized, They and Their Animals Starve

Reporter Risks Life to Get Photographs Showing Starvation

By THOMAS WALKER,

"high-minded fantasies." Indeed, "acceptance of 'reality,'" he warns, can "become its own delusion."

To the extent that there is a (mostly implicit) argument behind Moyn's scathing assessment, it is that the Cold War liberals overreacted. He grudgingly acknowledges the historical events that were behind the shift in thinking. "In the middle of the twentieth century," he writes, "there was a lot to be glum about" (a tastefully understated way to recognize the physical and spiritual devastation of the Holodomor, thought police, and gulags). But when at first you don't succeed, try, try again: more radical ideologies may have usurped the language of perfectionism and historical progress, and many liberals may have been caught up in that revolutionary enthusiasm, but that doesn't mean we should run away from the ideas *entirely*. Just because the Soviet Union took up the mantle of History and Progress and it all went horribly wrong doesn't mean we can't still do it—just better. True enough. Just because another driver barreling down a street at a hundred miles per hour crashes and dies, doesn't mean I can't do it—just better. But I might want to tap the brakes and think about it all the same.

Moreover, if this is indeed the main argument underpinning the normative assessment, one would think Moyn would offer a clear alternative that shows how liberalism can embrace the values he holds without the totalitarian consequences. But Moyn's alternative liberalism is vague—merely the unarticulated inverse of what he attacks. This should not be surprising. As Scruton observed, utopianism is often more about hating what *is* than about articulating what ought to be: "Those who advocate [utopias] rarely describe them, or touch on their nature only fleetingly in the course of denouncing the realities that impede their arrival."

DVD art for *Arrested Development*

It's clear enough that Moyn thinks liberals should retain a romantic hopefulness in Progress and enlightenment operating through history. The state should be our friend. Redistribution is the key to true liberty, aiming at "collective emancipation." His is a liberalism that drinks deeply from the well of socialism and Marxism. But he does not offer many specifics or explain how such values should be embraced if you hope to do so without totalitarian flirtations. And he even acknowledges, in a humble confession to those slightly more radical than he, that the earlier, pre–Cold War form of liberalism he admires was actually "compromised to the core by its civilizational self-conception and racialist parochialism." To whom, then, shall we go?

There's nothing inherently wrong with this lack of a clear alternative, of course. One is entitled to write simply a critical book. Much of Moyn's scholarship seems to take this approach, and debunking sacred political cows (like his work on human rights) can be a worthwhile endeavor. But in this case, it leaves the reader with little more than the kind of argument captured in a scene from *Arrested Development* that has since become a common internet meme: No, it has never worked for anyone else. "But it might work for us!"

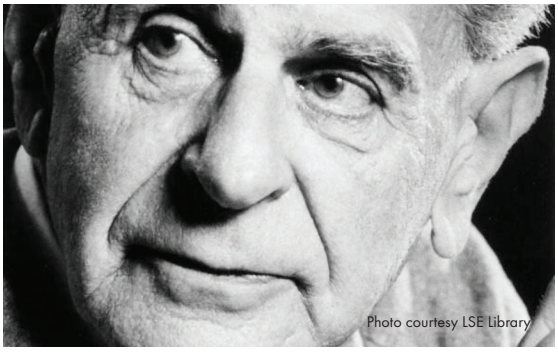
All this adds up to a book that is but an angry reproach to those who do not have Moyn's noble hope. The chapter on Arendt particularly gives this impression, since Arendt is not generally considered a "liberal." Moyn acknowledges this, but insists that she shares some of the characteristics he is focused on and so can reasonably be included. But the reader might wonder whether the primary reason for her inclusion is that Moyn simply doesn't like her and wants the opportunity to berate her for being, at one point, an ardent supporter of Zionism, despite her skepticism of other "violent emancipation" movements in the decolonizing world. (The fact that Arendt quite emphatically turned away from Zionism for its failure to recognize the specific hope she had is presented as a sort of afterthought that "is only fair to acknowledge" but that does not dampen the charge of hypocrisy.)

> **“*LIBERALISM AGAINST ITSELF* SERVES AS A MIRROR IMAGE OF RECENT INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENTS ON THE RIGHT.”**

For those who share Moyn’s prior commitments, there may be some cathartic relief from reading such a book. But for readers who do not, there is not much with which to engage. They will fundamentally disagree, but those disagreements are largely on matters outside the scope of the text. Nevertheless, a conservative might take something away from *Liberalism Against Itself*.

First, the book might remind us that “liberalism” is far from a monolith and need not manifest as a radicalism with which conservatives can have no truck. Undoubtedly, there are differences between conservatives and Cold War liberals on several matters: human anthropology; the origin and maintenance of Western institutions of governance; the nature of and relationship between the values liberals and conservatives might nominally share, including liberty, pluralism, social order, and even the very Western political tradition they see themselves as defending. And certainly, some of Moyn’s specific criticisms are well-earned. (Whatever Hegel’s merits and demerits, for instance, it’s clear that American thinkers—liberal and conservative—tend to dismiss him, as Popper did, based on gross oversimplification.) But on the points Moyn is most concerned with, the Cold War liberals will, to many conservative readers, come off looking better than the author. They may have been prone to simplistic answers and neat systems, but they are certainly people with whom we can share a civilization.

Second, *Liberalism Against Itself* serves as a kind of mirror image of recent intellectual developments on the right. Several commentators—and even Moyn himself—have pointed to the utility of reading his book alongside Patrick Deneen’s *Why Liberalism Failed*.



