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## The Cresset (Vol. LXX, No. 2, Advent/Christmas)

Valparaiso University

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# THE CRESSET

*A review of literature, the arts, and public affairs*

Advent/Christmas 2006



Environmental Racism  
*James B. Martin-Schramm*

Yusuf's Second Coming  
*Harold K. Bush, Jr.*

Counting to Twenty  
*Gary Fincke*

Mary's Turn  
*Cynthia L. Rutz*

Liturgical Reconstruction  
*James Brooks Kuykendall*

The Myth of the Global Citizen  
*Jeanne Heffernan Schindler*



# THE CRESSET

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# in luce tua

## An Electoral Reckoning

**M**Y CELL PHONE SOUNDED AN EXCITED AND impatient “BEEP! BEEP!” when the text message arrived at 3:00 AM. I had been asleep, but only for an hour or so. Pretty sure about what it was going to say, I let myself go back to sleep. The next morning I read it, tapped out in the wee hours by a former student and fellow political junkie (one with more stamina than I). “Dems won the Senate.”

On that recent election night, the Democratic Party surprised most pundits by winning control not only of the House of Representatives (as expected) but also of the Senate. I was among the “experts” proven wrong. A few days before the election, I predicted a Democratic pickup of about twenty-five seats in the House and five in the Senate, which would have left Republicans in control of the upper house. This was not so far off the final result of thirty seats in the House and six in the Senate, but that one extra Senate seat is the one that really matters. Of course, pundits always get the last word. We get to tell you what it means.

How important is this victory for the Democratic Party? One recent book has predicted a dawn of *The Emerging Democratic Majority* (Scribner, 2002). The authors predicted that sometime between 2004 and 2008, demographic and cultural trends would create a dominant Democratic electoral majority. Suddenly, their prediction—laughed at after the 2004 elections only a couple of years ago—seems remarkably prescient. Could the Democratic sweep of 2006 represent the turning point, the first win by a new Democratic electoral majority that combines economic populism, social tolerance, and a multi-cultural ethic? Did the “BEEP! BEEP!” of my cell phone in the middle of the night trumpet the first stage in an historic electoral realignment?

Probably not. Before the 2006 election, Republicans controlled the Presidency and both houses of Congress, but this itself was something

of an anomaly. Between 1900 and 1966, Americans elected the same party to control all three of these institutions in twenty-six of thirty-four elections (66% of the time), but since 1968 we have done so in only six of twenty elections (30% of the time). Today’s voters split their tickets and seem to prefer divided government.

**P**ERMIT THE SOCIAL SCIENTIST IN ME TO OFFER A little more data. In Presidential and House elections between 1998 and 2004, Republicans garnered between 48% and 51% of the national popular vote. In the same period, the Democrats took between 46% and about 48% in each election. The average Republican margin of victory in this period was only about 2%. In the 2000 election, exit polls on Election Day put party affiliation at 39%–35% in favor of the Democrats, and the 2004 exit poll put it at 37%–37% (*Almanac of American Politics*, 2006). Although Republicans have done well in recent elections, they have not created the sort of dominant electoral coalition that allowed the New Deal Democrats to run the country for the better part of four decades.

Their control of the Presidency and both houses of Congress is more likely the result of their highly effective campaign organizations and of an issue context that focused attention on national security, traditionally their strongest area. The Democratic Party’s recapture of Congress is thus probably best understood as a return to the divided governments of the 1980s and early 1990s that better reflected an almost evenly divided electorate than did the one-party control of recent years.

But is it still possible that this election marks an erosion of even that small 2% Republican advantage? After all, the Democrats won this year’s popular vote for the House of Representatives by roughly 52%–46%, almost identical to the Republican margin of victory in 1994 when their decade of electoral dominance

began. This is of course a possibility, but there is no clear evidence yet to confirm it.

In this year's exit polls, voters were asked how important certain issues were in their vote for a US House candidate. Thirty-six percent said that the war in Iraq was "extremely important." This group voted for Democratic candidates 60%–38%. The Republican Party, under the leadership of President Bush, took this nation to war. The nation has been at war for a long time now, and we have not seen the promised results. The increasingly dire situation in Iraq obviously hurt Republican candidates. Even many voters who supported the initial decision to invade Iraq and remove Saddam Hussein from power have since lost faith.

However, in those same exit polls a slightly larger percentage, 41%, responded that "corruptions and scandal in government" were extremely important in their vote, and this group voted for Democrats in similar numbers. Voters who turned against Republicans did so not only because of Iraq but because of their perception that Republicans had not been managing our nation's affairs responsibly and ethically. The drumbeat of news about lobbyist Jack Abramoff, the Valerie Plame affair, and Congressman Foley clearly took a toll.

**T**HIS ELECTION WAS ABOUT COMPETENCE. IN recent years, the Republican Party had won the right to govern the country, nearly unopposed. Since the Republicans were in complete control, the voters were able to hold them completely accountable for the results, and clearly the voters did not like what they saw.

Had the President himself been on the ballot this year, he would have fared no better, and the Democrats would have swept the table. Of course, the President was not, and this President never

will be again. Two years from now, voters will make new decisions about who should be President and who should control thirty-three Senate seats and 435 House seats. In all likelihood, they again will vote for a divided government. This is not a flaw in the American political system; this is its design.

The American Founders did not count on America's statesmen (or America's voters) acting like angels. The "enlightened statesmen" of Madison's *Federalist 10* might sometimes take the helm, but not often. The Founders understood that a ruling party given control of an entire nation's government even by the narrowest of majorities cannot be expected to act like the humble and cautious agents of a divided people; they more likely will act like the arrogant and ambitious rulers described in *Federalist 51*. They will act much like our Republican President and Congress have been acting. The solution is not to elect more virtuous rulers. The solution, at least the solution proposed by the Founders, is to "supply..., by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives."

It is in the nature of all politicians to act selfishly, but ambition can counteract ambition. Our current administration shows little interest in seeking the advice of Congress or even the Courts, and the other branches currently seem to have little inclination to assert themselves. The same will not be true of the new Congress. The administration and its policies will no longer get a free pass—not on Iraq, not on the rights of detainees, not on the budget deficit. Whether one agrees more often with the President or with the new Congress, that cannot be a bad thing. Our government was designed to be moved not by the arrogance and ambition produced by ephemeral electoral mandates but by the caution and prudence generated by cooperation and compromise. ♣

—JPO

## EDEN

Here, where the moon-beaten waves  
Curl themselves up the sand,  
The dagger of joy, swift-swung  
By your mother's remembered hand,  
Tore open old wounds. And you wept  
In the broken shells and the foam  
In the blank salt surges of surf-swept  
Confusions of home.

There's no difference whether the roar  
Is the August wind beating the leaves  
Or the breakers shaking the shore  
Or the blood pounding loud in your head -  
The terrible power of joy  
Batters down all the levees of lies  
And denials and deals and dread  
That narrow swift days as they flow  
To the restless, devouring sea.

We come back to the shore or the spinney  
As if to retrieve a coat  
Or a blanket abandoned too many  
Long, careless years ago.  
We return seeking joy in the places  
We glimpsed it first, and we find  
Just the memory of dead, loved faces,  
Strange vines and blank sand. And we fear  
That joy's vanished, leaving no traces.  
But how often does it appear  
When by chance we have glanced up, stunned,  
Overcome by desire and shame  
In the power of the view from here:  
A glimpse of a garden, a radiant face,  
And a saber of flame?

Charles Strietelmeier

# Skull Valley

## Nuclear Waste, Tribal Sovereignty, and Environmental Racism

**T**HE ENERGY BILL THAT PRESIDENT BUSH SIGNED into law in the summer of 2005 included several features designed to benefit the nuclear power industry. For example, the legislation authorized research, development, and construction of a new test reactor at the Idaho National Laboratory and established a \$2 billion risk insurance program for up to six new reactors based on this design. In addition, the legislation also extended for twenty years the Price Anderson Act, which limits the nuclear power industry's liability in the case of an accident. It also cleared the way legally for the reprocessing of nuclear waste from

commercial reactors and for the use of plutonium to generate commercial energy.

Most readers of *The Cresset* may also know that the Bush administration wants to establish the nation's permanent underground repository for high-level nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain in Nevada. Few, however, may be aware that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) recently issued a license to establish an interim storage facility for this waste on the Skull Valley Goshute Indian Reservation in Utah. Once the facility is constructed, up to 4,000 casks, each storing ten metric tons of spent nuclear fuel (SNF) with a radioactive half life of at least 10,000 years, would be stored above ground for up to forty years on a portion of the tribe's reservation. Located approximately fifty miles from Salt Lake City, the storage facility would be large enough to accommodate

*James B. Martin-Schramm*

about eighty percent of the SNF produced by commercial nuclear reactors to date.

This unprecedented project raises important ethical questions about the use of tribal sovereignty, environmental racism, and the fairest way to share the burden of storing high-level nuclear waste. Normative guidance from recent mainline

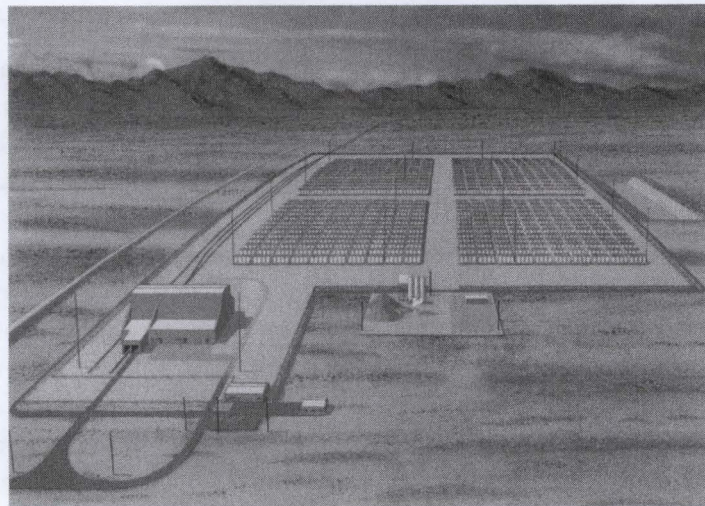


Figure 1. Artist's rendering of PFS storage facility on Skull Valley Goshute Reservation (Private Fuel Storage, February 2001).

