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Is the New **Right Fascist?**

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The Violent **Faith of Cormac** McCarthy

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Patrick Deneen's Otherworldly Regime

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TESSA CARMAN

THE DEATH OF CONSERVATISM ... IS GREATLY EXAGGERATED

BY CHRISTINE ROSEN

ALSO INSIDE: SEBASTIAN MILBANK ON PAUL JOHNSON A CONVERSATION WITH MIKE COSPER





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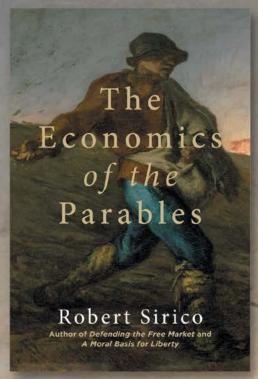
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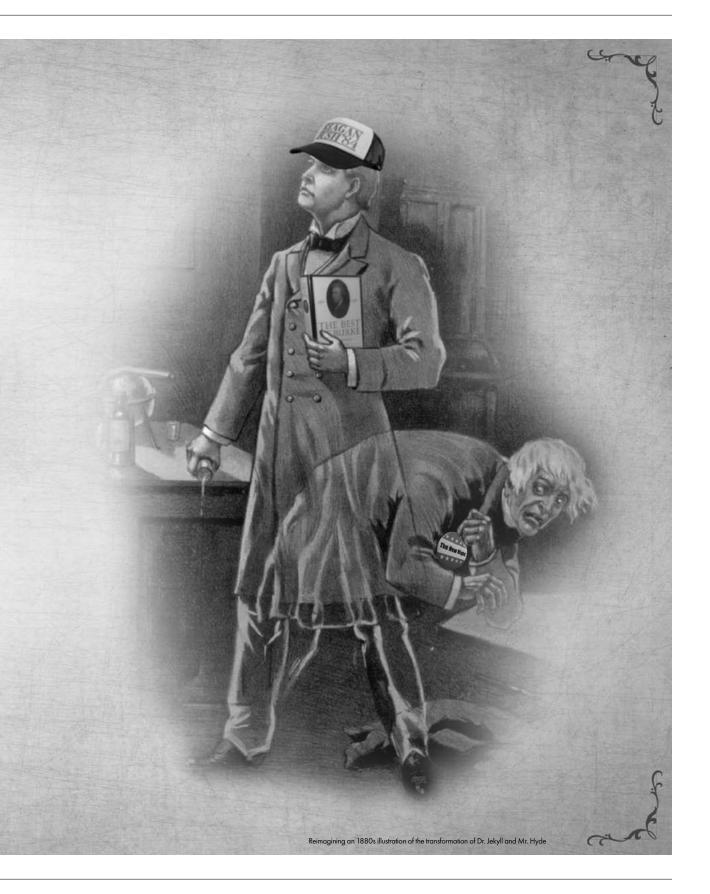
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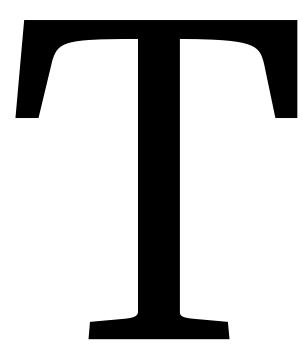
THE DEATH OF CONSERVATISM IS GREATLY EXAGGERATED

by CHRISTINE ROSEN

The New Right has been sounding the death knell of "Conservatism Inc.," fusionism, Reaganism, and neoconservatism for a while now in an effort to forge a more pugnacious movement.

But how do you build a new world from whole cloth without destroying the values you claim to be preserving?





THESE DAYS, MANY on the right are itching for revolution. Eager to dispense with what they believe is a hidebound conservatism that promoted restraint and narrow ideals at the cost of broader cultural and political victories, these rebels have embraced new philosophies ranging from integralism, Trumpism, Nationalist Conservatism, and even a devotion to the autocratic-lite populism of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who told attendees at last year's Conservative Political Action Conference to "take back the institutions in Washington and in Brussels" and "Play by your own rules." Depending on your political proclivities, these developments are



A 19th-century illustration of the transformation of Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde, from Robert Louis Stevenson's novel

either invigorating or like watching a tetchy Mr. Hyde emerging from the stable temperament of Dr. Jekyll.

The concerns of these would-be disruptors include conservatism's perceived failure to halt the progressive left's long march through cultural and educational institutions; the increasing power of the administrative state; the rise of "woke" corporations; the continued insistence of some conservatives on America's unique responsibilities in world affairs; and the failure of the traditional free market capitalist message to confront present economic realities. Many books, essays, conferences, and organizations have sprung up to attempt to craft an agenda for these often-competing New Right impulses.

It is in this context that Jon Askonas, writing in *Compact* magazine, purports to tell us "Why Conservatism Failed." One would hope that an obituary for conservatism would be more thorough than what Askonas offers, so to be charitable, let's consider his essay a provocation rather than the official death knell for conservatism.

NOTHING NEW HERE

Conservatism's obituary has been written many times before, of course. But Askonas claims to bring a new insight and a new indictment of conservatism's devotion to tradition: "The conservative defense of tradition has failed—not because the right lost the battle of ideas, but because technological change has dissolved the contexts in which traditions once thrived." Citing Marx, Askonas claims that "a technological society can have no traditions."

Elaborating on this claim, Askonas argues that "modernity liquidates traditions for the same reason that a firm might liquidate an underperforming factory: to improve the allocation and return of capital." This is an intentionally limited definition of tradition, one that purports to measure the usefulness of tradition as akin to a commodity that should be replaced when it becomes inefficient. Askonas also blames conservatism for too readily acquiescing to technological change. Using the example of the introduction of cheap agricultural fertilizers and the many unintended consequences its use had for the practice and culture of farming, Askonas claims this demonstrates "how extensive the social impact of a single technology can be, and how little the conservative defense of tradition offers in response to this sort of change." For good measure, he throws in the charge that conservatives also lost the culture war, not because their ideas were wrong, but because of "the Pill and the two-income trap."

None of this is new. In the 1950s in *The Conservative Mind*, Russell Kirk acknowledged, "For a century and a half, conservatives have yielded ground in a manner which, except for occasionally successful rear-guard actions, must be described as a rout." Like Askonas, Kirk identified how, throughout the modern world,

Russell Kirk (1918-1994)



"things are in the saddle," including "industrialism, centralization, secularism, and the leveling impulse," and he indicted conservative thinkers for lacking "perspicacity sufficient to meet the conundrums of modern times." A similar lament emerged in the work of mid-2oth-century sociologists such as Robert Nisbet, who noted in *The Quest for Community*, "Surely the outstanding characteristic of contemporary thought on man and society is the preoccupation with personal alienation and cultural disintegration."

And while Askonas enjoys citing Karl Marx, his argument is far more indebted to French sociologist Jacques Ellul, whose 1954 book The Technological Society examined in detail the erosion of moral and social values wrought by technological change. Another significant influence is Neil Postman, whose Technopoly was subtitled "the surrender of culture to technology." There are many, many more -including, it must be said, Theodore Kaczynski, the Unabomber, whose manifesto included a special shoutout attacking conservatives that sounds quite similar to Askonas': "The conservatives are fools," Kaczynski wrote. "Apparently it never occurs to them that you can't make rapid, drastic changes in the technology and the economy of a society without causing rapid changes in all other aspects of the society as well, and that such rapid changes inevitably break down traditional values."

In other words, there is a rich (dare I call it) tradition of critical assessments of technology's impact and unintended consequences, both from within and outside the conservative intellectual world, which Askonas surely knows but does not make mention of in his essay, perhaps because in those works tradition is treated as the complicated and nuanced thing it is, rather than the one-dimensional straw man Askonas needs us to accept so that his obituary for conservatism will make sense.

Are we a society without traditions? Should we refer to it, as Askonas does, in scare quotes as "Tradition"?

No.

A TRADITION OF CHANGE

Askonas never offers a proper definition of the role of tradition, but philosopher Roger Scruton's description will do: "For the conservative, human beings come into this world burdened by obligations, and subject to institutions and traditions that contain with them a precious inheritance of wisdom, without



FOR CONSERVATIVES, TRADITIONS ARE NOT STATIC THINGS; THEY CAN AND MUST CHANGE TO FIT NEW CIRCUMSTANCES.

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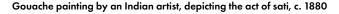
which the exercise of freedom is as likely to destroy human rights and entitlements as to enhance them."

Note that Scruton, like most conservative writers, more often speaks of traditions, plural, not "Tradition." That is because many forms of tradition flourish in different communities, in different times and places, and of course not all of them (foot-binding, sati) are worth bequeathing to future generations. For conservatives, traditions are not static things; they can and must change to fit new circumstances. But conservatives also believe that such change should come slowly, thoughtfully, and with humility—weighing the benefits and drawbacks. As Kirk observed, "Conservatives respect the wisdom of their ancestors . . . they are dubious of wholesale alteration. They think society is a spiritual reality, possessing an eternal life but a delicate

constitution: it cannot be scrapped and recast as if it were a machine."

Conservatives believe that traditions serve as moderating influences on the deeply human desire for change, not a means of suffocating that desire. As Edmund Burke wrote in a 1792 letter, "We must all obey the great law of change. It is the most powerful law of nature, and the means perhaps of its conservation. All we can do, and that human wisdom can do, is to provide that the change shall proceed by insensible degrees. This has all the benefits which may be in change, without any of the inconveniences of mutation." Or, as Kirk put it, "Conservatism is never more admirable than when it accepts changes that it disapproves, with good grace, for the sake of a general conciliation."

Askonas is dismissive and impatient with this sensibility because he sees it as the handmaiden to our capitulation to the technological society. "In between great-books seminars, conservatives have decried any interference in what technologies the all-knowing market chooses to build, while taking no stance on what technologies we ought to build," he complains. This is misleading, as it elides some crucial distinctions between conservatives and libertarians; conservatives continue to battle their libertarian friends about the excesses of the free market (just ask those of us who have extremely libertarian colleagues with whom we often clash). Conservatives are in fact on Askonas' side of this argument and would agree that technologies that emerge from unfettered free market capitalism can often have a destructive impact on society.







An FDA-mandated package insert for oral contraceptives in 1970

But a blanket denunciation of the uselessness of conservative tradition allows Askonas to argue that the only path forward is revolution rather than reform: "We can no longer conserve. So we must build and rebuild and, therefore, take a stand on what is worth building." A touch more cynicism crept into remarks Askonas made during an appearance on a podcast in March, when he accused conservatives of trafficking in nostalgia as opposed to principles. "It is the combination of the same kinds of practices that destroy the tradition with a mere sort of sickly veneer of the way things used to be," he said, comparing modern conservatism to the kitschy horror of a Thomas Kincaid painting.

This would indeed be horrifying if Askonas' claim that conservatives failed to reckon with the technological changes around them, thus effectively participating in their own extinction, was true. In fact, conservatives have spent decades building institutions and communities to combat just those changes. Askonas should know; he's written essays (many of which I admire) for several of them, including *The New Atlantis*, a journal that for 20 years has been dedicated to documenting the good, the bad, and the ugly of technological transformation, and for which I was fortunate to be one of the founding editors.

In addition, conservative thinkers and policy experts have for years argued for more guardrails to protect against the excesses of technology, particularly when it comes to its impact on children. Many thinkers have challenged the totalizing vision of technology with what can be broadly understood as a conservative sensibility: Nicholas Carr, L.M. Sacasas, Matthew Crawford, Jaron Lanier, Alan Jacobs, Sherry Turkle, and many more have reckoned with what is lost as well as gained when technology supplants older ways of doing things.

PRUDENCE AND THE PILL

But we should not limit ourselves merely to personal technologies and the Internet. What of the conservative response to technologies of reproduction, cloning, and human enhancement?

The debate over the Pill's use and impact is ongoing, influenced not only by longstanding religious challenges to contraception but also by a new generation of secular critics such as British writer and self-described "reactionary feminist" Mary Harrington, who in her new book, *Feminism Against Progress*, pushes back on the narrative that the Pill was a consequence-free liberationist technology for women.

In the realm of bioethics, the late Edmund Pellegrino and Leon Kass, among others, offered a compelling example of how to invite public debate about deeply challenging moral questions at the beginning and ends of life with regard to cloning, genetic manipulation of human embryos, and stem cell research, for example. The efforts of such conservative thinkers helped forestall the abuse of many technological powers by constantly insisting we ask the question, "Just because we can do something, should we?"

Or, to return to Askonas' example of agriculture and the communities that develop around small-scale as opposed to industrial farming, groups like Front Porch Republic champion the integrity of place, scale, and face-to-face community in a world where technology promises the elimination of all three. Askonas name-checks Roger Scruton in his essay, but he fails to note that when he was alive Scruton was himself the owner of a farm in Wiltshire and famously championed the small-scale agriculture Askonas claims conservatism was helpless to save.

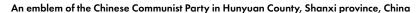
"A hundred years ago," Scruton told Dominic Green in an interview on his farm in 2017, "people in this part of the world would eat turnips and carrots to get through the winter. Now, they have avocado pears and rocket salad." Scruton understood what globalization had wrought, and unlike the monolithic portrait of conservatives that Askonas paints, Scruton was an outspoken critic of libertarian free marketers who refused to reckon with the costs of

globalization to communities such as his. Scruton also understood that nurturing his particular farm and community meant having to adapt to certain technological realities.

"You can't globalize the old rural economy," Scruton said. "By its very nature, it's a local thing, and that's what we're trying to support with this little festival," referring to a local apple festival he and his family created to help support local farms, including their own. The virtues of this local orientation would have been familiar to Edmund Burke, as would Scruton's willingness to undertake reforms to keep certain traditions, such as a successful family farm, alive.

This conservative approach to change is something Askonas fundamentally misrepresents in his obituary for conservatism. In doing so, he overlooks evidence of conservative resilience and resistance to technological capture. Consider the many parents' groups, like Wait Until 8th, which encourage the formation of communities committed to delaying their children's exposure to technologies like the smartphone until they are older. Or the ongoing backlash, some of which is yielding state and federal legislation, against the exploitation of children's attention on social media.

There are even conservatives thinking about our technological future—and noticing that some long-standing conservative arguments have already won the day. As John Ehrett points out in a recent essay in *The New Atlantis* on the possibilities of conservative





futurism: "Conservatives have, in a sense, won the argument about Big Tech. The poisonous effects of Internet-centric culture and a screen-mediated world are now well known across partisan lines, and sooner or later a reckoning will come." Ehrett urges conservatives to craft "meaningful answers to the question of why we need innovation" but to do so in a way that grounds that process in an understanding "that human creativity is a participation in an infinite creative act, reorienting technological investment into the service of a higher good."

WILL TO POWER VS. CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM

Ultimately, Askonas' frustration with conservatism is about power, not capital-T Tradition. "Before we recover a human way of thinking, we may first need to address a more practical question, first posed by Nietzsche," Askonas writes, "Who deserve to be the masters of the earth?' Corporations? The Chinese Communist Party? The National Institute of Health? The Department of Defense? Or human beings living according to their natures." He argues that we don't need the "kind words and tax credits" of old-fashioned conservatism but "a serious program of technological development."

Conservatism would answer Nietzsche's (and Askonas') question quite simply: none of the above. Indeed, for conservatives, the traditions Askonas sees as useless are precisely what help curb and civilize mankind—and thus allow a level of self-governance that doesn't require a Communist Party to impose its will and that can hold the leaders of its own institutions accountable. History has shown that encouraging mankind to live "according to their natures" tends to end in war, violence, scarcity, and general brutality, with the strong ruling the weak. (Conservatives, given their understanding of human nature, would warn against such encouragement, too.)

As for Askonas, whom would he entrust with designing the "serious program" he desires? Who decides who enforces the rules of this program? And who benefits? "Those who look to build a human future have been freed from a rearguard defense of tradition to take up the path of the guerrilla, the upstart, the nomad," he writes. His choice of role models is instructive, both for what they tell us of his understanding of conservatism and tradition, and what they portend for a future devoid of either.

Consider the "guerrilla." Among the more famous



ULTIMATELY, ASKONAS' FRUSTRATION WITH CONSERVATISM IS ABOUT POWER, NOT CAPITAL-T TRADITION.

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of history's guerrilla fighters are men like Mao, Fidel Castro, Josip Broz Tito, and Che Guevara, the last of whom literally wrote the book on the practice. What kinds of "serious programs" did they build once they seized power? In the case of Mao and Castro, a punishing and deadly authoritarianism built on a bed of empty utopian promises and the bones of their citizens; for Tito, purges, fraudulent elections, show trials, and eventually ethnic cleansing and the collapse of Yugoslavia.

Likewise, the "upstart" Askonas praises is a type more skilled at destruction than building.

Upstarts "move fast and break things," as Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg so memorably put it. Although something new, shiny, and even useful might come from the upstart, he rarely reckons with the wreckage he leaves behind. As for the "nomad," always a minority lifestyle, he embodies impermanence, effectively living as a social parasite on the order created by others, never experiencing either the risks or rewards of setting down roots in one place.

Traditions are larger than any one individual who might embody their characteristics. Yet Askonas' preferred leaders of the next age are examples of radical individualism—an individualism whose fruits tend to be either destruction, authoritarianism, or both.

Among a certain segment of the right, however, the destruction is the point. As John Daniel Davidson, writing on *The Federalist* website in 2022, bluntly put it, people affiliated with the right should "stop thinking of themselves as conservatives (much less as Republicans) and start thinking of themselves as radicals, restorationists, and counterrevolutionaries." They should also, he argued, use the levers of power to their advantage: "The government will have to become, in the hands of conservatives, an instrument



UNLIKE THE GUERRILLA OR THE UPSTART OR THE NOMAD, CONSERVATIVES UNDERSTAND THAT SOCIETY IS NOT FOR THE ENJOYMENT OF ANY ONE INDIVIDUAL.

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of renewal in American life—and in some cases, a blunt instrument indeed." As for who will wield that power and how they will do so fairly, Davidson says such questions can be answered "after we have won the war." Spoken like a true guerrilla.

OUR CHINESE FUTURE?

If, as Davidson and Askonas suggest, we rid ourselves of tradition and instead enact change through the seizure of power by guerrillas, upstarts, or nomads, then whatever they build will be built without guidance from the past, for this vision only works if you jettison the messy realities of history (which is perhaps why it is so appealing to political philosophers and political scientists, and rather less so to historians).

Askonas misunderstands how conservatives measure progress: not in decades but in epochs. In the U.S., for example, history teaches a peculiarly important lesson about conservatism and revolution: you can't have both. Yes, America's Founders, as revolutionaries, seized power from England. But then they immediately went about devising a way to share it among many different groups—first, and incompletely, by way of the Articles of Confederation and then, ingeniously, through our Constitution.

Askonas' vision gives us radicals, reactionaries, and counterrevolutionaries whom he promises will build something new and better from the ashes of a dead conservatism. But where are the (small r) republicans? Where are the people who can live, govern, and thrive after the revolution? Judging Askonas on the future society he hints will replace a dead

conservativism, the nation that most resembles his vision is not a free and diverse America, but China.

The Chinese surveillance state doles out social credit to good citizens and imprisonment to minorities like the Uyghur people. But what is this if not the state making use of its technological powers, unencumbered by Tradition, to build a "better" society? Birthed by a guerrilla (Mao), China's leaders embarked on a relentless effort to expunge Tradition and Values (and murder any naysayers) during the Cultural Revolution. Its political elite now controls what the populace sees and hears, and they have no patience for the inconveniences of history (such as the bloody events that unfolded in 1989 in Tiananmen Square).

Conservatism is not merely a game of winners and losers as Askonas too often portrays it to be. It is a way of understanding the world and being in the world that takes as its starting assumptions arguments from common sense and the experience of all who came before. Despite decades of postmodern and poststructuralist theory and rapid technological change, such a view still holds great appeal. In a culture that celebrates fetishization (even fetishizing the normal in the form of normcore), common sense, as well as devotion to family, community, and country, can be a steadying force.

What first principles will Askonas' new world be built upon?

RESPECT YOUR DEAD

Revolutionaries always predict a more high-minded future for their schemes. Conservatives' unenviable but crucial task is to think through the logical conclusions of such schemes, explore their likely unintended consequences, and always contrast the

A 1977 postage stamp commemorating the bicentennial of the Articles of Confederation





A business in New York City displays signage requiring proof of vaccination in 2021

utopian vision with the realities of human behavior and history.

Unlike the guerrilla or the upstart or the nomad, conservatives understand that society is not for the enjoyment of any one individual; instead, it is, as Burke famously argued in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, a partnership "not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born."

Askonas and others are correct to point to how our use of technology has strained that partnership in significant ways. The pandemic experience revealed how fragile is the bond of trust between citizens and our institutions; how little accountability there is during times of crisis from those who are deciding how people should live; and how easily fear can lead even the well intentioned down illiberal paths.

But conservatism counsels thoughtful adaptation, preserving what is most important about institutions, noting also what might change, but not promoting wholesale revolution. Askonas' eagerness to shrug off the mantle of conservatism to dive headlong into building new ways of being in the world that conform to current technological capabilities also fails to reckon with another serious blind spot: How will

this new world, the one better adapted to technology than its conservative forebears, create trustworthy institutions from whole cloth? As Scruton reminds us, "Good things are easily destroyed but not easily created."

The conservative temperament, with its respect for history and the homage it pays to the "democracy of the dead," as G.K. Chesterton called it, does not view progress as predictable and linear, nor every new thing as a sign of progress. And it recognizes that change cannot happen only from the top down, no matter how well intentioned the elite in charge believe themselves to be. Out of humility rather than pessimism, it reminds us that sometimes the proposed cure ends up being worse than the disease. In our technology-saturated society, convinced we can achieve lives of frictionless ease in metaverses of our own making, conservatism reminds us to come back down to earth, and to the reality of our limitations and our wonderfully contradictory, creative, messy, and extraordinary humanity. RL

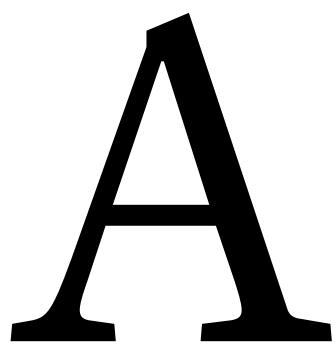
Christine Rosen is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

IS THE NEW RIGHT FASCIST?

by JAMES M. PATTERSON

The word fascist is thrown around carelessly by those on the left, such that it barely means anything anymore. Nevertheless, there was a historical fascism whose rhetoric is echoing among many in the New Right. Is there reason for concern?





adhered to a consensus of four principles: free markets, anti-totalitarianism, religious values, and limited government. The consensus was robust enough to entertain disagreements over which of the four to prioritize without abandoning any of the principles—until recently.

Starting with the emergence of the "Alt-Right" during the 2010s, a different group of political rightwing ideologues have surfaced to defend very different principles from those of traditional American conservatism. Rather, they are much more closely aligned with European conservatism: economic protectionism, foreign noninterventionism, and an aggressive use of government power. The only shared principle is that of religious values, but there are some caveats here. The religious among them profess little hesitance to use the state to coerce citizens on matters of faith, and the irreligious among them are happy to use religion to political ends. The factions embracing these alternative right-wing principles include Catholic integralists like Adrian Vermeule and Gladden Pappin, economic nationalists like Oren Cass and Julius Krein, masculine vitalists like Costin Vlad Alamariu (better known by his Twitter handle, "Bronze Age Pervert"), and members of the Claremont Institute like Michael Anton and John C. Eastman. The disparate conservative factions do not embrace all four European conservative ideas to the same degree or with the same priority, but they are willing to cooperate to establish an alternative to traditional American conservatism.

The funny thing about the New Right is that it seems very old. Those familiar with the history of European conservatism might worry when looking at this "new," alternative right-wing ideology. Economic protectionism, defense of totalitarianism, aggressive

A COMMON EXPERIENCE for American conservatives is to hear a progressive call their policy positions "fascist." Usually the connection between said policy and fascism is, at best, tenuous: "Oh, you support school choice? You know who else went to school? *Fascists.*"

However, in the past few years American conservatives have noticed that some among them have drifted into opinions that seem "right-wing" yet not traditionally conservative. Since the New Conservative Movement began in the 1960s, and especially since the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980, conservatives have traditionally

A 19th-century illustration of the first meeting of George Washington and Alexander Hamilton





Alt-Right participants at the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia

use of government power, and religious values formed the basis for the 19th-century reactionary politics against the French Revolution and the future foundation for 20th-century fascism. Indeed, one would not be wrong to make this association, as many in this group, such as Vermeule and Pappin, are happy to make such associations themselves. Others, however, might favor policy positions that fascists once promoted but are not themselves fascists and even dislike fascism. Such a distinction might strike the reader as silly, but it is quite simple. One does not need to be a fascist to favor industrial policy; otherwise, Alexander Hamilton would have been goose-stepping his way into meetings with George Washington. Most of the others mentioned above fall into this category, especially Cass and Anton. As for Alamariu, much of this is just an ironic diversion.

Yet many American conservatives as well as those on the left nevertheless regard the emergence of this alternative as the second coming of fascism. For example, in his 2022 autumn essay, "We Need to Stop Calling Ourselves Conservatives," John Daniel Davidson offered this common argument on the New Right: "The left will only stop when conservatives stop them, which means conservatives will have to discard outdated and irrelevant notions about 'small government.' The government will have to become, in the hands of conservatives, an instrument of renewal

in American life—and in some cases, a blunt instrument indeed." In reply, neo-conservative godfather Bill Kristol agreed that Davidson and his ilk should stop calling themselves conservatives and suggested on Twitter an alternate headline to Davidson's essay: "We Need To Start Calling Ourselves Fascists."

Such a comment seems like what one has come to expect from online discourse—an overheated article promoting one's preferred ideological solution and an equally overheated social media response designed to maximize impact and engagement. But what of the substance of the accusation? How "fascist" is the New Right or the factions in its orbit?

THE UNIQUE VINTAGE OF AMERICAN FASCISM

The short answer is that they are not fascist at all. Fascism was a European ideology that emerged in response to the rise of communism and the trauma of the First World War. Arguably, the earliest fascist party was the *Action Française* (1899–1926), with its leader Charles Maurras celebrating French religious and military tradition in his appeal to the French bourgeoisie disillusioned with continental liberal institutions like parliamentary government and the franchise. Maurras began the party during the Dreyfus Affair but experienced the greatest success in the years



Demonstration in Salamanca, Spain, to celebrate the occupation of Gijón by Francisco Franco's troops in 1937

following the Second World War. The first successful fully fascist parties were the eponymous Fascist Party of Benito Mussolini of Italy, the Nazi Party of Adolf Hitler in Germany, the Falangist Party of Francisco Franco's Spain, and the Fatherland Front of Austria's Engelbert Dollfuss. Whatever political struggles America experienced during the same time, the political parties did not divide between national and international socialist parties this way. After all, Eugene V. Debs, the leader of the Socialist Party of America, posed no real threat to the American republic, and what fascist opposition there was to communism in America was to a great degree conspiracy-theorizing,

or part of what Richard Hofstadter called "the paranoid style" in American politics.

The longer answer is that the traits the New Right does share with fascism stem from the borrowing of older American fascist appeals but reinterpreting them in ways that once served fascist interests in Europe. American fascism was intentionally different from its militant European varieties. A specific definition of fascism is notoriously difficult to provide, since, as noted above, the term has been subject to so much abuse. Robert O. Paxton has offered, nevertheless, an excellent one in his book *The Anatomy of Fascism*, adopted for this essay:

Fascism may be defined as a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupations with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.



FOR FASCISTS, THE CAUSE OF POLITICAL DECLINE WAS LIBERALISM.





THE FASCISTS WERE NOT QUITE SOCIALIST ENOUGH TO NATIONALIZE ALL INDUSTRY; INSTEAD, THEY ADOPTED AN ECONOMIC MODEL CALLED 'CORPORATISM.'



For fascists, the cause of political decline was liberalism. As Paxton says, "One of the most important preconditions was a faltering liberal order. Fascisms grew from back rooms to the public arena most easily where the existing government functioned badly, or not at all. One of the commonplaces of discussions of fascism is that it thrived upon the crisis of liberalism." After the end of the First World War in 1918, European countries returned to liberal, democratic governance but lacked the public trust and internal cohesion to practice it well; hence, as Paxton explains, fascists could easily persuade more conservative elements of the populations to use liberal democratic methods, namely elections, to vote themselves out of liberal democracy. As Benito Mussolini, the founder of the Fascist Party in Italy, said in 1933:

One should not exaggerate the importance of Liberalism in the last century and make of it a religion of humanity for all present and future times when in reality it was only one of the many doctrines of that century. ... Now Liberalism is on the point of closing the doors of its deserted temple. ...That is why all the political experiments of the contemporary world are anti-Liberal and the desire to exile them from history is supremely ridiculous: as if history was a hunting preserve for Liberalism and professors, as if Liberalism was the last and incomparable word in civilization....The present century is the century of authority, a century of the Right, a Fascist century.