Karl Popper (1902–1994)

Postliberal conservatives like Deneen tend to treat liberalism as a monolith—a consistent strain of thought beginning at the Enlightenment (or the Reformation, or with Duns Scotus, or Ockham…) and naturally unfolding according to its internal logic down to today. As noted above, Moyn is a corrective on this point.

More striking, however, is the similarity between Moyn and the Deneenites. The postliberal conservatives would be unlikely to appeal to the Enlightenment or to capital-P Progress, but like Moyn, they see history as a canvas on which one can, through intentional collective action, draw a more noble and just political order than the one that has been passed down to us. Moyn’s complaint that the Cold War liberals abandoned hope in a politics of progress and perfectionism echoes the postliberal call for a more robust “political imagination” that abandons “the defensive crouch.” Both have even been known to lambaste “tyrannophobia.” They would undoubtedly disagree on the form utopia ought to take (a recurring problem for political optimists), but Moyn and the postliberal conservatives share a very similar style of politics.

As I have argued elsewhere, Deneen and his fellow travelers on the right are adherents of what Michael Oakeshott described as the “politics of faith.” Moyn is also lamenting a “decline of political faith” (the subtitle of Shklar’s *After Utopia*, Moyn’s guidebook). Perhaps this convergence suggests that the matter of faith in politics is a more important intellectual dividing line today than the nominal division over “liberalism.” Indeed, it is this dividing line that pits liberalism—and conservatism—against itself. RL

***John G. Grove** is managing editor of* Law & Liberty *and previously taught political science at Lincoln Memorial University.*

"A medieval missionary tells that he has found the point where Heaven and Earth meet"—a wood engraving by unknown artist

A Contemporary *Confessions* for Modern Gnostics

It may be time to purge your inner Gnostic and appreciate God's good creation. Robin Phillips—and the Stoics—can lend a hand.

by DYLAN PAHMAN

JUDGING BY ITS SUBTITLE, I must confess that I had low expectations for Robin Phillips' *Rediscovering the Goodness of Creation*. Some conservative cultural commentators, the secondhand Eric Voegelins of the world, use the term *Gnostic* in imprecise and polemical ways, making of it a theological black box into which they put everything they do not like, justifying their dislike with religious zeal. Suddenly, things like socialism *and* capitalism, environmentalism *and* climate change, ascetic sexual ethics *and* promiscuity—each choice depending on the commentator's political biases—all become not just vicious or mistaken but *heretical*. This is unfortunate since, as Voegelin knew, Gnosticism authentically existed only once, in several distinct schools of thought, and genuine likenesses to it can be found in some, though not all, modern ideologies, even in the teaching and practices of some contemporary Christian traditions.

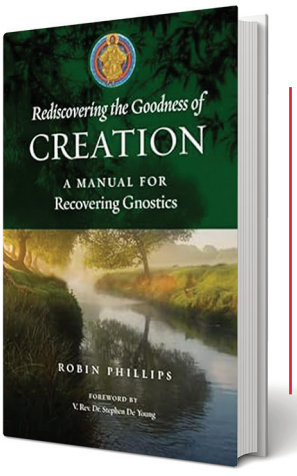
Happily, Robin Phillips is no secondhand Voegelin. In his introduction, he offers a helpful clarification: "Our topic is the goodness of the world, God's promise to bring creation to perfection, and what this means for you and me today." This relates to Gnosticism only by contrast: "Given that various heresies (such as Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Docetism, et cetera) have led to misunderstandings about God's purpose for creation and humanity's role in it, we must address these misunderstandings as we go along."

Furthermore, Phillips admits to being a "recovering Gnostic" himself, and not just metaphorically. True, his experience with evangelicalism involved many alarmingly Gnostic ideas and practices, but he also, for a time, was a member of an actual modern-day Gnostic cult in Britain where sermons were preached on the Gospel of Thomas and other ancient, apocryphal texts. He demonstrates a familiarity with these sources and, more importantly, the patterns of thought and detrimental habits of life that follow from genuine Gnostic teachings. His "manual" is as much autobiographical as instructional, reminiscent of the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, whom Phillips rightly identifies as "perhaps the greatest recovering Gnostic of all time."

Phillips' own story even begins with two chapters sporting "Confessions" in their titles, detailing his journey from evangelicalism to actual Gnosticism, through Calvinism, and finally to the Eastern Orthodox Church. The benefit of this approach is that while some might object that neither evangelicalism nor Calvinism is Gnostic or Gnostic-leaning, that was, nevertheless, Phillips' experience of these variants of the Christian faith. Yet experience is not an argument, and it would be an error for him to generalize from his particular encounter with these traditions. At the same time, critics cannot deny *his* experience. In fact, readers who have had similar experiences may see their own story in Phillips'. Thus, for some evangelicals, choose-your-own-adventure mystics, and Calvinists, Phillips offers answers for questions that may occupy them about the meaning and goodness of material creation.

On the more theoretical side, however, Phillips' familiarity with various theologies and traditions is a mixed bag. He refreshingly spends considerable time on the American Puritan Jonathan Edwards, rightly identifying him as an immaterialist (reality is entirely mental perception) and occasionalist (God is the immediate cause of all events). While many who admire him today would not endorse any of these views, Edwards, at least, thought they went hand in hand with the teachings Christians *do* turn to him for today. That Phillips takes the time to detail these peculiarities and how they relate to the popular appropriation of Edwards' theology is a rare strength in a book written for general audiences.