Protestant ethical reflection appears to cut both ways on this question. In the 1990s, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Presbyterian Church (USA) incorporated the concept of "eco-justice" in environmental policy documents.

Both churches addressed this concept in relation to four

moral norms: sustainability, sufficiency, participation, and solidarity. While all four norms pertain to the situation in Skull Valley, this article focuses only on the applicability and apparent conflict between participation and solidarity.

### **Participation and Tribal Sovereignty**

The ecojustice norm of participation emphasizes that the interests of all forms of life are important and must be heard and respected in decisions that affect their lives. The norm is concerned with empowerment and seeks to remove all obstacles to participation constructed by various social, economic, and political forces and institutions. The norm places an importance on open debate and dialogue and seeks to hear the voices or perspectives of all concerned.



The Skull Valley Band of the Goshute Indians is one of 554 Indian nations within the boundaries of the United States. The Skull Valley Band traces their claim to tribal sovereignty back to a peace treaty signed with Abraham Lincoln in 1863 and to the executive orders that Woodrow Wilson signed forty years later establishing their reservation. Like other tribes, the Goshutes had to give up vast swaths of land and make other concessions in order to gain the right of self-governance on tribal homelands and reservations. Anthropologists think that originally there may have been as many as 10,000 Goshutes roaming the Great Basin between Nevada's Ruby Mountains and Utah's Wasatch Range. After the first settlers arrived in 1847, the Goshute population, besieged by hunger and sickness, dropped to less than 1,000. Today the Skull Valley Band has dwindled to approximately 125 adult members, with less than thirty living on the reservation.

Early in the 1990s, the Goshutes were one of seventeen Native American tribes that expressed interest when the federal government invited communities around the United States to consider hosting a monitored retrieval storage (MRS) facility for the interim storage of spent nuclear fuel. Over the course of six months in 1996–97, the Goshutes negotiated a lease agreement with Private Fuel Storage (PFS), a consortium of eight utility companies that own and operate thirty-three nuclear reactors around the United States.<sup>1</sup> In December 1996, more than two-thirds of the tribe's General Council signed a resolution authorizing the tribe's executive committee to sign the lease agreement with PFS. While the financial terms of the lease agreement are not available to the public, a similar, though now scuttled, agreement with the Mescalero Apaches would have brought up to \$250 million to that tribe.

Shortly after the NRC commenced its review of the lease agreement in 1997, several members of the tribe publicly expressed their opposition to the plan. Some unsuccessfully sued the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) for supporting the lease agreement. Others complained that the tribe's leadership distributed "dividends" from PFS only to members of the tribe that supported the proposal. In September 2001, thirty-eight dissident members gathered to elect new leadership for the tribe. The

BIA later deemed the election illegitimate because it did not include a majority of the adult members. There remains significant disagreement among members of the tribe today about the terms of the lease agreement and the wisdom of the project.

Grace Thorpe, a Native American activist, complains that tribes like the Skull Valley Goshutes are "selling our sovereignty" to utilities who will benefit from it. Thorpe writes: "The issue is not sovereignty. The issue is Mother Earth's preservation and survival. The issue is environmental racism" (Thorpe, 54). It would be false, however, to give the impression that all Native Americans share Thorpe's views. In fact, several tribes refuse to take a stand on the issue and affirm the sovereign right of the Goshutes to make decisions with which others may disagree.

Clearly some Native Americans inside and outside of the tribe believe this decision to build a storage facility is a misuse of tribal sovereignty, but a majority of the Skull Valley Goshutes thinks locating a temporary storage facility for spent nuclear fuel on their reservation would be an appropriate use of their tribal sovereignty. Does it matter what others think? Does the norm of participation require support for all uses of tribal sovereignty? Or are the Goshutes, in fact, victims of environmental racism—whether they realize it or not?

### **Solidarity and Environmental Racism**

The ecojustice norm of solidarity emphasizes the kinship and interdependence of all forms of life and encourages support and assistance for those who suffer. This norm highlights the fundamental communal nature of life in contrast to individualism and encourages individuals and groups to join together in common cause and stand with those who are the victims of discrimination, abuse, and oppression. Underscoring the reciprocal relationship of individual welfare and the common good, solidarity calls for the powerful to share the plight of the powerless, for the rich to listen to the poor, and for humanity to recognize its fundamental interdependence with the rest of nature. In so far as solidarity leads to the equitable sharing of burdens, this norm manifests the demand for distributive justice.

There are two key ethical issues in this case related to the norm of solidarity. The first is whether the PFS proposal to store spent nuclear

fuel temporarily on the Skull Valley Goshute Indian Reservation is an example of environmental racism and environmental injustice. The second is how the burden of storing this waste and disposing of it permanently should be shared fairly among the citizens of the United States.

### **Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice**

The term, *environmental racism*, was coined in 1982 by Benjamin Chavez, the future director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, while protesting the dumping of highly toxic polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in Warren County, North Carolina. Evidence of environmental racism can be found in the disproportionate number of waste facilities and polluting industries located in communities of people of color. Evidence of environmental racism also can be found in the way that environmental laws have been enforced, or not enforced, in white communities and communities of people of color. Environmental racism pertains not only to actions that have a racist *intent*, but also to actions that have a racist *impact*. It occurs when people of color are either targeted or bear a disproportionate level of the burden created by the disposal of toxic wastes or the pollution produced by industry. *Environmental justice* broadens the scope of this concern to include people of any race, class, or income level (Roberts and Toffolon-Weiss, 9–11).

President Clinton signed an executive order in February 1994 establishing environmental justice as a national priority (Executive Order 12,898, sec. 2-2). Under this order, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in the Department of the Interior is required to conduct an environmental justice review of contracts involving the lease of Indian trust lands that may impact adversely Native American tribes. NRC staff worked together with staff from the BIA and other cooperating federal agencies to review the PFS/Goshute project. This environmental justice review featured “an analysis of the human health and environmental impacts on low-income and minority populations” resulting from activities related to the PFS/Goshute MRS facility. Following NRC policy, the staff focused their impact assessment primarily within a four-mile radius around the Skull

Valley Indian reservation, though a fifty-mile radius was utilized to examine the impact of local transportation routes on low-income and minority populations. The study concluded “the cumulative effect of the proposed [storage facility] and other activities on environmental justice concerns... is small.”(US NRC 2001, 6–28).

Despite this official finding with regard to environmental injustice, there are good reasons to suspect that the PFS storage agreement constitutes a case of environmental racism. In many respects, storage of spent nuclear fuel rods on the reservation of a Native American tribe could be viewed as the completion of a painful circle of death and exploitation. The vast majority of the mining and milling of uranium in the United States since 1950 has taken place on or adjacent to Indian reservations. Approximately twenty-five percent of the 15,000 workers employed in these activities were members of various tribes, especially Navajos. A large number of these workers eventually were diagnosed with diseases and other health problems caused by their exposure to radiation (Thorpe, 49). In addition, Native Americans not directly engaged in uranium extraction and processing have been exposed to dangers posed by groundwater contamination, radon exposure, and pollution of the air via tailings dust. Studies indicate that Indians living near uranium mines face the same health risks as those engaged in mining.

The Skull Valley Goshute Indian Reservation is ringed by toxic and hazardous waste facilities (See Figure 2). To the south lies the Dugway Proving Grounds where the US Army conducts tests on biological and chemical weapons like anthrax, nerve gas, and bubonic plague. To the west is the Utah Test and Training Range, a vast swath of desert the US Air Force uses for bombing runs and target practice by B-52 bombers and F-16 fighter jets. North and west of the reservation a private company, Envirocare, landfills ninety-seven percent of the nation’s low-level nuclear waste. East of the reservation sit the Tooele Army Depot, one of the largest weapons depots in the world, and the Deseret Chemical Depot, home to nearly fifty percent of the nation’s aging stockpile of chemical weapons. Here, the military is working around the clock to incinerate over a million

rockets, missiles, and mortars packed with sarin, mustard gas, and other deadly agents.

Trapped in this desolate and degraded landscape, the financial situation of the Goshutes is dire. The tribe looked into selling bottled water from springs on the reservation but concluded that few will want to buy water they fear may be laced with toxic substances released by the nearby chemical weapons incinerator. The tribe also has considered vegetable farming, but the land may still be polluted by a Dugway nerve gas experiment that went awry in the 1960s. The only avenue that promises any economic viability is the storage of waste on the reservation. Recently, the tribe signed an agreement to landfill municipal waste generated in and around Salt Lake City on a portion of the reservation. The tribe's leadership believes the interim storage of high-level nuclear waste is the best way to ensure the tribe's survival.

### Sharing the Burden of Nuclear Waste Disposal

Currently, 103 commercial nuclear reactors produce twenty percent of the nation's electricity and serve approximately fifty million people (Lake *et al*, 73). Over ninety percent of these reactors are located east of Utah at sixty-six locations in thirty-one states (Private Fuel Storage website;

NOI, 3). Through 2005, these commercial reactors had produced approximately 55,000 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel (SNF) (Private Fuel Storage, *Research regarding DEQ...*, 5; see also National Academy of Science, 2006).<sup>2</sup> By 2046, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission projects that these reactors will have produced 105,414 metric tons of SNF (US NRC 1999, 8).