In places like Italy, Spain, Austria, and Germany, fascism was a nationalist adoption of socialist programs to defend against the internationalist, communist parties seeking a worker revolution, hence "national socialist." Fascists were nationalists in that they extolled the nation as the bulwark against communist subversion, and the threat of communists—often real, but sometimes not—provided the basis for popular support, in addition to conspiracy theories that connected communism to the Freemasons and Jews. Foreign interlopers, so the theories went, did not share the fundamental qualities of the native born and their homeland, and they sought to deny the rightful heirs to the soil their pride of place.

The fascists were not quite socialist enough to nationalize all industry; instead, they adopted an economic model called "corporatism," in which the government was a primary stakeholder in large, somewhat private corporations. The governments would regulate what was to be made, how much to pay workers, and on what matters to conduct research, but they left the question of means to the executives and managers. Fascist parties in Europe appealed to common national struggles, religions, histories, and most infamously "racial purity" as the real basis for solidarity, one that pitted nations against each other rather than the international proletarian struggle against the capitalists. To that end, fascists praised technological advancement, managerial control over the economy, and a reclaimed masculinity in overt militarization. Caught in the middle were various liberal and conservative parties that lurched toward one extreme or another while unable to control fascist violence. The result: Fascist squadristi attacks on socialists in Italy; a total civil war in Spain; the suspension of the constitution and formation of a one-party clerico-fascist state (and eventually assassination) in

The National Fascist Party headquarters in Rome in 1934, featuring Mussolini's face



Austria; and the Reichstag fire, Kristallnacht, and all the inhumanities of the Nazi regime in Germany.

The American experience with fascism was different because it was not a domestic product but a European import. American fascism is a product of the fascist propaganda of the 1930s and '40s, its messages crafted to keep Americans out of war and friendly to fascist leaders because of their anticommunism, efficiency, and modernity. In the years leading up the Second World War, the Axis Powers sought to charm Americans with messages of anticommunism, efficiency, and modernity. Once the war started, though, fascist propagandists spread messages against American military intervention. Therefore, most unlike the deeply militaristic propaganda in fascist European nations, American propaganda was quite anti-militaristic. The Axis Powers understood that President Franklin D. Roosevelt harbored strong sympathies for the Allied Powers, as did many Americans, and fascists hoped to discourage American militarism, since it would likely be in defense of Great Britain and France.

American fascists like William Dudley Pelley and his Silver Legion of America (or "the silver shirts"), though small in number, endorsed fascism directly and opposed American intervention on the side of the Allies, as did the much more popular Fr. Charles



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Coughlin, a Canadian-born Catholic radio priest based out of Detroit, publisher of the magazine *Social Justice*, and leader of the antisemitic and fascist party the Christian Front, which had been infiltrated by Nazi agents. Fascist sympathizers like Charles Lindbergh promoted anti-interventionism as part of his "America First" appeal, which garnered significant support. All three identified American intervention on the side of the Allies as a Jewish plot and therefore

Charles Lindbergh speaking at an "America First" rally in Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1941





A ballot from the 1938 Austrian Anschluss referendum: "Do you agree with the reunification of Austria with the German Reich that was enacted on 13 March 1938 and do you vote for the party of our leader, Adolf Hitler?"

built into their defense of fascism a conspiracy theory of European origins for an American audience.

Americans more generally had some positive opinions of fascist states during their early years. Many American Catholics were hopeful that Mussolini would improve the conditions for the Vatican after he signed the 1929 Lateran Treaty, in which the Italian government recognized papal sovereignty over the Vatican and the Vatican recognized the Italian government. Mussolini, the stronger of the two partners in raw force, flouted the terms of the treaty in the following years, thereby dashing these early hopes. Even as late as 1936, however, Mussolini was liked well enough that former presidential candidate and New York governor Al Smith visited him while mulling a primary challenge against Franklin D. Roosevelt.

During the Spanish Civil War, the Republicans (those aligned with the Soviet Union) massacred Catholic clergy and religious, earning much American sympathy with Franco's Nationalists, leading to a sectarian fight at home over whether America should stay neutral in the war (supported by American Catholic leaders) or support the Republicans (supported by American Protestant leaders). Franco prevailed, and the result was a formally neutral but functionally Axis-aligned state. During the Second World War, Spain was in no shape to participate, but Franco directly aided the Third Reich, sent volunteers to fight for it, and provided material assistance to Axis industry. All the while he hoped to use his support to leverage territorial gains away from Vichy France, that is until the Axis began to lose. At that point, Franco hoped to put an Allied spin on his behavior

with propaganda successful enough to be repeated today as "common knowledge."

As for Austria, Americans often remain ignorant of Dollfuss except as the man Hitler had assassinated to usher in the 1938 Austrian Anschluss, although a subset of American Catholics may still regard him as the "good fascist" because he presented himself as a good Catholic who hoped to subject Austrians to an authoritarian state informed by Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical Rerum Novarum. The truth is that Dollfuss was weak, as his position in Austria depended on an alliance with Mussolini and the Rome Protocols of 1934 against Hitler. Even so, Dollfuss composed a one-party state in which an anti-Nazi fascist party, the Heimwehr, combined with the Christian Social Party to form the Fatherland Front, the base of Dollfuss' power as he attempted to liquidate various socialist parties within his borders. Hitler had Dollfuss assassinated in 1934, clearing the way for a reproachment with Mussolini at the 1936 Rome-Berlin Axis coalition and the 1939 Pact of Steel.



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Some Americans even admired Hitler. Coughlin's Christian Front and Lindbergh's America First could make strong ethnic appeals not merely to German Americans but also to Irish Catholics who remembered Roger Casement's securing Germany's willingness in 1914 to ship munitions to support an Irish Brigade (which the British would later intercept) and a statement of German support for an independent Ireland from Arthur Zimmermann. For this reason alone, many German and Irish ethnic Americans were at least open to Hitler's being an improvement over the Weimar Republic. Not to be outdone was the old WASP guard of the Ivy League. Ernst "Putzi" F.S. Hanfstaengl, Harvard class of 1909, attended a class

reunion in 1934 at first with an invitation to serve as vice marshal, an invitation rescinded after a backlash, yet Hanfstaengl showed up all the same despite a substantial protest from Cambridge locals. At the time, Hanfstaengl oversaw the Nazi foreign press office and was a personal friend of Hitler's. Rather infamously, Joseph P. Kennedy, FDR's ambassador to the U.K. and a friend of Coughlin's, was a highly placed American defender of Hitler's as late as 1939. As John D. Wilsey notes in his recent spiritual biography of John Foster Dulles, even Dulles sought to soft-pedal opposition to Hitler on behalf of the American financial interests that his law firm represented. While working in the Dulles archives at Princeton, Wilsey even uncovered a photograph of the two men together smiling at a meeting in 1933. Dulles eventually came to his senses by 1939—quite late.

Of the four fascist leaders, only Franco survived the Second World War, and he did his best to refashion his regime as pro-Allies as possible by stressing his anticommunism. He had very good reason to suspect that the victorious Allies wanted him replaced, although that effort was eventually scrapped as the rapidly worsening situation with the Soviet Union took priority. Leaving Franco where he was, the Allies agreed, was the least bad option. In his Franco: Anatomy of a Dictator, Enrique Moradiellos describes how Franco would spend the rest of his long life slowly unraveling his fascist state into a weakly authoritarian one while seeking western support by stressing his anticommunism. He liberalized the economy once autarky had badly impoverished the nation, and increasingly left day-to-day national affairs to underlings as he became increasingly engrossed in soccer matches. That Spain enforced a public Catholicism led some American Catholics to believe it was a real alternative to an anti-Catholic "liberal" America.

Hermann Göring and Adolf Hitler with Ernst Hanfstaengl in Berlin, 1932



Among these were L. Brent Bozell Jr. and his wife, who moved there in 1965 just prior to starting the traditionalist Catholic magazine *Triumph*. That they lived there during the final years of Franco's rule makes their admiration all the more surprising, as most of the Spanish were more than fed up with "el Caudillo por la Gracia de Dios" by then. Of course, during the decade of Bozell's time there, Franco had long ago stopped murdering Basque priests, executing his enemies, and forcibly shutting down Masonic lodges because of his suspicion that they collaborated with the Jews. By then he was just ... an old man.

THE NEW RIGHT IS NOT FASCIST—YET

Therefore, returning to the original question regarding the New Right—is it fascist?—the criteria presented by Paxton are, again:

- 1. Obsessive preoccupations with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood
- 2. Compensatory cult of unity, energy, and purity composed of mass-based party of committed nationalist militants
- 3. Uneasy but effective collaboration with the traditional elites
- 4. Abandonment of liberty to pursue redemptive violence without restraint for internal cleansing and external expansion

As it happens, the New Right overlaps with this definition of fascism most of all in the first and second categories, is attempting the third, but is only partially interested in the fourth.

Those among the New Right are certainly obsessed with community decline, humiliation, and victimhood. At the 2022 Restoring the Nation conference organized by Sohrab Ahmari at Franciscan University of Steubenville, the overriding theme was that Ohio's economic desolation represented the logical conclusion of liberalism. During his talk at the conference, Patrick Deneen made great rhetorical use of the poverty he saw in the city and the surrounding areas. After describing Steubenville, Ohio, as a town that looked like it lost the Second World War, he illustrated his point by comparing photographs of busy streets from the mid-20th century to the abandoned storefronts of late 2022. He ridiculed the town to his audience: "As I was driving around Steubenville, and I hope that you have the chance to go to downtown Steubenville, you can just inhale, and smell, and taste the liberty." Deneen, whether he knew it or not, was



Proud Boys at a "Back the Blue" rally in Portland, Oregon, in 2020

making the same appeal to the "deserted temple" of liberalism that Mussolini had made during the 1920s. Deneen, of course, does not cite Mussolini in his argument; his preferred authority on the subject is Christopher Lasch. The point is not that Deneen endorses *Il Duce*. He does not. Rather, Deneen's rhetoric is quite similar in its obsession with blaming liberalism as the sole cause for what he perceives as American decline, and for the application of Paxton's definition, that similarity is worrying enough.

Something similar can be found in the work of Michael Anton. Anton began this appeal in his 2016 "Flight 93 Election" essay for the *Claremont Review of Books*, originally under the pen name *Publius Decius Mus*. Anton breathlessly concluded in that essay, "If [the core of the American nation] cannot rouse themselves simply to *vote* for the first candidate in a generation who pledges to advance their interests, and to vote *against* the one who openly boasts that she will do the opposite ... then they are doomed. They may not deserve the fate that will befall them, but they will suffer it regardless." Again, the language is that of humiliation and decline.

The leader of the New Right most interested in a compensatory cult of unity, energy, and purity

might be Yoram Hazony and those at the Edmund Burke Foundation. Hazony is a very unlikely source for fascist sympathy, being a Modern Orthodox Jew and Israeli. Nowhere does he argue for the formation of paramilitary groups like the Sturmabteilung (or the "brown shirts") of the Nazi Party or Mussolini's Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale (or the "black shirts). While some might point to the Proud Boys or other right-wing paramilitary outfits on the right, their association with Hazony is nonexistent. Rather, for Hazony, the unity, energy, and purity of the nation is abstract and almost spiritual. He deflects accusations that fascists were nationalists by insisting they might have invoked the nation as a principle but were, in fact, imperialists. A good nationalist "will be on his guard against imperial projects, coercive international institutions, and theories of actionable universal rights" while also doing "what must be done to maintain and build up the material well-being of his own nation, its internal cohesiveness, and its unique cultural inheritance." The trouble for Hazony is that his abstraction is just a generalization from the Israeli national experience, one that maps poorly on the broader history of nations. After all, the cultural inheritance of Germany was, for Hitler, in the



The January 6, 2021, riot in Washington, D.C.

Germans of Danzig. Nations historically have gone to war for territory, and if such wars disqualify nations as nations, then Hazony is left with the "nationalism" of Singapore, Switzerland, and Suriname.

One might find rhetoric for the cult of unity more closely capturing Paxton's understanding of fascism in the work Glenn Ellmers, who despaired of American unity and purity when saying in a 2021 *American Mind* essay, "'Conservatism' Is No Longer Enough":

Obviously, those foreigners who have bypassed the regular process for entering our country, and probably will never assimilate to our language and culture, are—politically as well as legally—aliens. I'm really referring to the many native-born people—some of whose families have been here since the Mayflower—who may technically be citizens of the United States but are no longer (if they ever were) Americans. They do not believe in, live by, or even like the principles, traditions, and ideals that until recently defined America as a nation and as a people. It is not obvious what we should call these citizen-aliens, these non-American Americans; but they are something else.

The imposition of high immigration and the abandonment of American values has lead to a moral crisis for Ellmers, who concludes, "It has been like this for a while—and the MAGA voters knew it, while most of the policy wonks and magazine scribblers did not ... and still don't. In almost every case, the political practices, institutions, and even rhetoric governing the United States have become hostile to both liberty and virtue. On top of that, the mainline churches, universities, popular culture, and the corporate world are rotten to the core." Ellmer's solution is for those formerly known as "conservatives" to ready their bodies for what he envisions to be a real civil war. Ellmers is not alone in this appeal to extraconstitutional means in the fight for a newly purified American way of life. Jesse Kelly pronounced on Twitter in May of 2023: "The American Right will have to decide whether it wants a big federal government doing unconstitutional things to stop blue states from turning into Gomorrah or just let them burn in their own depravity. Sadly, there isn't a second choice." Once again, the language concerning unity and purity drive the need for the use of energy regardless of its unconstitutionality. Given the events of January 6, this kind of language cannot be taken purely as bravado.

As for tentative alliances with elites, little needs to be said except to observe those who show interest in the New Right. The clearest elite allies of the New Right are Senators J.D. Vance and Josh Hawley and former Trump attorney general Jeff Sessions, with some interest from Senators Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz, as well as Governor Ron DeSantis. Donald J. Trump is oddly at a distance from the New Right despite being their champion.

Finally, the fourth category refers to appeals to internal purity and external expansion. The New Right stresses internal purity but rejects American expansion. As shown already, American fascists promoted American neutrality because fascist governments in Europe wanted to dissuade Americans from intervening in the Second World War against the Axis powers. Where do we see such a promotion of neutrality today? The answer is in the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine and the pro-neutrality, even pro-Russian sentiment in publications like Compact and The American Conservative. For Thomas Fazi at Compact, the Russian invasion of Ukraine was a rational response to NATO encirclement. For Bradley Devlin at The American Conservative, data from April 2023 intelligence "reveals who is really waging this war against Russia. Ukraine, which has been a money-laundering operation for the well-connected in the West for the last decade (see Hunter Biden), continues to be just that. Ukraine is the American liberal empire's proxy in the truest sense."

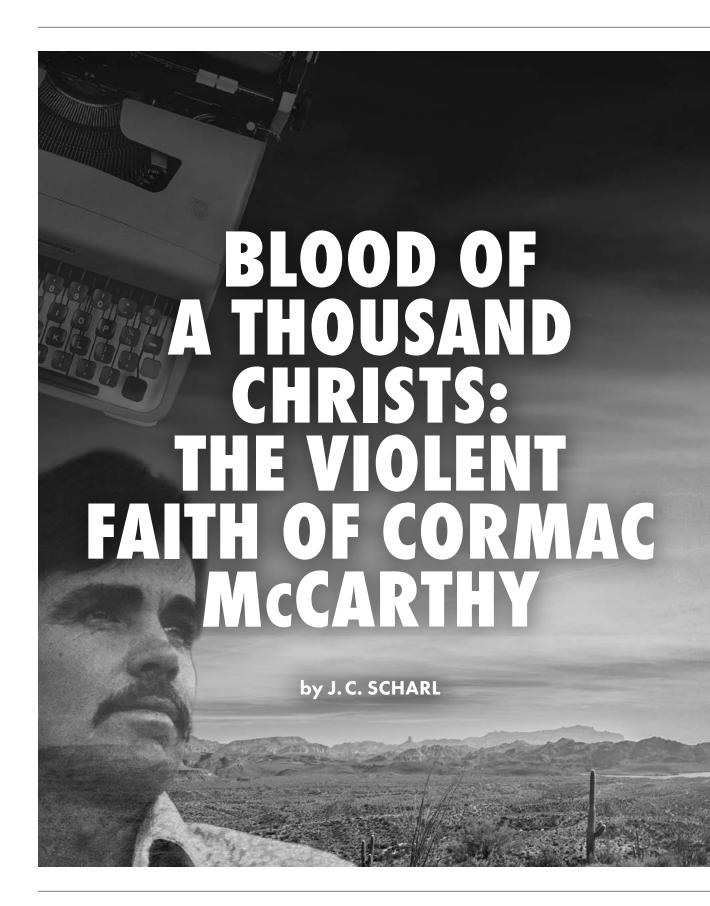
Even so, that these appeals to nonintervention resemble older American fascist appeals is not enough. American isolationism preexisted fascist propaganda, being that it was the default American foreign policy position during the entire 19th century. Indeed, that history is what the fascists hoped to exploit when making their original appeals. One could argue that America has never fully reconciled itself with replacing the British Empire as the world's maritime hegemon, and those discomfited by our position in international affairs have included people from all ideological stripes, including for many years people on the left. After all, the communists made the same appeals to noninterventionism and neutrality during the Cold War. Where the issue really comes to a head is in the elevation of Aleksandr Dugin as a Russian intellectual worth consulting to gain perspective on the ongoing conflict, as Michael Millerman did in a short 2022 Compact article. As John Ganz pointed out in his Substack, Unpopular Front, Dugin has called himself a fascist.

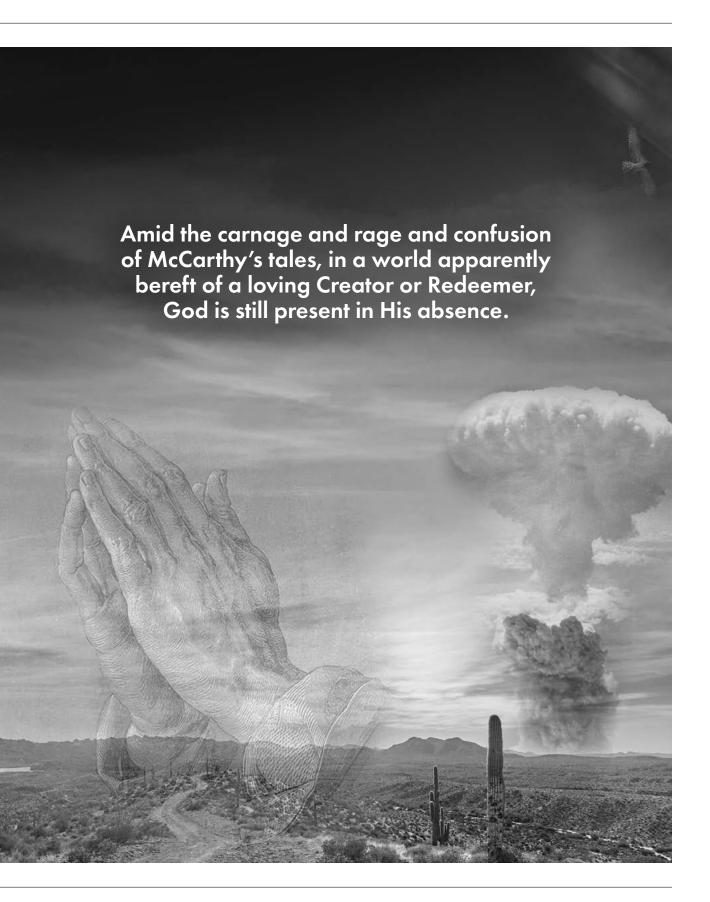


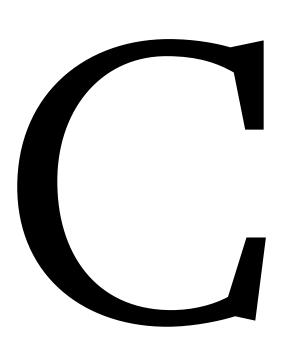
Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO)

With all the above considered, the answer to our question is that the New Right is not fascist but (1) has some important intellectual figures who borrow from proto-fascist, historical fascist, and contemporary fascist sources, (2) draws from the same historical American policy positions that fascists once did, and (3) shows no sign of a limiting principle for adopting more aggressively fascist positions. That said, the New Right is also a deeply factious movement, and its leader (to the extent that it has one), Yoram Hazony, regularly denounces fascist leaders in The Virtue of Nationalism. Also, one does not need to plan a Beer Hall putsch or wear colorful armbands to agree on discrete matters with fascist thinkers or to share a policy position that American fascists took decades ago. What is genuinely worrisome is that there is no limiting principle and the implicit demand that there be "no enemies to the right," as well as an insistence that there is an ongoing state of emergency requiring extraconstitutional or even anti-constitutional measures and that economic ruin is reversable only through a dramatic imposition of government power. Therefore, the New Right is not fascist, but there is no reason for it not to be except for the ongoing sobriety of its leadership. That is reason enough to worry. RL

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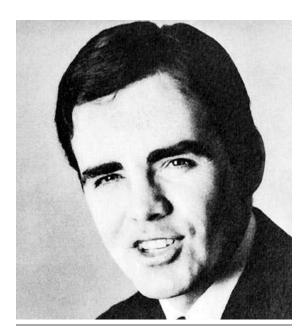






CORMAC McCARTHY, WHOSE STARK, quintessentially American novels have frustrated, infuriated, and inspired a generation of writers, published two new books back-to-back in 2022—likely his last. Gregory Wolfe describes the enigmatic, hilarious *The Passenger* and its slim coda, *Stella Maris*, as McCarthy's "overture at the end," a re-presenting of the McCarthian themes that the author has been exploring in book after book for decades.

That is not to say, however, that McCarthy's oeuvre has suddenly become clear. The new books are as stubbornly resistant to proof texting as his earlier novels. But if only from the title of what will probably



Cormac McCarthy in 1967

be McCarthy's last book, I found myself asking to what degree we can say that McCarthy's work is, in that great American tradition, "God-haunted." *Stella Maris*, Star of the Sea, Our Lady of Peace, is invoked for the safety of wayfarers over the sea, which is traditionally a symbol of this world and its destructive ways. What are the folk of McCarthy's books if not wayfarers, buffeted by the sea of time, violence, and despair? Is there perhaps a star gleaming in this storm?

Few American writers are simultaneously as popular and as unpopular as Cormac McCarthy. Those critical of McCarthy's work generally form two camps: the more pedestrian, who find McCarthy's writing simultaneously plotless and repulsive, and the more sophisticated, who believe McCarthy is running some kind of sham, and that all his spiraling descriptions conceal the dark truth that he has nothing to say. I have greater sympathy with one of these camps than with the other, for McCarthy's plots are often meandering-sometimes even petering out entirely after several hundred pages, as in The Passenger—and the violence, especially in Blood Meridian, The Road, and No Country for Old Men, is gut-wrenching. But the more sophisticated critics, with their suspicions that McCarthy's voice is merely schtick, are sensing something important about McCarthy's work, though they interpret it wrongly. They sense that McCarthy is indeed writing about

a void, and at the end of the day he truly does have nothing to offer to fill that void.

Does this make McCarthy's work a waste of time? Only, I believe, if we consider human existence a waste of time. McCarthy is obsessed with the futile offering, the empty gesture, but even as his characters demonstrate the pointlessness of the gift, he himself makes it over and over again: the gift of attending to the world, of looking, of listening, until we become convinced that even if what we attend to is loneliness, if what we look at is collapse, if what we hear is the wind whistling through an abandoned house, our attention becomes a little participation in the death of the world—a participation that, in keeping with the mystery of faith, may become some kind of atonement.

GOD AMONG THE HORRORS

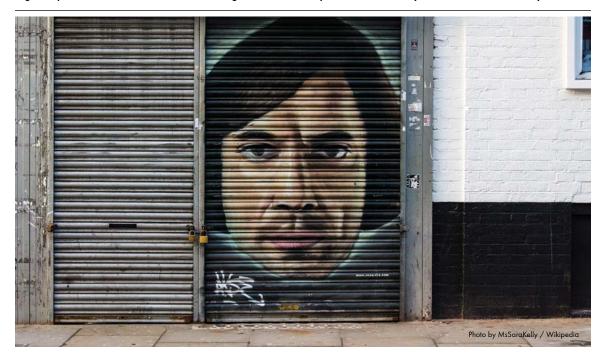
McCarthy was born in 1933 in Rhode Island and christened Charles Joseph McCarthy Jr. When he was only four years old, his family moved to Knoxville, Tennessee. This was a momentous move for little Charles; McCarthy went on to become known as a Southern writer, and most of his books take place in the American South and Southwest. McCarthy's family was Irish Catholic. He was baptized a Catholic

and attended parochial school. He has been married three times and divorced three times. Some of his books, most notably *Suttree*, with its accounts of Appalachian homelessness, are discernably autobiographical. Legends of McCarthy's eccentricities abound, from refusing to speak and receive honoraria while living in poverty in a barn, to his distaste for literary folk, preferring scientists and engineers to people of the word. From this life, rather an epic in itself, spin out the two major themes of McCarthy's work: violence and faith.

The first of these themes is certainly the more noticeable in his novels, which are famous for their gruesomeness. McCarthy is not merely interested in evil; he is interested in violent evil, in evil that seeks to rend and skin and rip and gut, evil that wants not merely to annihilate but to dismember slowly, joint by joint, the world.

And this is no ordinary violence; the violence of McCarthy's novels is pervasive, creative, operatic in its scale, yet keen and specific as splinters under the fingernails. Even people who have not read much McCarthy know this about his works, aided perhaps by the film versions of some of them (which are, if anything, less violent than their source material). This element of McCarthy's voice reaches its apex in *Blood Meridian*, a book so bathed in blood that the

A graffiti portrait of Javier Bardem as Anton Chigurh in the film adaptation of No Country for Old Men in London, by Akse



plot itself dissolves into it, becomes merely a ripple in the wash.

Yet there is another theme, quieter yet persistent, that exists alongside—often within—the violence: faith in God. I have chosen those words carefully, because the theme is not God Himself, or His existence or presence, but *faith* in God. McCarthy does not often ask whether God exists; throughout his many works, that question is generally beyond dispute. Even the atheists, like White in *The Sunset Limited*, reveal eventually that they do not really disbelieve in God's existence; it is just that they want nothing to do with Him. "Why can't you people just accept that some people don't want to believe in God?" Whether or not McCarthy himself assumes there is a God, his characters do, because the question of whether God exists is not within the scope of language.

What we can consider, however, is *faith* in God. Asking if God exists is not the role of the poet or the novelist, according to McCarthy. It may not even be the role of the human. The real question, the question McCarthy's characters face over and over, is what do you believe about God? For example, in Cities of the Plain, John Grady Cole speaks with a blind man about his intense but conflicted love for the prostitute Magdalena. The blind man urges him to pray, then the dialogue runs as follows:

Will you? No. Why not? I dont know. You dont believe in Him? It's not that.

For McCarthy heroes (and even many villains), it is never "that." Even the ragman in *Suttree* won't deny God. "I always figured they was a God," he says after getting Suttree to agree to burn his body with gasoline after he dies. "I just never did like him."

These questioners are Job, not Sartre. It is not a lack of belief in God's existence; often it is not even a lack of faith in prayer. It is always something else, something connected with the inescapable violence of the world, that draws such a thick veil between us and God that McCarthy's characters often doubt whether it is worthwhile to seek to draw it back. Looking around at the world, McCarthy concludes it is a fearful thing to imagine the God who made it.

Of all his writings, it is in the play *The Sunset Limited* that McCarthy tackles the question of faith most



WHETHER OR NOT MCCARTHY HIMSELF ASSUMES THERE IS A GOD, HIS CHARACTERS DO, BECAUSE THE QUESTION OF WHETHER GOD EXISTS IS NOT WITHIN THE SCOPE OF LANGUAGE.

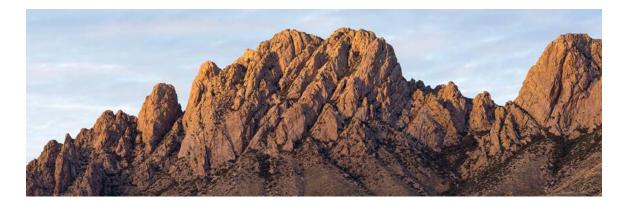
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directly. In the play, White, an atheist philosophy professor, has attempted suicide and was prevented by Black, an ex-con and born-again Christian who is not content with saving White's body; he wants his soul as well. As the two battle back and forth, the professor's view becomes ever bleaker. He says at last, "Western Civilization finally went up in smoke in the chimneys at Dachau and I was too infatuated to see it. I see it now." Later, he declares, "[This is] a horrible place full of horrible people. These people are not worth saving."