Unfortunately, this is not true of every figure or topic Phillips touches on in his wide-ranging exploration of a more traditional Christian doctrine of creation. I was excited to see, for example, that



Rediscovering the Goodness of Creation: A Manual for Recovering Gnostics

By Robin Phillips

(Ancient Faith Publishing, 2023)

Phillips had a more positive perspective on the Dutch Neo-Calvinist Abraham Kuyper—having any familiarity with Kuyper is rare enough among Orthodox writers—but his brief treatment of Kuyper felt shallow by comparison to that of Edwards. He defends the superficial similarities of his positive view of creation with that of Kuyper by saying, "If we can excise Kuyper's view of his Calvinism…it is puzzling that his teaching should even be controversial." Fair enough, but that is a big "If." I happen to be a minor scholar of Kuyper's work, and I can say that while many elements of his social thought transcend his confessional commitments, he certainly did not think his views could be "excise[d]…of his Calvinism." Indeed, perhaps his most famous statement of his worldview comes from his *Lectures on Calvinism*.

"PHILLIPS WAS A MEMBER OF AN ACTUAL MODERN-DAY GNOSTIC CULT IN BRITAIN WHERE SERMONS WERE PREACHED ON THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS."

Grief-stricken American soldier comforted by another soldier after his friend is killed in action during the Korean War (1950)

I detected a similar superficiality sometimes in Phillips' reliance on secondary sources. For example, he cites Mary Ford in claiming that "in the settled tradition of the Church, it's understood that since the passions, our basic desires, were given to us by God, they cannot be evil in themselves, contrary to what the Stoics, for example, believed." Despite this common summary of Stoicism, that simply is not what the Stoics taught. Rather, they defined a passion as the result of a process that begins with our natural impressions, then judgments, and finally the assent of our will to an irrational and vicious assessment of the events of our lives (thus becoming "passive" to them, hence the term *passion*).

Moreover, in addition to the four basic passions—pleasure, desire, fear, and grief—all of which the Stoics considered vicious, they acknowledged three good passions (*eupatheia*): joy, wishing, and caution. These correspond to the first three basic passions, except directed toward virtuous ends. Where ancient Christians (and Jews) differed with the Stoics was not their in view of the passions—many Christian ascetical works, such as the *Philokalia*, even praise the Stoic ideal of *apatheia*, or "passionlessness"—but rather they corrected the Stoics' ignorance of a good form of grief: contrition. All that is to say that the Stoics' problem, at least in terms of their ethics, was not a Gnostic view of the material world but rather their failure to grasp the beatitude "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

Yet, in treating Platonism, Phillips does a great job summarizing the important elements of this philosophy for a broad readership. "Whereas Plato's early work (e.g., the *Phaedo*) saw the human body as evil, the *Symposium* presents the body as genuinely good, although not the highest good. Through the mouthpiece of Socrates, Plato shows that love and desire for the good and beautiful things we perceive through our senses prepares our souls to love and desire the transcendent Goodness and Beauty we perceive through the intellect." The lesson is clear to me: Phillips should trust his own evident ability to grasp the meaning of primary texts more, and trust others' easy summaries less. In this case, Phillips is right that ancient Christians incorporated this more mature Platonism into their theology and connected it to the hope of the resurrection.

Rediscovering the Goodness of Creation is at its strongest in making the case for a ubiquitous Gnosticism in our day—and even in many churches—by addressing the disconnect between the biblical and traditional view of the resurrection and the pop theology that is all about

"getting to heaven" in a disembodied state rather than heaven joining with earth incompletely in the present and fully at the resurrection of our bodies.

My own upbringing was evangelical, and Phillips' experience resonated with mine. Especially within dispensational theology, I encountered an expectation that this whole world would burn away rather than be transformed through a purging fire, and that the material creation was of little importance to our spiritual life. We were taught to hope for a rapture away from the suffering of this world, not that all our suffering can be ascetically transfigured by a daily embodiment of and witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because the body matters, bodily suffering matters, as does alleviating the suffering of others. Thus, Christ healed the sick and infirm, suffered and died on the cross, and rose again from the dead.

One peculiarity of the book—not necessarily a bad thing—is the vocabulary Phillips employs. He refers to things like God's "shekinah glory" and the "already" but "not yet" nature of the kingdom of God. The first of these is redundant, since *shekinah* is Hebrew for glory (thus, it translates "glory glory"), but it is a common enough expression in certain Protestant circles. I thought he also could have given the Calvinists more explicit credit; I first encountered the already/not-yet conception of God's kingdom not when I became Greek Orthodox but when I studied Reformed theology at Kuyper College.

But these remnants of Protestant Christian-ese do raise questions as to the intended audience for the book. It is published by Ancient Faith Publishing, a ministry of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in North America, yet I expect these turns of phrase will have a bizarre ring to Greek, Romanian, Lebanese, and other "cradle" Orthodox Christians who never spoke the theological language of American evangelicalism like me. Again, this is not necessarily a negative, but it does seem that the book is primarily evangelistic toward Protestants rather than educational for those who are already Orthodox Christians. Phillips could have cast a wider net with just a little less of this sort of language sprinkled throughout his book.

But might it be the case that in labeling himself a "recovering Gnostic," just as some label themselves "recovering alcoholics," Phillips admits that he may not ever fully be free of it? One fault he does not display is pride, so with an eye toward offering some accountability to someone whose story so resonates with my own, I want to conclude with a few notes for a future work or second edition.