The federal government is legally obligated under the 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act to store all high-level nuclear waste and spent nuclear fuel in a permanent underground repository. Until the federal government opens such a facility, however, the generators and owners of this waste have the responsibility both to provide and to pay for the interim storage of it. To date, twenty-one reactor units have run out of room to store spent nuclear fuel in cooling ponds. Many of these utilities have received approval from the NRC to store the fuel in casks above ground, normally on the grounds of the reactor facility. By 2010, seventy-four reactor units will have run out of storage space in their cooling ponds. Some of these reactors also will have run out of storage space above ground, which may require the utilities to cease reactor operations even before 2010 (Private Fuel Storage, *Research Regarding DEQ...*, 2; see also National Academy of

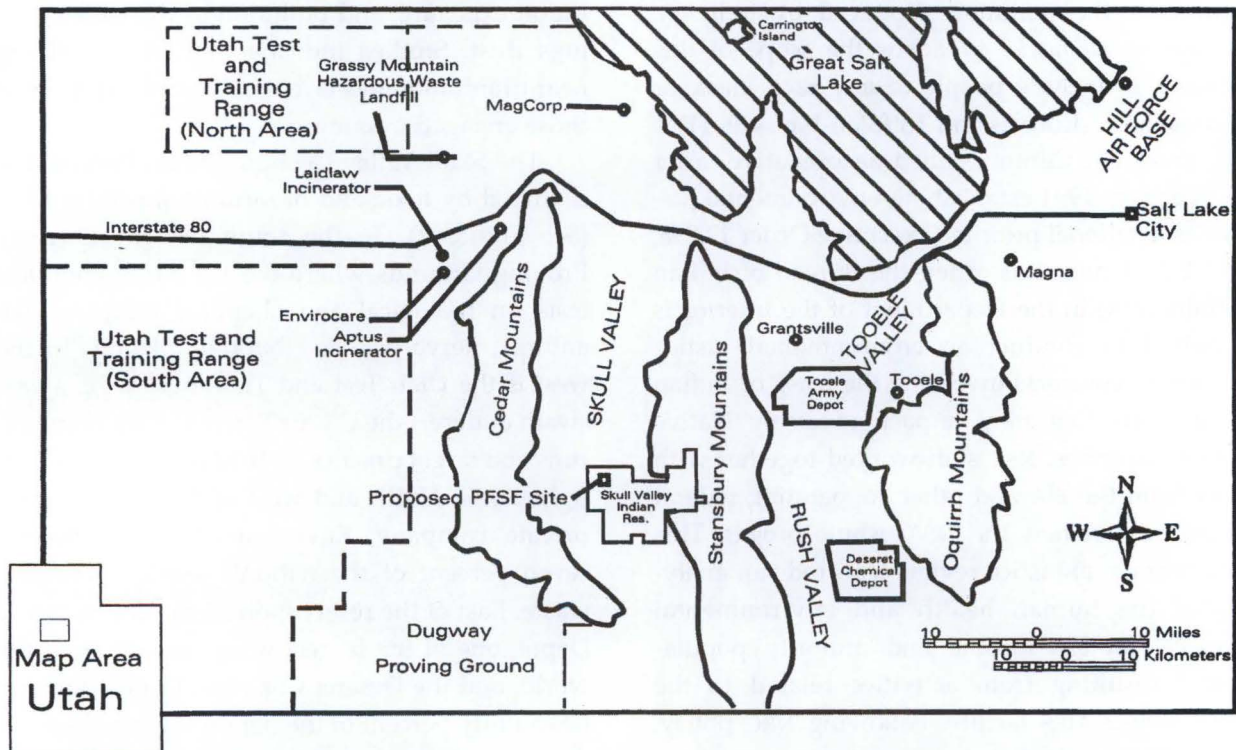


Figure 2. Regional Location of Skull Valley Indian Reservation in Utah (US Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards).

Sciences 2006). These are the driving factors behind the PFS/Goshute storage proposal.

To date, the federal government has spent over \$7 billion studying the scientific feasibility of establishing a permanent repository for high-level nuclear waste and spent nuclear fuel at Yucca Mountain in Nevada. In December 2001, the General Accounting Office (GAO), the nonpartisan, investigative arm of Congress, concluded that the Department of Energy is not ready to make a site recommendation because 293 scientific and technical issues remained unresolved. Ignoring the GAO, President Bush decided early in 2002 to accept the Department of Energy's recommendation that a permanent geological repository for high-level nuclear waste be established at Yucca Mountain. Shortly afterwards, the governor of the state of Nevada vetoed the President's decision under rules established in the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, but, under the same rules, the US House of Representatives and the US Senate voted by large margins to override Nevada's veto in the summer of 2002. These votes in Congress cleared the way for the Department of Energy to request a license from the NRC to operate a permanent repository at Yucca Mountain. This licensing review process is currently estimated to take at least five years. Legal battles also likely will delay the construction and opening of the facility. As a result, it is not likely that Yucca Mountain will be open by 2010.

If and when Yucca Mountain does open, the facility is designed to store a total of 77,000 tons of spent nuclear fuel and high-level nuclear waste. Storage of commercially produced spent nuclear fuel is limited, however, to 63,000 tons. The remaining space in the facility is reserved for the storage of defense-related nuclear waste.

In debates about the PFS/Goshute proposal, the state of Utah has expressed strong concern that Yucca Mountain cannot accommodate the total amount of commercially produced SNF that the NRC projects will be produced by 2046. If the Yucca limit of 63,000 is subtracted from the NRC projection of 105,414, the remainder is 42,414 metric tons of SNF for which there is no permanent home. The state of Utah does not believe it is coincidental that this figure is virtually identical to the amount of SNF that PFS wants to store on an interim basis for up to forty years on the Goshute Reservation. Given the uncer-

tainty about Yucca Mountain, the state fears that the "temporary" storage facility in Skull Valley will become permanent, because the waste will have no other place to go.

In response, PFS—the consortium that will operate the Skull Valley facility—has sought to reassure the citizens of Utah that the Department of Energy and the NRC would not allow the Goshute facility to be converted to a permanent repository. This would be a violation of law, because Congress has mandated that permanent disposal must take place deep underground in a geologic repository. In addition, if the Department of Energy did not take possession of the spent nuclear fuel at the end of the forty-year lease, the utilities that own the fuel still would have a legal and financial obligation to take back the fuel and find another interim storage facility. Nothing, however, prohibits PFS from entering into new negotiations with the Skull Valley Goshutes after the initial lease expires if both parties are interested in drafting a new lease arrangement. Any new lease still would have to be approved by the NRC, however.

From this overview, it is clear that the storage and ultimate disposal of high-level nuclear waste is a major public policy issue on the verge of becoming a national crisis. From California to New York, people all around the nation are saying, "Not in my backyard!" This NIMBY syndrome is behind the decision of Congress to focus solely on Yucca Mountain as a permanent repository. The NIMBY syndrome also fuels political and legal battles around the nation aimed at rejecting pleas by utilities to increase the amount of spent nuclear fuel that can be stored on a temporary basis in casks above ground. All citizens of the United States must shoulder some of the blame for failing to muster the political will to deal with this problem in an effective way. In many respects, U.S. citizens driven by the NIMBY syndrome have helped to drop this issue in the laps of the Goshutes. After all, no other community in the nation has stepped forward to store high-level nuclear waste on either an interim or a permanent basis. Over fifty million people in the nation enjoy the benefits of nuclear power, but most refuse to accept the burdens associated with its waste.

Some environmentalists see this waste bottleneck as the most effective way to bring to an end

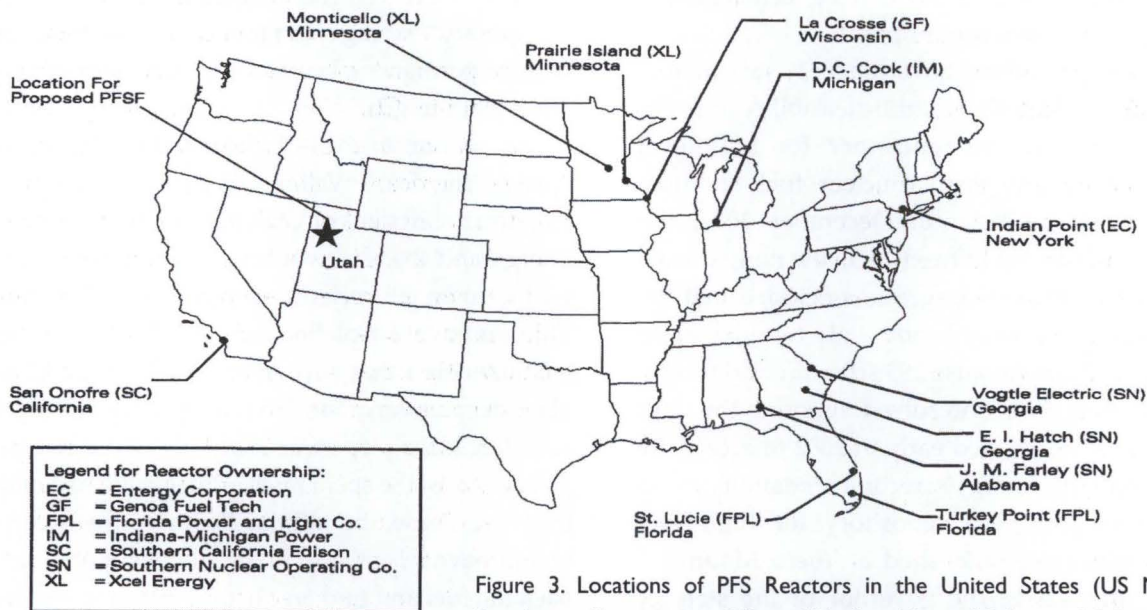


Figure 3. Locations of PFS Reactors in the United States (US Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards).

the nuclear energy industry in the United States. When utilities run out of places to store spent nuclear fuel on an interim basis, federal law requires them to shut down the reactors. Over time, this means that the people of the United States will have to find other ways either to produce or to conserve twenty percent of the nation's current energy supply. Investments in renewable energy production, energy-efficient technologies, and changes in patterns of consumption could go a long way to meet this challenge, but none of these measures resolve the issue of what to do with the nuclear waste.