McCarthy returns to the horrors of World War II in *The Passenger*. The main character, Bobby Western, lives with the knowledge that his father—"who had created out of the absolute dust of the earth an evil sun by whose light men saw like some hideous adumbration of their own ends through cloth and flesh the bones in one another's bodies"—helped build the nuclear bomb. He recalls what he heard about Nagasaki in visceral detail:

Burning people crawled among the corpses like some horror in a vast crematorium. They simply thought the world had ended. It hardly even occurred to them that it had anything to do with the war.

This section closes with Bobby's sister Alicia, for whom he harbors an incestuous but unconsummated



passion, writing to him in a letter, "God was not interested in our theology but only in our silence." Horror, McCarthy indicates, is no proof that God does not exist.

This is not to say that McCarthy never puts atheism into his characters' mouths. The clearest example in his canon comes from *The Road*, in which a father and his son traverse a post-apocalyptic wasteland, skirting cannibalistic gangs and picking their way to the coast, where they can only hope a remnant of human community persists. In their travels, they meet a beggar on the road, to whom they offer a little help. The beggar voices some of the starkest despair in McCarthy's bleak canon, declaring:

There is no God.

No?

There is no God and we are his prophets.

Later, the beggar says:

Things will be better when everybody's gone....
We'll all breathe easier.

The rest of the book carefully refutes the beggar's nihilism, as the two heroes struggle on, seeking to live and rejoin the human race—an act that requires some kind of belief in God, as we see on the final page of *The Road*:

[The boy] tried to talk to God but the best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and he didnt forget....The breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of time.

These two themes—violence and faith—make for uneasy but inseparable companions. But to

understand just how intertwined these two are in McCarthy's imagination, we must listen more closely to his voice and see how he approaches violence and faith through his writing.

GOD'S SIGNATURE

McCarthy's writing is poetic. By that I mean that many of McCarthy's sentences do not appear to exist to serve some purpose outside themselves: their language, the texture of the sounds, the relations (often ironic, in his case) between the words and their meanings—all this is the province of poetry.

Specifically, his writing is elegiac. An elegy is a poetic song of something lost or passing away; it is an act of deliberate, careful recording, a close look at what is gone so we can fix its virtues in our mind before time obliterates even the memory of what used to be.

McCarthy is a master of the elegiac sentence, the vivid description that is itself a piling up of themes (in his case, almost always tragic themes), the sentence in which the metonymy or the synecdoche or the metaphor is so perfectly realized that there is no linguistic bridge between what is and what is meant, in which the description is a farewell. As the description of a landscape unfolds across the page, a corresponding description of the human condition, or our situation in the universe, or our muddled relationships with God and each other rises simultaneously in our minds.

See this passage, for example, from *Blood Meridian*, the book in which McCarthy's particular prophetic voice reached its zenith.

The shadow of an eagle that had set forth from those high and craggy fastnesses crossed the line of riders below and they looked up to mark where it rode in that brittle and faultless void. ... In the evening they came out upon a mesa that overlooked all the country to the north. The sun to the west lay in a holocaust where there rose a steady column of small desert bats and to the north along the trembling perimeter of the world dust was blowing down the void like the smoke of distant armies.

If someone wanted to know what Blood Meridian was "about," they could do no better than to read this passage. Seemingly just a beautiful description, it is actually the entire theme of the book: the unremitting brutality of this world beneath the placid face of a silent heaven. There is no obvious "door" in or out of this metaphor; it is not an edifice erected to house something else, nor does it evidently serve any theme or point outside its own words. It is simply there, a sentence crafted and honed for its own sake, and yet it is clearly more than the sum of its words, or even the sum of its connotations. This sentence is about the desert, yes, but it is also about the men looking at the desert; it is a description of a scene, and it is a description of the whole created order over which the spirit of God hovers like an eagle whose proper sphere is the "brittle and faultless void." This is the poetic nature of McCarthy's voice. Much of his finest writing is simply a long, searching look at something that, we intuit, is passing away.

Such passages appear over and over again, giving McCarthy's prose a dream-like feel, an atmospheric quality that comes not from the plot but from the way the themes pulse through the very sentences. The themes suffuse—haunt, if you will—the words.

This kind of poetic writing, in which the metaphor is so complete that we are tempted to miss that it is a metaphor at all, pervades The Passenger as well, but in a new way. The book contains some of McCarthy's signature descriptions of landscapes, but he devotes his powers to dialogue in this book—a curious choice for an author famous for creating characters whose isolation shapes their personality and their fate. The Passenger is a book of isolation, too, but isolation in community. Unlike many other McCarthy leading men (The Kid of Blood Meridian, the father of The Road, John Grady Cole of The Border Trilogy, Llewellyn Moss of No Country for Old Men, Lester Ballard of Child of God, the list goes on), Bobby Western, the main male character of The Passenger, does not have to be alone. He has what it takes to belong to a community, apparently; people like him.



IT IS IMAGINATIVELY POSSIBLE THAT GOD IS A SADOMASOCHISTIC ENTITY WHOSE DELIGHT IN CREATION IS A PERVERSE DELIGHT IN CREATION'S SUFFERING.

"

But fate drives him into the wilderness just the same.

Before he goes, however, he indulges in many lengthy dialogues—also rare for a McCarthy man.

And it is here that McCarthy brings the power of his poetic voice to bear, for these dialogues reveal

And it is here that McCarthy brings the power of his poetic voice to bear, for these dialogues reveal much without seeming to. Take Bobby's brief speech about the Z boson, a hypothetical particle in particle physics:

You wouldnt see a lepton with the opposite charge to the W particle because it wouldnt be a W particle. It would be a Z particle. [Weinberg, a physicist] figured that you wouldnt see anything, and that was what you had to look for. Or all you would see would be a burst of hadrons and that would be the signature of the Z that people said would never be found.

Asher sat with his pencil between his teeth. Neat, he said.

This is a fascinating little peek at particle physics, and just navigating the dialogue here is an intellectual exercise in itself. It contributes little to the plot (insomuch as *The Passenger* has a plot), and it would be easy to skim through this section as an elegant but nonessential piece of world-building.

Yet this is *The Passenger*'s version of the *Blood Meridian* landscape description: a seeming flourish that actually exposes the whole problem of God and faith. In this discussion of an obscure, hypothetical

element of one branch of theoretical physics, the Z particle becomes a seamless metaphor for Cormac McCarthy's God. The Z particle cannot be found; the only way to discern it is to seek its absence, to notice and track the voids in the world. That is the only indication of its presence—that, and a violence, an explosion caused by something imperceptible, or maybe the absence of something imperceptible.

For McCarthy, violence is the signature of God: God, who cannot be seen, who is only indicated by an absence, who no amount of experimenting or observing will reveal, but whose existence is in evidence all around us, every day, through the apocalyptic and apophatic violence that makes up the very stuff of the world.

THE BROKEN SCALES

"Curse God and die," says the beggar in The Road, quoting Job's wife from that most bewildering of Old Testament tales. The beggar's words exemplify one of the possible responses to the intermingling of God and violence, death and the Divine: despair.

In Cities of the Plain, an old man describes an army marching out to war in all its fluttering glory bearing "portraits of the Virgin carried on poles into battle as if the mother of God herself were the authoress of all that calamity and mayhem and madness." The mother of God here is raised up as the mother of violence, a fearsome equivocation. In Outer Dark, one character bewails the state of the world, saying, "I've seen the meanness of humans till I don't know why God ain't put out the sun and gone away." To which some McCarthy characters, like White in The Sunset Limited, might reply, "Who says He hasn't?"

White gives us the best example of an intellectual atheist's response to suffering in the world, declaring, "The one thing I won't give up is giving up. I expect that to carry me through," indicating his determination to commit suicide—to curse God, if you will. But even White does not spend his energy arguing that God does not exist; instead, he insists, "I don't believe in God. ... Can't you see the sound of the clamor and din of those in torment has to be the sound most pleasing to His ear?" He does not believe in God, not because he has been convinced rationally that God does not exist, but because the world around him indicates that whatever God is, He is not good. His disbelief is a choice, a refusal to associate with a God who, to White's eyes, is simply violence omnipotent.

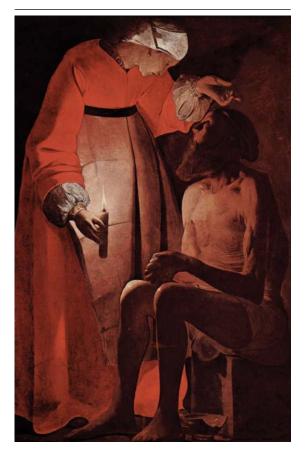
We get a glimpse of what this looks like at the ending of *Blood Meridian*, when the incarnation of evil known as Judge Holden dances naked with harlots and dissipated soldiers. Having just committed a crowning act of violence, an act so gruesome that even this most explicit of books refuses to describe it, now

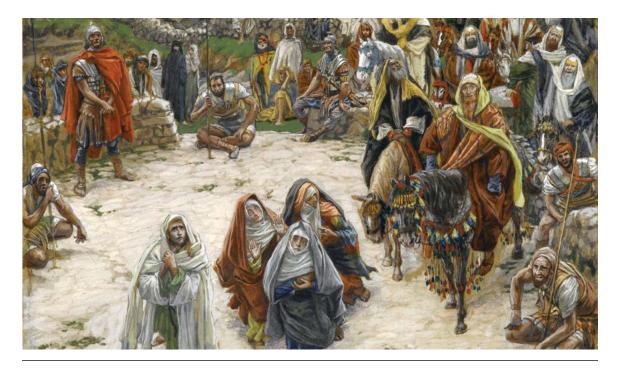
[the judge] pirouettes and makes a pass, two passes, dancing and fiddling at once. His feet are light and nimble. He never sleeps. He says that he will never die. He dances in light and in shadow and he is a great favorite. He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die.

Taken by itself, this could be a beautiful description of God from the writings of a Christian mystic. But Judge Holden is, to my eye, the most purely evil character in McCarthy's canon.

That is no coincidence. Rather, it is the shadow we all live under: it is possible that this is the truth. It is

Job Taunted by His Wife by Georges de La Tour, c. 1620





Crucifixion, Seen from the Cross, by James Tissot, c. 1890

imaginatively possible that God is a sadomasochistic entity whose delight in creation is a perverse delight in creation's suffering. Even for those of us who have staked everything on a different story, there are things in this world that do not make sense, realities of violence and suffering that we must seek to accept as mysteries, not to understand. Even within Christian doctrine, God has a special affinity for agony. Think of when He asks Abraham to sacrifice his own son; does God's intercession at the last second atone for the anguish Abraham (and Isaac, presumably) bore? Think of the Flood, when God annihilates the mankind He created, a mankind He will later die to redeem; does God's later intervention in history somehow balance the scales for what came before?

These are, of course, questions that fascinate college atheists, juvenile questions that children use to obfuscate evangelicals. But that does not rob these questions of their urgency. Even the death of Christ on the Cross, if we try to present it as some sort of rational solution, something to balance the scales, only weighs down further the side of anguish. Only when we see the Cross as an act of love, a profound identification of God with the creation He has made, do the scales themselves shatter, and God's blood begins to offer solace.

McCarthy knows all this. In *All the Pretty Horses*, Alejandra's grandmother says to John Cole Grady that in a Spaniard's heart there is "a deep conviction that nothing can be proven except that it be made to bleed. Virgins, bulls, men. Ultimately God himself." If this is so, we are all Spaniards; we are all convinced of the deepest truths only by blood.

A THOUSAND CHRISTS

"This is a thirsty country. The blood of a thousand Christs. Nothing."

So says an aged Mexican father watching his son bleed out after a pointless barroom brawl in *Blood Meridian*. This world is endlessly thirsty, McCarthy believes: thirsty for blood and for tales of blood. At one point in *The Sunset Limited*, Black offers to tell White a "jailhouse story," a tale of gore and blood and violence such as rightly lives in a Cormac novel, if only White will stay and not go kill himself. It works—for a while. This gives us a clue to McCarthy's own novels: Could it be that he offers these as his own jailhouse stories, stories from the prison of the world, to keep his readers with him, as it were, to keep them alive?

And within those jailhouse stories, there are glimmers of something else, something from beyond the

prison walls. In *Cities of the Plain*, John Grady Cole says "he believed in God even if he was doubtful of men's claims to know God's mind. But that a God unable to forgive was no God at all." Debussy, the glamorous transsexual in *The Passenger*, admits to Bobby, "I don't know who God is or what he is. But I dont believe all this stuff got here by itself. Including me."

These passages do not necessarily reflect McCarthy's own beliefs—in fact, I think it is fairly clear that they do not, or at least do not sum up his beliefs. But they exist. They were written, and written clearly and beautifully, without irony, each of them set as a gleaming thorn in the crown McCarthy is weaving, and that tells us something.

Perhaps the key is to be found in *The Crossing*, when a distraught father whose son has died in an earth-quake moves into a collapsing church to reckon with God. The man's fate is sure; the compromised vault of the church will fall and crush him, sooner or later. Yet he remains, reading his Bible, wrestling with God. A priest comes to reason with him. The priest, we read,

spoke to this misguided man of the nature of God and of the spirit and the will and of the meaning of grace in men's lives and the old man heard him out and nodded his head at certain salient points and when the priest was done this old man raised his book aloft and shouted at the priest. You know nothing. This is what he shouted.

Bobby Western ends *The Passenger* living in a windmill in Portugal. He says to a friend:

I light candles for the dead and I'm trying to learn how to pray.

What do you pray for?
I don't pray for anything, I just pray.

Black ends *The Sunset Limited* alone in his room, bested by White's final explosive denial of God's good, and in the face of God's silence, he says only, "If You speak again, I'll keep your word. Is that okay?" There is no answer.

The father of *The Crossing* dies at last, not crushed by the vault but of simple illness:

At his dying he had told the priest that he'd been wrong in his every reckoning of God and yet had come at last to an understanding of Him anyway. He said that his demands upon God remained intact and unspoken also in even the simplest heart.



THIS WORLD IS ENDLESSLY THIRSTY, MCCARTHY BELIEVES: THIRSTY FOR BLOOD AND FOR TALES OF BLOOD.

"

These are hard sayings. Harder yet is what is to come: "God needs no witness. Neither to Himself nor against. ... To God every man is a heretic."

For McCarthy, then, the whole world is Job kneeling in the dust, pleading for God to come and explain Himself, which God will not do. As the book of Job shows, when God does come at last, it is not to explain Himself but simply to be there.

As should be obvious by now, McCarthy's books, from The Orchard Keeper to Stella Maris, do not offer simple answers to questions of faith. Instead, they weave faith and violence together so closely that, where there is one, we must reckon with the other. McCarthy's characters blaspheme often; none of them has what I would call a reconciliation with God. Yet still, despite all this, his world is truly God-haunted: haunted by the ghost of God, God the Creator, God the Judge, God the Victim. The Catholic Church, into which McCarthy was baptized, teaches that Christ's Wounds will never heal. This world can indeed hold the blood of a thousand Christs-and Christ will keep giving it, even unto the end of the age. That is the only ray of light, one that pierces even the bleak world of Cormac McCarthy. RL

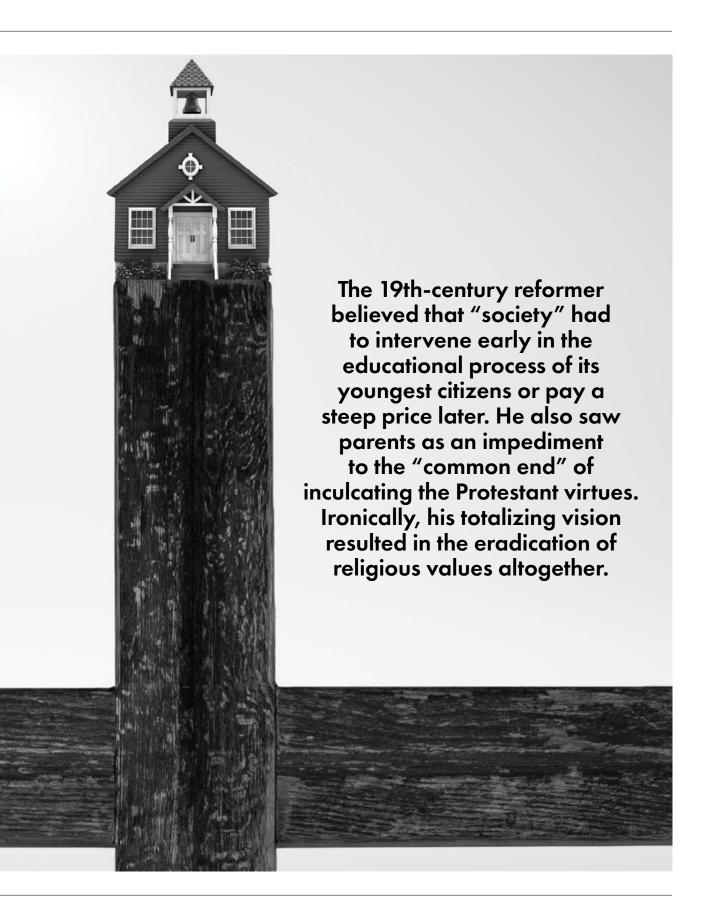
Editor's note: Cormac McCarthy passed away on June 13, age 89, as this issue was going to press. May he rest in peace. The mystery of God, which he pursued in every one of his writings, is now clear to him.

J.C. Scharl is a poet and playwright. Her work has appeared on the BBC and in many poetry journals on both sides of the Atlantic. Her verse play, Sonnez Les Matines, opened in New York City in February 2023 and is available through Wiseblood Books.

HORACE MANN AND THE IRONY OF SECULAR EDUCATION

by JEFFREY POLET



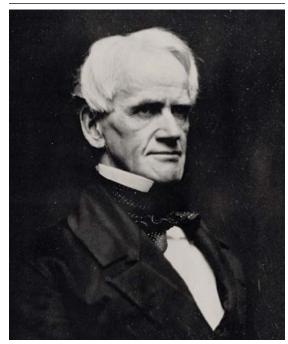


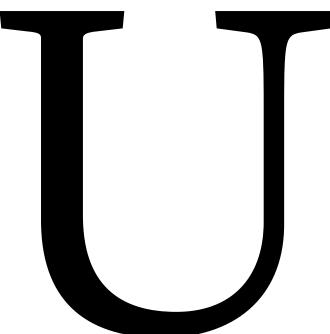
indifference, with a concomitant accusation that anything left behind wasn't worth preserving anyway, while another would involve coercive efforts to force the past and its defenders to keep pace. One of the main mechanisms of such compulsion is a system of education. Justice William O. Douglas provided a good example of this in *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, objecting to Amish people's opting out of the system of public education:

It is the future of the student, not the future of the parents, that is *imperiled* by today's decision. If a parent keeps his child out of school beyond the grade school, then the child will be forever barred from entry into the *new and amazing* world of diversity that we have today. ... If he is *harnessed* to the Amish way of life by those in authority over him and if his education is *truncated*, his entire life may be *stunted* and *deformed*. [emphasis added.]

The obsession with progress tracks what David Corey has called "the politics of unitary vision." In other words, human beings experience stark divisions; if those divisions are consequential enough that they find themselves unable to live with them, they resort to one of three strategies: they separate from one another (the secessionist strategy),

Horace Mann (1796-1859)





UNLESS WE LIVE IN the night when all cows are black, we occupy a multihued world whose contours become more distinct as light intensifies. Our tendency to simplify brings us deeper into the shadows, and perhaps one of our greatest oversimplifications is the uncritical faith in progress, and one of the unfortunate side effects of this tendency is that we too easily identify those on the right side of it and those on the wrong side.

Americans possess the itch for progress deeply in their marrow, with scant attention to what—or who—gets left behind. There are different ways of dealing with *that* problem: one would involve



Amish school near Rebersburg, Pennsylvania

minimize the differences (the pluralist strategy), or allow one faction to subjugate others (the unitary strategy). The latter can be accomplished through either force or milder forms of compulsion, such as mandated and compulsory systems of education. In contemporary America, we see all three strategies at work, but progressives most actively pursue the unitary strategy and accomplish it through control of the schools (both the public schools and the universities).

Horace Mann, the 19th-century educational reformer, provided America with a fine "unitary" example. Mann operated at a crossroads moment in American history: the development of "the American



AS A POLITICAL WHIG, MANN FOLLOWED THE POLICIES THAT FOCUSED ON NATIONAL UNITY.



system," with its emphasis on linking the continent together via roads and canals; Jacksonian democracy, with its egalitarian impulses and increased atomization of the population, which also, by expanding the franchise, altered the idea of citizenship; an increasingly intemperate citizenry; a nation struggling through its sectional crisis fueled by debates over slavery; the age of transcendentalism and reform; mass immigration, especially that of Catholics; and the emergence of an industrial economy with its demands on the formation of "workers" who were no longer independent economic actors.

Coming from an uneducated background, Mann was, until his admission to Brown University at the age of 20, an autodidact and in many ways embodied the reformist spirit of the age, including its objections to intemperance and, more importantly, slavery. Stamped by the severe Calvinism of his youth, Mann as a teenager began to follow the more unitarian path so many had blazed before him. Hating the substance of his religious upbringing, he maintained its form and spirit. As a political Whig, Mann followed the policies that focused on national unity. In that sense, Mann was very much an advocate for a politics of unitary vision, and while he didn't necessarily draw his ideas from classical sources, a detour into their thought will help illuminate his.



Title page of the oldest complete manuscript of Plato's Republic

PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

In his *Republic*, Plato elevated the well-being of the whole over the parts, ushering in the idea that a nontribal society could still hold together without shared blood lines. Once the ties of kinship were weakened, some other principle had to take its place. Plato never advocated any educational program as that instituted in Sparta, but neither was he indifferent to its advantages. Self-interest, particular loyalties, competing stories, and varieties of parenting meant that political order was constantly on a vertiginous edge threatening to collapse.

In his dialogue *The Laws* (Book VII), he carefully outlined a system of education that served justice by promoting unity. This system "can be treated more suitably by way of precept and exhortation than by legislation." The essential problem was that "in the private life of the family many trivial things are apt to be done which escape general notice," producing "in the citizens a multiplicity of contradictory tendencies" that are "bad for a state." Like trees

that we brace when they are saplings, young people must be properly staked so they grow to be straight and true, and this must take place "when growth occurs rapidly."

Unless private affairs in a State are rightly managed, it is vain to suppose that any stable code of laws can exist for public affairs; and when he perceives this, the individual citizen may of himself adopt as laws the rules we have now stated, and, by so doing and thus ordering aright both his household and his State, may achieve happiness.

Plato began this comprehensive system of education in utero and continued it through infancy and childhood. Because of the force of habit, it is in infancy that the whole character is most effectually determined, meaning every adult interaction with children had to be regulated with reference to how the interactions cultivated the virtues that served the well-being of the state. When Clinias asked "how the authority of the state [can] be brought to bear on human creatures that are not yet capable of speech," the Athenian Stranger replied that he was referring to "the unwritten law," or "the whole of the body of such regulations" that are "the mortises of a constitution"—similar to what Tocqueville meant by mores. The laws are simply the brickwork of the polity, held together by the habits of the heart that operate as the concrete that holds it all together; so any system of education must attend to the cement even more than to the laws, with the proper blending of elements taking place at the beginning. The Stranger insisted that regulating the stories we tell, the behaviors we allow, the music we encourage the young to listen to, the manners we inculcate, the marriages we arrange, the games we play, the work we assign, patterns of sleep, even the amount of alcohol we drink, all helped stabilize and unify the state.

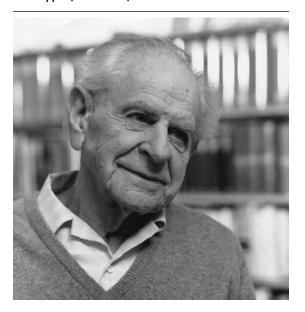
For when the program of games is prescribed and secures that the same children always play the same games and delight in the same toys in the same way and under the same conditions, it allows the real and serious laws also to remain undisturbed; but when these games vary and suffer innovations, amongst other constant alterations the children are always shifting their fancy from one game to another, so that neither in respect of their own bodily gestures nor in respect of their equipment have they any fixed and acknowledged

standard of propriety and impropriety; but the man they hold in special honor is he who is always innovating or introducing some novel device in the matter of form or color or something of the sort; whereas it would be perfectly true to say that a State can have no worse pest than a man of that description, since he privily alters the characters of the young, and causes them to contemn what is old and esteem what is new. And I repeat again that there is no greater mischief a State can suffer than such a dictum and doctrine.

Having lived through the constant rise and fall of Athenian governments, Plato's aversion to "change," which is always "highly perilous," resulted in strict rule of children's lives. "Children who innovate in their games grow up into men different from their fathers; and being thus different themselves, they seek a different mode of life, and having sought this, they come to desire other institutions and law." He did allow for change in "what is bad," but only the wise statesman was capable of making such determinations.

The good society required a lawgiver preeminent in wisdom to discern the good and instantiate that wisdom into laws. When the laws are good, obedience to the law results in virtue. "The virtuous man is he who passes through life consistently obeying the written rules of the lawgiver, as given in his legislation, approbation and disapprobation."

Karl Popper (1902-1994)



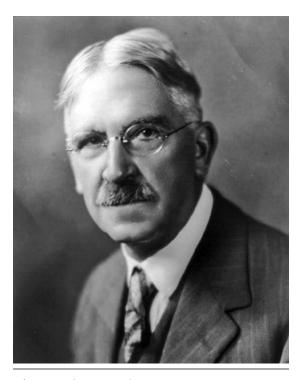
Likewise, Aristotle began Book VIII of the *Politics* by insisting that "the legislator should direct his attention above all to the education of the youth." A well-organized state insisted that "education should be one and the same for all, and that it should be public, not private—as it is at present, when everyone looks after his own children separately, and gives them separate instruction of the sort which he thinks best." Unlike Plato, Aristotle referred such education to "things which are of common interest," thus allowing for some individuating, but also insisted that no citizen "belongs to himself"; rather, "all belong to the state" for each are a part of it, "and the care of each part is inseparable from the care of the whole."

Unlike Plato's Stranger, Aristotle dealt with some knotty political problems, noting that there will be "much disagreement" about what this education should look like, in part because we are "by no means agreed on the things to be taught." "The existing practice is perplexing; no one knows on what principle we should proceed." Disagreeing about the purposes of education presents enough difficulties, but we also disagree about the means. Drawing a sharp distinction between the liberal and the servile arts, Aristotle warned against preparing our best and brightest for any kind "of paid employment" that must necessarily "absorb and degrade the mind." For the general population he recommended an education "partly of a liberal and partly of an illiberal character," the distinction hinging on whether the education served an extrinsic purpose. Therefore, "the first principle of action is leisure," since leisure (sharply distinguished from "amusement") alone allows us to exercise our capacities to the fullest for no other purpose than to enjoy them.

MANN AND THE PROBLEM OF DEMOCRACY

Karl Popper in his *The Open Society and Its Enemies* designated Plato as a forerunner of modern totalitarianism, and whatever the merits of that claim it speaks to the uncomfortable fit between Plato's writings and modern liberal democracy. Plato's world was hierarchically arranged and nonegalitarian, while liberal democracies are deeply suspicious of hierarchies. Balancing the demands of public education and a democratic ethos against the American emphasis on freedom and individual conscience became a central problem for Mann.

Mann's approach combines this old classical way of thinking with a denuded Calvinist theology and



John Dewey (1859-1952)

a commitment to the promises of American democratic liberalism, this despite, or maybe because of, his concern about democratic excesses. Permanently stamped by Calvinism, Mann advocated for an education that in substance mirrored Max Weber's portrait of Franklin as the conduit for the virtues of a Protestant work ethic, and in form resulted in the common-school system we recognize today.

The future of American democracy required "comprehensive organization and...united effort, acting for a common end and under the focal light of a common intelligence." Mann viewed local governments as "bunglers" who couldn't move education to its goal of national progress. Parents also often made a hash out of their children's education, putting society's needs at the mercy of parental incompetence. Parents would have children for only a short period of time, but society had to deal with them for the long haul. Better, Mann believed, that society intervene early in the process rather than pay a steep price later. After all, "rulers have forgotten that, though a giant's arm cannot bend a tree of a century's growth, yet the finger of an infant could have given direction to its germ."