I think there may be some lingering Gnosticism in Phillips' tendency toward needing one correct and totalizing approach to the material world. Though

Portrait of Tertullian (1584)

Published in 1584 in *Les vrais pourtraits et vies des hommes illustres grecz, latins et payens*

Clement of Alexandria (1584)

Published in 1584 in *Les vrais pourtraits et vies des hommes illustres grecz, latins et payens*

he admits that a range of perspectives can be found among the Church Fathers, spanning from the world-averse theology of Tertullian to the world-affirming thought of Clement of Alexandria, the thrust of the book sets out a more Clementine approach over/against the former. But sticking with the metaphor of alcohol, we might learn something from the Scriptures here. On the one hand, God made "wine that makes glad the heart of man" (Psalm 104:15). Wisdom instructs, "Give strong drink to him who is perishing, / And wine to those who are bitter of heart" (Proverbs 31:6). And St. Paul tells St. Timothy to "use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities" (1 Timothy 5:23). Yet he tells his community, "Do not be drunk with wine" (Ephesians 5:18). And Wisdom teaches, "The drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty" (Proverbs 23:21).

When it comes to our relation to the goodness of creation, we, like the Church Fathers in general, ought to take a more Stoic approach: creation is good only to the extent it is used for good ends, in accordance with natural law, a point Phillips outlines well, though he curiously neglects to call it "natural law." Most people can enjoy the benefits of wine by drinking in moderation, but the alcoholic cannot allow himself even a taste. So, too, for some of us, it is not Gnosticism to turn away from some aspect of God's good creation, but rather an acknowledgment of our own brokenness, an expression of contrition rather than the passion of grief. Some should never drink. Others should be celibate. Still others might need to alter radically their diet in ways that go beyond occasional fasting. Different spiritual diseases require different spiritual medicine.

Similarly, though Phillips' exit from Gnosticism leads him to a more positive assessment of the arts, he nevertheless accepts Voltaire's account of the London Stock Exchange as tending toward a consumeristic, liberal, secular unity. (No doubt actual Christians of the time viewed it differently than did Voltaire.) Apparently, the arts are part of God's good creation, but finance and investment, which bring peace between people of different religious backgrounds, are not? If that is the case, the critique should extend back further in time to the largely commercial Byzantine Empire as well, where Jews, Muslims, and pagan Slavs all peacefully traded with Orthodox Christians for the maintenance of the Eastern Roman economy. If the arts are good, by the same logic so should commerce be.

London Stock Exchange (2005)

Photo by grén / Wikipedia

> **"LIKE THE CHURCH FATHERS, WE OUGHT TO TAKE A MORE STOIC APPROACH: CREATION IS GOOD ONLY TO THE EXTENT IT IS USED FOR GOOD ENDS."**

I doubt Phillips would disagree with any of this, but I still think it needed to be stated more clearly: a "recovering Gnostic" probably should not become a monk, for example, but not everyone is a "recovering Gnostic." We still need those who withdraw from the world to cling more completely to God, not out of rejection of the goodness of creation, but out of a greater love for the goodness of the Creator. And on the flip side, we also need Christians who piously cultivate the material resources of creation in ways that serve the needs of others, even investors at the London Stock Exchange.

None of that detracts from the value of Phillips' book and life experience. In the right hands, *Rediscovering the Goodness of Creation* will help other "recovering Gnostics" do exactly that. RL

***Dylan Pahman** is a research fellow at the Acton Institute, where he serves as executive editor of the* Journal of Markets & Morality.

Yankee Doodle or *The Spirit of '76* by A.M. Willard. Courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress.

1776: The Year That Changed Everything

The late 18th century did more than transform the colonies into America. It saw an explosion of revolutions—political, cultural, economic, scientific—that remade the West forever. The question is why—and why the West?

by **MARK DAVID HALL**

ACCORDING TO RON SWANSON, the gruff libertarian of the TV show *Parks and Recreation*, "History began on July 4, 1776. Everything else was a mistake." Andrew Wilson partially agrees, although he focuses on the year rather than the day: "The big idea of this book is that 1776, more than any other year in the last millennium, is the year that made us who we are." *Remaking the World: How 1776 Created the Post-Christian West* is a sweeping book with a strong thesis. It is also a delightful work full of interesting stories and facts.

Wilson contends that Western society is distinctive because of seven transformations: "Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic, Ex-Christian, and Romantic," which he refers to by the acronym WEIRDER. Each of these occurred in 1776. He provides a nice overview of this argument in this second chapter, and subsequent chapters unpack and explore each transformation.

The first substantive chapter raises the fraught question of why some peoples developed faster than others. He begins to answer it by considering the earliest human civilizations. Drawing from Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, he contends that humans shifted from being hunter-gathers to forming civilizations in places with moderate climates

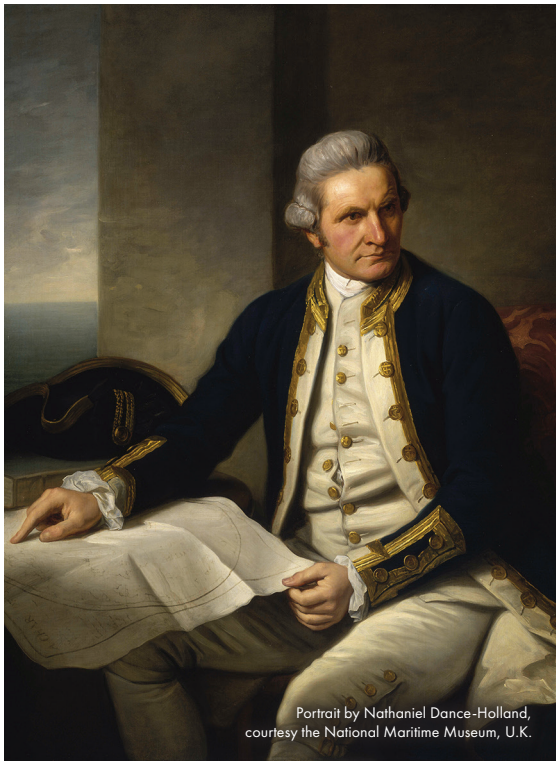
and good soil where crops could be cultivated and stored. Those civilizations in the Fertile Crescent were particularly blessed as they had access to large animals that could be domesticated and could travel easily from east to west (which facilitated the spread of knowledge and facilitated trade).