Even if nuclear waste is not produced in the future, the United States still is faced with the challenge of storing temporarily or disposing permanently the high-level nuclear waste that has been produced to date. This raises the question of whether it would be better to store existing stockpiles at over seventy locations around the country or to consolidate these stockpiles in one place. PFS contends that it would be more cost-effective and easier to provide a high level of security if spent nuclear fuel all was stored in one place. The state of Utah, however, argues that if it is safe to store spent nuclear fuel where it is now, then it should remain where it is—presumably in perpetuity.

There lies the rub. The radioactivity of some elements in spent nuclear fuel has a half-life of at least 10,000 years. Is it morally responsible to

store thousands of steel and concrete casks containing this waste above ground at dozens of locations around the nation for thousands of years? Is it safer to entomb such highly radioactive waste in a geological repository deep underground? Like it or not, and absent any new alternative strategies, disposal underground still appears to be the best option.<sup>3</sup> But Yucca Mountain is not open, and it is not clear it will open any time soon. Now that the NRC has awarded a license for the PFS/Goshute interim storage facility, this could give the nation forty more years to figure out how to dispose of the waste permanently. At the same time, once the waste has been transferred to an Indian reservation, it is possible that the nation will forget that a long-term disposal problem still exists.

So, who should bear the burden (and reap the benefits) from storing the nation's high-level nuclear waste, either on an interim or a permanent basis? On the face, it seems clear that those who benefit the most from nuclear energy should also shoulder most of the waste burden. But how realistic is it to expect that millions of people in thirty-one states will abandon the NIMBY syndrome in order to muster the courage and political will to address this problem in a responsible manner? Isn't it more likely that they still will try to externalize the costs by dumping the problem on others?

This brings us back to the PFS/Goshute interim storage plan. The Goshutes are no less intelligent than other people in the United States. Whereas most US residents live a middle-class lifestyle or better, virtually all Goshutes on the reservation live below the poverty line. In addition, while most people in the United States are members of the white, dominant culture, the Goshutes are members of a tribe that now constitutes a tiny fraction of its former glory. Once construction begins, some members of the tribe would qualify for jobs building and operating the \$3.1 billion facility. Once operational, revenues from the lease agreement would provide private healthcare for tribal members on the reservation who now have to travel over two hundred miles to the closest office of the Indian Health Services. In addition, PFS revenues would be utilized to build a religious and cultural center on the reservation to help the band preserve their disappearing heritage. Funds also would be available to encourage members of the band to return to the reservation through subsidized housing construction and other infrastructure improvements. Finally, it is likely that the PFS lease agreement would make members of the band millionaires over the life of the project.

Are members of the dominant culture taking advantage of the Goshutes by tempting them to accept what could amount to virtually the nation's entire stockpile of commercially-produced, spent nuclear fuel? Or are the Goshutes shrewdly taking advantage of the failure of members of the dominant culture to face an environmental problem of their own creation? Now that the NRC has approved the forty-year lease agreement, the Goshutes have good reason to believe that it will be safe to operate the facility for the length of the contract. At the conclusion of the lease agreement, the Goshutes should be much better off financially and will not necessarily have to sign another lease agreement. Nor is it guaranteed that the NRC would approve a new lease agreement, in which case the utilities would have to take back the fuel they had stored temporarily on the Skull Valley Reservation.

Examining the proposal from these financial and health perspectives, it is clear that there may be significant benefits for the Skull Valley Goshutes. But what about cultural concerns? Is the tribe selling its soul to accept the waste? Is the storage facil-

ity an insult or betrayal of "Mother Earth?" Are the Goshutes threatening the foundations of their very culture through this "misuse" of tribal sovereignty? How is it that Christians do not lose sleep over the invention and use of nuclear energy but expect Native Americans to maintain a principled opposition to storing nuclear waste on religious terms? Is it possible for Indian cultures to embrace the costs and benefits of certain technologies just as other cultures have done around the world? Is it the case that Christians put Indians on a pedestal and insist that they live up to some environmental ideal?

In the end, it is clear that those who have produced the waste should bear the burden of dealing with it. This moral responsibility seems to be escaping many today. Is it completely out of the question, therefore, to see the limited good (and harm) this project could do for the Skull Valley Goshutes? Is it beyond the pale of ethical respectability to support the Goshutes in their proposal to store temporarily most of the spent nuclear fuel produced in the United States? Or is this, truly, one of the most egregious cases of environmental racism to date?

### **Update**

Recent developments put the future of the Skull Valley project in serious doubt. Although on 21 February 2006, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) issued a license to Private Fuel Storage for the Skull Valley facility, two other federal agencies had yet to rule on other aspects of the project. On 7 September 2006, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) both issued separate "Records of Decision" regarding the project. These agencies, apparently acting under pressure from members of Utah's Congressional delegation, moved to block construction of the facility (Fahys, 2006).

The Bureau of Land Management offered several arguments to justify its decision (US DOI-BLM 2006). It rejected Private Fuel Storage's (PFS) right-of-way application to build a rail spur to the Skull Valley facility, because the rail spur would be constructed in the newly created Cedar Mountain Wilderness Area.<sup>4</sup> It also rejected the PFS alternative to transport spent nuclear fuel (SNF) to the facility by heavy trucks because this option would impede traffic on the two-lane road leading to the

reservation. This road serves as one of only three emergency evacuation routes for the chemical weapons incinerator in Tooele Valley.<sup>5</sup> The BLM also expressed concern about an increased risk of radiation exposure for workers at the rail/truck transfer facility and noted that any storage of SNF at the transfer facility would violate BLM policy regarding the storage of hazardous waste on BLM lands. Finally, BLM emphasized that the NRC's Environmental Impact Statement for the project studied the potential of transporting SNF to the facility over the span of twenty to forty years but did not examine the potential impact of transporting the SNF away from the facility in a shorter time frame at the end of the lease period (DOI-BLM, 15).

The Bureau of Indian Affairs decision cited similar concerns and offered additional reasons for not approving the final draft of the PFS-Skull Valley lease agreement (DOI-BIA, 3). Among other issues, it noted the potential impacts of a terrorist attack on the storage facility and the possibility that the SNF might remain on the reservation beyond the duration of the proposed lease. "This uncertainty concerning when the SNF might leave trust land, combined with the Secretary's practical inability to remove or compel its removal once deposited on the reservation, counsel disapproval of the proposed lease"(29).

Both of these decisions were greeted with dismay and consternation by PFS and the Skull Valley Band's leadership. In the *New York Times*, John Parkyn, chairman of PFS, said both decisions were riddled with errors and indicated that PFS likely will appeal (Stolz and Wald, 2006). In an article published by Reuters, Leon Bear, Skull Valley Band chairman, complained "this land is held in trust for the Indian people, not for them. The Department of the Interior took it upon themselves to make this decision for us. We made a decision already, we signed the business lease, we had the resolutions where a majority of our people wanted this facility out here" (Tanner, 2006). Naturally, those opposed to the Skull Valley project received the BLM and BIA decisions with joy and appreciation.

### Questions Remain

What are we to make of these developments? Have the recent decisions by the BIA and BLM protected the Skull Valley Band from becoming vic-

tims of environmental racism, or have they viti-ated the band's tribal sovereignty? Now that the Skull Valley project may no longer be viable, who should bear the burdens associated with the long-term disposal of spent nuclear fuel and high-level nuclear waste? Regardless of how this case ultimately is decided legally, difficult and important ethical questions remain. †

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### Notes

1. The following companies originally were members of Private Fuel Storage: American Electric Power, Entergy Corporation, GPU Nuclear, Xcel Energy, Florida Power and Light, Southern Company, Southern California Edison, and Genoa Fuel Technology. Several of these companies have since withdrawn.

2. Since 9/11, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has restricted public access to information about spent nuclear fuel and other forms of high-level nuclear waste. In May 2002, the NRC reported 45,000 tons of commercially produced spent nuclear fuel (See US NRC, May 2002).

3. A clause in the PFS/Goshute lease agreement leaves open the possibility that the tribe may decide in the future to permit the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel stored on the reservation.

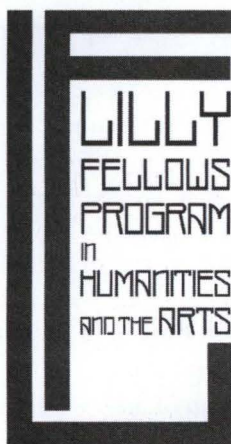
4. The Utah congressional delegation sponsored the creation of this new wilderness area in Utah. It was attached as an amendment to the FY 2006 National Defense Authorization Bill. The Bureau of Land Management's Record of Decision states: "The Cedar Mountain Wilderness Area is atypical; low-level overflights and operations of military aircraft, helicopters, missiles, or unmanned aerial vehicles over the wilderness are not precluded" (15).