Nearly 40 years after Mann's death, John Dewey, in his "My Pedagogical Creed," expressed his belief

that "the teacher always is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God." Dewey averred that the central purpose of education was to adjust individual interest to "the social consciousness" whose theme was human progress. Granted, there are significant differences between Mann and Dewey, but the latter is clearly in the lineage of the former. Mann observed that the Lord's prayer wouldn't say "thy Kingdom come...on earth as it is in heaven" unless it contained the promise that it *could* be established here on earth, and compulsory, universal education was the key to the kingdom.

But Mann was writing in a different age. Living in what Walter McDougall called "the throes of democracy," Mann was more keenly attuned to democracy's excesses than was Dewey. Mann both captured and attempted to correct the excesses and the tumults of the age in his all-too-purple prose. The key to "taming the democratic beast" (Tocqueville) involved promoting the Union and emphasizing a system of education that, rather than indulging the interests of parents or sects, produced citizens not given over to the temptations of rampant individualism. A world that "quicken[s] the activity and enlarge[s] the sphere of the appetites and passions," Mann insisted, must also "establish the authority and extend the jurisdiction of reason and conscience. In a word, we must not add to the impulsive, without also adding to the regulating forces."

Mann's view of human nature maintained its Calvinist pessimism. Our propensity toward self-ishness overwhelms our sense of right. The "latent possibilities of evil" overwhelm us when left to their own devices. "The greatest ocean of vice and crime overleaps every embankment, pours down upon our heads, saps the foundations under our feet, and sweeps away the securities of social order, of property, liberty, and life." Like Tocqueville, Mann saw American individualism as devolving into egoistic self-interest that had "no affinity with reason and conscience," and the stakes of the divorce between passion and reason would be more than the "Protestant and Republican country" could bear.

Mann had traded his Calvinism for a largely secular faith in progress, accomplished by an ordered liberty, economic stimuli, and moral reform. On the policy end, "moral reform" meant the triumph of the temperance movement, of which Mann was an active advocate, and a Prussian-style system of education that would tame the savage animalism of human nature, which alone could "turn a wilderness into

cultivated fields, forests into ships, or quarries and clay-pits into villages and cities." All prior efforts to solve the problem of human sin and error had failed because they neglected "a solution so obvious" that it is as if it were "written in starry letters on an azure sky: Train up the child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

John Pinheiro in his Missionaries of Republicanism drew our attention to the ways in which anti-Catholicism drove the politics of 19th-century American politics, particularly after the early waves of Catholic immigration. Mann's suspicion—nay, hatred—of sectarian schools in general and Catholic schools in particular drove his development of the common-school system. Mann argued vigorously for a system that was compulsory, universal, and managed by a centralized bureaucracy under legislative direction. But the real key was that public education had to be nonsectarian, by which he meant above all "non-Catholic." Though not a thoroughgoing religious skeptic, Mann became "latitudinarian" in his political thinking, meaning that he was willing to build social life on a broad foundation of religious belief without establishing any one particular church.

His 1848 "Report of the Massachusetts School Board" demonstrated his ability to walk the line between religious establishment and established religion. Responding to criticisms that the state schools were thoroughly secularized, Mann reminded the board that the "consummation of blessedness" toward which public education aimed "can never be attained without religion."

Devoid of religious principles and religious affections, the race can never fall so low but that it may sink still lower; animated and sanctified by them, it can never rise so high but that it may ascend still higher.

With the influence of religion, men become "the most deformed and monstrous of all possible existences." But what kind of religion, and how will it be defined and administered? Like Locke in England and some American writers, Mann advocated for a minimalist theology built "upon the most broad and general grounds." This theology was generally Christian, but one can't mistake its Protestant overtones. Opposing "doctrinaire" castings of the faith, Mann's public theology emphasized the authority of the Christian scripture, Christ as a moral exemplar, and a Providential and Supreme Being who governs human affairs both through intervention and through the creation of a "divine law" that compels moral assent. Mann insisted that their system of education "earnestly inculcates all Christian morals" as revealed in "the religion of the Bible."





Mann distinguished between two approaches to the question of how "to secure the prevalence and permanence of religion among the people": one approach advocates for a government-sponsored established church, while the other holds that "religious belief is a matter of individual and parental concern" that government "exercises no authority to prescribe, or coercion to enforce" to the contrary. He clearly identified the former with the oppressive governments of Europe and the latter consistent with the liberty enshrined in the "solitary example" of America. The former results from the fallacious belief "that the faith of their authors was certainly and infallibly the true faith" while the latter emerges from a skepticism of the self and respect for the elusive nature of truth, which had to "struggle for centuries" and "bleed at every pore" and be "wounded in every vital part" before it could "triumph at last," but not until its martyrs had been sacrificed before "the throne of the civil Power" that fortified its beliefs "by prescription." What is true for us individually ought to be held vigorously as the standard for our life but can never become the standard for our neighbor.

So how did Mann square this disestablishment of any particular religion with his unabashed endorsement of a more general one? He claimed that morality could achieve no proper grounding without religious belief, thus public order itself was dependent on a general religion, while specific beliefs and practices were purely private. Taxpayer dollars could not be used to advance a particular sect, but they could be used "as a *preventive* means against



MANN'S RELIGIOUS
GROUNDING OF PUBLIC
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BE UNDERSTOOD AS A
NATIVIST RESPONSE TO
MIDCENTURY CATHOLIC
IMMIGRATION.



dishonesty, against fraud, and against violence." In short, the schools had to provide the kind of biblical instruction that, in the words of the Massachusetts law establishing the common schools, would impress upon the youth

the principles of piety, justice, and a sacred regard to truth, love of their country, humanity and universal benevolence, sobriety, industry, and frugality, chastity, moderation, and temperance, and those other virtues which are the ornament of human society, and the basis upon which a republican constitution is founded.

WHEN IS A RELIGION NOT A RELIGION?

Rigidly moralistic, Mann's religious grounding of public education could best be understood as a nativist response to midcentury Catholic immigration and the formation of parish schools. The law was dispositive because it was the state legislatures "who speak for the common heart in self-constituted assemblies" producing laws whose "reformatory power" provide "wise training for the young." This faith in democratic processes resides alongside but overwhelms his support of religious freedom.

If men decline to coöperate with us, because uninspired by our living faith, then the arguments, the labors, and the results, *which will create this faith*, are a preliminary step in our noble work [emphasis added].

It is difficult for us to get our minds around the implications of this teaching because our understanding of the Establishment Clause is shaped by court cases from *Everson* forward that emphasize the "high wall of separation" between church and state, and such cases at their inception involved conflicts between Catholic and public schools. In one of those moments of historical irony, the outcome was to make the public schools less Protestant and less religious, thus more secular, in order to protect those schools against the charge that they were in effect religious establishments.

Just as true religion does not allow you to judge others for not agreeing with you, so too should religious education enable a child to learn to judge for himself what religion is true. Even as one wouldn't



St. Thomas High School in Houston, Texas

teach the dictates of a particular political party to schoolchildren in hopes that they would vote for that party later in life but must teach politics broadly so that the child can choose a party for himself, so too one teaches religion in hopes that the child will learn how to choose religion. To support via tax dollars a school that one believes is teaching false doctrine, a citizen is "excluded from the school by the Divine Law" while at the same time "compelled to support it by human law," and "this is a double wrong." It is politically wrong because, forced to support the public schools financially but required by conscience to send his children to another school, the citizen must "thus pay two taxes." It is also religiously wrong because "Divine power" itself forbids the use of coercion to advance its purposes.

Mann thus balanced the American emphasis on religious freedom and freedom of conscience against the necessity of producing the sorts of virtuous citizens whose development required a religious foundation. Even while declaiming any kind of religious compulsion, Mann also noted that any school system "cannot be an irreligious, an anti-Christian, or an un-Christian one." But the disestablishment of any



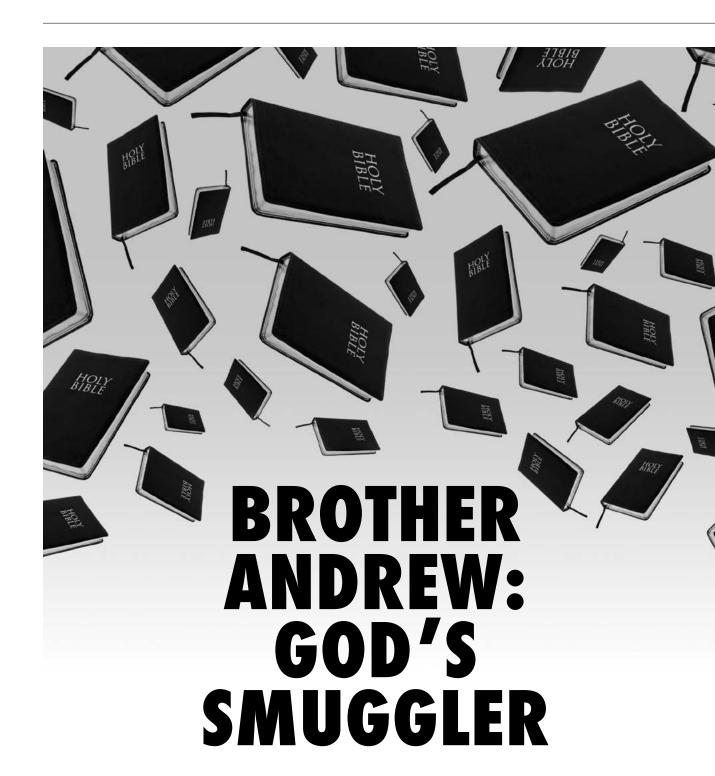
SUCH ZEALOUS REGARD FOR DISESTABLISHMENT BECAME FOR THE BELIEVERS IN PROGRESS THEIR OWN GRAVEDIGGER.

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particular faith soon became, in the hands of others, a disestablishment of all faith and, the principle having been conceded, the grounds for contestation were removed.

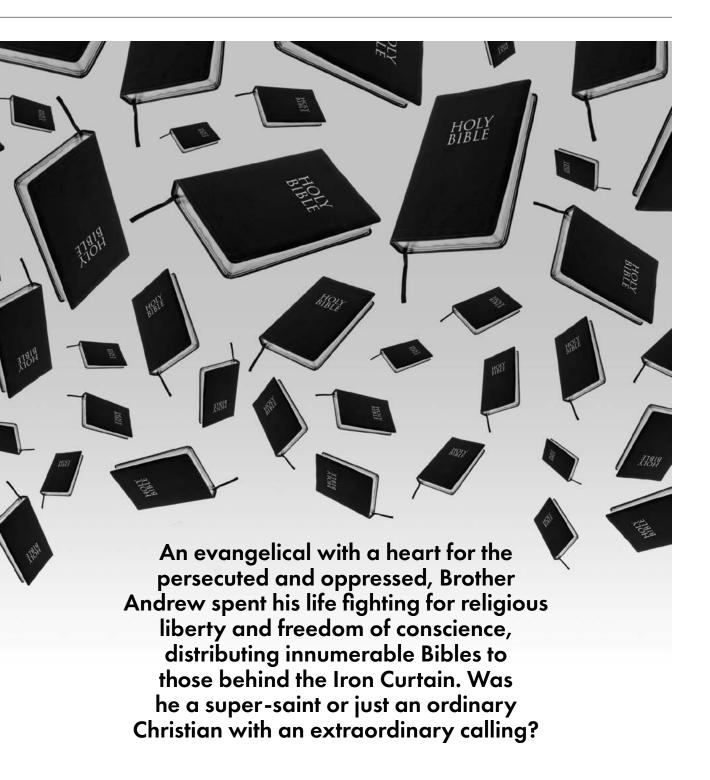
Such zealous regard for disestablishment became for the believers in progress their own gravedigger, repeating the error of Mann's optimism that broad religious establishment could withstand the acids produced by nonsectarian disestablishment. Mann took it as obvious that it would be absurd for schools to support a particular party or program or substitute some alternative religion for the Christian one. This is, arguably, exactly what has happened in our schools, and we find ourselves in the middle of a new kind of disestablishment whose legal battles and consequences and heated exchanges mirror those of the past. And it's no surprise that the adherents of the new faith share Mann's confident assumption that social life is impossible without its creeds and shaping of moral character. Neither is it a surprise that those who have an alternative faith want to opt out and not bear the burden of the "double tax" Mann so forcefully condemned. And just as the last battle of Protestant disestablishment took over 100 years to settle, it is likely that our current battle faces a similar time frame, if we have but the patience to work it out. RL

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by DOUG BANDOW







worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire" (1 Pet. 1:7).

A Dutch missionary named Anne van der Bijl, better known as Brother Andrew, was an evangelistic giant for the persecuted. He died in September of 2022, at age 94, but his life's work continues. Where others saw walls, prisons, guards, and resistance, Brother Andrew saw opportunity: "Our very mission is called 'Open Doors' because we believe that all doors are open, anytime and anywhere." He added that "I literally believe that every door is open to go in and proclaim Christ, as long as you are willing to go and are not worried about coming back."

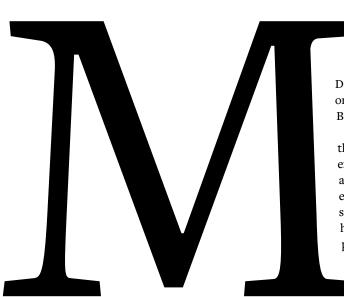
Of course, most people want to come back. Indeed, Brother Andrew seemed frustrated that so many believers seek safety and prosperity. Brother Andrew "was equally opinionated about the Western church;

our camp drew his sharp criticism. It was difficult for a man who would risk meeting with Pakistani extremists to understand how those completely free to be part of a church or read their Bibles would not do so," wrote David Curry, president of Open Doors USA, the organization founded by Brother Andrew to smuggle Bibles into communist Europe.

People being people shouldn't surprise us. But that truism makes Brother Andrew's life even more extraordinary. He saw the plight of the persecuted as a responsibility of all Christians. He emphasized that everyone was capable of helping those in need and sharply dismissed those who emphasized the risks he took: "Every place is dangerous," including "every place outside the will of God." Brother Andrew

urged Christians to follow those before them in being willing to sacrifice everything: "This is what I saw the Russian and the Chinese Christians do under communism: lay down their lives in the gulag, the re-education camps, the labor camps. That's why the Church won."

Nevertheless, God doesn't expect everyone to confront authoritarian states and foreign despots. Indeed, the majority of Open Doors' current employees live and work far from the sort of perils that characterized Brother Andrew's early ministry. He contended that he was "not an evangelical stuntman," but rather "an ordinary guy." He challenged the rest of us: "What I did, anyone can do." Nevertheless, near the end of his life he still wished he had done more. When queried if he had any regrets after decades of service, he responded that he "would be a lot more radical" if given another chance.



MODERN CHRISTIANS TYPICALLY VISUALIZE

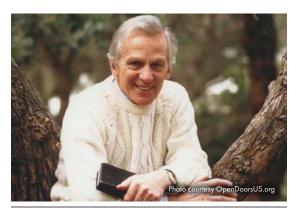
martyrs as historical figures, such as believers killed for entertainment in ancient Rome's Coliseum. However, Christians of all varieties continue to die for their faith to this very day. Many more face imprisonment and torture, subject to the brutal whims of others.

Most martyrs live heroically but anonymously, unknown to anyone outside their own family or community. Some are raised up in ministry and serve a wider population. A few become symbols of the persecuted church. The sort of faith that animates such people, wrote the Apostle Peter, is "of greater

Brother Andrew's life illustrated the Apostle Paul's famous quandary. So much more good work for him to do in this world, but so much new promise awaiting him in the next one. In an official statement from Open Doors upon Brother Andrew's death, his colleagues observed: "For more than 60 years, Open Doors' founder—Brother Andrew—visited over 125 countries in service to the global church. It's with mixed feelings that we share his greatest journey yet." They concluded that "God used Andrew's obedience and prayers to change millions of lives and eternities. We are grieving but we are equally thankful. Celebrate our brother's homecoming with us today." After all, on his last voyage as he passed from this world to the next, God was sure to welcome him with the injunction, "Come and share your master's happiness" (Matt. 25:23).

RESISTANCE BEGAN EARLY

Brother Andrew led an eventful life from childhood. Born in 1928, the son of a blacksmith and semi-invalided homemaker, he was a teenager during Nazi Germany's occupation of the Netherlands, his homeland. Food was scarce, forcing him and his five siblings to subsist as best they could, including on tulip bulbs.



Andrew van der Bijl (1928-2022)

He engaged in resistance activities, though their impact was marginal. As *The Economist* noted: "In the middle of the night the boy would creep down from the loft, steal his mother's precious rationed sugar and pour it into the German soldier's petrol tank." More seriously, he was forced to hide to avoid German labor conscription, showing him the reality of political totalitarianism.

After the Netherlands' liberation, he joined the military, helping to reclaim the Dutch East Indies, present-day Indonesia, which had been seized by Japan. The resulting dirty war affected him deeply,

Ancient Rome's Circus Maximus depicted in The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer by Jean-Léon Gérôme, 1883





Dutch recruiting poster for the Nazi Waffen-SS

wrote *Christianity Today*: "He was haunted, after, by the sight of a young mother and nursing boy killed by the same bullet. He started wearing a crazy straw hat into the jungle, hoping it would get him killed. Van der Bijl adopted the motto, 'Get smart—lose your mind.'"

His spiritual conversion began while being cared for by Christian nurses—one of whom he later married after they met again back in the Netherlands—while recovering from a gunshot wound. Through this process, he developed a strong love of the Bible, explained Curry:

Andrew *really* believed what all Christians are supposed to: that the Bible changes people. It was his passionate love of Scripture that had transformed him from an injured war veteran to a champion of the global church. Andrew believed, unquestionably, that if he could get anyone—an extremist, a lazy American worshipper, a nonprofit CEO like myself—to keep reading the Bible and wrestling with Scripture, that our heads would clear and our

hearts would chase what's right. Whatever wisdom and courage we needed would stir in us over time.

Brother Andrew's conversion was completed after attending a revival meeting back in the Netherlands. At the time, he was working in a factory, but his newfound faith gave him a new life, in which he felt called to share the Bible: "I promised God that as often as I could lay my hands on a Bible, I would bring it to these children of his behind the wall that men built," and he would do so "to every ... country where God opened the door long enough for me to slip through."

In 1953 he moved to Glasgow, Scotland, to enter the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade Training College. His studies ranged from systematic theology to auto mechanics. Eager to engage the world around him, Brother Andrew soon visited West Berlin.

The city was an oasis for people seeking to escape to the West. Indeed, it was the flight of so many younger and professional East Germans that caused the communist regime to later wall its people in. There Brother Andrew encountered the recent conflict's aftermath. According to *The Times*, Brother Andrew remembered "the flotsam and jetsam of the Second World War—the stateless, the homeless, the confused and the forgotten—lived in squalor alongside more recent refugees, those who had made a narrow escape as the Iron Curtain descended across Europe."

In the Soviet Empire, religious liberty shrank dramatically. Although persecution could be violent, hostile communist governments employed more subtle punishments as well: As reported by *The Economist*:

Brother Andrew did not track the number of Bibles smuggled because only God could be the perfect bookkeeper





Preserved part of the "iron curtain" in the Czech Republic

Religion, [Brother Andrew] learned, wasn't banned under communism; it had been co-opted by the state. In Czechoslovakia ministers had to renew their licenses every two months, and submit their sermons in advance for official approval. Where they could not beat God, the authorities tried to outshine His appeal. In East Germany they offered free "Welcoming Services" instead of baptism. Or wedding services that were legal and free of charge. Those who saw God as the higher authority were told they were misguided. Many lost their jobs and were imprisoned.

Brother Andrew's ministry effectively began on a trip to the 1955 World Youth Congress in Poland, which had been swallowed by the Soviet Union. The gathering was meant to showcase communism, but he carried religious tracts with him, distributing them to Polish citizens and Soviet soldiers alike. He also spoke to members of an underground Christian church.

He had prayed for God's guidance and found his mission. The following year he drove to Moscow, where he distributed Bibles and other religious literature. At the start it was him, a few friends, a small car, and faith. Indeed, he found it difficult to say no. When asked to take more Bibles along, recorded *The Economist*, he "wasn't so sure. Their car was already

weighed down. Then some other friends came with a whole carton of Ukrainian Bibles. 'Of course we'll take them,' his fellow smuggler said, stowing them openly on his lap. 'If we're going to be arrested for carrying in Bibles, we might as well be arrested for carrying in a lot of them."'

He recruited other Christians to help. After all, "we know there is no one-man show in God's family. The great task couldn't be accomplished by Brother Andrew alone," wrote *Eternity News* upon his death. "There must be many, many Brother Andrews—big ones, small ones—who unitedly take up the burden. Here we give our thanks to all the 'big' Andrews and 'small' Andrews." Like a well-trained military, they experimented, varying tactics, locations, vehicles, and companions. One couple posed as honeymooners.

OPENING BORDER DOORS

Looking back nearly seven decades, his efforts seem almost glamorous, like being a spy for God. However, smuggling was and remains a dangerous business, requiring that border guards, tasked with "protecting" their people from outside information, not see (or do anything if they do see) religious contraband. Brother Andrew offered a simple prayer: "Lord, when you were on earth, you made blind eyes see. Now, I pray, make seeing eyes blind."

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BROTHER ANDREW'S BATTERED BLUE VOLKSWAGEN BEETLE, A GIFT FROM A NEIGHBOR, BECAME A SYMBOL OF HIS MISSION.

"

His experience affirmed his godly call. According to a news report, on one trip he watched border guards search the cars before him for contraband. "Dear Lord,' Brother Andrew recalled praying, 'What am I going to do?' As he prayed, a bold thought came to Brother Andrew: I know that no amount of cleverness on my part can get me through this border search. Dare I ask for a miracle? Let me take some of the Bibles out and leave them in the open where they will be seen. Putting the Bibles out in the open would truly be depending on God, rather than his own intelligence." He was waved through the crossing.

Brother Andrew's battered blue Volkswagen Beetle, a gift from a neighbor, became a symbol of his mission. The Cold War raged, putting his life and, perhaps more important, mission at risk. On his first half dozen trips, he passed through borders unrecognized, his spiritual wares unnoticed. But he was arrested in Yugoslavia, though he was deported rather than imprisoned. After that he founded Open Doors to bring order to his mission.

Even then, his efforts remained modest and little known. But in 1967 he published his autobiography, *God's Smuggler*. In an age before instant celebrity and social media, Brother Andrew sold 10 million copies in 35 languages. His unexpected notoriety transformed Open Doors, greatly expanding its funding and reach. He wrote another 16 books, but *God's Smuggler* gave him another name, both vivid and descriptive. After the book's publication and his public recognition, he left smuggling to others.

His work was controversial, and groups including the American Bible Society, Baptist World Alliance, and Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board worried about the danger to those he helped. Yet his efforts are believed to have delivered more than a million Bibles to the "Evil Empire," as President Ronald Reagan labeled the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellite governments. A common joke was that if the Soviets had won the celebrated "space race" to the moon, they would have found Brother Andrew there, waiting with Bibles. He was characteristically modest, saying that he did not track the number of Bibles smuggled because only God could be the perfect bookkeeper.

However, there was much more to do. Brother Andrew discovered that his visits filled more than material needs. A Baptist pastor told him: "Even if you had not said a word, just seeing you would have meant so much. We feel at times as if we are all alone in our struggle." That encouraged Brother Andrew to think more broadly about his mission: "What persecuted Christians want is spiritual communion and companionship. They need to know they aren't alone in their struggle."

Even *The Economist*, a liberal-minded British publication, was taken with his role:

"You know, years ago I knew that people in the West were praying for us," a Romanian Christian once told him. "But now for many years we have not heard from them. We've never been able to write letters, and it's 13 years since we received one. It has come to us that we are forgotten, that nobody is thinking of us, nobody knows our need, nobody prays." As soon as he got home, he promised, he would tell so many people about the little Christian community in Romania (or Bulgaria, or Poland, or Russia—wherever he happened to be) that never again would they feel alone.

Survivors of religious persecution from 17 countries meet with President Trump, 2019



The more he worked the more he sought to do. Open Doors explained: "As our ministry expanded, other needs emerged. For example, in some countries pastors have little or no seminary training. We provide them with training so they can be more effective leaders of their congregations. In other regions Christians are discriminated against, denied education and quality job opportunities. So we may strengthen the church by providing small loans to help Christians start businesses. The needs and thus the strategies vary from country to country."

Today Open Doors is an international behemoth focused on the persecuted. The organization has 25 national offices and operates in 70 nations. It has greatly expanded the scope of Brother Andrew's original ministry. In 2021 Open Doors trained 3.4 million persecution victims in everything from leadership to trauma care, distributed 1.3 million Bibles and other religious materials (many written in minority languages), and provided nearly 700,000 people with emergency relief from both violence and natural disasters.

The organization also advocates on behalf of the persecuted. Of particular note is its research on persecution worldwide and publication of the annual World Watch list, which ranks the 50 worst persecutors of Christians. In the main, there are few surprises: persecution is concentrated in an almost continuous belt from North Africa through the Middle East and Central Asia ending in the Pacific. The 2023 list ranks North Korea first, followed by



'OBTAINED COPIES
OF THE KGB REPORTS
NUMBERING MORE
THAN 150 PAGES
ABOUT HIS WORK IN
THE SOVIET UNION AND
EASTERN EUROPE.'



Somalia, Yemen, Eritrea, and Libya. Other notables are Nigeria at 6, Pakistan at 7, Iran at 8, Afghanistan at 9, India at 11, Saudi Arabia at 13, China at 16, Cuba at 27, Mexico at 38, and Nicaragua at 50. The organization also produces detailed "dossiers" on the worst abusers.

Private advocacy for the persecuted has become more important as those who make and implement foreign policy increasingly treat religion as an embarrassment, an afront to their sensibilities and popular conceptions of modernity and morality. A commitment to human rights should naturally include support for religious liberty. Indeed, assaults on this most fundamental form of freedom of conscience represent the famed canary in a coal mine, warning of a flawed political order and inevitable violations of other fundamental rights.

A ONE-MAN (PEACEFUL) CRUSADE

Brother Andrew quickly learned that persecution comes in many forms. Some are brutal and simple—such as the murderous depredations of the Islamic State. Others are less violent but more sophisticated. As reported by St. James' by the Park, Brother Andrew saw

the subtle ways in which the communist authorities, instead of banning the Church, ground down its leaders and worshippers, ensuring that they were demoralized. Christian agitators lost their jobs for spurious reasons and were denied university places without explanation. State-sponsored official churches gave the impression of a freedom of faith while underground churches, where allegiance to the state did not go hand in hand with allegiance to faith, were persecuted.

The Soviet bloc remained Brother Andrew's focus throughout the Cold War. His Dutch passport gave him access to nations typically closed to Americans. He remained indefatigable, in 1968 visiting Czechoslovakia, in which the so-called Prague Spring had been crushed by the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact. He boldly handed Bibles to invading Soviet troops.

Perhaps the greatest honor bestowed upon him inadvertently came from the KGB, the ruthless defender of the Soviet state and all it stood for. As *The Times* reported, after the USSR's demise, Brother Andrew "obtained copies of the KGB reports

numbering more than 150 pages about his work in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. He was surprised that they had known so much about him, but had been unable to stop his work." The itinerant Dutchman had humbled the Evil Empire.

However, Brother Andrew did not limit himself to Europe. In 1965 he visited Maoist China. Per The Times obituary: "He found a more dispiriting atmosphere than anything he had seen in Eastern Europe-indifference and apathy. Instead of a persecuted Church, he found Bibles on sale but no one buying them, and seminaries with evidence that western missionaries had collaborated in espionage with their own embassies. He left the vast country, where countless western missionaries had proselytized less than a century earlier, a broken and disillusioned man." He later returned to a more open China and achieved greater success. Indeed, in 1981 a 20-man Open Doors team sailed along China's coast and floated a million Bibles and other materials into China. Unfortunately, the communist giant is returning to past levels of persecution.

He found Cuba much less restrictive, however; it helped for him to emphasize his Dutch citizenship, given the widespread view of America as the enemy. He also traveled to Uganda, then ruled by the mercurial but brutal Idi Amin, who put Brother Andrew on a death list.

The Middle East became a major concern once the Cold War ended. He first visited that region with a trip to Lebanon during its horrific civil war. Again, his geopolitical independence aided his efforts: "With Bibles in hand, he went to see the prime minister and the president, and most of the generals of the various armies engaged in the civil war," reported *The Times*. "He also had his first contact with Ayatollah Fadlallah, the spiritual inspiration for the fundamentalist group Hezbollah. Later, he made contact with Hamas, when their leaders were deported by Israel to southern Lebanon."