Civilizations arose around the globe, and by 1776 there were 10 major powers in Eurasia: Tokugawa Japan, Qing China, Mughal India, Ottoman Turkey, Romanov Russia, and the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British Empires. Several non-European civilizations had been more advanced or richer than any European nation, and yet in the late 18th century the western European powers began to develop far more rapidly than the others.

Wilson offers possible explanations for this divergence throughout the book, but he begins by emphasizing the intellectual curiosity that led some Europeans to explore the world for the sake of knowledge rather than plunder or conquest. Illustrative of this phenomenon is Captain James Cook. Wilson cleverly ties Cook's exploits to 1776 by noting that in the summer of that year two ships left England in opposite directions. The first of these was Cook's *former* ship, HMS *Endeavour*. In it, Cook had navigated the globe to "observe the transit of Venus: a rare astronomical event that would enable the scientists of the Royal Society to calculate the distance between the earth and the sun." After succeeding in this quest, Cook visited numerous lands that the scientists on board studied in great detail. Wilson notes that the three botanists on the ship collected 30,000 dried specimens, which enabled them to identify more than "a hundred new genera and thirteen hundred new species."

Unfortunately for Wilson's thesis, the famous voyage just described occurred in 1768–71. The ship formerly named *Endeavour* left England in 1776 to transport Hessian soldiers to America. But Cook did leave England in the summer of 1776, this time in the HMS *Resolution*. Alas, after exploring numerous islands throughout the Pacific, Cook was killed in Hawaii in 1779.

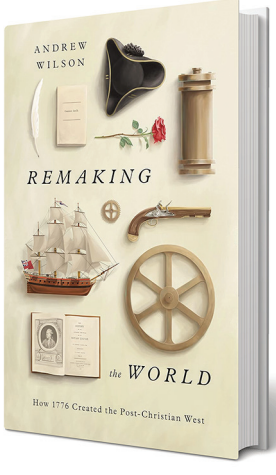
Captain James Cook (1728–1779)



Portrait by Nathaniel Dance-Holland, courtesy the National Maritime Museum, U.K.

Wilson argues a strong thesis, but he acknowledges early on that each WEIRDER transformation did not "spring up out of nowhere in 1776." He implicitly acknowledges that it would be more accurate to say that these transformations occurred in the late 18th century, but his attempts to tie the changes to 1776 make the book more interesting. And it does seem to be the case that 1776 was a particularly important year—especially for Americans.

According to Wilson, in 1775 no country could reasonably claim to be a democratic republic, whereas today every country in the world (with six exceptions) claims to be democratic. Channeling his inner Ron Swanson, Wilson (who is English) contends that "the fountainhead for this transformation was



Remaking the World: How 1776 Created the Post-Christian West

By Andrew Wilson

(Crossway, 2023)

Georgii III. Regis.

CAP. XII.

An Act for granting and applying certain Stamp Duties, and other Duties, in the *British* Colonies and Plantations in *America*, towards further defraying the Expences of defending, protecting, and securing the same; and for amending such Parts of the several Acts of Parliament relating to the Trade and Revenues of the said Colonies and Plantations, as direct the Manner of determining and recovering the Penalties and Forfeitures therein mentioned.

WHEREAS by an Act made in the last Session of Parliament, several Duties were granted, continued, and appropriated, towards defraying the Expences of defending, protecting, and securing, the British Colonies and Plantations in America: And whereas it is just and necessary, that Provision be made for raising a further Revenue within Your Majesty's Dominions in America, towards defraying the said Expences: We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal Subjects, the Commons of Great Britain in Parliament assembled, have

Printed copy of the Stamp Act of 1765

the United States." He recognizes that America's conflict with Great Britain must be traced back to the Stamp Act Crises (1765), but Wilson highlights 1776 because the Continental Army was formally "launched" on January 1 of that year and because of General Washington's great victory at Trenton (Dec. 25–26, 1776).

It is puzzling that Wilson spends only about two pages discussing the Declaration of Independence in his chapter on democracy, mostly dispelling myths about it. It would have helped his case to at least note that many Americans, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Frederick Douglass, and Abraham Lincoln, believed that the Declaration articulates the basic principles upon which America was founded and that these principles have inspired people around the globe.

Wilson offers a brief discussion of what he calls the "great prophets of democracy" such as Algernon Sidney, James Harrington, and John Locke, and he briefly suggests that the American Puritans may have had something to do with the development of America's experiment in self-government. In my

> "THERE WAS PLENTY OF CREATIVITY AND DISCOVERY IN THE MIDDLE AGES, AND ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS WERE NOT ALWAYS SO ENLIGHTENED."

opinion, he underestimates how democratic New England was and the impact of Protestant political theology there and elsewhere well before 1776. His lack of appreciation for earlier Protestant republicanism is illustrated by his observation, after he quotes Jefferson's famous deathbed letter ("the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred"), that "there are no passages like that in Harrington, Sidney, or Locke." In fact, Jefferson borrowed these striking images from a 1685 speech the English radical Richard Rumbold made before he was executed for plotting against James II.

The third transformation Wilson considers is the Enlightenment. He acknowledges, as he must, that the movement was broad, multifaceted, and often dated as lasting from 1685 to 1815. But he ties it to 1776 by describing a meal at the Baron d'Holbach's Paris salon on February 11, 1776, and then observing that "there was more intellectual fire power sitting down for lunch in Europe on [that day] than at any time since," including Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Adam Smith, Antoine Lavoisier, Edward Gibbon, Carl Linneaus, Edmund Burke, Catharine Macaulay, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Denis Diderot. Moreover, these men and women were "connected to each other, through an international network of letters, salons, clubs, societies, magazines, taverns, and coffee houses," and many of them understood themselves

A creedal yard sign photographed in 2022

to be "engaged together in a common project."