5. Traffic on this twenty foot-wide road has increased significantly since the Skull Valley Band opened a municipal waste landfill on the reservation. Each day 130-160 trucks haul baled waste to the reservation. Once operational, two trucks (12 feet wide and 150 feet long) per week would haul SNF to the storage facility during daylight hours. (See BLM Record of Decision, 13).

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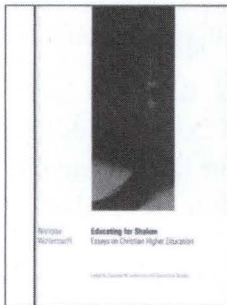
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# Counting to Twenty

*Gary Fincke*

**F**OR THREE WEEKS, EACH TIME I'VE CALLED MY father, no one has answered. I've allowed the phone to ring twenty times. I've counted because I want to be certain I can tell him how far I've gone to account for his near-deafness, his arthritis. How long I've waited in case he was outside trying to fumble his house key into the lock, nervous because the floodlight that illuminates the front porch and the driveway hasn't been replaced after months of being burnt out.

Altogether, I've called seven times, once each on every night of the week, staggering the attempts over the days from Thanksgiving to the middle of December. I can explain my system to him as well, that I haven't just dialed his number on three Monday evenings when he was playing dart ball in his church league. Or three Wednesday nights when he was watching television at my sister's house until the local newscast began. But with each succeeding call, I've understood I was counting the rings the way a boxer, standing in a neutral corner, might be singing along with the referee, impatient for ten.

I blame the joy of twenty on my father. For the first forty-two years of my life, either in person or on the phone, I talked with my mother. And when she died, there we were, my father and I having to feel our way into dialogue.

My mother had managed all of the financial records, so I spent the first day I returned helping him work through the books while my father vacuumed carpets and dusted furniture. Three hours after we started, my father stopped in the spare room and asked me if I wanted lunch. "Sure," I said. "Whatever you have." He returned with an American Cheese sandwich and a cup of coffee, put them on the table, and left.

In the middle of the afternoon, he stopped by again and picked up the dishes. "Well," he said, "we're getting along here, aren't we?"

My mother had died on New Year's Day, and I saw how Christmas had stalled at gifts opened but unpacked, how her medicine was arranged by frequency: Crystodigin, Diaranese, Almodet (once daily), Cytomel (three times per day).

They had duties that supported her weak heart. I lifted the vial of Percoset (as needed, for severe pain, no refills), and I wondered at the gaps between the demands screamed by my mother's heart. Beside it was Nitrostat (as needed, for chest pain), those pills that the foolish in movies always grope toward as they tumble one room away from their carelessly placed relief. The urgency of labels leveled to a kind of democracy, a haze of help from which nothing can emerge.

By then I'd learned my own medicine from the tablets I took, twice daily; the capsules I swallowed, as needed; and the vapor I breathed in the lapsed-lung darkness, lying back like Proust, whose life I'd learned for my job, whose asthma bedded him for years. He didn't take Theolair, Optimine, Ventolin. He insisted, finally, a huge black woman was chasing him.

So she caught him. So now my father strained to speak, trying, "Well, did you sleep good?" to unmuzzle the following morning, and I answered him, "Good enough," as if truth might trigger prescriptions, as if accidentally we might talk, as needed, swallowing to save our faulty selves, carefully speaking from the confluence of our altered blood.

**M**Y FATHER HAD ALLOWED MY MOTHER TO DIE an old-fashioned, stay-at-home, natural death. No machinery. No hospital. No exotic drugs beyond the maintenance ones she'd taken for years. Most likely she could have lived another year; probably another two; maybe another three. All of those thousand days as an invalid he would have cared for her if either one of

them could have put up with even one day of her not being able to stand up or walk.

She'd managed, on the day she died, to finish the crossword puzzle in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. All the way to having the patience to look up "orison," a six-letter word for "prayer," and "alim," which turned out to be "a Turkish standard." Or maybe she simply knew that stumper from having worked ten thousand crosswords. No matter, I'd thought, when I found the folded *Post-Gazette* beside the couch on the day before the funeral. It was the kind of definition a lousy puzzle maker would resort to when he'd worked his way out of English words. What remained was the evidence that she'd solved it, that there was no chance she'd filled in the toughest six spaces by checking the solution in the next morning's paper.

On the last afternoon of her life, my mother wrote and mailed her weekly news to me. After the funeral, after traveling home, I received her note from the neighbor who'd held our mail. That letter kept me in a chair for half an hour before I opened it. Her handwriting was as perfect as always. There was a return address affixed in the envelope's top left corner as it's supposed to be, insurance against loss.

**E**VERY DECEMBER, AS THE YEAR RUNS DOWN, I play my *Phil Spector Christmas Album* and reread the January issues of *Life* that I've collected. The year-in-review specials mix well with The Crystals singing "Santa Claus is Coming to Town." The fads and the recent dead sparkle when Darlene Love is belting out "Winter Wonderland."

This year I start with the January 1984, issue, the one I purchased on Christmas Eve in Hollywood, Florida. I was wearing shorts and loading up on expensive delicatessen food to take back to the condominium my family was living in for the holidays. The Hitler Diaries. Wacky Wallwalkers. Boy George posing with his mother. I end up reading a page of quotations, stopping at one attributed to William Fears, telephone lineman of Mill Valley, California: "There's nothing in space—Believe me, I'm positive of that. My father told me."

I think about Bill Fears, whether or not he'd followed the space probe Voyager to Neptune, the trip featured in the January 1990 issue. And I

remember that I'd woken up on Christmas morning, 1983, to the worst Florida cold wave in fifty years. I'd driven my family down to the Keys, thinking it would be warmer and recalling my father's anger at our not coming to his house for Christmas. "There's nothing in Florida," he'd told me. "You'll see." My family spent the afternoon shivering in the bleak fifty degree sunlight of a Northeast March.

On my stereo, as I reminisce, Bob B. Soxx and The Blue Jeans finish "Here Comes Santa Claus," and they're replaced by the voice of Phil Spector himself, the Wall-of-Sound producer delivering his early 1960s, end-of-the-album soliloquy over a wash of "Silent Night." "It is so difficult at this time to say words that would express my feelings about the album to which you've just listened," Phil begins.

"Sure, Phil," one of my sons, visiting for the holidays, says from the kitchen. I look up from the pictures of Buster Crabbe and Arthur Godfrey, two people who died in 1983.

"Of course, the biggest thanks goes to you," Phil insists, and my son, standing in the doorway now, says "Sure it does, Phil," as "Silent Night" swells louder. "What a cheesy record," he adds, though, since it's over anyway, I'm not going to argue with him. Neither of us says a word about where Phil Spector has arrived, accused of murder in California.

**O**N THE SECOND DAY AT MY FATHER'S, I WENT into the basement to see what needed to be packed and kept, packed and given away, or packed and dumped at the end of the driveway for the trash collector. "You decide," my father said. "I won't argue."

I saved pictures, books, and souvenirs—anything somehow symbolic. I charity-boxed used clothes and the appliances which appeared to be most recently moved to the basement. And then, listening to my lungs for the first sign of wheezing, I hauled two dozen cartons of carpet remnants, wrapping paper scraps, ribbon pieces, and a hundred thousand labels from products that had promoted some sort of refund offer.

Maybe five hundred General Mills cereal coupons. At least as many Betty Crocker box tops and Planters Peanuts vacuum-jar seals. An old

RCA color television box full of miscellaneous wrappers. A Sears washing machine box crammed with sorted, rubber-banded coupons. I didn't check to see what my father might receive if he mailed all of them in or lugged bundles to each of the three nearest grocery stores. Whatever it was, he'd never miss it. There were expiration dates from the 1970s, thousands of "must redeem by's" from the 1980s. I didn't want to tell my father to spend the rest of his life searching for "9s" among the decade digits.

"Just you wait," my mother would say, "you never know." There were two broken hot water tanks and three nonfunctioning upright vacuum cleaners. She'd shelved four ancient toasters and six radios, stored three televisions tuned to clouds. For parts, maybe. Or miracles the next time they were plugged in.

Or as if that personal landfill would follow her soul, junk as faith, gathering possessions like a Pharaoh, believing she'd sort it out, later, when she had time, when there was an eternity of leisure to order and classify what filled her cellar.

**I**N THE FIRST YEAR AFTER MY MOTHER DIED, MY father called twice. And neither time was I home. He called after twelve, and my wife answered, thinking it was the police inviting her to the morgue to identify our son who was less than a year into driving. Perhaps my father was living strange hours now. Maybe he believed the rates were lower after midnight. Each time, he simply said, "Tell him his father called."

**O**N THE THIRD DAY I STAYED WITH MY FATHER, after breakfast, I went back to the basement, entering the root cellar where there was a tub full of potatoes that had sprouted into what looked like a mass of thick-bodied, tentacled insects. On one shelf were cans of vegetables, fruit, and potted meats, some of the cans looking so ancient with rust I imagined them being there when I was a child.

Above them were more than a hundred jars of home-canned vegetables and fruit. I wondered about how they were arranged, whether my father could tell which were recently prepared and which might be approaching some sort of unwritten expiration date, canned five years before or

even ten. Something about the beets and the near-soup of tomatoes made me consider the possibility of botulism. Already my father had regressed to eating sandwiches and hot dogs as if there was nothing to meals except removing hunger. These things would be here years longer, sitting in the dark until he happened on them one day and opened one jar on a whim.

Or they might stay there forever untouched like the thirty jars of apple butter my friend Paul Kress and I had discovered one winter afternoon in a long-abandoned house we were exploring. It was as if the surviving members of that family hated their mother's specialty, taking beans and peaches, but leaving the apple butter behind. The boy who'd driven Paul Kress and me there was six years older, strong enough to throw those jars accurately through the upstairs windows while mine and Paul's lobbed against the side of the house ten feet below, making a satisfying splatter.