These activities might give some evangelicals pause, but he believed peacemaking to be another calling. Per *Eternity News*: "He took private meetings with leaders of several Islamic groups. He was one of the few Western public figures to regularly go to those groups as an ambassador for Christ." Indeed, in his 90s, Brother Andrew visited Pakistan to meet the leader of the Taliban to deliver his message from God.

He evidently preferred religious missions to military invasions. He sharply challenged Americans with his call to pray for Osama bin Laden. "I believe

everyone is reachable. People are never the enemy—only the devil," he was quoted as saying in *Christianity Today*. "Bin Laden was on my prayer list. I wanted to meet him. I wanted to tell him who is the real boss in the world." For the same reason, Brother Andrew expressed disappointment in the killing of Bin Laden.

He pressed Christians to respond to Islamist terrorism by engaging Muslims. He contended that "we are fearful because we stay home and prepare for the worst to come, because we think that's what they are planning. That may be true, but it's because of our inactivity. The moment we take the offensive and plan to go there, we lose our fear." Brother Andrew emphasized love even in dealing with terrorists. "When we have an enemy image of any political or religious group or nation," he insisted, "the love of God cannot reach us to call us to do something about it." He frequently turned the word *Islam* into an acronym for I Sincerely Love All Muslims.

He further emphasized the importance of Western Christians aiding their Middle Eastern brethren. Again, from *Christianity Today*:

The Christians there can do nothing unless we start doing something. They depend on us. We are one body in Christ. We are not reaching out to the Arab Christians or to the Palestinians, nor barely to the Messianic Jews, and we are certainly not reaching out to the other Jews with the gospel because they are already God's people, and they have no choice and we don't give them a choice. [Middle East Christians] have few resources in their own country, and we in the West have all the liturgy and all the wealth and all the insight and knowledge. This is our eternal shame. We ought to do something.

WHAT SHALL WE DO NOW?

Given the experience of the past two decades, Brother Andrew's views may seem naive, failing to recognize the depth of evil in this world he was trying to convert. Even some of his supporters doubted the effectiveness of his high-profile personal contacts. However, the outcome of U.S. government policies show the desperate need for a new approach, and Brother Andrew's willingness to reach out in a winsome way won support. Observed Jack Sara, Bethlehem Bible College president: "He had a soft heart for those in pain, the persecuted, and those usually considered on the other side, the enemy. He was willing to step

into a difficult place and talk with difficult people, but never compromise the message of the gospel."

Brother Andrew also perceived God's providence and purpose in persecution: "I don't pray that God will lift the persecution," he told the *Christian Post* in 2013, "because if there is persecution there is a plan that God has, otherwise God wouldn't allow it." He elaborated: "How do we pray? Not for God to remove persecution, but use that to purify the Church. And it is my strong belief that the countries where there is persecution are stronger in faith than churches in countries where there is no persecution."

While he was brave by choice, those he ministered to and served were brave by necessity: "He never ceased to be amazed by those he met," wrote *The Economist*. "The people in Macedonia who were too scared to come to church unless it was dark, but come they did. The people in Bulgaria who would arrive at intervals so that at no time did it appear as if a group was gathering. It took an hour for 12 of them to assemble."

Now he is gone and the rest of us must step up. As David Curry observed: "And now, we press on. Because in the words of Brother Andrew, 'there is more work to do." Indeed, this is Jesus' message to us today. The Great Commission continues to call: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

Jesus sent Brother Andrew to the communist and Muslim worlds. Jesus sends the rest of us to our neighbors, co-workers, friends, customers, and more. Brother Andrew was an exceptional "ordinary guy." So are the rest of us in our own ways. That may be the most important message to take from his exceptional life. Brother Andrew should inspire people today no



WHILE BROTHER ANDREW WAS BRAVE BY CHOICE, THOSE HE MINISTERED TO AND SERVED WERE BRAVE BY NECESSITY.



less than in the past. We are to be like him, but not necessarily in action. Rather, we should model him in spirit, to be a "good and faithful servant" and to trust and follow God. RL

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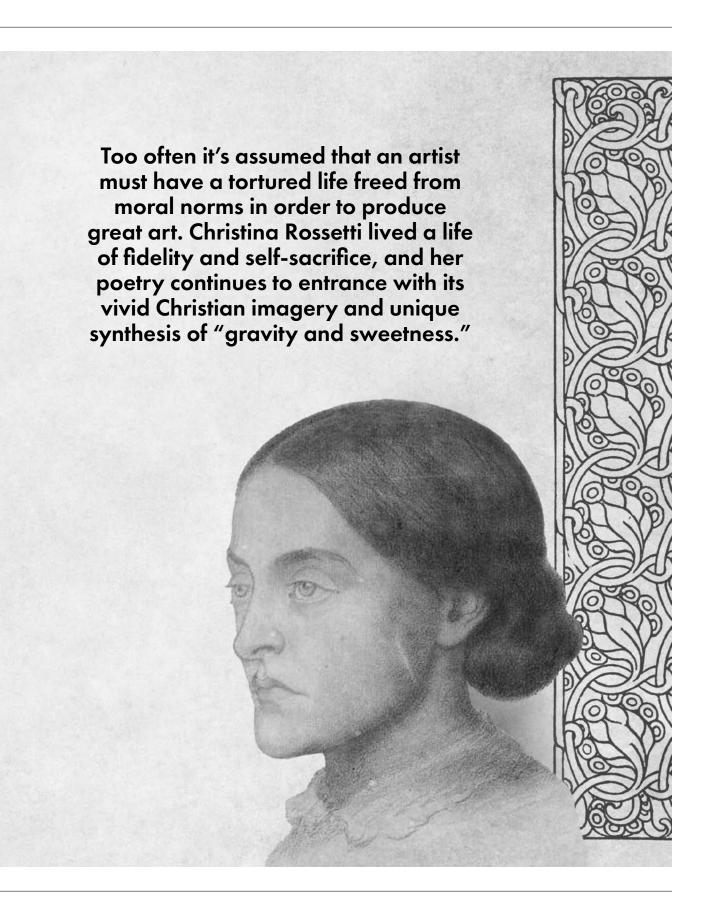
The Times, Sept. 29, 2022, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/brother-andrew-obituary-cgch66dhm World, Oct. 11, 2022, https://wng.org/opinions/on-brother-andrew-gods-smuggler-1665490215

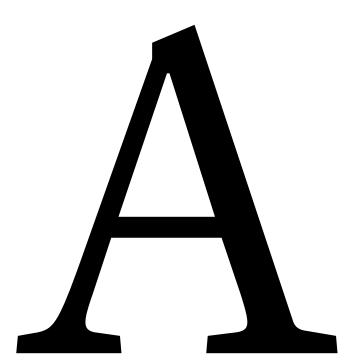
Vatican News, Sept, 29, 2022, by Stefan J. Bob, with additional reporting by Johan Th. Bob in the Netherlands, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2022-09/open-doors-founder-brother-andrew-dead-at-94.html



CHRISTINA ROSSETTI: AWOMAN FOR ALL SEASONS

by TESSA CARMAN







The Light of the World by William Holman Hunt

AS THE PRE-RAPHAELITE PAINTER William Holman Hunt was working on *The Light of the World* (1851–1854), his portrayal of Jesus knocking on a vine-covered door, he found perhaps an unlikely model for the face of Christ: Christina Rossetti, the sister of his fellow Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel. Hunt admired her "gravity and sweetness of expression," and thus thought this young woman perfect to convey the Savior's gentle persistence on the door of the human heart. Indeed, "gravity and sweetness" would mark Christina Rossetti's own faith, as well as her poetry.

Rossetti's poems entrance by their vibrant imagery, depth of feeling, and fine craftsmanship. Her

sonnets are as moving in their melancholic love as Elizabeth Barrett Browning's in their ecstatic fulfilled love. She was skilled at dramatic verse, inhabiting different speakers, while also penning personal, powerfully intimate, spiritual poems: *Goblin Market*, "Up-hill," "Song" ("When I am dead, my dearest"), "A Birthday," "A Better Resurrection," and many beloved sonnets such as "Remember me when I am gone away," "I lov'd you first: but afterwards your love," and "Many in aftertimes will say of you." Several of her Christmas carols have entered English hymnody, most famously "In the Bleak Midwinter" but also "Love Came Down at Christmas."

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ROSSETTI'S POEMS ENTRANCE BY THEIR VIBRANT IMAGERY, DEPTH OF FEELING, AND FINE CRAFTSMANSHIP.

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While the poet lived what appeared to be a retired life of writing poetry and letters to friends and family, she was born in the midst of the tectonic shifts and debates and personalities of England's Victorian Age. Rev. John Keble's Assize sermon "National Apostasy" on July 14, 1833, sparked the flame that became the Oxford Movement. Charles Darwin's Origin of Species would enter the world stage in 1859. The industrial age was well underway, as were its critics: Charles Dickens was writing his greatest works, and the great William Wordsworth passed away in 1850, when Rossetti was 20 years old. Elizabeth Barrett Browning published Sonnets from the Portuguese that same year. Emily Dickinson and the Brontë sisters were contemporaries, and it was the age of Edward Lear, Robert Louis Stevenson, and John Ruskin. Her life roughly spanned the reign of Queen Victoria, crowned when Rossetti was seven years old; the queen would live only seven years beyond the year of Rossetti's own death in 1894 at age 64. She became a well-beloved poet, and when Tennyson died in 1892, there were whisperings that she ought to be the nation's new poet laureate (much to her chagrin; her friend Ford Madox Ford commented that "the idea of such a position of eminence filled her with real horror").

Rossetti's reputation as a poet has only grown since her lifetime; she is now regarded as one of the greatest of Victorian England's poets. Her life and work were certainly shaped by her experience as a woman in the Victorian Age, and feminist criticism has enjoyed speculating on her love affairs (she turned down two proposals of marriage) and searching for subversive qualities in her art. But underlying Rossetti's life and work is a deeper and underappreciated subversion: her deep love of the Scriptures, her Anglo-Catholic faith, and, above all, her love affair with Christ.

AMONG THE EXILES

On December 5, 1830, Christina Georgina Rossetti was born in London to Gabriele Rossetti, a lapsed Roman Catholic and Dante scholar in exile from Italy, and the half-Italian, half-English governess Frances Polidori Rossetti. Rossetti and her elder siblings-Maria Francesca, William Michael, and Gabriel Dante-were educated at home by their mother; they were immersed in the Bible and literature, as well as the Italian language. Their home became a haven for Italian expatriates, the wars for unification driving them from their homeland. She grew up reading the Romantics, as well as such tales as The Arabian Nights. Later she would also become familiar with Augustine's Confessions and Thomas à Kempis' Imitation of Christ and study Plato, Dante, Aquinas, George Herbert, and William Blake, as well as contemporary theologians John Keble, John Henry Newman, Isaac Williams, and Edward Pusey.

Childhood visits to her maternal grandfather's house outside the city would also play a formative role for the budding poet: "If any one thing schooled me in the direction of poetry," she wrote in a letter to the poet and critic Edmund Gosse in 1884, "it was perhaps the delightful idle liberty to prowl all alone about my grandfather's cottage-grounds some thirty miles from London." Throughout her life she would maintain friendships with a diverse array of

Christina Rossetti, portrait by her brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti





The Rossetti family, photographed by Lewis Carroll in 1863

writers and artists—such as the atheist poet Algernon Charles Swinburne, Lewis Carroll, the adventurous William Holman Hunt, the pious Coventry Patmore and his wife, the novelist Hall Caine, painter and illustrator Arthur Hughes, and the families of William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones—but also with the unnamed neighbors and fellow parishioners at her church. Charles Cayley, a translator of Dante's Commedia and a family friend, also became a dear and intimate friend. Though she turned down his proposal of marriage because of his agnostic faith (many of her love sonnets, those written in English and those in Italian, were most likely written with him in mind), they remained close friends until his death.

THE OXFORD MOVEMENT

Mrs. Rossetti and her two sisters, devout evangelical Anglicans, became committed Anglo-Catholics when the Oxford Movement came to London. One of the movement's most prominent preachers, William Dodsworth, was vicar of the Rossettis' parish church, Christ Church, Albany Street, St. Pancras, until 1851. This "Catholic revival" was a phenomenon that covered more than a return to ritual. Rather, it was a spiritual revival indeed; John Henry Newman marked its beginning with the aforementioned Rev. Keble's

"National Apostasy" sermon in 1833. (Newman would publish the first of the movement's 90 Tracts for the Times later that same year.) Keble excoriated his fellow Englishmen for spiritual lukewarmness and religious indifference. He called for a spiritual and moral awakening, and it was in this context that the Tractarians took on a project of renewal through ressourcement: They sought not only to preserve "the apostolical succession and the integrity of the Prayer Book" that bound together the Church of England's spiritual life but also to recover some of the richness of the church that had been swept away during and after the Protestant Reformation. These years saw a renewed emphasis on everyday holy living, the founding of Anglican religious orders for men and women, and the publication of 48 volumes of translations from the Church Fathers, the Library of the Fathers, as well as the volume Hymns Ancient and Modern.

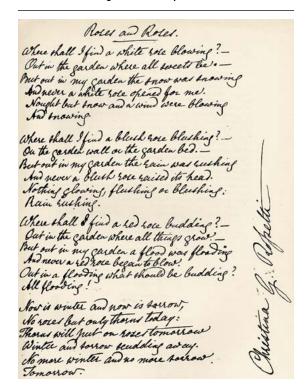
Rossetti and her sister, Maria, joined their mother and aunts wholeheartedly in the Catholic revival. In fact, Maria would join one of the Anglican sisterhoods in London in 1874. Rossetti regularly went to confession, took communion twice a week, faithfully attended church services, observed morning and evening prayer, and with the ladies of the household took part in charitable work, such as making scrapbooks

for children in the hospital. And though Rossetti herself did not become a religious sister like Maria, for 10 years she volunteered at St. Mary Magdalene Home on Highgate Hill, where "fallen women"—that is, former prostitutes, abandoned wives, or unwed mothers—could receive help and shelter. (She would advocate raising the age of consent after her experiences at Highgate.) She also would spend time at hospitals associated with Maria's All Saints Sisterhood. And always she tended to her mother, whom she held in the highest regard and deepest affection. As she would write in a sonnet when her mother turned 80:

To my first Love, my Mother, on whose knee I learnt love lore that is not troublesome: Whose service is my special dignity, And she my lode star while I go and come.

The Church of England remained Rossetti's mother church. Though Newman and others, such as the Rossettis' former pastor William Dodsworth, would ultimately join the Roman Catholic Church, Rossetti herself never seemed tempted by the Tiber. (She twice turned away the painter and former Pre-Raphaelite James Collinson because of his

Handwritten and signed manuscript of "Roses and Roses"





ANGLO-CATHOLICISM SOUGHT TO BALANCE THE PICTURE BY EMPHASIZING THE REALITY OF MYSTERY, SYMBOL, AND SACRAMENTALITY—INDEED, THE POETRY OF CHRISTIANITY.

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conversion Rome-wards, though some speculate the rejection was due more to his lackluster personality.) She was content to remain in the church of her youth, while also recognizing the brotherhood of those in the Roman communion. Her brother William wrote that "she considered them to be living branches of the True Vine, authentic members of the Church of Christ." Indeed, when Cardinal Newman passed away, she honored him with a sonnet:

O weary Champion of the Cross, lie still: Sleep thou at length the all-embracing sleep: Long was thy sowing day, rest now and reap: Thy fast was long, feast now thy spirit's fill. Yea, take thy fill of love, because thy will Chose love not in the shallows but the deep.

THE POETRY OF FAITH

In a time of sometimes over-rational defenses of the Christian faith, Anglo-Catholicism sought to balance the picture by emphasizing the reality of mystery, symbol, and sacramentality—indeed, the poetry of Christianity. The Tractarians saw creation as pointing toward the glory of God; everything in creation was weighted with the reality that Christ had loved the world into existence. As Rossetti scholar Emma Mason has put it, Rossetti and the Tractarians agreed

with the Church Fathers that "every detail carried in it the mark or stamp of God, each stone, ant, bee, and mosquito revealing his wisdom and collectively inviting the onlooker into faith." The natural world, too, provided a way to "see" the unseen by way of analogy, in which "material phenomena are both the types and the instruments of real things unseen." Newman himself, in his classic *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, argued that Christians have a "duty" to have a "poetical view of things"; the poet then can provide a space for contemplation of the divine through attention to the natural world.

In an essay entitled "Sacred Poetry," Rev. Keble, himself the chair of poetry at Oxford and author of a collection of verse on the Christian liturgical year, enjoined the religious poet to follow the example of plain chant: to avoid extravagant imagery in favor of "grave simple, sustained melodies," "fervent, yet sober; aweful, but engaging; neither wild and passionate, nor light and airy," yet filled with "noble simplicity and confidence" in God's truth. Indeed, this captures much of the spirit of Rossetti's poetry: there is a disarming simplicity and sincerity in her poems, as well as a keen awareness of the symbols inherent in the everyday. In his Lectures on Poetry, Keble noted that while "Poetry lends Religion her wealth of symbols," religion "restores these again to Poetry, clothed with so splendid a radiance that they appear to be no longer merely symbols, but to partake (I might almost say) of the nature of sacraments"—that is, poetry enables one to see "sacramental symbols,"

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's The Girlhood of the Virgin Mary, with Christina modeling Mary, 1849



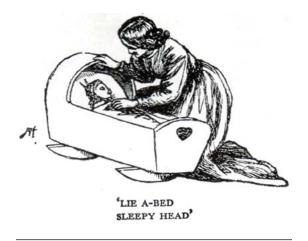


Illustration by Arthur Hughes from Rossetti's Sing-Song (1893)

everywhere, just "as the first Christians saw around them at all times and in all places."

In this way the Catholic Revival paralleled the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (P.R.B.), the artistic compact Rossetti's brother Dante Gabriel spearheaded and that sought to achieve a kind of secular sacramentality, a reaction to an industrial, disenchanting age. Though not a Pre-Raphaelite herself, Rossetti became associated with the movement through her brother. She served as a model for the Virgin Mary in Dante Gabriel's paintings *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848–49) and his painting of the Annunciation, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (1849–50). Some of her earliest and most well-beloved poems were first published in *The Germ*, the P.R.B.'s short-lived literary and artistic periodical.

Rossetti's poetry was not "issue-based"; her nursery rhymes, however, were more didactic, as befitting children's verse. Her collection *Sing-Song* includes rhymes about country and household, but also about loving one's neighbor (including the creatures of the natural world) and verse on heavier subjects such as the death of birds and babies, all with a sensitive eye toward the child's world.

Given her respect for God's image in humankind and in the goodness of creation, certain causes she espoused nevertheless made their way into her poetry: she contributed a short piece of verse whose topic was kindness to animals, and which benefited the Anti-Vivisectionist Society. Another poem, "The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children," may have been prompted by her experience at Highgate: the speaker, an illegitimately conceived daughter, reproaches the father who abandoned her and forced her mother to live a lie:

Why did he set his snare
To catch at unaware
My Mother's foolish youth;
Load me with shame that's hers,
And her with something worse,
A lifelong lie for truth?

In "A Royal Princess," the princess of the title comes to recognize that she owes her comfortable position to the exploitation of others: "Once it came into my heart and whelmed me like a flood, / That these too are men and women, human flesh and blood."

The Bible was intimately tied with the book of nature in her art: as the critic Dinah Roe notes, "It could be said that Rossetti's poetry is in fact constituted by exegesis. She refers to the Bible, either by quotation or allusion, in nearly every poem." Historian Timothy Larsen has highlighted her rigorous defense of truth and her challenge to comfortable Christianity in her devotional work and scriptural commentary, observing that she "pronounces all bad theology as a violation of the command not to take the Lord's name in vain." Hers was no milquetoast faith.

Rossetti possessed what G.K. Chesterton called "the old humility": She was "undoubting about the truth," firm in her faith in Christ and His Church, but doubtful of herself. Her poetry, letters, and devotional writing evince a consistent call to self-examination, to continual conversion of heart. *Memento mori* is a key theme of her poetry. She was keenly aware of the reality of a final accounting and that what we do in this life will matter for the next.

One of her stanzas from her poem "The Lowest Place" is inscribed at her burial place in Highgate Cemetery:

Give me the lowest place: or if for me That lowest place too high, make one more low Where I may sit and see My God and love Thee so.

THE CALL TO OBEDIENCE

The sensuousness of her imagery—particularly in the celebrated narrative poem *Goblin Market*—and the pathos of her sonnets continue to make Rossetti popular, but less enchanting to the modern mind is the unmistakable aroma of piety and duty in her work. This is a poet who felt the tension of the intoxicating fruits of the world and the call to obedience to Jesus Christ. Compared with her

oft-intemperately passionate brother Dante Gabriel, Christina can seem like a stick-in-the-mud on a first, shallow glance. And, indeed, Christina wrote during a time when Romanticism was ascendant: the Age of Johnson, an era that emphasized reason, balance, and order in art, was over. This was an era of the elevation of "passion" as not something that one experiences (or suffers) but as nearly itself a virtue: To be "carried away" by one's feelings, or passions, was a good thing. Indeed, it is a hard thing indeed to dramatize the actual battle that transpires in a soul that is striving for mastery of one's emotions; it is harder by far to master great passion than to be carried away by it, but the latter is what excites, well, our passions. It is more exciting to read of the wife who gallops away on the instant with her lover than the Anne Eliots or the nurse or nun-or poet-who spends years tending to sick children and neighbors. Perhaps the genius of Christina Rossetti's work is that it dramatizes the journey of the soul that strives to do good and to love neighbor and God well.

For example, the use of the word *sweet* in her work illuminates the tension and paradox of the affirmative and the negative way: loving the world and yet rejecting it for the sake of Christ; savoring the short-lived sweet things of this life and the longing for the undying sweetness of eternity.

Frontispiece for Goblin Market and Other Poems





Lizzie and her sister Laura, in Goblin Market

Lizzie's sacrificial love for her sister Laura in *Goblin Market*, a sweeter fruit by far than any of the luscious goblin fruit that finally brings death, becomes an image of the new life brought from death, reflected in the springtime but also imaged in the love of Christ: a real and powerful reality across Rossetti's poems.

Sinister goblin men are not the only ones who offer sweets in Rossetti's poems. In "I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes Unto the Hills," the speaker longs for the "sunshine" of "the everlasting hills," in the midst of the weariness of this world:

I am pale with sick desire, For my heart is far away From this world's fitful fire And this world's waning day ...

Each stanza begins with a lament that is then answered by the Saints:

In a dream it overleaps
A world of tedious ills
To where the sunshine sleeps
On the everlasting hills.—
Say the Saints: There Angels ease us
Glorified and white.
They say: We rest in Jesus,
Where is not day or night.

In the final stanza, Jesus, too, speaks—and He is the one who offers sweets.

Say the Saints: His pleasures please us Before God and the Lamb. Come and taste My sweets, saith Jesus: Be with Me where I am.

Here the offer of sweets is an invitation and a gift rather than an advertisement for merchandise. And in "the heavenly day," nothing can rot or spoil, unlike the sweets—the flowers, the fruits, the friendships of earthly life. Whereas, in "Paradise," the fruit of the Tree of Life is "Sweeter than honey to the taste, / And balm indeed."

"Advent," a poem that makes use of the parable of the seven virgins waiting with their lamps for the Messiah, compares the sweetness of Christ with honey. The waiting souls on earth discuss:

"Friends watch us who have touched the goal."
"They urge us, come up higher."
"With them shall rest our waysore feet,
With them is built our home,
With Christ." "They sweet, but He most sweet,
Sweeter than honeycomb."

Here the sweetness of reprised friendship is anticipated in the heavenly realm: Christ is the home wherein even the friends will be reunited, but Christ himself is "most sweet."

But in the meantime, the earthly life, though it does contain sweet summer weather and the "sweetest blossoms die" ("Sweet Death"), is full of toil, an uphill climb. And yet to know that good things wait, though "long deferred," and rest that we cannot conceive is "comfort [to the] travel-sore and weak" ("Up-Hill").

But in *Goblin Market*, the sweets of the goblin men are not simply harmless, evanescent pleasures. They are rather akin to the wooings of "The World":

By day she wooes me to the outer air, Ripe fruits, sweet flowers, and full satiety: But through the night, a beast she grins at me, A very monster void of love and prayer.

"The Love of Christ Which Passeth Knowledge" builds and extends the image of Christ as "most sweet," to the love that he bears for lost souls, just as Lizzie herself is sweeter than honey to Laura, partly because Lizzie loves her. It is not knowledge but love that finally saves Laura.

In the beginning of the poem, Christ speaks of his longsuffering love:

I bore with thee long weary days and nights, Through many pangs of heart, through many tears;

I bore with thee, thy hardness, coldness, slights, For three and thirty years.

Who else had dared for thee what I have dared?
I plunged the depth most deep from bliss above;
I not My flesh, I not My spirit spared:
Give thou Me love for love.

In the third stanza of "The Love of Christ," He calls the souls, "Much sweeter thou than honey to My mouth." The image of the sweet-as-honey loved one is turned back upon the human being.

This is how Rossetti sees the tension of this life finally resolved: the sweets of this life—fruit, honey, friends—are foretastes of the sweet love of Christ that is greater by far than both wintertime and evil goblin fruits. Indeed, our loves in this life are made sweeter, rather than spoiled, when they are experienced in light of the ultimate Love.

Piety, then, is rooted in love and hence rendered a sweet duty, while at the same time a painful trial, because of the rightful longing we experience for complete and perfect rest, and true and lasting communion.

WINTER TO SPRING

In 1872, *Scribner's Monthly* published Rossetti's "A Christmas Carol"—more commonly known today by its first line, "In the bleak mid-winter" (accompanied by either Gustav Holst's 1909 musical setting or Harold Darke's of 1911). Music continues to be written for her poems to this day.

A few years later, the Irish writer Katharine Tynan Hinkson visited the esteemed poet at her home in Torrington Square and found, to her surprise, not a saint in "trailing robes of soft, beautifully coloured



ROSSETTI'S PIETY
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material," but rather a middle-aged spinster "wearing short serviceable skirts of an iron grey tweed and stout boots." But the poet herself was hardly as dour as her garment: "I wrote such melancholy things when I was young," she told Hinkson, "that I am obliged to be unusually cheerful, not to say robust, in my old age."

Like Mary in "bleak mid-winter," celebrating new life in the "stable-place" where for the "Lord God Almighty," a "breastful of milk / And a mangerful of hay" is enough, Rossetti found great sweetness amid her quiet life. She was still writing poetry regularly and would publish a 500-page meditation on St. John's Apocalypse, *The Face of the Deep*, while tending to her mother and two aunts. Though she traveled little and spent much of her life in garden-less London houses, she noticed and praised even the smallest of creatures, including a sea mouse given her by her friend Charles Cayley and her pet cats Muff and Carrots.

When her brother William's baby son Michael was at death's door, Rossetti asked to be allowed to baptize him. William consented, and "she performed the rite unwitnessed, and I doubt whether any act of her life yielded her more heartfelt satisfaction." Such an act bespeaks her love and attention toward the least of these. She knew the beauty of this life, but she also knew that it paled in comparison to the beauty of Christ, Love Himself.

When she lay dying of breast cancer, her priest visited her once a week to administer the Eucharist. She was still moving her lips in prayer moments before passing into eternal springtime.

Rossetti's piety would scandalize later critics and writers, who viewed her faith as morbid, even repulsive. And yet, with cheerful vigor, wit, and determination, Rossetti evinced true joy in her life, not in spite of but because of the beauty of Christ and the reflection of that beauty in creation, and in every human being, no matter how marginal or vulnerable.

Christina Rossetti is a rare poet: the strength of her quiet faith, her self-sacrificial love, and her keen spiritual perception invigorate her art. As in the best of the Anglo-Catholic tradition, goodness and truth meet in her life and work. She demonstrates that a life of ordered, faithful loves, undergirded by the conviction that every human soul is made for beauty, is no stranger to making great art.

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IN THE LIBERAL TRADITION

Paul Johnson: A Modern Victorian

by SEBASTIAN MILBANK

ON THE 12TH OF JANUARY this year, British journalist and writer Paul Johnson died at the age of 94. Setting to the job of writing about him, it quickly started to seem as if 94 years were far too few to fit in everything he is reported to have said, done, and written. Wikipedia ominously offered up a "partial bibliography," which includes dozens of books on every imaginable subject (including a 1,000-page history of the modern world).