Many Enlightenment thinkers thought of themselves as using reason to bring light to darkness. To them, the Middle Ages were the dark ages, wherein "people spent all of their time burning witches, eating turnips, and dying of the plague, until early modern Europeans arrived and switched on the lights." Wilson challenges this caricature, contending, on the one hand, that there was plenty of creativity and discovery in the Middle Ages and, on the other, that Enlightenment thinkers were not always so enlightened (especially on matters of race). Nevertheless, the era was a time of intellectual ferment and discovery in ways that continue to shape us today. For instance, it seems obvious to us to use the scientific method, educate boys and girls, think critically about the past, and "expect truth claims to be established by persuasion, not fiat."

Some of the Enlightenment figures mentioned above played a role in the West becoming, in Wilson's words, "Ex-Christian." Ex-Christians reject essential aspects of orthodox Christianity even as they often remain profoundly shaped by the tradition. Ex-Christians come in different varieties, from a James Boswell who remained a professing Christian but rejected elements of orthodox theology to irenic deists like Franklin to polemical deists such as Voltaire to combative atheists like Diderot to God-haters such as the Marquis de Sade.

Most Ex-Christians are still shaped by Christian morality and ideas, such as the inherent dignity of all persons. Their doctrinal convictions are sometime even expressed in creedal form, for instance:

> In this house, we believe that science is real, women's rights are human rights, black lives matter, no human is illegal, love is love, kindness is everything.

Any departure from this contemporary orthodoxy, Wilson observes, is treated as a grievous sin. Living individuals committing it will be called to repentance, and the dead may well be "canceled" (as Hume and Voltaire have been).

Before 1700 there were only three sources of power: wind, river, and muscle. The first is inconsistent and hard to utilize, the second is not portable, and so in practice most things were lifted, pulled, crushed, etc., by human or animal power. The 18th century saw the invention of a machine that revolutionized society—the steam engine. The first inefficient steam engine was built in 1712, but Isaac Watts' innovations allowed for the widespread use of efficient steam power. His first commercial steam engine started running on March 8, 1776. This engine, along with advances in chemistry and metallurgy, laid the basis for the Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution was responsible, in part, for what economic historians call "the great divergence." Throughout human history, the gross domestic product per person remained roughly the same—until the late 18th century. With industrialization came an absolute explosion of wealth in Western countries, an explosion that began in Great Britain but that spread elsewhere. The scale of this increase of wealth is remarkable. Wilson observes that today "human beings consume around *seventy times* more goods and services than we did two centuries ago—an increase not of 70 percent but of 7,000 percent."

Why did some countries develop more rapidly than others? Acceptance of free markets is part of the answer, and one conveniently (for Wilson's thesis) advocated for by Adam Smith, whose *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* was published in 1776. Wilson also considers the importance

of good institutions (e.g., courts that enforce contracts), colonization, culture (a desire to explore the unknown, innovate, disseminate knowledge, etc.), and that the geography of Europe resulted in fragmented countries that competed with each other. Whatever the exact combination of causes, there is no doubt that the late 18th century saw an explosion of wealth in the West that continues to shape us today.

Of course, not everyone celebrated all the transformations discussed above. Romanticism is often treated as a reaction to the Enlightenment. Wilson acknowledges that many iconic figures of Romanticism were children in 1776, but he makes a reasonable argument that Rousseau may be understood as an early Romantic and that his last book, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, was based on strolls he took around Paris from 1776 to 1778. The work, Wilson suggests, "shows many of the hallmarks of Romanticism…inwardness, imagination, individuality, inspiration, innocence and intensity."

Wilson is teaching pastor at King's Church London, and his Ph.D. is in theology. He informs his readers in the first chapter that his "primary motive in writing [this book] is to help the church thrive in a WEIRDER world," but the bulk of the work could have been written by a historian simply attempting to explain the massive transformations that occurred in the late 18th century. The book's last two chapters are pastoral in nature, suggesting ways in which Christians did and can respond to the transformations he identifies.

Although Wilson describes the transformation of many Westerners into Ex-Christians, he recognizes that countless remained committed to orthodox Christianity and engaged their cultures in important ways. He identifies three such ways he hopes will inspire Christians today. The first is the profound celebration of God's grace that flourished in the 1770s. This is reflected well in the marvelous hymns from that era, such as "Rock of Ages" and "Amazing Grace." Second, he highlights the increasing commitment of believers to end the enslavement of men and women, a commitment nicely illustrated by Lemuel Haynes' pamphlet *Liberty Further Extended, or Free Thoughts on the Illegality of Slave-Keeping*. Haynes, the first African American to be ordained a pastor, wrote this pamphlet in 1776. Finally, Wilson observes that Christians like Johann Georg Hamann began to make thoughtful criticisms of the excessive rationalism and materialism found in the work of some Enlightenment luminaries.

The final chapter offers ways in which Christians might respond to our WEIRDER world. Wilson observes that many of the benefits of this world—"life expectancy, wealth, safety, education, health choice, and rest"—can entrap rather than free us. Many of us are so consumed with the pressure of privilege, constructing identities, and pursuing status that we feel overwhelmed. The temptation to compare ourselves constantly with others on social media and the possibility of being canceled if we don't observe today's orthodoxies doesn't help. Christians should help our fellow citizens understand that the Gospel of grace provides true freedom. They need to present the "Christian vision of liberty in all its fullness: spiritual and physical, freedom *from* and freedom *to*, confronting the flesh within and the power without."