The older boy fired his next jar against the wall, shattering glass, spraying apple butter in a glorious, huge splat that began to ooze down the wooden slats. It was ten minutes work, that wreckage, followed by ten minutes of pitching hard-packed snowballs at windows until every one was broken.

And then, when we were back in the car, ready to leave, the tires spun in the softened snow, sinking. Within seconds we were halfway up the hubcaps with no chance of moving.

I was young enough to begin thinking God had seen to it that the car would get stuck, that judgment had been made and we'd been found wanting. My friend and I were nearly useless for pushing. I was ten, all skin and bone, and he was eleven, even skinnier, but at least he had some idea of how to drive a car, giving gas and letting out the clutch.

I pushed anyway. I slipped and slid beside the sixteen year-old who'd taken us there in the old rattletrap he'd bought with money saved from a summer job. I took splatters of slush because to do otherwise was to announce my worthlessness.

The broken windows leered at us. The hilarious stains of apple butter began to talk among themselves about the stupidity of vandalism. It took a set of chains dragged from the trunk and

applied to the rear tires, wooden planks salvaged from the house, rocks jammed into the deep grooves in the slick, soft snow, but finally we were out before anyone stopped to help and noticed what we'd been doing.

After I left the root cellar, that scene followed me the rest of the morning. My mother had spent days canning the hundreds of jars of peaches, pears, green beans, beets, and tomatoes that remained, the kitchen fogged by steam, the counter littered with stems and peels. She'd stood, evening after evening, to slice and chop. I thought of those jars being there years from now, the house falling to ruin and entered by boys from some other neighborhood who knew nothing about the people who'd lived here. I was turning so sentimental with guilt that I wanted to find someone to whom I could apologize.

After lunch, my father said, "I want to show you something."

"What?"

"In the garage."

There was no point in saying "What?" again. It was maybe twenty degrees outside, maybe thirty in the garage, and I buttoned up my coat while waiting for him to choose from the floor-to-ceiling junk that surrounded us.

It had been five years, at least, since he'd squeezed a car in there. And finally, when he'd given it up, the room had narrowed rapidly to the width of a lawn mower. I felt, for a moment, like somebody whose job it was to rescue earthquake victims, reach among twisted metal and broken concrete for quivering or lifeless hands.

I was watching my breath while he moved a barrel that, for all I knew, held a million Cheese-Puff labels. "Here," he said. "Look."

It was a safe. For sure, I hadn't been expecting a safe. "You need to know the combination so you can get in here some day." He had me stumped. I didn't know what my father could have been hoarding that needed a combination lock to protect it.

"OK," I agreed.

"Pay this some mind now."

"OK," I repeated with brilliance.

"Right four times to forty; left three times to thirty; right two times to twenty; left once to ten; right to zero and bingo."

I thought he was kidding. I thought he was making certain I wasn't daydreaming about cutting the lawn with one of the three hand mowers jammed against the back wall under a set of bed-springs.

"You got it?"

"No problem."

He gave the dial a spin. "Go ahead."

I decided to play it out, call his bluff. When I got back to zero, I tugged the door like I believed in my father's infallibility, and the thing opened. "Good," he said. He pushed the door shut with his foot and respun the dial. "Now you know."

Outside it was snowing so heavily I decided to stay another day. The forecaster promised the snow would end by mid-afternoon. A warm front was approaching. In January, that meant the temperature would approach forty degrees the following day. The Pennsylvania Turnpike would be cleared, and neither my father nor I would have to worry about my driving into impassable conditions.

A month later, when I returned, the snow that was falling when I arrived was nothing but an hour's cover. When we walked across my father's yard, the grass reappeared where our shoes pressed.

After dinner my father led me back outside. "There's my sky," he said, and, not knowing what he expected, I answered, standing in his driveway, "It's turned clear, all right."

I thought my father was planning to tell me the ancient names for the stars or the tales they inspired about people who suffered and changed and ascended while somebody left behind handed their stories down to another generation. The two dip-pers and Orion were all I remembered, and I waited for him to show me where he believed my mother was, how one cluster of stars had reformed, at least for him, to suggest hope in the future.

The two of us stood with the night in our lungs. We breathed a sentence of silence until he said, "Venus and Jupiter," directed me low in the sky where there were so many lights I could nod, certain they were among them.

**P**HIL SPECTOR OVER WITH, I TURN ON THE RADIO, an oldies station, and pick up *Life*, January 1989, the issue I bought one year to the day

I returned home from my mother's funeral three days after her death on New Year's Day, 1988.

Pictures of Roy Orbison, John Houseman, Billy Carter, Louise Nevelson—they'd died, for sure, after my mother, even Roy Orbison, who, as I remember, died just in time to make this issue.

Despite his failing memory for things that have happened or been said less than an hour before, my father astounds me with remembering more than the trivia of annual deaths. For instance, he can recite the thirty-one lines of my poem about my mother's death. The elegy is in calligraphy, framed, on his living room wall, a birthday gift from my sister, who says she's followed along as he speaks, checking for accuracy.

"That's not the way it happened," my mother would say, if she read it for herself. The last time she visited, we watched the videotape I rented of *Gunga Din*, replaying the scene where Rudyard Kipling has a cameo part in the film based on his story. I told her that's Kipling himself writing near the end, that here he appears again alongside the colonel, who, lost for words, borrows the poem Kipling's character has been composing.

"They've changed it," she said. "They've added something." And I told her she was right, that the studio erased Kipling from the theater version, that the movie she's watched ten times on television shows only Kipling's ghost, the colonel oddly off center to make room for the vague emptiness beside him.

"So it's not the real *Gunga Din*," she said, and I gave it up to rewinding.

On the radio, just after a commercial, the announcer says, "Hello, Solid Gold Saturday Night—Who's this?"

"This is Bill," the caller answers, sounding eerily like my father.

"Where you calling from, Bill?"

"Pittsburgh," the caller replies, and I'm sitting up, listening, because so far it's a match of voice, name, and city.

"That's triple-W, S, right?"

"Right," Bill from Pittsburgh says, "WWSW." The call letters sound like they're being spoken by an eighty year-old man, somebody who would never call a syndicated rock-and-roll show.

"And what can we play for you, Bill?"

"The Hippy, Hippy Shake."

"I can't stand still . . ." The Swinging Bluejeans begin, and I imagine my father listening to the recording of his call, thinking somehow the odds were excellent that I was simultaneously tuned in hundreds of miles away. Wasn't this my music? Hadn't I been glued to the radio all of the time when I was in high school?

Though of course there are thousands of Bill's in Pittsburgh, dozens of them who would sound like my father on the radio. And one of them loved "The Hippy, Hippy Shake." And that particular Bill was holding a beer and dancing by himself in his living room, shouting through the house to his wife, saying, "Listen to that, would you? Isn't it great?" ♣

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## DANCING WITH DOUBT

Even when the stars lift us out and above  
ourselves, doubt moves between the spaces  
of the lacy God inside me. I am the brute

staring at it from a long distance, a gadget  
of flesh questioning things that have no bones  
of their own. I've found the common sprouts

of doubt growing around the Jesus option  
as easily as they do Shiva's dance, the laws  
of geometry, quantum physics, or a stone

face carved on a jungle floor. All the gods  
are up for grabs. Who can name the cause  
that makes them merge, the mantra or prayer

that brings the true God to the beloved's  
sweet invitation the way old Shep comes  
running when I call out his name? That's

the way it should be: I trust him not to go out  
too far without me and he affirms that whenever  
I call he'll come bounding through the bushes  
ready to walk the dark woods at my side.

Fredrick Zydek

# Playing at Worship

## On the Dubious Business of Liturgical Reconstruction

RECENTLY I RECEIVED ONE OF THOSE “CUSTOMERS WHO BOUGHT X PROBABLY ALSO WILL BE INTERESTED IN Y” emails from a popular internet retailer. Y was titled *Gregorian Chant*. Although I’m not really into the whole “new-agey chant thing,” I clicked on the link because X was a mélange of Bach choral words, and I was curious to see what the connection between such ostensibly disparate repertoires was. Several legitimate connections might be made, although not the sort that I would expect to be programmed into the marketing databases that generated this automated email. In fact, the email was prompted by the ensemble common to both discs, the Choir of King’s College, Cambridge, directed by Stephen Cleobury. The matter-of-fact title and the out-of-focus, shimmering stained glass cover photo demonstrated that the marketers of this new disc visualized it as another in the lucrative *Chant* phenom.

A glance at the track listing, however, made it clear that—despite what the marketers had made of it—the artistic conception of the disc had a certain integrity of its own. What I saw in the twenty-seven tracks were complete liturgies for Mass and Vespers. This should not be altogether unexpected. Mr. Cleobury is a professional church musician, and the very *raison d’être* of King’s College choir is the singing of daily services. More than that, this choir leads what I suppose must be the most “widely-attended” worship service in the world—namely the annual Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, broadcast live around the globe every Christmas Eve. Over the last several decades, this premiere choir has released a wide catalogue of recordings not only of standard and new choral literature, but also reflecting the repertoire performed every day in King’s College chapel (anthems, hymns, Anglican chant, canticles, service music). In 1992, the choir even released a fly-on-the-wall “Live Evensong” disc, complete with whispers and shuffling of feet as

### *James Brooks Kuykendall*

the congregation gathers. Plainchant is sung daily at King’s, and this disc is in a sense just a part of this living tradition.