But who needs a 1,000-page history of the modern world when you can just follow the biography of Paul Johnson? Like some kind of very high IQ Forrest Gump, he keeps popping up in the history books, in a series of confusingly varied roles. There he goes storming along the streets of the Midlands potteries; somewhere over the horizon stands a brilliant *New Statesman* editor, lecturing his colleagues; off goes

a young officer to Gibraltar, confronting the evils of Franco; here he is meeting an admiring Richard Nixon; now advising Princess Diana—who is this man? Can it possibly *be* the same man?

The temptation, like a bad sportswriter falling back on calling soccer a "game of two halves," is to chop his life into two acts. First, we have Paul Johnson the leftie, beloved in Latin America, compared to Eric Hobsbawm, crusading anti-establishment journalist, friend of Aneurin Bevan and enthusiastic Keynesian. Then follows his alienation from the increasingly militant Labour movement, his departure from the *New Statesman*, and embrace of Thatcher and Reagan. Johnson the "reactionary" is born, railing against modern relativism, a doughty Cold Warrior, defender of Pinochet and Jonathan Aitken, and conservative Catholic foe of liberation theology.

It's certainly a more satisfying and digestible story, but sometimes complexity and contradiction better capture human nature than more straightforward storytelling. For Johnson the conservative was much in evidence decades before his supposed '70s conversion—in 1964 you'll find him sneering at the "glazed eyes" of Beatles fans and denouncing Ian Fleming's Bond series as "schoolboy sex fantasies." And well after the great shift rightward, he could be discovered throwing his support behind Tony Blair!

he scope and variety of his achievements and interests invites comparisons to one of those grand old Victorians like Gladstone or Disraeli, and perhaps the most Victorian aspect of his character, as reported by his son Daniel, was that he "rebelled violently against eminent Victorians and anything that smacked of restoration and reaction." Behind the apparent ideological swerves was an extremely consistent liberalism in the classical sense, a love of freedom and a skepticism

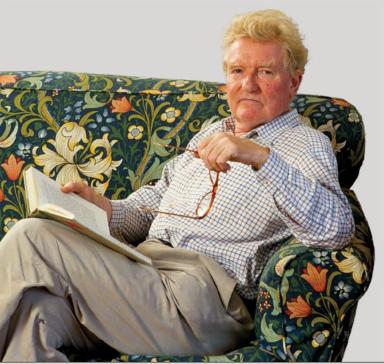


Photo by Homer Sykes / Alamy Stock Photo

toward social engineering, whether justified in terms of romantic reaction or utopian socialism.

Here was a man who believed in progress as an artifact of individual human effort, genius, and character, a thing that could be lost more easily than it was won. His political allegiances seem confusing from the perspective of abstract political idealism but make a great deal of sense at a human level. Paul met politicians he liked, whom he saw something in, whom he resonated with, with whom he formed friendships, and endorsed their political projects on this basis. It was a habit that infuriated more ideological commentators but one that spoke to his own convictions, rather than a lack thereof. He denounced popular music (to the horror of left-wing commentators) because he didn't want to see a "generation enslaved by a commercial machine" and believed in the vital role of the young as "the real leaders and creators of society tomorrow." He cheered on the French students in '68 (to the horror of right-wing commentators) because he respected young people willing to risk their lives to confront "the incompetence and complacency of all traditional political forces."

Reading the aforementioned 1,000-page book—*The Birth of the Modern: World Society* 1815–1830—you're immediately struck by its unabashed humanism. This is the sort of writing often dismissed as the "Great Man Theory of History." Rather than treating human societies as masses driven by impersonal forces, we're introduced to strong characters shaped by individual circumstance and providence. The book begins with an account of Andrew Jackson's victory over an invading British force in 1812, crediting him with shaping world history forever.

Taking a leaf from his book, we might read Johnson himself as a participant in a decisive battle, one whose outcome, for good or ill, was determined by strong, flawed characters, not blind material forces. He backed Labour's Barbara Castle against the union militancy that had ground British society to a halt, and when the battle was lost on the left, he took the side of Thatcher. Here, too, a certain Victorian spirit seems to shine through; a casualness about ideology, a fear of the capacity of civilization to fall into stasis and decay, and a pragmatic determination to keep society moving forward.

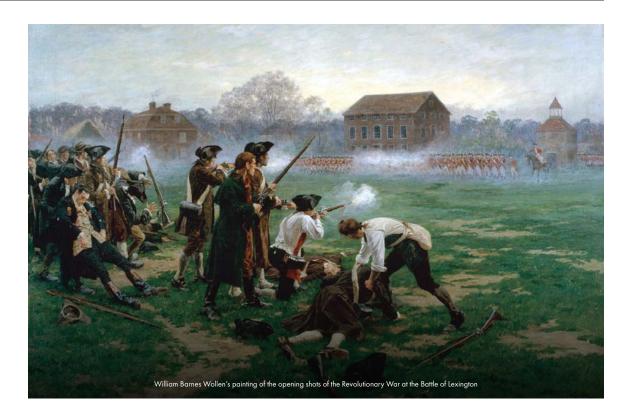
oday Britain finds itself in perhaps a still more serious crisis, caught between an increasingly dysfunctional state and a rapacious global market. The former is rocked by public sector

strikes, a collapsing state monopoly on healthcare, a justice and policing system plagued by delay and under-resourcing such that criminals go free and crime unpunished, and a welfare state that seems to grow even as critical infrastructure is left unbuilt. The latter is evident in the jobs lost to aggressive global rivals like China; the corruption of a banking system that regularly funnels the money of dictators, oligarchs, and terrorists through the City of London; and the mass movement of cheap foreign labor into Britain at the behest of British companies in a race to the bottom that has seen British productivity stagnate for over a decade.

It's a grim situation that cries out for intelligent responses—and strong leadership. Liberalism has become, not without some justice, a soiled brand in the context of these failures. The relentless push toward individualism and consumption, the denigration of traditions, the growing mistrust of shared institutions, and the failure of markets to deliver growth and prosperity for the many are all features of liberalism's present crisis. Simply insisting that we go back to a prior liberal order or trusting in the impersonal forces of technological progress to rescue us are backward-looking counsels of inaction and despair. Against such follies, Paul Johnson's life stands as a still lively and inspiring challenge, and a call for individual creativity and courage.

One would look with despair for a single programmatic ideology in his writings and ideas. But you discover something refreshing and vital if you look instead for the human factor. Paul Johnson was most of all a Catholic, one in the mold of Lord Acton, with the ability to engage equally both fellow Catholics and Protestant Englishmen. The product of a Jesuit education that he much preferred to his time in Oxford, we find in his works a love of ordered liberty married to a fierce nonconformism, a Newman-like sense of conscience and individual reason as something sacred and inviolable. The state of modern Britain reflects as much a human failure as an ideological one, and perhaps the most damning thing you could say about it is that Paul Johnson's career would be impossible today. We have become censorious, prim, and puritanical, but at the same time unserious, cynical, and mocking. We've never needed writers like Johnson more, and we've never deserved them less. RIA

Sebastian Milbank is executive editor of The Critic.



Patrick Deneen's Otherworldly Regime

Another attempt by a New Right thinker to lay out all that went wrong with the American experiment proves to be little more than daft history wedded to worse philosophy.

by JONAH GOLDBERG

IT IS A COMMON HABIT of progressives to denounce various aspects of American history as racist, sexist, or in some other way bigoted. The U.S. Constitution, we are often reminded, had a "three-fifths clause" that counted blacks as less than whites—for purposes of congressional representation. The clause, rightly, is denounced as a stain on our founding charter. The missing context, however, is that it was the abolitionists who did not want blacks to be counted at all, while the slaveholders wanted them to be counted in full, so as to give the slaveholding South more political representation and power. The progressive historian Charles Beard launched a new front, arguing that the Constitution was drafted to protect the wealth and property of the people who wrote it. It wasn't until the 1950s that Forrest McDonald and others debunked Beard's shoddy and polemical history. Another oft-heard gripe is that the franchise wasn't granted to everyone overnight. Women couldn't vote for a century or more, and non-property holding men had to wait a while as well, though not as long.

My standard response to such progressive indictments is that, yes, these things look bad *when measured against the yardstick of the present*. But you're using the yardstick wrong. The correct comparison is between the Founding and what came *before* it. Prior to the Founding, there was no democracy and precious little in the way of inalienable rights for anyone but nobles and monarchs.

In short, the American Revolution launched a new chapter in human history, and while those drunk on the fierce arrogance of Now may condemn it for not fully implementing its ideals in every particular all at once, those alive at the time saw it for what it was. For instance, not long after the "Shot Heard 'Round the World," the Holy Roman Emperor, Joseph II, told the British ambassador to the Austrian imperial court, "The cause in which England is engaged...is the cause of all sovereigns who have a joint interest in the maintenance of due subordination...in all the surrounding monarchies." Joseph's mother, the Dowager Empress, wrote to George III to express her "hearty desire to see the restoration of obedience and tranquility in every quarter of his dominions."

Grant this to Patrick Deneen, the author of *Regime Change*: *Toward a Postliberal Future*—he doesn't repeat the progressive mistake. Instead, he proudly holds the yardstick up to the present and finds the past better in almost every regard. I don't just mean the 1950s or the 1850s, arguable—yet contestable!—claims. Rather, he insists that, by the time of Lexington and Concord, the horse had already left the barn: things had gone catawampus for the West a century earlier.

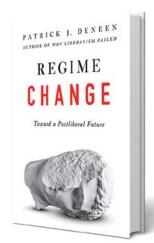
As with his previous book *Why Liberalism Failed*, Deneen looks upon the great expanse of progress since the Enlightenment and shudders. His complaint isn't merely that the West's embrace of liberalism meant too many sacrifices in pursuit of progress; it's that embracing *progress* as a concept—both moral and material progress—was a kind of original sin.

Deneen never adequately defines progress in *Regime Change*, but he is constantly throwing shade on the term. The left's belief in moral progress gave us wokeness and other horribles. The right's belief in material progress gave us everything from closed



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Regime Change: Toward a Postliberal Future By Patrick J. Deneen (Sentinel, 2023)

factories and climate change to *anomie*. As with his previous book, Deneen writes like a prosecutor, downplaying inconvenient facts and evidence in his brief—or leaving them out entirely—while pounding the table about damning circumstantial evidence and anecdotes.

Thus, looking back at some five centuries of rising life expectancy, exploding living standards, population growth, literacy, etc., Deneen could declare in *Why Liberalism Failed*: "Among the greatest challenges facing humanity is the ability to survive progress."

n this sequel of sorts, many of the familiar characters are once again in the dock, starting of course with John Locke. His Second Treatise on Government (1690) inflicted upon the world a new metaphysic of self-interest that in turn led to the corrosion of custom, tradition, and the classical political tradition Deneen prefers. Locke's "radical new definition of property that extended not only to material objects, but to ownership of self [italics his]," inexorably unleashed the execrable notion that rewarding merit should be considered a social good. "The liberal regime came into being not mainly to protect property rights—though that was an important political imperative—but to legitimate the ruling principle that would encourage the formation and ascendancy of the 'industrious and rational." This "progressive" innovation led to the invidious concept of merit and the "despotic" and "tyrannical" rule of today's "meritocracy."

John Stuart Mill made everything worse by declaring war on the authority of "custom," which let loose a kind of virus of the mind. Mill's call for "experiments in living" added an acidic libertinism,

eroding the institutions necessary to a healthy order, and informs, at a metaphysical level, the morally bankrupt ideology of both the progressive-left and the classically liberal right.

Even poor Adam Smith is charged as a co-conspirator. His crime lay not so much in pointing out that the division of labor was essential for economic progress, but for saying that prosperity was worth pursuing at all. Smith acknowledged that the division of labor could "stunt the reflective capacities" of some workers who would increasingly specialize on specific stages of the means of production. But, Smith argued, the concomitant prosperity generated from such efficiency made it an acceptable trade-off. (Life expectancy in the U.K. when Smith was writing was about 39 years, and about a third to half of children didn't survive childhood.) But for Deneen, growing material prosperity for all wasn't worth it. Men, you see, lived much richer lives when they made more expensive pins from scratch by themselves in the isolation of their dimly lit workshops. (I do wonder why Deneen simultaneously laments the opening of factories in the 18th century and the closing of them in the 21st.)

What unites these and other liberal villains was their emphasis on the benefits of *separation*—separation of powers, separation of public and private, religious and secular, individual and social, the "few" and "the many." Deneen writes that the "successor regime" to our current one "must eschew liberalism's core value of *separation*, and instead, seek a deeper and more fundamental and pervasive form of *integration*."

How do we get to this post-liberal integral order? The author looks to the premodern political theory of Aristotle, Aquinas, and the Greek historian and theorist Polybius as the architects of his new—sorry, old—"common good conservativism."

Now, I should say that there's much to his version of conservatism that I have no problem endorsing, in part because so much of it is hardly new to traditional American conservatism. But you wouldn't know that from reading Deneen's version of conservative intellectual history, particularly in the first third of the book, in which he stridently lays out his argument that conservatives prior to his "New Right" kin were nothing more than fellow-traveling libertarians or "right-liberals" uninterested in, or ineffectually cowardly in defense of, traditionalism of any kind. Indeed, his whole schema depends on asserting that the "ruling class" is essentially an undifferentiated

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blob of left-liberals and right-liberals who share power for their own benefit against the interests of the many.

This regime is at best a duopoly of libertarians or classical liberals and progressive liberals, and at worst a Potemkin facade for a monolithic "elite" exemplified by "Woke Capitalism," which Deneen describes as the "perfect wedding of the 'progressivist' economic right and social left." Similar Twitterready claims clutter the early pages and should tip off readers not looking for talking points they already agree with. Not only is there little to no evidence to support the idea that mainstream conservatives favor Woke Capitalism, but there's no reason to believe that mainstream *libertarians* support it either. Heck Milton Friedman—scourge of corporate "social responsibility"—would have torched the idea.

n these early pages, "populism" is almost always in scare quotes, a term used by "elites" and "the ruling class" to demonize "the many" who are economically statist and socially conservative. But when Deneen uses *populist* without scare quotes, it's always a positive term to describe the virtuous masses who "are achieving 'class consciousness'—not as Marxists, but as left-economic and social-conservative populists." With his admiring references to the likes of Tucker Carlson and Kurt Schlicter, and his ad hominem uses of "Never Trump" to discredit arguments he refuses to contend with (including my own), it's almost as if he hopes that the Very Online right that eats this stuff up won't read much beyond the introduction or index—or title.

It's not until much later that Deneen admits the obvious: "the many" are far less homogeneous than his manifesto rhetoric would suggest. We have to



Tucker Carlson with former president Trump

wade through many chapters to discover that Deneen acknowledges that elites are inevitable and not inherently illegitimate. Indeed, they are a requirement for his "Aristopopulism" to work. After insinuating that "Never Trump" is code for "elitist" or "liberal" for half the book, he finally concedes on page 152 that Trump is a "deeply flawed narcissist."

The truth is that the whole point of the book is much more modest-and underwhelming-than the title and revolutionary-cosplay chapter titles suggest. Whereas, according to political theory, "regime change" means the wholesale replacement of a system of government, usually by force, Deneen's Regime Change boils down to the idea that we need to replace the existing elites, specifically on the right, with a "New Right" of people who think like Patrick Deneen. Still, there is a tiny threat to the actual regime in his mission statement: "What is needed, in short, is regime change—the peaceful but vigorous overthrow of a corrupt and corrupting liberal ruling class and the creation of a postliberal order in which existing political forms can remain in place, as long as a fundamentally different ethos informs those institutions and the personnel who populate key offices and positions" [italics mine]. In other words, so long as my team is in charge, we can keep the Constitution and all that stuff. I'd find this more worrying if I thought this tiny cadre of reactionary malcontents could get a post-liberal integralist elected dogcatcher.

Regardless, given that today's New Right is, by my rough count, at least the fifth self-declared New Right since World War II, I find such highfalutin tough

talk less worrisome—and less impressive—than the integralists might think. This is a very old story about a very old strategy. A cranky faction of the right decides it has that special *gnosis* and that they are the only legitimate standard bearers for their side. They denounce the (alleged) holders of power and influence as fakers, RINOs, closet progressives, Me-too Republicans, sell-outs, squishes, wets, and so on in order to claim that history must make room for the new priests of the True Faith. Often, the mainstream media will hype the New Right insurgents to use it as a cudgel against the establishment right they already despise. Not knowing that this attention is purely instrumental and short-lived, these rebels become all the more convinced they have History on their side.

The intellectual history of the right—and left—is replete with such efforts. The orthodoxies and heresies change (somewhat) almost every decade, as do the terms for them. People are declaring Libertarian Moments and Neoconservative Moments and Nationalist Moments all the time. It's moments all the way down.

Stripped of its disquisitions on Aristotle and Aquinas and oddly envious or trollish allusions to various leftist radicals (one chapter borrows its title from Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?* and another from C. Wright Mills' *The Power Elite*), *Regime Change* looks more like just another moment where one faction leaps at an opportunity to get to the top of the greasy pole.

So while I can't begrudge Deneen and his fellow neo-integralists an old-fashioned effort to muscle their way to the commanding heights of the right—which, in fact, commands very little—I must object to much of the analysis he employs to justify his putsch.

dmittedly, part of my objection is parochial. His endlessly repeated claim that conventional modern conservatives over the past half century have been willing aiders and abettors of progressivism amounts to little more than what the cool kids call "retconning"—rewriting the accepted storylines to get right with younger fans. The idea that the likes of free market conservatives such as Michael Novak, author of *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, William F. Buckley, Irving Kristol, and Thomas Sowell were willful, or unwitting, accomplices of progressivism is as unserious as Tucker Carlson's claim that the right side of the aisle in the Capitol is comprised of "libertarian zealot[s] controlled by the banks."

Much of Deneen's indictment is simply a restating—with attribution—of James Burnham's brilliant work The Managerial Revolution. That's fine (I do likewise in Suicide of the West). But Burnham was a co-founder, columnist, and intellectual lodestar for National Review. There's some nuance and gratitude missing when you borrow so much from a foundational thinker of modern conservatism while simultaneously denouncing modern conservatism. More amusingly, many of the contemporary conservatives Deneen heavily relies on for his descriptions of America—including my AEI colleagues Tim Carney and Charles Murray—are profoundly libertarian on economics. (See Murray's What It Means to Be a Libertarian and Tim Carney's The Big Ripoff.) Apparently, they're fools except when they make arguments and observations ripe for neo-integralist cherry-picking.

The biggest problem with the arguments of anti-liberals—most of whom are far less erudite and

Jeffrey Epstein's private island in the U.S. Virgin Islands





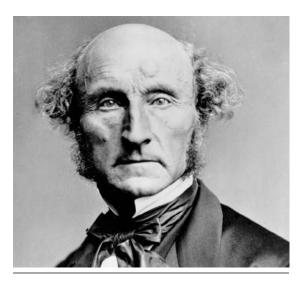
MUCH OF DENEEN'S ANALYSIS SEEMS TO FLOAT HIGH IN THE PLATONIC AETHER OR LOW UPON THE SURFACE OF THE TWITTER SEWER.

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subtle than Deneen himself—is an almost contemptuous disregard for history and culture despite claims of mastery over both. For example, Deneen laments how university faculty have retreated to specialized intellectual "silos" where the only "shared commonality, according to one legendary half-jest, is a universal complaint about campus parking." I can't help but think Deneen would have benefitted from walking down the hall and picking the brains of some historians and political scientists.

Instead, Deneen stays in his comfort zone, offering an extended appeal to the authority of classical thinkers. The result is that much of his analysis seems to float high in the Platonic aether or low upon the surface of the Twitter sewer, disconnected from both the societies his philosophical heroes lived in as well as the country he looks out upon in 2023. For starters, it's fine as a matter of bombast or poetic license to compare the sins of the existing "ruling class" with the virtues of the pre-Enlightenment ruling classes. But it would be nice if there were a bit more acknowledgement that the pre-modern ruling classes actually ruled, sometimes over slaves and serfs. Their authority derived from fictions about noble blood and Divine Right. Today's so-called ruling class aren't equivalent rulers, not least because those controlling the government must subject themselves to the approval of "the many" through these things called "elections." And all of them are subject to the rule of law, one of those glorious triumphs made possible by the liberalism he despises. Aristocrats—and philosophers!—of virtuous antiquity could live in the open like Jeffrey Epstein exploiting young girls—and boys!-without apology. The bright light of day in

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John Stuart Mill (1806–1873)

our decadent regime drives such miscreants to suicide. Similarly, you can tell Deneen is ensorcelled by these metaphorical comparisons when he claims that "essential workers" during the pandemic "resemble a class of serfs" ruled by a rootless "liberal aristocracy."

ost Americans know nothing of Locke and Mill and perhaps only slightly more of Adam Smith. They know dismayingly little—if polls are any guide—about the finer points of the Founding or the fine print of the Constitution. But that doesn't change the fact that Americans are exceedingly liberal in their attitudes and expectations. According to a 2021 survey by Gallup, 84% have a positive view of free enterprise. A 2019 survey found that majorities prefer the free market to take the lead on "technological innovation" (75%), the "distribution of wealth" (68%), and the "economy" and "wages" (62% each). Polls routinely find that Americans place a very high value on the liberal lynchpins of the existing "regime"—from free speech and fair trials to property rights and religious freedom. "Merit" also polls quite well.

Polls change, of course. When "capitalism" is in bad odor, "socialism" becomes more popular and vice versa. Partisanship often drives public opinion in favor—or disfavor—of all manner of public policies. But the simple fact is that American culture is an extension and amplification of the decidedly liberal culture we inherited from England. As De Tocqueville said, "The American is the Englishman left alone."

seeking to secure "their ancient English rights and liberties." As Harvey Mansfield has observed, nearly all American political conflicts boil down to arguments over competing rights. Americans love their rights, because Americans are irretrievably liberal. I love the image of populism-enthralled integralist eggheads explaining to members of Bikers for Trump that they need to sign up for a confessional state that bans pornography. Deneen derides "fusionism" as the elitist "top down conservatism" that he seeks to dethrone (as if it still sat on a throne). This is a profoundly elitist, almost cartoonish understanding of how elites operate and what fusionism was. Frank Meyer, the primary author of fusionism, argued that the tensions between liberty and order, freedom and virtue, the individual and the collective, were deeply embedded in the DNA of Western civilization in general and the Anglo-American tradition in particular. And he was right.

The idea that you can easily translate the ideas of Aristotle, Aquinas, and Polybius into an alternative 21st-century regime that erases or supplants the deeply embedded cultural preferences of Americans is otherworldly. The best an American political movement can hope to do is tease out aspects of their thought that complement the American character. Ironically that is precisely what the Founders thought they were doing. Deneen presents Polybius' idea of a "mixed regime" or "mixed constitution" as a clearcut alternative not just to what we have now but also to the regime set up by the Founders. But many Founders were well-versed in Polybius-and the Polybius-indebted Montesquieu—and saw their system of checks and balances and divided government as a fulfillment of such ideas. (Ironically, while the Founders were deeply indebted to Locke's empiricism, they were not particularly influenced by Locke's Second Treatise.)

America has some deep and worrisome problems. As Adam Smith said, "There's a great deal of ruin in a nation." Deneen's descriptions of some of them are fairly unobjectionable, but his prescriptions will likely join the musings of previous frustrated conservatives and reactionaries unwilling to accept that Americans just aren't that into them. Because they're Americans. RL

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Mensuram Bonam: Does It Measure Up?

A new document published by the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences "hopes to shed the light of the Gospel and of Catholic Social Teaching on the specific area of economics and the world of finance." But does it confuse more than enlighten?

by PHILIP BOOTH

WHEN TEACHING CATHOLIC social thought and business ethics, I warn against two reductionist fallacies. The first is the idea that government regulation is the solution to the absence of ethics within markets. While there may be situations in which government regulation is appropriate, or even necessary, we know that our fallen human nature, which causes many problems within markets, also afflicts regulators and so limits the efficacy and increases the dangers of trying to perfect markets through regulation.

The second false idea to be avoided is that markets do not need ethics. Some people argue that virtuous behavior is self-generated within markets or, indeed, that virtues are not necessary. To some extent, markets do encourage virtuous behavior: people want to stay at hotels where the manager smiles rather than is nasty, and we wish to buy financial products from people who are honest. But the untrustworthy can benefit from sharp practice, and this is especially so in financial markets. Christians therefore need to promote, as the Acton Institute tagline puts it, a "free and virtuous society"—and so we need both markets *and* morality.

The social teaching of the Catholic Church has said a great deal about these issues. Pope Benedict XVI pointed out, in *Caritas in veritate*, that "Without



Mensuram Bonam: Faith-Based Measures for Catholic Investors— A Starting Point and Call to Action

The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (2022)

internal forms of solidarity and mutual trust, the market cannot completely fulfil its proper economic function" (emphasis in the original). This is certainly borne out by the economic evidence. As Nobel Prize winner Kenneth Arrow once noted, "Virtually every commercial transaction has within itself an element of trust. ... It can be plausibly argued that much of the economic backwardness in the world can be explained by the lack of mutual confidence."

In response to this demand for ethics in finance, we have had the development of ethical investment funds. The size of this sector is disputed. But one estimate, found in the Investment Leaders Group publication "The Value of Responsible Investment," suggests that \$34 trillion worth of investments are held by investors who have signed on to the UN's Principles for Responsible Investment. But just because something calls itself ethical does not mean that it is. And something that does not describe itself as ethical may still be so. To quote Pope Benedict XVI again, "Efforts are needed ... to ensure that the whole economy—the whole of finance—is ethical, not merely by virtue of an external label" (*Caritas in veritate*, 45).

A perusal of ethical investment funds in the U.K. uncovers one that does not invest in alcohol, gambling, nuclear power, oil, gas, or coal; another with a focus on healthcare but that seems quite comfortable investing in companies that provide abortion and abortifacient drugs; and another that avoids pornography, arms, gambling, and alcohol.

What is a Catholic to make of this? How should Catholics make their contribution to ensuring that people behave ethically in all branches of the economy, especially when it comes to the allocation of capital? *Mensuram Bonam: Faith-Based Measures*

for Catholic Investors—A Starting Point and Call to Action, published by the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, is intended to help us.

ts title means "A Good Measure." The authors are obviously pleased with the title because the English or Latin is mentioned more than 50 times. The document begins with this quotation: "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put in your lap."

One of the most puzzling things about the document is, in fact, its title. The explanations given for it—that we need metrics (or good measures) for evaluating integral human development and that the superabundance of God's forgiveness sets the ethical norm for how belief is lived—are not especially convincing. But, in the analysis of the usefulness of the document, perhaps its title is not the best measure.

The document addresses Catholics involved in investment decision-making processes. It explicitly claims that its advice is the fruit of Catholic teaching and doctrine. This is important, because as Catholics our moral judgments have to be rooted in the Catholic faith. However, we hope that all people of goodwill will recognize the moral precepts that underlie a Catholic approach to finance and investment—the principles of natural law and the cardinal virtues that are accessible through reason alone. And so *Mensuram Bonam* can be of use to people of other traditions, too.

There is no doubt that the discussion provoked by documents such as Mensuram Bonam is needed. As noted above, the existing ethical investment fund landscape is not especially attractive to Catholics. As well as including investments that are plainly unethical, these funds often exclude things that Catholics do not find intrinsically problematic, such as alcohol. Ethical investment has also become aligned with "environment, social, and governance" objectives that are not always soundly based within a Catholic ethical framework. So there is a need, whether from a body connected with the Vatican, in academic discourse, from charities or think tanks, or from national bishops' conferences, for a proper consideration of the factors that should be taken into account by Catholic investors.

Also important is that guidance is needed to inform investment practice by the institutions

of the Church. Religious orders and dioceses are reconsidering their investment policies to align them with Church teaching. There is a growing number of Catholic investment funds that can be sifted through. Indeed, I sit on the ethical advisory board of one such fund. We think about the issues raised in *Mensuram Bonam*—and they are not straightforward.

So what exactly does the document say—and does it *help*?

he document reminds us that, as Catholics working in finance, we must marry faith and reason and prayerfully discern the right path. The reader is provided with a timely reminder that "for investors with faith, the view of the world formed by numbers and analytics is forever incomplete. Even brief moments in the presence of Scripture, or quick references to the Church's teachings, can fill in by grace or wisdom those ethical gaps in perspective or process." It is interesting that the secular "well-being" movement reminds us of the importance of breaks to unclutter our minds and relieve stress. As is so often the case, such movements have a glimpse of the truth. *Mensuram Bonam* is right: we should seek brief moments of prayer and listen to God in whatever work we do in the world-and this applies to fund managers, too. The economist might say, somewhat inappropriately, that there are diminishing returns to prayer! Of course, this is not true, but even two minutes every few hours can be very helpful. Saying the Angelus, for example, might be a good start.