Wilson suggests as well that Christians have much to offer those Americans who are (or think they are) post-truth. The Christian understanding of Creation, Incarnation, and Resurrection makes it possible for us to

> know what is true, not just about God, but about creation, humanity, history, and the future. Creation is coherent, created with a purpose by an all-loving God. Every human being possesses inestimable value simply by bearing God's image. History is heading somewhere under divine guidance rather than going around in circles.

Remaking the World is a remarkable book. One shouldn't take Wilson's strong thesis too literally, but he identifies important transformations that came about or at least began in the late 18th century that continue to impact the West today. The book offers a serious historical argument, but it is also fun to read because of Wilson's ability to tell interesting stories, relate fascinating anecdotes, and make improbable connections. RL

Mark David Hall *is a professor in Regent University's Robertson School of Government and a senior fellow at the Center for Religion, Culture, and Democracy. His next book,* Who's Afraid of Christian Nationalism?: Why Christian Nationalism Is Not a Threat to American Democracy or the Church, *will be published in April 2024.*

CONVERSATION STARTERS WITH . . .

Rachel Ferguson

Q **You have a gift for relating a very personal religious commitment to issues of poverty, racism, criminal justice, and social flourishing in general. How important was faith in your upbringing and how important is it in your day-to-day?**

I grew up the daughter of an evangelical minister in the "Jesus Movement," so it was pretty important! What that means for my perspective is that, not only were questions of faith totally central to everything in our lives, but we also had a multiethnic congregation that crossed class barriers. I spent my Thursday nights picking up inner-city kids for Bible study and basketball. Various people lived with us when they needed a place to stay, including numerous bluegrass musicians and my two "foster" brothers (not official foster kids, just teens in crisis). My foster brothers were in and out of the criminal justice system for some years, and so I got a firsthand experience of jail visits, collect calls, court dates, etc. It was a very exciting—if a bit chaotic!—way to grow up.

Interestingly, I might say that my day-to-day life now is determined by faith in a much deeper way than it was in my family home. I've been influenced quite a bit by Dallas Willard and the spiritual formation movement. I relate deeply to his critique of the tradition I grew up in. We believed sincerely, we read our Bibles and prayed, and we evangelized! But we didn't really understand what Jesus was talking about when he referred to the kingdom of God. We thought it was something a long way off rather than the life of the Spirit that He invites us into right now. We also did not regularly practice other spiritual disciplines

(probably because they seemed too Catholic) such as fasting, silence and solitude, simplicity, etc. This meant that we were often "white-knuckling" the Christian life rather than learning how to draw on His grace more and more as we respond to the "still, small voice." It's hard even to hear that voice when one rarely gets quiet to listen.

After spending more than four years undergoing a major spiritual transformation in my 30s, I find that God has changed me from the inside out. Rather than just trying to do the right thing, I pursue becoming the woman God intends for me to be, so that the right things flow more and more naturally out of my character. When I stumble, I return to meditation on a few central truths: the goodness and (*agape*) love of God, my identity as His precious child, and the new kind of life He has given us. This is a life based not on power, or image management, or the pursuit of pleasure, but on dying to those things. This new life is built entirely on trusting Him, based on a clear vision that the kingdom of God—being in His will—is a treasure so precious that giving up everything to get it is still an amazing deal. It was only after this transformation that I felt my moral imagination come alive in a way that allowed me to conceptualize and write my book.

Q **Speaking of which, in *Black Liberation Through the Marketplace*, which you wrote with Marcus Witcher, you draw attention to how Black entrepreneurs and on-the-ground Black institutions have been defying the paternalism of the left and the indifference of the right. What drew you to focusing on the Black community specifically, and did you have any concerns that critics would accuse you of a kind of paternalism, as in, *What do two white people have to say to the Black community?***

What drew me into the Black American experience in particular was really a combination of two things: 1) My childhood experience had left the plight of the Black American male as a kind of nagging question in my mind as I pursued understanding and defending classical liberalism. 2) The eruption of activism after the unrest in Ferguson brought that old nagging question to the fore—especially as I both lived and worked quite close to Ferguson. It occurred to me that in spite of the fact that the classical liberal tradition has a ton of insights on questions of race and discrimination, it is not thought of as a resource in this area. Therefore, I thought it would be helpful to gather together into one place a classical liberal account of what happened to Black Americans, as well as boosting a few of the central recommendations that a classical liberal political philosophy would make for repairing all that's been lost for that community.

> "ONE EXTREME CLAIMS THAT RACISM IS SO POWERFUL THAT IT'S DETERMINATIVE. MANY PEOPLE REFER TO THIS AS THE 'VICTIMHOOD NARRATIVE,' AND OF COURSE IT RUNS THE SERIOUS RISK OF INFANTILIZING BLACK PEOPLE AND UNDERMINING THEIR AGENCY."

When I mentioned moral imagination earlier, what I meant is that finding our identity in Christ loosens the grip that other identities have on us—including political ones. This allows us to consider issues one by one, rather than as part of a political platform. It also allows us to see where our opponents have gotten something right and to critique our own failures without fear. Finally, the hope that comes with faith allows us to envision pathways forward that seem impossible right now. In a time of rising political polarization, nothing could be more relevant than a keenly developed moral imagination.