And yet, not quite. For this disc, Mr. Cleobury has pieced together two services as they were sung in England—and more specifically at the King’s College chapel—in the decades immediately preceding the Protestant Reformation. The disc follows the so-called “Sarum Rite,” an elaborate local variant of Roman liturgy that had become established at Salisbury, but that by the late middle ages had come to dominate the church all across England. Cleobury has opted to record the First Vespers for the Eve of the Nativity of the Virgin (September 8), and the Mass for the Octave of the Nativity of the Virgin a week later. As John Milsom explains in his album notes, the Virgin Mary was one of the saints to whom King’s College Chapel was dedicated (the other being St. Nicholas). “Days associated with those saints stood out as special ones in the college’s calendar, and on them we can imagine the college’s community of scholars, students, and servants attending chapel services with special diligence.”

This recording is a “liturgical reconstruction,” an outgrowth of the “historically-informed performance movement” that brought us “authenticity” and “original instruments.” The products of painstaking research into worship practices, musical sources, performance practice, and pronunciation, liturgical reconstructions set today’s listener down in a bygone era of Christian worship. As a musicologist, it thrills me to see so many aspects of my profession come together in such a tangible way. There are dozens of liturgical reconstruction recordings on the market today—an impressive fact considering the beleaguered nature of the classical recording industry generally. Not surprisingly, discs of medieval plainchant have long relied on this sort of reconstruction as a marketing gimmick, because nothing from that repertoire



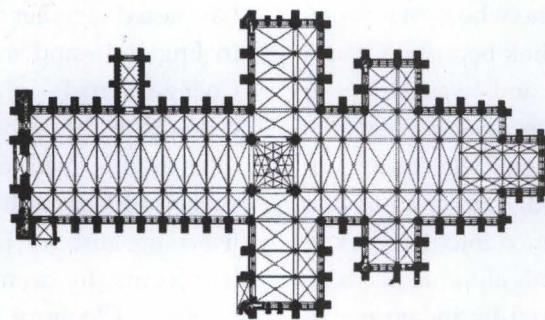
could be said to sustain itself in the established repertory of “old favorites” (See: Weber 1991, 29–37). I don’t think I’ve ever known anyone who has looked at the track listing of a chant CD and said “Oh, I can’t wait to hear the fifth mode ‘Christus Factus Est!’”

Probably the most intrepid reconstructionist of the last two decades is the English conductor Paul McCreech. His ensembles, the Gabrieli Consort and Players, first gained wide acclaim through performances and recordings of the elaborate repertory associated with the Basilica San Marco in Venice at the end of the Renaissance—particularly the impressive polychoral works of Giovanni Gabrieli and his circle. In an important 1998 release, McCreech (with assistance from the liturgical scholar Robin Leaver) gives modern listeners a sense of the environment for which Bach composed his Leipzig liturgical music. In two discs we hear organ preludes, congregational chorales, two cantatas, a missa, readings, and the Eucharist celebrations, not to mention a five-minute excerpt of a Martin Luther sermon. Having become so accustomed to Bach’s works as single items on concert programs or service lists, hearing this recording underscores anew both the variety and the consummate quality of Bach’s oeuvre.

Perhaps the most striking example of fly-on-the-wall liturgical reconstructions yet released on disc is McCreech’s reconstruction of a sixteenth-century Sarum rite Christmas mass. The centerpiece of this disc is the Missa “Cantate” for six voices by John Sheppard. Sheppard’s career spanned the turbulent years from Henry VIII to Elizabeth I, and this setting was presumably composed during the brief re-establishment of the Catholic church—and with it the Sarum rite—in England under Queen Mary (r. 1553–1558). By approximating its original liturgical environment, McCreech allows the listener a chance to experience anew the power of polyphony. It is impossible to capture in words the explosion of Sheppard’s Gloria after twenty minutes of mono-

phonic chant. Of the total seventy-five minutes for the reconstructed service, Sheppard’s polyphony lasts under half an hour.

But just as the action of an opera often happens in the recitatives, the dynamic parts of a service are the prayers and readings. In the Sarum rite, monophony cannot be confused with monotony. The album notes contain stage directions which chart the singers’ movements and a diagram of the floor plan of the Salisbury Cathedral complex.



Floor plan of the Salisbury Cathedral, Salisbury, England (G. Dehio and G. von Bezold, *Die Kirchliche Baukunst des Abendlandes*, Stuttgart, 1887–1902, plate 424).

*The procession leaves the quire by the west quire door, turns right and goes clockwise round the outside of the quire (that is around the ambulatory). It passes down the south side of the church and enters the cloisters by the nearest available door, circuits the cloisters and re-enters the church by a door at the*

*western end of the nave. It returns along the central aisle of the nave and makes a station before the choir screen.... Three clerks of the highest form, wearing silken copes and walking in the middle of the procession together sing the following proses, and the choir sings the verses and partial repetitions of the responsory. Note that the procession halts whenever the three clerks sing and resumes its progress whenever the choir sings.*

“Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them,” Shakespeare instructs his audience. Such explanatory notes to situate the listener never have been more essential in a recording. Although I doubt that McCreech’s singers donned silken copes for the recording sessions, the notes rescue what might otherwise become a bewildering experience for those of us not thoroughly versed in this liturgical practice. The Secret, for example, is the prayer offered at the consecration of the elements. The text of the Secret is printed in the album notes, but the recording yields only indistinct distant mumbling. The notes explain: *After the Offertory says the Secret quietly, terminating it aloud as follows*

["per omnia secula seculorum"]. *The Preface then follows and leads directly into the Sanctus...* The Gabrieli Consort re-enact the mass right down to the sanctus bells and the clinking of the thuribles. McCreesh has jested that such recordings might be issued with scratch-and-sniff incense.

There is certainly great value in these reconstructed snapshots of Christian worship, and different listeners may experience them as educational, devotional, or ultra-aesthetic entities. In all due deference to Wagner, the liturgy is potentially the most powerful *Gesamtkunstwerk* [total work of art] ever realized, and as Dorothy Sayers insisted, the dogma *is* the drama. For McCreesh, an attraction to the music has prompted a desire to perform it in a creative program. It would be difficult—and perhaps even wrong—to sustain an anthology-style program of short liturgical works. A reconstructed service respects the integrity of each constituent item, while amounting to a whole rather greater than the sum of its parts. As McCreesh himself has said, "it's a sort of artistic program-planning tool and sometimes even a marketing tool, and we're absolutely completely happy at accepting that." But he goes on to say that "the point is *not* to try and pretend that we are creating services, because services will always feel very, very different, and the whole concept of recording *a* service for posterity is of course absolute rubbish" (McCreesh 1997).

**W**ELL, YES AND NO. INDEED, SERVICES AND concerts *will* feel different, for despite their sometimes similar means, their disparate ends are not close enough even to be compared. But is this issue really *that* simple? To the secular mind, perhaps so, but it strikes me as much more ambiguous.

We might, for example, try to imagine a continuum of recorded "services." At one end is the weekly tape of the Sunday service distributed to the shut-ins—a common practice in many American churches nowadays. The fact of the recording has little or no effect on the mechanics of the liturgy itself, save for the necessity of speaking into the microphone. If an electrical surge rendered the recording equipment inoperative, no doubt the service would go on regardless. The reason for the service is not the making of a recording but is

fellowship, communion, and worship. God as both Author and Object is truly invoked. The recording serves to convey a sense of the corporate worship to those who are not physically present for it, and the fact that they will take part in the service at a later time does not compromise their position as a *participant* in the service.

In the middle of the hypothetical continuum would be services recorded "for posterity," because they document some important historical event. This might be just a local or congregational anniversary, which sometimes are commemorated with a return to an older form of worship—for example, the Latin Mass, or a Dutch-language service in a community with Dutch heritage, or perhaps lining-out Psalms in the Presbyterian tradition. Or this service might be as significant as the coronation of a monarch. More than fifty years after the fact, you can still walk into a music store and buy a live recording of the 1953 coronation of Elizabeth II.

At the other extreme of the continuum would be the "service" concert that is a commodity produced for the microphone, and—in turn—for sale to a wide market, aimed not at the devout but rather at anyone who will buy it. If the recording equipment ceased to function, the only reason the performance (for such it is) would continue is the sheer joy of making music. God is not invoked, but rather his name is quoted as part of a meticulously-prepared "script." And here it becomes clear that the continuum doesn't really work, because at some point we cross a line between services and "services."

A few years ago I attended a performance in which the Gabrieli Consort & Player re-enacted a Lutheran Christmas mass in a form that Michael Praetorius would have recognized in 1620. The concert took place in the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola in Manhattan. Although after settling into my assigned pew I was in the place where the congregation might sit, my role was that of audience member—to sit back and enjoy the show. The role of "congregation" was given to a specially-prepared choir sitting in a transept. Luther would have been appalled. Despite this obstacle, I decided to treat the concert as an opportunity to worship, even if not in my customary worship environment.

As the concert proceeded, I became increasingly uncomfortable by the thought that, regardless of whatever religious persuasions the performers might have had, this was for them just a “gig.” I am cynical enough to believe that this is true even in some Sunday worship services, too, but this was different. Here, people were paying to go through the motions, for the sake of the motions. The Celebrant—for so the singer was credited—intoned the Words of Institution. We heard Christ’s instructions at the Breaking of the Bread: *“Nehmet hin und esset. Das ist mein Leib, der für euch gegeben wird.... Dieser Kelch is das Neue Testament in meinem Blut, das für euch vergossen wird zur Vergebung der Sünden. Solchs tut, sooft ihr’s trinket zu meinem Gedächtnis.”* And yet there was no bread nor cup of which we could partake; nor was there spiritual fellowship. Isn’t this part of the liturgical environment that Praetorius would have counted on? I figured that the best I could do was worship as an individual, comforted by the line from the Westminster Shorter Catechism that “the sacraments become effectual means of salvation not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them.” McCreesh is right that a service will feel “very, very different,” but perhaps he should consider that some may approach his work as a means for worship.