Mensuram Bonam also points out something of which most readers of this magazine will be acutely



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aware: "More than managing transactions strategically and responsibly, investors with faith are invited to regard themselves as immersed in a plurality of relationships. Indeed, the good measure of one's meaning and happiness is from contributing one's life, talents, work and resources to others, and to the world." Markets are places of social encounter—even markets conducted over electronic platforms. And, as the document makes clear, this leads to the need for investors to ask themselves how today's decisions as an investor specifically cooperate with God's plan for creation and humanity.

It is made clear that Catholic faith-based investment does not simply involve excluding unethical investments. There must be engagement, too. Fund managers are asked in what way they are influencing governance. This is especially relevant to debates around investing in fossil fuels. Most religious orders, and many dioceses and Catholic institutions, have ceased investing in companies producing fossil fuels. But the world (including religious orders and dioceses) is still consuming them, so somebody must produce them. Is it better to disinvest or to engage with companies that may still be extracting fossil fuels?

Interestingly, *Mensuram Bonam* asks investors whether "the lobbying of companies or their influence on regulators align with an investor's purpose and values." Supporters of market economies are well aware of the problem of "rent-seeking" by companies and other interest groups. Even economists on the left, such as Joseph Stiglitz and Thomas Piketty, have joined the likes of James M. Buchanan, Gordon Tullock, and Luigi Zingales in writing about the problem. Indeed, lobbying and rent-seeking has been mentioned as a problem by Pope Francis. It is, indeed, unethical for companies to use the political process to pursue their own private interests. And Catholic investors should engage with those corporations in which they own shares to restrain such behavior.

There follows a summary of how grace and fidelity to God must be at the center of our commitment to the common good and a discussion of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and its relationship to economic life. This will be helpful to the non-Catholic reader of the document and will save users from having to consult several sources.

We then come to the concrete, practical suggestions on which many reviews have focused. The document lists a series of questions for discernment under each principle of CST. They include "Are human rights fully respected?" "Are other persons respected or commodified?" and "Is authentic sustainability being realized (and 'greenwashing' avoided)?" *Mensuram Bonam* asks investors to contemplate, discern, and propose, following Pope Francis. Investors should then deploy a strategy of engagement, enhancement, and exclusion.

As for the exclusion categories, the document recognizes that "the moral imperative sometimes presents clear situations in which exclusion without exception has to be applied, such as involvement in abortion. There are also grey areas that may require discernment before an informed, moral decision can be made. These include the abuse of 'speculative products or investment techniques." Some Catholics have complained that abortion and environmental harms are put in the same table of potential exclusions, but the document makes clear that a process of discernment would lead them to be treated differently.

This is all useful, even if familiar to many Catholics in the investment world. The document is not beyond criticism, however.

o say that Mensuram Bonam could have been better written or edited is an understatement. It certainly scores more highly for content than for style. And some things seem a little muddled. At one point it argues that concerns that mixing faith and ethics with investment criteria will reduce returns have been "largely refuted." And "there should be little to no fear of underperformance." But then it states: "Some investment instruments and forms of investment, due to their inherent characteristics, are unsuitable for combining the use of capital with the promotion of the common good-even if this means that investors lose out on the benefits (for example, diversification)." Surely the latter is true. And, if diversification benefits are lost, returns for a given risk will, in fact, be reduced. Ethical approaches to investment will likely require sacrifices in terms of financial returns. As the document itself wisely makes clear, financial returns are not the only good measure of the appropriateness of an investment.

Some important ground was also omitted. There could have been more consideration of virtue ethics, which is a good starting point for Catholic investors. *Mensuram Bonam* could also have presented a more systematic approach to dealing with exclusions that are perhaps the most immediate practical



SHOULD WE INVEST IN A BUS COMPANY THAT HAS A PROFITABLE ROUTE BUT THAT HAPPENS TO TAKE MOTHERS AND NURSES TO AN ABORTION CLINIC?

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consideration for faith-based investors. What do we do when deciding whether to invest in a company performing abortions? That's easy enough. But what if the company produces the chemicals that some abortion providers buy to perform abortions? What if the intention of the company producing them is that they are to be used for a licit purpose, but some abortion providers happen to buy them? How about a real estate investment trust that lets part of one of its properties to a company that is an investor in a company that sells such chemicals? Should we invest in a bus company that has a profitable route but that, among other passengers, happens to take mothers and nurses to an abortion clinic?

This all takes us into discussions about different forms of cooperation with evil. This is highly relevant to practical decision-making in Catholic investment funds and deserved a longer treatment.

Perhaps that will be the subject of a follow-up paper. But while *Mensuram Bonam* should not be the last word, it is nevertheless important. It is a reminder that we should never succumb to the risk of bifurcating our lives. Going to church on Sunday and then recklessly making as much money as possible, by whatever means possible, during the week is not a defensible lifestyle for Catholics—or for anyone. RL

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To Defend Shakespeare Is to Defend the West

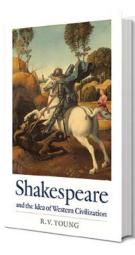
The deconstruction of classical texts seeks also to rip up the foundations of Western civilization. Can we find in the works of the immortal Bard the key to defending the West, a certain call to "readiness"?

by RICHARD M. REINSCH II

LONG BEFORE AMERICAN higher education became almost a wholly owned subsidiary of progressive thought control, literature departments fell much earlier to many of these same forces, with the deconstruction of classic texts by "new historicism," "cultural materialism," or "post-colonialism." One of the biggest targets of these postmodernist efforts was and remains the grand work of William Shakespeare. Understanding this ongoing phenomenon and what it all means is the subject of R.V. Young's *Shakespeare and the Idea of Western Civilization*.

The sustained attack on Shakespeare should not be surprising. He is, Young observes, "the consummate expression of the Western literary and cultural tradition." Young arrives at this judgment by a distillation of the essence of Western civilization: "its solid adherence to profound and substantial tradition blended with the leaven of an inquiring, critical spirit." Shakespeare "embodies" Western culture with his plays, which demonstrate the West's "deepest commitments of its moral and spiritual vision" while also "continually subjecting them to scrutiny." Scrutiny, that is, not denial, evasion, or the outright refusal to acknowledge the West's grand tradition.

This witch's brew of literary study is, Young argues, nearly incomprehensible. Its insanity only deepens



Shakespeare and the Idea of Western Civilization

By R.V. Young (Catholic University Press, 2022)

because of the status that Shakespeare has obtained not only as "the principal poet of Western civilization" but also because he has "transcended his origins in the West" with study and performance of his work occurring in China, India, Japan, and many other non-Western countries. Shakespeare's work is lauded by artists in other civilizations as a tremendous achievement, speaking to them directly and poignantly. This means that Shakespeare contradicts one of the theories of postmodernism: that literary work is a direct product of social ideology. Could a work limited by ideology and confined by its cultural conditions be met with such a cross-civilizational reception?

The forces of ideological avarice that have preyed on Shakespeare's body of work are engaged in another project altogether. There are profound "moral and political consequences" stemming from it, as these ideologies reduce ideas to "physical processes," meaning that the "material conditions" and "power relations" of a society that a writer inhabits are the determinative factors of the writer's work and "displace inspiration and vision as factors in the evaluation of literature." These ideologies basically reduce to the point that the only thing of value in literature

is a varying discursive formation constructed by the ideological energies and constraints of successive phases of social history, and any individual title, say, *The Tempest*, is likewise merely an empty signifier, the locus of diverse ideological constructs associated with an indeterminate number of ink and paper exemplars and the utterances and gestures of staged performances.

We deal here with a form of insanity, Young notes.

The author reminds us that literature comes from imagination and intellect. Great artists transcend their circumstances and their culture even as they work from within it. One measure of an enduring work is that we keep going back to it to learn more from it and about ourselves. The separation of time, culture, language, and politics are not barriers to such learning, but an invitation to go even deeper in our study. And such a process is also inherently joyful. The Marxist, feminist, gender literary scholars can see only themselves in the text, a text they manipulate for their own ends. As Young notes at one point, with these scholars you must doublecheck everything they say about a work, knowing in advance that other ideological forces are lurking.

oung does not analyze the entire Shakespeare corpus but evaluates the Bard's work as it presents love and marriage, philosophical realism, race, freedom and tyranny, and the Gospel and natural law. In each chapter, the author sets forth that Shakespeare is at pains to present the truth of the human condition in these contexts and how error, pride, and sin mar man's efforts to live well and flourish. Shakespeare is nothing if not exacting in how Western civilization has combined reason, revelation, and the questing spirit to illuminate the truth of the human condition. And this is his singular excellence whose truth unfolds as we read, discuss, and perform his plays.

Shakespeare's most moving presentations of love and marriage are found in the comedies, Young insists. We repeatedly turn to Romeo and Juliet and Othello, but in The Merchant of Venice, Much Ado



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"

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"

About Nothing, Twelfth Night, and As You Like It, Young argues, we see the emergence of attraction, romance, balanced by the good of companionate marriage as its outcome. Love between couples is not private but inherently social and institutional. What begins as desire must be elevated and "also seen as a grave responsibility." Young further observes that "nowhere is the alienation of contemporary men and women from the Christian traditions of the past—and hence from the moral vision embodied in Shakespeare's plays—more manifest than in the realm of sexual morality."

We are also doubly separated from the classical world's understanding of marriage, which, Young writes, could not even place married love on the same plane with male friendship. Marriage was not regarded by Aristotle as a friendship of equals, even though it was a special friendship. Similarly, Catullus compares his devotion to a woman as a father loves his sons. That, however, has changed. Marriage becomes something between equal partners, however, at least in moral stature, in Much Ado About Nothing. Young observes that Shakespeare doesn't exactly say this in his plays. For example, the meaning of love and marriage is "generated by the plot" in Much Ado About Nothing, revealing "contrasts between two approaches to marriage and between the love of a man and a woman and nonsexual love between friends."

Two of the characters in the comedy, Beatrice and Benedick, maintain a witty, sardonic banter between them, one that is led by desire but could only be sustained because each regards the other as a worthy partner. They "woo peacefully" but gain a thoroughgoing knowledge of one another. The contrast is with Claudio and Hero who casually and passively walk into the betrothed state, until Hero falls victim to a



John Gielgud as Benedick and Margaret Leighton as Beatrice in the 1959 Broadway production of Much Ado About Nothing

wicked accusation of cheating by the unsavory character of Don John. Claudio accepts the accusation's veracity, while those who truly know Hero's character, particularly Beatrice, cannot accept it. Hero falls ill and unconscious because of the slander. The difference with Beatrice and Benedick could not be more obvious as they have slowly realized their love for one another. But that realization of mutual love and desire isn't enough, Young adds.

Benedick must place Beatrice higher than his love for male friends. She tells Benedick to kill Claudio owing to her rage at his acceptance of the accusation against Hero. Benedick doesn't actually kill Claudio, but he also rejects the charge against Hero, and implicitly Claudio's judgment in believing it, choosing to believe in Beatrice and Hero's innocence against the word of male companions. As Young says, Benedick must "be a man instead of merely one of the boys." Beatrice's wit, graciousness, and strength have made her what her name suggests, blessed and beatified. Benedick suggests benediction. They are a worthy match. All that being said, what is affirmed in the play is chastity, duty, sacrifice, and love, the sublimation and then integration of human desire into an act of gift and promise in marriage. Is this not what the play's postmodern critics simply cannot abide?

urning to the tragedy plays, Young argues that Shakespeare clearly makes the decision to reject nominalism, the philosophical notion that there are no universals, just the mental groupings that we arbitrarily give to objects that appear to be in the same class with one another. Young traces the advent of nominalism to the 14th-century theologian William of Ockham, its influence working its way through Western philosophy and making its appearance in parts of the Reformation. In short, Shakespeare was confronted with choosing either the philosophic universalism of Aristotle and Aguinas or the absence of universal truth in Ockham. Nominalism inherently cashes out, Young thinks, in an increasingly subjectivist individualism where will displaces reason and reflection on nature itself. Tragedy, Young observes, is built on moral realism, on the notion that we can't just make up our own reality. Truth exists, difficult trials fall on men and women who are uncommonly good, who falter in Shakespearean tragedy. To embrace nominalism is to refuse the drama of life, which Shakespeare is demonstrating in his tragedies.

Perhaps no better example exists, Young cites, than Juliet's famous soliloquy: "Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name..." She concludes, "Romeo, doff thy name, And for thy name, which is no part of thee, Take all myself." Romeo should shed his name, family, and personal history for romantic desire. This is indeed a certain individualism, perhaps paralleling the rising individualism in the Protestant Reformation, creeping into Shakespeare's world. But the explosion and

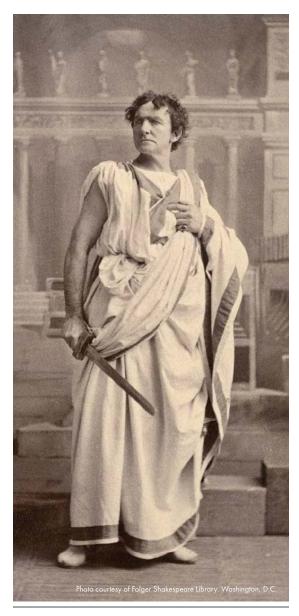
William of Ockham, as depicted on a stained glass window at the All Saints Church in Surrey, England



crashing of Romeo and Juliet's personal, hidden love with the concrete facts of their families, institutions, and society cannot be so easily wished away. We side with their love, finding Romeo and Juliet noble in their actions. Our society has been so firmly baked and defined by individualistic expectations, Young concludes, that we lose the overall substance of Romeo and Juliet and the overheated faults in the characters. Romeo refuses prudence, limits, and caution after he is banished, rushing headlong into disaster. He rejects the wise counsel of Friar Lawrence that he delay and be patient: "Thou canst not speak of what thou dost not feel." A celibate priest cannot know the inner depths of eros, or, as Young notes, "Universal moral principles are of no force in the face of immediate, particular emotion."

Of course, the other side of the drama is that their families and other institutions in society have become corrupt and unlovable. Nominalism's quest to assert subjectivism as the substance of truth is never more powerful than in the breakdown of necessary institutions for social flourishing. What examples of love, patience, and decency have Romeo and Juliet's families given them but a crabbed existence of hatred, jealousy, and violence? We find ourselves in many ways beset with the same general problem. Key institutions across American life are either dysfunctional or perceived as such, and often for good reason. The price paid is the loss of belief in moral principle, duty, and self-restraint, as many increasingly think that you get what you can for yourself because nothing else really matters or has weight and meaning.

ow then to recover authentic freedom even amid tyranny? Shakespeare, Young thinks, does not give us an answer that most would be satisfied with. Julius Caesar, Hamlet, and Macbeth show us the diminished capacity for thought and integrity that marks any human path that commits itself to politics. There also may not be political solutions as such, just limitations, compromises, and reversals. In Julius Caesar and Hamlet, we see "tragic heroes" lose "their freedom of mind" by an encounter with tyranny. Shakespeare's focus isn't on political institutions as such, but "the spiritual destiny of individual human beings." What makes tyranny tragic, Young states, is "less the use of force" and more "the spiritual deterioration, the diminished mental candor" affecting both tyrants and those who challenge their corruption.



Edward Loomis Davenport as Brutus in an 1875 production of Julius Caesar

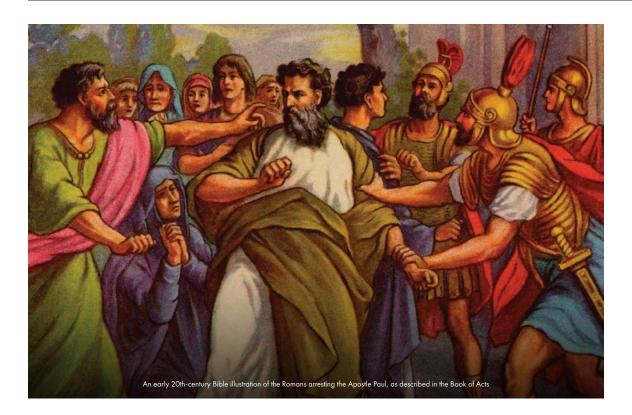
Brutus is a tragic figure because he gives to politics a position of primacy that it cannot fulfill and one that will lead to the destruction of nonpolitical goods: friendship and marriage. Brutus plunges into the pursuit of a political abstraction that justifies killing Caesar, his friend. This path leads to civil war and chaos, and also leads to the name Caesar being applied to future leaders of Rome. Brutus descends into ideology and inherits the whirlwind, Young concludes. He remains, though, a noble character

who permits politics to pull him into a situation that dissolves his life and those of others. To challenge a tyrant requires its own prudence, not merely aping the tactics of such a thug.

Hamlet, much like Brutus, faces the same predicament: How do I oppose a seemingly invincible tyranny? Hamlet learns from his father, the murdered former king of Denmark, that Hamlet's uncle—now king of Denmark-was the slayer. What to do with this incredible turn of events? Hamlet evinces doubt but finds the means to act decisively, but he also kills indiscriminately to avenge his father. Tyranny has also reduced the candor of his free mind and made him less than he really is, which is a noble man. But Hamlet, perhaps under the Christian influence, grows and learns from the opposition he faces. Does Hamlet die a killer or with an enlarged soul? His death appears more hopeful than Brutus'—he acknowledges Providence and asks Horatio "to tell my story." Hamlet's death remains tragic, though, and its ending ambiguous. The bloodshed at the end of the play is caused by Hamlet, and he remarks at his death "-the rest is silence." However, what he does learn, according to Young, is that to oppose a tyrant is "not to imitate the violence and deceit of the tyrant." Rather, what he learns is what Hamlet calls "readiness."

We might argue that Hamlet's condition explains well the overall situation of Shakespeare's work visà-vis the deconstructionist scholars. Hamlet overcomes his personal doubt to find the imagination and courage to oppose tyranny. We will have to do the same in many contexts to defend our civilization. exhibiting "readiness" as we confront those who in attacking the literature of the West are really launching "an attack upon the civilization itself." Toward that end, R.V. Young's book has opened Shakespeare to us in a compelling manner, outlining the case for why he sits in a high and exalted place in the Western imagination. Shakespeare's stories have become part of us, guiding our souls and imaginations to a more capacious understanding of human excellence and tragedy. Young has liberated Shakespeare's eternal gifts for a people made weary by the enfilading ideological fires of the academy. We owe him our gratitude. RL

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St. Paul the Not-Quite Revolutionary

How political was the Apostle Paul? Did he directly challenge the Roman regime by declaring Jesus as Lord and bringer of the true "Good News"? Or is the attempt to paint him a perennial advocate of regime change a reflection of modern obsessions?

by DANIEL N. GULLOTTA

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, Paul introduces himself to his readers as an "envoy" and an "ambassador" of Christ Jesus. While we might be quick to glance over such designations or translate them into the familiar Christian theological sobriquet "apostle," such titles carried with them a certain amount of political and cultural significance in the first century. Throughout Asia Minor, various inscriptions bore homages to Augustus Caesar as the world's "savior," and emissaries throughout the Roman Empire spoke of the "good news" of his reign. Of course, Paul spoke on behalf of a very different kind of ruler, the crucified and resurrected Jesus, who had commissioned him to preach "obedience of faith among all the nations" (Rom. 1:5). Given the imperial Greco-Roman context that the first Christians moved in, what should we

make of these rhetorical similarities between the gospel preached by Paul and the gospel promoted by Caesar? Was Paul being strategically subversive, perhaps even revolutionary? How oblique or explicit was Paul in using these imperial Roman motifs and terminology? Just how political was the Apostle Paul? The Apostle and the Empire: Paul's Implicit and Explicit Criticism of Rome by Christoph Heilig attempts some answers.

Since the 1970s, following the lead of scholars such as Neil Elliott, Dieter Georgi, and Richard A. Horsley, such questions have ignited a whole industry of studies on the relationship of Paul and the Jesus movement to the Roman Empire. The Society of Biblical Literature annually hosts a whole unit devoted to "Paul and Politics," and academic publishers have

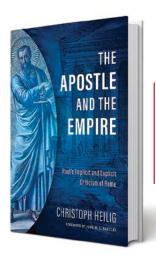
produced a wealth of titles related to the subject. But such scholarship has not been limited to the halls of the academy; it has also become popular among clergy and laity, and from diverse confessional and theological perspectives. For example, popular biblical scholars N.T. Wright and John Dominic Crossan, despite their numerous theological differences, both claim that Paul's gospel directly commented on and criticized the Roman Empire.

Much like how Candida Moss and others have challenged the idea of widespread and intense early Christian persecution and martyrdom, Heilig suggests that the Pauline churches may not have faced the "concrete sanctions or looming threats" suggested by other New Testament scholars. This is not to say Paul and his later Christian comrades did not face any legal problems, as the letters between Pliny and Trajan on what to do with Christians attest. Building off the work of Laura Robinson, part of the problem according to Heilig is how these scholars misunderstand the Roman Empire as some kind of "police state." But even if Rome was not a totalitarian state, this does not mean Paul and the first Christians were ideal Roman subjects. One need only read the Acts of the Apostles or Paul's own references to his brush with Roman authorities to see that he was a "highly visible troublemaker." But it is precisely because of the wide reaches but hard limits of Roman religious tolerance that Heilig implores readers to think in more nuanced ways when it comes to supposed "hidden criticism" of the Roman Empire in Paul's letters.



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The Apostle and the Empire: Paul's Implicit and Explicit Criticism of Rome

By Christoph Heilig (Eerdmans, 2022)

utting his criticism and approach into practice, Heilig spends the bulk of The Apostle and the Empire focusing on 2 Corinthians 2:14: "But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him." With an extensive amount of literary material (such as letters, poems, inscriptions) and archeological evidence, Heilig argues that this is possibly an allusion to Claudius' triumphant procession in Rome celebrating his victory over Britannia in A.D. 44. Taking for granted that Paul was an "active observer of his contemporary context," Heilig points out several inscriptions found at Corinth hailing Claudius' victory, as well as the evidence of the yearly cultic celebrations taking place in Corinth, during which the emperor was personified by a pagan priest during these rituals and celebrated for his conquest. During his stay in Corinth, Paul would have seen and experienced these displays of Roman imperialism, making the allusion in 2 Corinthians 2:14 even more salable. Perhaps more tantalizing is Heilig's linkage of the celebration of Claudius' victory to Paul's co-workers in Corinth, Priscilla and Aquilla. According to Acts 18:1-3, Priscilla and Aquilla had been working in Rome as tentmakers before being expelled in A.D. 50, making them potential eyewitnesses to Claudius' procession. Given these events and connections, it's "hard to imagine that Claudius did not feature in these discussions" between Paul, Priscilla, and Aquilla. While still speculative, Heilig's presentation is as conceivable as it is exciting.

With this context in mind, Heilig highlights what he views as the most provocative elements of Paul's allusions. By fusing Jewish eschatological



The first two verses of the Acts of the Apostles from a 14th-century Greek manuscript

expectations with Roman military imagery, Paul's "metaphorical replacement of the emperor with the Jewish god YHWH" was clearly an act of subversion. Paul's Corinthian readers, therefore, would draw comfort from such allusions given their new outsider status as Christians. Paul creatively reminds readers, alienated as they were from large parts of Roman society, that God is greater than the emperor. But before modern readers get overly excited by Heilig's conclusions, he argues that passages speak more to Paul's "unease" with the empire as opposed to complete apathy or severe criticism on either end of the spectrum. Subversive is not the same as confrontational, after all: completely absent from Paul is the call to open armed rebellion. As Heilig puts it, Paul "seems to challenge basic assumptions of Roman ideology," which most likely reflects Paul's "sense of unease in relation to Roman demonstrations of military powers." In short, Paul may not have been directly attacking Caesar, but he was certainly using contemporary events and his political reality to his rhetorical advantage and situational needs.

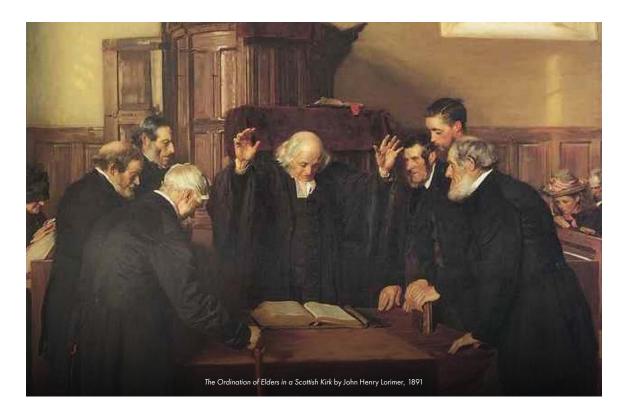
Rather than looking for "hidden" clues or anti-imperial Roman "codes," Heilig implores future scholarship and exegetes to focus on specific historical circumstances. To help in these future endeavors, Heilig champions incorporating modern archeological evidence as well as ancient lexical data being produced by new digital humanities ventures. In Heilig's view,

Romans 13, the most politically fraught section of the Pauline corpus, is in dire need of such a treatment. The result might be a more complex vision of the politics of the ancient church. The first Christians were neither rebels with a cause nor model citizens. Paul was not naive to his Roman reality, but he was clearly uncomfortable with many elements of it, such as the consumption of food offered to idols and some of Rome's sexual ethics.

ne of the remarkable things about Heilig's work is how many audiences he is writing for. On the one hand, he is addressing a lively debate within the field of Christian origins and New Testament studies while clearly having an eye out for Christians (both clergy and laity) who are excited by or unnerved by the modern political usefulness of Paul's writings. With these dual and sometimes overlapping audiences in mind, at one moment Heilig is addressing the thorny political situation of first-century Corinth, then a few pages later discussing the violent Christian nationalism displayed at the January 6 insurrection or the references to Paul's letters by Jeff Sessions. Because much of Heilig's criticism is not exactly new but rather a popularizing of his 2015 work Hidden Criticism? The Methodology and Plausibility of the Search for a Counter-Imperial Subtext in Paul, this twin approach makes sense as it will offer engaged lay readers examples to draw from.

Despite being such a slim volume, The Apostle and Empire can be dense reading at times, speaking more to those well versed in this corner of Pauline studies than, say, your average politically interested pastor. But given N.T. Wright's overwhelming popularity with large sections of evangelical American Christians, Heilig's insights are well argued and should be considered by those too eager to turn Paul into an ancient Malcolm X. Going beyond the false binary of apolitical and political, Heilig's work is encouraging because of its emphasis on the lived reality of those under imperial threat, as well as the small but meaningful ways power can be challenged. Paul may not have been a revolutionary, but by claiming that Jesus was Lord (and indicating that Caesar was not), he was still a radical. RL

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Presbyterians Yesterday and Today

A new one-volume history of the Presbyterian tradition in America seeks to situate it firmly in the broader evangelical movement. But if not all evangelicals are Presbyterians, is it fair to say that not all Presbyterians are evangelicals?

by JONATHAN L. MASTER

PRESBYTERIANS CONTINUE TO play an important role in American religious life. While making up less than 5% of the population today, historically Presbyterians have punched above their weight in both politics and governance. Eleven signers of the Declaration of Independence were Presbyterians; nine members of a Presbyterian church have served as president of the United States. During the earliest days of the republic, it was Presbyterians who were among the leading lights in industry and political theory—so much so that in 1776, King George III was advised that the Revolutionary War was "a Presbyterian war from the beginning." Though the exact quote is disputed, King George is said to have referred to it in a similar way, as "a Presbyterian rebellion."

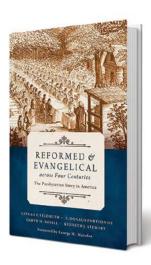
It is surprising, then, that there is not an up-todate, standard single-volume account of the history of Presbyterianism in America. This is the role that Reformed & Evangelical Across Four Centuries: The Presbyterian Story in America (R & E) aims to fill. It is a significant book with aspirations that will serve students and historians well.

When it comes to single-volume histories, the 2007 volume by D.G. Hart and John R. Muether, *Seeking a Better Country*, comes the closest and in many ways holds together the most cohesively. There are also older books, including those by Leonard J. Trinterud and the slightly later volume, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* by Lefferts A. Loetscher, both of which the authors of R & E cite. There are also several histories that focus on a specific stream of Presbyterianism

in the United States, whether regional or denominational. *R & E* represents an attempt to present the Presbyterian story more broadly. While this book aims at becoming the single-volume standard, it is a multiauthor effort: while all are Presbyterians, the contributors are in different Presbyterian denominations and thus represent different streams within the American tradition. Their individual contributions are not delineated, but there are sections of the book that read differently from others.