As for us being white, I've definitely heard people say they were asking themselves that question prior

> **STORIES LIKE THOSE OF MADAM C. J. WALKER, T. R. M. HOWARD, AND JOHN H. JOHNSON SHOW THAT BOOKER T. WASHINGTON'S DETERMINATION TO BUILD A MIDDLE- AND UPPER-INCOME BLACK CLASS WORKED.**

to reading the book or attending a talk I gave. But what I'm hearing after the fact is that they dropped that concern as they absorbed our approach. I have a theory as to why this is. It seems to me that a person can fall off the horse on one side or the other when it comes to handling race in America. One extreme claims that racism is so powerful that it's determinative. Many people refer to this as the "victimhood narrative," and of course it runs the serious risk of infantilizing Black people and undermining their agency.

On the other end of the spectrum, the claim is that individual effort determines everything. This view misses the role of community and social capital in the success of any individual, but it also leans heavily in the direction of not being very interested in telling the truth about the past. What we do in the book is thread the needle between these two. It's simply absurd to claim that convict leasing, eugenics, redlining, urban renewal, highway construction, union racism, the perverse incentives of the welfare state, the drug war, and the incarceration crisis has no effect on individual outcomes. Of course they do. But it's also absurd to ignore the outstanding history of Black American institutions—the church, fraternal organizations, Howard, Hampton, Tuskegee, the National Negro Business League, the NAACP, literacy clubs, Black main streets, Black wall streets, the civil rights movement, and on and on. Black Americans took hold of their partial freedoms and ran with them, while successfully vying for full citizenship. Stories like those of Madam C.J. Walker, T.R.M. Howard, and John H. Johnson show that Booker T. Washington's determination to build a middle- and upper-income Black class worked. And that kind of economic clout made a huge difference for the fight for political rights as well.

Q **You are director of the Free Enterprise Center at Concordia University Chicago, assistant dean of the College of Business, and professor of business ethics, which is a mouthful. Free market economics is not exactly viewed favorably in the academy; in fact, it would appear to be an enemy to be destroyed. How is Concordia University Chicago different in that regard? How is your emphasis on free markets received by students in Chicago?**

Concordia-Chicago is a very unusual place! As a Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod institution (a theologically conservative tradition), it's quite countercultural in this regard. I was brought to campus specifically for the purpose of actualizing our commitment to the concepts in our motto: "Truth, Freedom, Vocation." As for our students, I find much more openness than you might expect, and I have a guess as to why. Concordia-Chicago is majority minority, with a majority of students who are the first in their family to attend college. We're an official Hispanic-serving institution. That means that a huge proportion of our students are far more focused on achieving the American dream and providing for their families (including extended family!) than they are on esoteric or revolutionary theories of politics and culture or the activism that tends to go with those things. On the last day of my Business Ethics class, I always ask my students what they feel called to in their vocations and why. I almost started weeping last semester as, one by one, they expressed the desire to marry, have children, help their parents retire, and get their siblings and cousins good jobs. It was so beautiful! So when I tell my students that business can do an incredible amount of good in the world, that making a profit doesn't have to be about greed or pleasure-seeking, and that you can do your job in an ethically excellent way, they believe me!

Q **You recently wrote a favorable review of *Reforming Criminal Justice* by Matthew T. Martens for *Religion & Liberty Online*. In light of the George Floyd riots and attorneys general apparently decriminalizing property crimes in big cities across the country, how do you get conservatives to see criminal justice reform as a priority—or even a thing? Wouldn't their first reaction be to get even tougher on crime, à la Rudy Giuliani and William Bratton in the NYC of the 1990s?**

To answer your question, I have to clarify something about our current situation, which makes the whole "tough" versus "soft" on crime question quite a bit more nuanced. While we arrest a whole lot of people (many of whom sit in jail for months waiting to be charged), we actually don't solve very many crimes! This is referred to as a "clearance rate," and it is embarrassingly low. We also have a serious problem with innocent people being convicted, due to the way that plea bargaining has crowded out the jury trial. By holding long sentences over people's heads, we can get confessions of guilt from people who are just afraid of being punished for asking for an actual trial. We know this is the case because a significant number of exonerations have been for people who pleaded guilty! That means that criminals can relax in the knowledge that they probably will not get caught, while community members feel constantly harassed and unjustly imprisoned. It's a terrible mix! The upshot of all this is that we MUST think deeply about the structure of our system, as opposed to a quick-fix mentality that just creates more laws or harsher punishments. That simply is not working.

To be clear, when criminals run amok because laws aren't enforced, this constitutes an egregious failure on the part of our leaders. Notice that conservative criminal justice reform often refers to itself as "smart on crime" rather than either tough or soft. What we're witnessing in San Francisco and the like is simply "stupid on crime." Rather than figuring out ways to increase our clearance rates and unravel the power of the plea bargaining system, those leaders are just removing consequences for genuine crime, thinking that will make the incarceration rate go down. It completely misses the solution by misunderstanding the nature of the problem.

Q **Finally, what book(s) have you read at least three times, and why?**

Everything by C.S. Lewis should be read at least three times, but I especially recommend his best but least well-known work of fiction: *Till We Have Faces*. It's a retelling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche from the viewpoint of Psyche's sister, who convinces her to bring the lamp into her marital bed. It's absolutely riveting, as well as a deep rumination on sin and human psychology. I might also add that you simply will not believe that a man wrote this book. The sister is one of the most convincing female characters/narrators I have ever come across. Astounding. Cannot recommend enough! RL

***Rachel Ferguson, Ph.D.**, is a professor of business ethics, assistant dean of the College of Business, and director of the Free Enterprise Center at Concordia University Chicago. She is also a board member for LOVEtheLOU, a neighborhood stabilization ministry in North St. Louis; the Freedom Center of Missouri; and ReThink315. Her new book, co-written with historian Marcus Witcher, is* Black Liberation Through the Marketplace: Hope, Heartbreak, and the Promise of America.

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