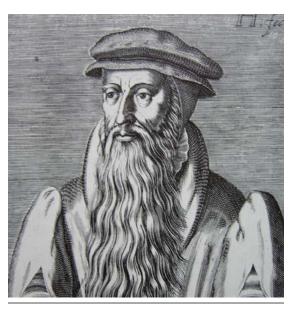
he first obvious strength of *R* & *E* is the attention it devotes to the origins of Presbyterianism in England and Scotland. This section (roughly the first 80 pages) is the strongest and most detailed. While it devotes less attention to the role of Calvin and other European Reformers in the development of Presbyterianism, it more than makes up for this by providing a carefully researched and clearly presented account of the specifically English and Scottish theological soil into which Genevan convictions were planted and eventually took root.

The writers avoid the usual focus on Calvin and Geneva because of a desire not to obscure other sources of influence. They state at the outset that "a too-rapid emphasis on Genevan influence becomes an obstacle to fuller understanding." No doubt this can be the case, and they instead go into fuller detail regarding the influence of Luther on the English church and on Elizabethan era Puritan preachers. Without question, Luther had an outsize influence on the development of Protestant theological sensibilities in England, but an argument could be made that the formative influence of John Calvin on the Scottish church in general and on John Knox in



Reformed and Evangelical Across Four Centuries: The Presbyterian Story in America

By Nathan P. Feldmeth, S. Donald Fortson III, Garth M. Rosell, and Kenneth J. Stewart Foreword by George M. Marsden (Eerdmans, 2022)



John Knox (c. 1514-1572)

particular deserves special pride of place in tracing the origins of a movement that would be codified in documents heavily influenced by Scottish theologians and by a practice of church government that had its earliest English-speaking expression in Scotland.

The big question hovering over the entirety of the book is that of definition. While *R* & *E* aims at being a sweeping history, it is particularly concerned with giving an account of those strands of Presbyterianism that fit within the later consensus movement of evangelicalism. This leads to some internal tensions that are not always synthesized by the authors themselves. An especially noteworthy example of this is the section of R & E that engages with the work of David W. Bebbington. Bebbington has argued persuasively that the evangelical consensus revolves around four emphases, known by those who follow him as the "Bebbington Quadrilateral": biblicism, conversionism, crucicentrism, and activism. Bebbington notes the emergence of this evangelical consensus in the 1730s, connecting it directly to the work of John Wesley and others in the so-called Great Awakening.

R & *E*, by contrast, tries to demonstrate that these four emphases were found in earlier Presbyterianism. It makes a convincing case that the key elements of the later evangelical movement were not merely a result of the Great Awakening; rather, the later evangelical coalescence around the quadrilateral was built on existing Presbyterian emphases. While this continuity between post-revival Presbyterians and their

forefathers in England and Scotland is important, it may be slightly beside the point. Bebbington's thesis is not that these elements individually—or even all of them together-were entirely new. Rather, their significance lies in the fact that they move from being features found within the context of a larger theological and ecclesiological system (such as Presbyterianism) to becoming the glue that holds together the evangelical movement. In other words, they become foundational, defining elements of a multidenominational movement that exists apart from traditional concerns about ecclesiology or the sacraments. The elements of the quadrilateral were not introduced in the 1730s, but earlier Protestants (many of whom evidenced these convictions, as R & E demonstrates) saw the narrower convictions regarding ecclesiology, worship, the Lord's Supper, and baptism as far more significant. They were less willing to set these aside for the sake of a broader coalition. But this concern to emphasize the evangelical bona fides of Presbyterianism is central to R & E; it is throughout the book and expanded upon in its conclusion. There the authors express a hope for the further strengthening of Presbyterianism through revival and for its renewed commitment to the transformation of culture through the efforts of multidenominational organizations such as the National Association of Evangelicals.

his central question of definition also plays a prominent role in the debates around subscription to the Westminster Standards. As this volume demonstrates, the question of confessional subscription emerges much earlier than is often recognized. The authors trace the beginning of the debate to the Great Ejection in 1662, when thousands of Puritan ministers were forced out of the Church of England upon the Act of Uniformity and the Restoration of the monarchy. From that point forward, Presbyterians were decidedly outside the theological mainstream in England, so the question of what bound them together was an open one. Although the authors are careful to treat this question dispassionately, it must be noted that, throughout the history of Presbyterianism, those who have argued against the need for robust confessional subscription are shown to have slid into something that hardly resembles traditional Presbyterian teaching at all—often in a short period of time.

About halfway through R & E, the book moves from being an essentially straightforward chronological

narrative to more of a topical treatment arranged chronologically. It is in this part of the book that questions of Darwinism, civil rights, women in leadership, and modernism are addressed. Also addressed is the role of seminaries in meeting the growing need for ministers in the 1800s. Special consideration is given to Princeton Theological Seminary, which is dealt with both in a more general way and then again in a chapter on the influence of German universities. This is appropriate, but it could still be argued that the distinctive approach to ministerial training and to confessional subscription displayed in other seminaries played an even more significant role in the history of American Presbyterianism, especially during westward expansion, than this book would indicate.

These topical chapters, while necessary given the concerns of our day, nonetheless read differently from the earlier ones. This may be related to the timing and nature of their composition—perhaps they were composed as standalone articles—but it also has to do with their subject matter. It is much easier to provide a neutral and unifying account of Presbyterian history when addressing historical matters on which there was widespread consensus among Presbyterians; but the more modern issues that R & E



THOSE WHO HAVE ARGUED AGAINST THE NEED FOR ROBUST CONFESSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION ARE SHOWN TO HAVE SLID INTO SOMETHING THAT HARDLY RESEMBLES TRADITIONAL PRESBYTERIAN TEACHING AT ALL.





Princeton Theological Seminary's Stuart Hall

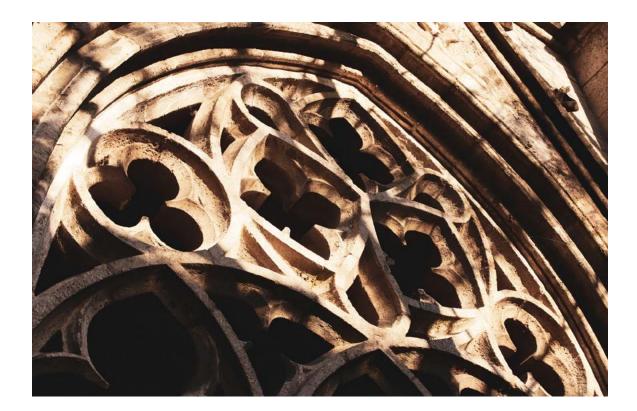
seeks to discuss have been handled in decidedly different ways by different branches of the Presbyterian church. Many of these issues also arose in a context in which fragmentation among Presbyterians had already taken place. In other words, not only was there an absence of uniformity among Presbyterians about how to address something like modernism or the civil rights movement; there were also by that time many more Presbyterian bodies struggling to understand and address these contentious developments. It is not entirely clear that the evangelical distinctives highlighted throughout the book provide a useful guide in navigating these controversies. The authors recognize this diversity of views and attempt to treat them by offering summaries of various Presbyterian denominational responses. But it is impossible to avoid oversimplifying the varied approaches or to keep from ignoring the approaches taken by smaller Presbyterian communions, even if one might argue that the responses of these smaller denominations better reflect what it means to be both evangelical and reformed.

he laudable attempt of *R* & *E* to handle these questions is one of the great strengths of the book. But it does highlight a tension inherent in the authors' task. They clearly aim to position the healthiest Presbyterians as reformed and evangelical—both in their earliest expressions and in their current practice. But if the healthiest and truest expressions of Presbyterianism are the reformed and evangelical ones, then why does the response of the PCUSA to missions or to homosexuality merit so much greater attention than that of the OPC or the

PCA, as it does in this volume? To be sure, the PCUSA (and its earlier designations) was and is the largest American denomination calling itself Presbyterian, but during the periods in which those issues became especially controversial, it could be argued that the mainline church was neither reformed nor evangelical (in a Bebbington sense), so why devote so much attention to their response? At what point do the criteria of evangelical and reformed render the largest Presbyterian denomination in America tangential to the story?

None of this is meant to detract from the significant achievement of this book. It is an important and useful volume. The first part of Reformed & Evangelical Across Four Centuries is outstanding, and the second, more topical section provides a helpful starting point for inquiry into issues that have not only divided Presbyterians in America but have divided Americans as a whole. The tensions inherent in R & E point not to a deficiency in the book but rather to the difficulty of defining the parameters of a broad sweeping account. The authors of R & E seek to demonstrate that Presbyterianism is an expression of the Christian faith that is both reformed (with varying views on subscription) and evangelical (with historical differences on revivals and cooperation). In so doing, they provide an enlightening history of a movement that has had an enormous historical influence, offers a vibrant ongoing witness, and lives with a host of internal divisions. RL

Jonathan L. Master is president of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.



Two Minds for Neo-Calvinism

A new introduction to the neo-Calvinist thought of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck attempts to fill a void in the scholarship on this important theological movement. But does its slighting of one theologian in favor of another ultimately undermine its intentions?

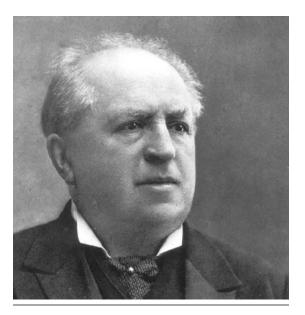
by DYLAN PAHMAN

IN HIS FOREWORD to Cory C. Brock and N. Gray Sutanto's *Neo-Calvinism: A Theological Introduction*, George Harinck notes:

Internationally the interest in neo-Calvinist dogmatics is on the rise. A new generation of theologians from all over the world, and often without historical connections with the Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition, came into contact with its theology through the translations of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*, Kuyper's Stone Lectures on *Calvinism*, and many other publications they wrote. Since about 2000 this translation got a new and decisive impulse and developed into an industry, thanks to many, but especially through the effort of John Bolt (Bavinck) and Rimmer De Vries (Kuyper).

Indeed, the Acton Institute has had the privilege, in partnership with Lexham Press, to publish a 12-volume *Collected Works of Public Theology* by Kuyper, the result of a decade of efforts from the Abraham Kuyper Translation Society and the generosity of De Vries, among others.

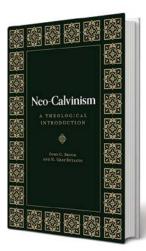
In my own academic work on Kuyper, I would appear to exemplify Harinck's point about the rising international and ecumenical interest in neo-Calvinism. I am a Scots, German, and Irish American, and a Greek Orthodox one at that. But I'm also an alumnus



Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)

of Kuyper College and Calvin Theological Seminary. My familiarity with and interest in Reformed theology and neo-Calvinism, Kuyper in particular, has been ongoing for more than a decade.

Alas, many popular and even some scholarly works on neo-Calvinism offer a theologically superficial picture of the tradition. Brock and Sutanto acknowledge this problem and aim to correct it: "Though the studies that explore the implications of neo-Calvinism on public theology, politics, and philosophy are exciting, worth investigating in their own right, and intertwined with the work of dogmatics, this imbalance is unfortunate." Thus, they state the book's aim at the end of their introduction: "By sketching the



Neo-Calvinism: A Theological Introduction

By Cory C. Brock and N. Gray Sutanto (Lexham Academic, 2022)



Herman Bavinck (1854–1921)

dogmatic roots and contours of neo-Calvinism, we hope to reground the neo-Calvinist tradition in its own catholic roots and also to invite nonspecialists from other backgrounds to draw on this tradition for their own work." A book like this has been needed for a long time now, but have Brock and Sutanto finally filled this long-vacant niche in the neo-Calvinist ecosystem?

I'm of two minds.

ny book that clearly defines its terms gets at least one cheer from me. Brock and Sutanto limit their sources and time period: "We define neo-Calvinism as a specific, historical movement of neo-confessional Calvinism in the Netherlands of the long nineteenth century." As they are particularly interested in the roots of neo-Calvinism, they further limit this to the works of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck as the two earliest theological minds of the movement: "The term 'neo-Calvinism,' then, refers to their development of [John] Calvin's theology into a holistic worldview that had a particularly God-centered orientation toward all things within the context of the modern consciousness." At points they even note influences reaching beyond Calvin to several other early Reformed theologians—such as Franciscus Junius, Jerome Zanchi, and Francis Turretin—as well as back further, to Thomas Aguinas, Augustine of Hippo, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Athanasius of Alexandria.

Yet, in emphasizing the modern and contemporary adaptation of neo-Calvinism, they also correctly note the influence of German philosophical sources, such as Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Arthur Schopenhauer. As they put it in the first of the 16 theses with which they conclude the book, "Neo-Calvinism is a critical reception of Reformed orthodoxy, contextualized to address the questions of modernity."

These theses are another bright spot of Neo-Calvinism. They might serve as a handy checklist for readers. How do you know you've absorbed the insights of this book? For example, do you know what Brock and Sutanto mean when they claim in thesis 5, "Organicism' and 'organic unity' are fitting terms to describe creation's many unities-in-diversities, as it analogically reflects the Triune God"? You will if you read chapters 5 and 7. (Spoiler: As the Holy Trinity is one unity with three distinct-but-inseparable members, so also creation reflects this divine reality, constituting an organic whole that nevertheless contains many distinct members.) You can read through these theses and mentally check off each one you now understand after having read what preceded them. I love it. I only wish they were presented in the introduction rather than being buried at the very end, in



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THE THEOLOGICAL
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SPHERE SOVEREIGNTY.





Michelangelo's depiction of the fall of mankind

the conclusion, so that readers could have them in mind from the start. It would have been even better if each chapter had developed Kuyper's and Bavinck's arguments for a single thesis. To be sure, those arguments can be found throughout the book, but as it is, finding them could be more intuitive. That's only a minor complaint, however, as many books fall far short of the clarity of *Neo-Calvinism* in that regard.

A third bright spot is that despite their emphasis on theology in itself, Brock and Sutanto continually connect the theological insights they explore to Kuyper and Bavinck's principles for Christian social engagement, such as common grace, the antithesis, and sphere sovereignty. Once again, they succeed in offering clear definitions. Common grace "is the fact of [God's] loving patience in preserving both humanity and the creaturely cosmos despite human rebellion and its polluting corruption for the sake of redemption." The antithesis is "the antithetical relation between the kingdom of Christ and that of this world [that] is not ontological but ethical.... The enemy is sin, Satan, and the principle of the flesh at work in the hearts of human beings." Moreover, "Kuyper describes this antithesis through the lens of redemptive history accordingly: "After the fall into sin and curse, a new seed"-Jesus Christ and new humanity of the Church—"had to be replanted that would grow in the fullness of time and refresh the dead body that was once a living organism." Lastly, sphere sovereignty begins with the reality that

Christ is the King of the kingdom, and ... he has determined to administer his rule through the many authorities that occupy the multiple spheres of creation. In each sphere God has granted an aspect of authority and a relative freedom from the authorities of the other spheres. Simultaneously, there are no hard borders between these spheres, but...working at their best [they] are an organism of relations.



Adolf Von Harless (1806–1879)

Not only do they do justice to the many neo-Calvinist social principles rather than selecting just a few, they helpfully do so in the context of a deeper exploration of their theological grounding.

eo-Calvinism, despite its improvements over other, similar books on the market, retains some major defects, however. First, Brock and Sutanto do not sufficiently establish the uniqueness of their theses. Comparisons of neo-Calvinism to contemporary Roman Catholicism, or at least Kuyper's and Bavinck's perception of it, can be found, but the extent to which neo-Calvinism differs from—or dovetails with—other contemporary Protestant traditions cannot be discovered from reading this book.

The most important of these, to my mind, would be Lutheranism. Kuyper and Bavinck reference Lutheran theologians like Adolf Von Harless and Hans Lassen Martensen in their works. Bavinck lists both as among the foremost ethicists of the 19th century in his *Reformed Ethics*, in fact. While Kuyper and Bavinck have their criticisms of Lutheranism, they also constructively build upon Lutheran ideas in the development of their theology. These figures

demonstrate neo-Calvinism's "catholic" commonalities with, rather than uniqueness from, contemporary Lutheranism. For example, one can find clear antecedents in Von Harless's 1842 System of Christian Ethics to the unfolding of what Kuyper called the "progressive" aspect of common grace throughout history, a treatment of which Neo-Calvinism lacks. A comparison with a near contemporary Lutheran like Dietrich Bonhoeffer might have been fruitful as well, given the authors' appeal to Bavinck's categorization of "family, church, state, and culture" as "meta-spheres," which seem to correspond exactly to Bonhoeffer's conception of four creational "mandates" in his Ethics.

This leads me to a second, more severe defect. While Brock and Sutanto note that Kuyper never isolates meta-spheres in the same way as Bavinck, there are many instances where no differences between the two theologians are acknowledged. On my reading, the book tends in those cases to collapse the neo-Calvinist viewpoint into Bavinck's at the expense of Kuyper's.

For example, consider Brock and Sutanto's account of conscience. They claim that, based on the need for common grace, "Bavinck and Kuyper both sharply question just how common the appropriation of natural law is." In support of this claim, however, they cite only Bavinck's account of how "while the

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moral order and natural law are reality, the domains of historical context, human desire, and sin restrict the epistemic possibilities for the human conscience to receive said moral order commonly and correctly due to the complexity of the embodied self." Thus, while acknowledging natural law, by the authors' presentation Bavinck would seem to anticipate Alasdair MacIntyre in claiming that conscience's witness is mediated, "operat[ing] according to a plethora of situated logics."

Contrast this with Kuyper's statements in *Our Program*. To Kuyper, "conscience is the immediate contact in a person's soul of God's holy presence, from moment to moment. Withdrawn into the citadel of his conscience, a person knows that God's omnipotence stands guard for him at the gate." Conscience is the moral basis of the sovereignty of nonstate spheres, such that "the only point of support that has ultimately proved invincible and indomitable over against the power of the state is the conscience." Indeed, as Kuyper begins his treatment of the topic, "The conscience marks a boundary that the state may never cross."

To be fair, the authors do note that Bavinck supported freedom of conscience, and we can add that Kuyper also believed the conscience to be corruptible and in need of palingenesis (regeneration). But at the very least, there appears to be a sharp contrast of emphases, if not also of content. Does social context determine the content of the conscience (Bavinck)? Or does God through the conscience sanctify the sovereignty, and thus the free existence, of the various social spheres (Kuyper)? Which determines which? Perhaps neo-Calvinism at its root truly embraces both—that is, that our consciences and social contexts create feedback loops into one another. That would be intriguing and compelling. Unfortunately, Brock and Sutanto, in favoring Bavinck over Kuyper, obfuscate this apparent difference between them and thus neglect to explore the fascinating implications for appropriating both of their neo-Calvinist theological insights in addressing the question of conscience today.

This, then, leads to the third and most severe defect. To the extent that Bavinck's views are presented as the sum of "Kuyper and Bavinck," even where they conflict with Kuyper's, Brock and Sutanto fail to accurately represent Kuyper's views, and thus misrepresent neo-Calvinism as something bound by a view common to both thinkers. To give another example, in exploring the relation between

science and worldview, they quote Bavinck at length and then summarize his position that "to build a worldview, one has to begin with science." Yet this is the *opposite* of Kuyper's view. For Kuyper, one's worldview dictates the starting point of all scientific inquiry. Thus, as the authors note, despite this contradiction Kuyper distinguished between "normalist" science that mistakenly denies the reality of sin and "abnormalist" science that correctly accounts for it. Furthermore, Kuyper insists that only by a common worldview can scientific investigations across the faculties of a university contribute to a single whole. A shared worldview alone makes individual scholars into a scientific organism—namely, a university in substance rather than mere form.

And so I'm conflicted. *Neo-Calvinism* is the best introduction to the theology of Kuyper and Bavinck available. But on several points, Brock and Sutanto fail to accomplish their own stated goal. So I recommend it...but only until something better comes along.

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





CONVERSATION STARTERS WITH . . .

Mike Cosper

Tell us a little about your spiritual journey and how it led to your podcasting career at Christianity Today.

I grew up in a Christian home and have one of those faith stories that is murky even to me. I walked an aisle in the second or third grade and was baptized shortly thereafter, but it wasn't until I was 16 that I had a real encounter with the power of the Gospel and the presence of God—a kind of Damascus Road experience. So for me there's no precise beginning for my faith, but there are important milestones that made it more concrete for me.

We were Southern Baptists until we moved into a town with no thriving Baptist churches. We attended a nondenominational church throughout my teen years, but I came back to the Baptists when I stumbled into church planting at the age of 19, when I was in college. I remain at that Baptist church plant to this day. I ended up joining the staff as an associate pastor and worship director shortly after we launched and served there for 15 years. In 2016, a combination of unhealth at the church and a growing sense of calling outside it led me to transition out of ministry there. I'd been writing and publishing for several years by then, and I had an idea in my head about a nonprofit

media company that could serve Christians who were ill-served by most of the media options at the time. (Most of my friends who were in the marketplace consumed no Christian media at all.)

Unfortunately, it turned out that starting a conservative nonprofit in 2016 while also being a Trump skeptic was a lethal combination, and plans got derailed. So I pivoted and launched a for-profit production company that served churches and non-profits, doing work that wasn't far removed from my original plans.

Along the way I produced some original material,

I met Tim Dalrymple shortly before he became the new president at *CT*, and when he shared where he wanted to take things and invited me to join the team he was assembling, I leapt at the opportunity.

Have you seen changes in evangelicalism over the past 10, 15 years? If so, do you think it has been a question of its trying to influence the culture more aggressively, or rather the culture infiltrating too many evangelical churches?

Yes and both. I think faithfulness in the church is always contested in two directions—syncretism and sectarianism. In our current moment, the syncretistic impulse looks just like the one I faced when starting out in ministry. Today they call it "exvangelicalism." Back then it was "the Emergent Church." I suspect that, like the Emergent Church, exvangelicals will largely be assimilated into the mainline.

On the other side, though, the sectarian pressures feel very different than they did 20 years ago. I started ministry in the post-Cold War era, and the evangelical leadership archetypes were a Bible thumper, a happy guy in a Hawaiian shirt, and a CEO. The culture wars still existed, but for young leaders they were very unattractive. 9/11 shifted the tone a bit, but I think larger shifts emerged around 2008. It started with the emergence of Sarah Palin, who was initially embraced by conservatives for all the ways she seemed to embody the values of faith and family. The condescension of the media and of progressive politicians, plus a treatment of her that (rightly or wrongly) was perceived as unfair, left conservative evangelicals feeling attacked and condescended to. Throughout the Obama years, religious liberty felt under threat—lawsuits against bakers and nuns, the inevitable march toward the embrace of gay



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marriage, and right after that the rise of the transgender movement.

Point being, there was a cumulative effect during those years that not only paved the way for a reactionary movement (and Donald Trump) but also gave oxygen to the idea that Christians were under siege.

So now it seems like the old sectarian impulses of fundamentalism are back, along with a populist impulse and an even uglier authoritarian impulse expressed as "Christian nationalism." These strike me as just as great a set of errors and dangers as the syncretistic impulse. In fact, I'd argue that the more authoritarian versions of them are just syncretism by other means.

You're perhaps most famous for your series of podcasts on the collapse of Mars Hill. Have you seen any change in "celebrity preacher" culture, perhaps a decline in megachurch growth or more skepticism among believers in the "pews"? Or is it just a question of, "Well that was that guy or that church—my bestselling preacher is great"?

There's no evidence megachurches are in decline. While they make up a minority of churches in the US, 70% of evangelicals attend a megachurch. There are

all kinds of entrenched cultural reasons why that's the case—many of them overlapping with why we like big brands, malls, and box stores.

That said, I do think there's a growing ambiguity among evangelicals about what to make of megachurches. I certainly hear more about it, but that may be a matter of where I stand these days. I've said all along that I don't think megachurches are inherently incapable of faithfulness, and I think there are some that do a pretty good job of resisting the celebrity-pastor impulse. My hope is that the parade of scandal over the past decade might make people think twice about why they want to publish books or put their face on the home page of a church's website.

It seems like once a month at least we're treated to new stats about a decline in church attendance and the rise of the "nones." Many assume that sex/money scandals or a too-conservative take on women's ordination/LGBTQ+issues is what's driving people out, but the biggest declines have been in liberal mainline churches. Is this just a normal cycle of rise and decline, with a resurrection on the horizon? What should evangelical churches in particular be doing to convey the importance of being a member of a local church?

I think there are problems enough inside evangelicalism that those stats are cold comfort. If the church is embracing nationalism in a syncretistic way, if popular Christian books are advocating an authoritarian vision of Christianity, if the culture war dominates ecclesial life, then the church *is* in decline even if the numbers are constant.

A worthwhile data point here is the rapid rise of the number of pastors who say they'd quit ministry if they could. That signals something toxic inside the church, even if attendance isn't in decline.

A while back, I was talking with a pastor who leads a church with more than 15,000 people in attendance. He asked, "If we're not supposed to measure health by attendance and giving, then what should we measure?" I suggested that they start counting the number of visits pastors and members made to hospitals and funeral homes. Where is the church showing up to share one another's burdens? Are they there at the most critical and trauma-filled moments of one another's lives? I'm certain an emphasis like



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this would (oddly enough) be a remarkably successful growth strategy. It would also be a powerful discipleship strategy. I'm just not sure anyone is willing to try it.

Didactically or explicitly "Christian" art—especially movies and fiction—used to be pretty kitschy and aimed at the already converted. Have you seen any improvement on that score?

No.

What's your favorite B&W film and why?

Billy Wilder's 1961 film, *One Two Three*. I've probably watched this movie 100 times. Wilder somehow manages to pack a dense political satire into an absurd Cold War comedy: nonstop jokes about bad Soviet knockoffs of American products, Germans who insist they were never Nazis but can't stop standing to attention and clicking their heels, and the skewering of communist propaganda, which no one (including the communists) actually believed.









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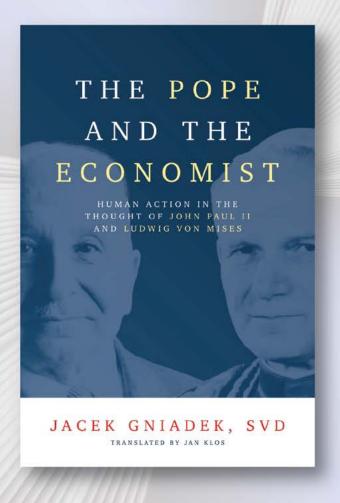








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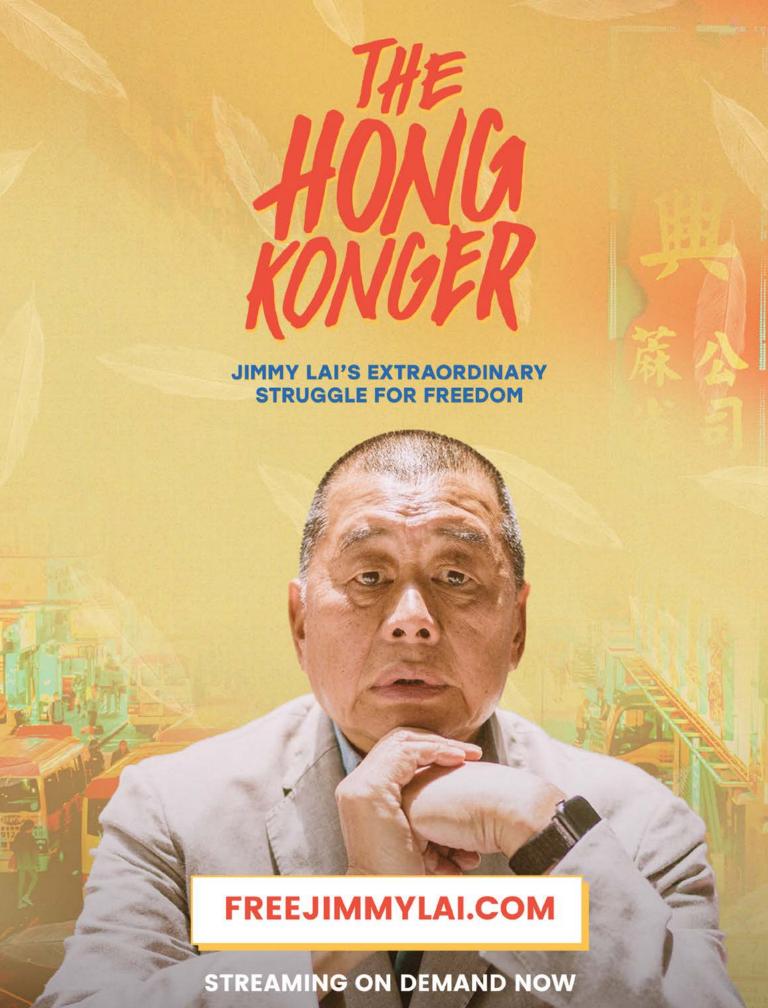
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