Of course, I would have been even more upset if they *had* offered the communion elements, but who gets to say where the line is drawn in recreating the multi-sensory artwork of the liturgy? Many liturgical reconstruction recordings aim so fervently at recapturing the aural experience of a given worship service that we are given all the extramusical sound effects as well. The sounds of thuribles are the most frequent example, but why has it stopped there? In our secular age, what is to stop the next reconstructionist from donning cas-

socks and immersing “congregants”—and perhaps even taking up a collection—all in pursuit of this great *Gesamtkunstwerk*? Given the jealous God who commands that His name not be taken in vain, this would be worse than Civil War reenactors firing real cannonballs at each other.

**T**HERE ALWAYS CAN BE WRONG REASONS TO GO TO church. Jesus himself spoke of those who went to the temple to be seen. Because I feel it myself, I am very suspicious of the “urge to liturge”—which turns the aesthetic beauty of the liturgy into the end rather than the means of worship. It seems particularly prevalent in our post-Christian society. The continuing wide popularity

of the King’s College Lessons and Carols broadcast as a token “sacred” moment in an otherwise secularized Christmas holiday suggests to me the attempt to use an aesthetic food to satisfy a spiritual craving. I have friends who have faith in nothing beyond the material of this world who nonetheless love high church services that allow them to pretend, if only for a moment, that there is something

transcendent somewhere. They know “better” of course, but it is a fun game to play, and it gives them a warm, fuzzy feeling. And there’s nothing like a sweet, meek baby Jesus and a candlelit “Away in a Manger” to provide that. Just as there are “aesthetic celebrants,” presenting only the aesthetic service-as-concert experience, there are also “aesthetic communicants,” coming to receive only the beauty.

Who can say how the Holy Spirit might use such an opportunity to speak to the unsuspecting participant? The apostle Paul managed to look past selfish reasons that had prompted rival evangelists: “But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice” (Phil. 1:18). The carefully wrought liturgies of old hardly could be said to

*People were paying to go through the motions, for the sake of the motions. The Celebrant—for so the singer was credited—intoned the Words of Institution. We heard Christ’s instructions at the Breaking of the Bread... and yet there was no bread nor cup of which we could partake; nor was there spiritual fellowship.*

take the Lord's name in vain, and I suppose they at least make for more wholesome entertainment than many other recordings readily available to the American consumer today. And I must remind myself too that there was grave concern over the propriety of Handel's sacred oratorio *Messiah* in its early years. This letter, signed Philalethes, appeared in the *Universal Spectator* on 19 March 1743:

*An Oratorio either is an Act of Religion, or it is not; if it is, I ask if the Playhouse is a fit Temple to perform it in or a Company of Players fit Ministers of God's Word....*

*...if it is not perform'd as an Act of Religion, but for Diversion and Amusement only (and indeed I believe few or none go to an Oratorio out of Devotion), what a Prophanation of God's Name and Word is this, to make so light Use of them? I wish every one would consider whether, at the same Time they are diverting themselves, they are not accessory to the breaking [of] the Third Commandment....*

*But it seems the Old Testament is not to be prophan'd alone, nor God by the Name of Jehovah only, but the New must be join'd with it, and God by the most sacred the most merciful Name of Messiah; for I'm inform'd that an Oratorio call'd by that Name has already been perform'd in Ireland, and is soon to be perform'd here: What the Piece itself is, I know not, and therefore shall say nothing about it; but I must again ask, If the Place and Performers are fit?*

Today, *Messiah* generally is recognized as one of the great works of sacred music in the Western classical tradition. Despite its scriptural text, *Messiah* was not "church music" and (unlike Bach's passion settings) would have found no place in the liturgy. *Messiah* was a concert piece, intended to be performed in the theater in exactly the same manner as Handel's other sacred and secular oratorios. I expect that even today *Messiah* is more often performed in a concert setting than in a church.

I understand Philalethes's concern: *hallowed be Thy name*. How can we recognize the holiness of

God when at the same time we turn salvation history (in the case of *Messiah*) or divine worship (in the liturgical reconstructions) into a commodity, easily bought and sold, to be reverently used or casually abused? Do we damage our understanding of the transcendence of God if we can press a button and partake of whatever "service" we like, and press another button to skip through the boring bits? Composer and philosopher Julian Johnson has railed against our society's tendency to reduce everything to mere property—a process he describes as "pornographic":

[T]he central category of pornography is perhaps not sex but the process by which the humane is reduced to the status of things. The theoretical term for this is "reification." Pornography is reification employed in the sexual arena and displays all of its hallmarks: the reproducibility and interchangeability of all commodities, the reduction to an object, the importance of packaging, the reduction to pure surface, the simulacrum of desire, the formulaic sameness of posture, the domination of nature.... While society publicly deplores the objectification of the humane in pornography, it is busy colluding with it elsewhere through advertising, commodity fetishism, and music. (Johnson 2002, 59)

Johnson worries about the debasement of the arts. My concern is the debasement of the spiritual. The liturgical reconstruction phenomenon, despite the fascinating and even illuminating fruits it has yielded, seems to me indicative of the much bigger problem which pits the superficial culture we live in against the reality of the Christian faith which we are called to live. The mere recognition of this, I hope, may help to prepare us for our battle in the world. ✠

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# music

## Yusuf's Second Coming

**N**EARLY THREE HOURS BEFORE BOB DYLAN took the stage at St. Louis's Pageant Theater in 2004, the lines to get in stretched over two blocks along the avenue. My friends and I got into the line, chatty and smiling, even though the wind was starting to make me wish I had brought a jacket. We took turns reliving the great concerts of our youth. My contribution was a reconstruction of Cat Stevens's final American show in my home town of Indianapolis during the legendary "Majicat" tour, on 17 February 1976. Despite the dreariness of an Indiana winter, there was something miraculous about that experience. As if to foreshadow it, Stevens chose to have a magician as a warm-up for his show, rather than another musical act. At the end of his performance, the conjurer stacked up four boxes at center stage, waved his arms, and out popped Cat Stevens.

It was one of those moments in life that are never forgotten, an almost supernatural beginning to a stellar night of music. Leaving the arena, I hoped to be able to see Stevens perform again as soon as possible. Little did I realize at the time that for me, there never would be another night like that one. Perhaps fittingly, the venue in which I saw Cat Stevens, Market Square Arena (also the venue of the final concert appearance of Elvis Presley), has since been reduced to rubble and trucked off to a landfill.

Since those days, much has happened in the life of Cat Stevens, born Stephen Georgiou in 1948. A British citizen, he converted to Islam in 1977, the year after the final tour. He did release a couple of albums after that final tour, but the last one under the name Cat Stevens came out in 1978. He adopted his current name Yusuf Islam a year later. Since those days, he has devoted himself to a pious form of the Muslim religion and to various charitable works of social justice. These include Small Kindness, an organization that has helped feed the

poor in the Balkans, Darfur, Indonesia, and Iraq. For these and other reasons, a committee of Nobel Peace laureates presented Islam with a Man of Peace award in 2004.

Ironically, Islam made headlines just weeks before the Man of Peace presentation for other, less flattering reasons. In those alarming and paranoid times after 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq, Islam was denied entry to the United States when his name turned up on an FBI no-fly list. He had gained a negative reputation, whether rightly or wrongly, because of several incidents earlier in his career. Most notably, in 1989 he was said to have supported the *fatwa* calling for the death of author Salman Rushdie. He also has been accused of financing terrorist organizations such as Hamas, some of which were said to have connections with al Qaeda. In 2004, he succeeded in a lawsuit for libel against two of the British newspapers that had made those claims. Through it all, he has claimed to have been misunderstood or misquoted.

Meanwhile, Islam now has released the long awaited—but never really expected—pop record that marks his official homecoming to the mainstream entertainment world. The return to the limelight after decades of absence has become a staple of modern entertainment. Dylan's own resurrection has set the bar pretty high, with his platinum-selling albums, Grammy Awards, and lucrative commercial deals for women's underwear. Supergroups like The Eagles and Fleetwood Mac have reunited, cut records, and then earned tens of millions of dollars in concert bookings. Yusuf Islam's return was foreshadowed most obviously by his appearance at the New York Peace Concert, broadcast nationwide on 20 October 2001, just six weeks after 9/11. He sang his classic "Peace Train" a cappella, and he came off as a plaintive voice seeking appeasement. His appearance at the event was politically charged, since most viewers were aware of his past associations, including his chosen name.

*Harold K. Bush, Jr.*

His new release, *An Other Cup* (Atlantic Records) even downsizes that name. Today, he evidently prefers to go by the name Yusuf alone, without the Islam. Maybe that is a further attempt to distance himself from unsavory religious stereotypes. Of course, Yusuf is the Arabic equivalent of Joseph, and Yusuf has stated in interviews that he renamed himself in honor of the hero from Genesis, so his name does reflect a strong respect for the biblical tradition. The record, as well, makes clear that he has embraced as part of his mission a reconciliation between the seemingly incompatible systems of faith of Christianity and Islam.

The predominance of spiritual themes in this album should not be much of a surprise for fans of the old Cat Stevens. Indeed, much of his best work in the 1970s capitalized on the period's yearning and increasingly eclectic spirituality. There is a radiant and childlike quality in much of his finest work. Among these beautifully written and performed gems, "Peace Train" and "Morning Has Broken" are most famous for illustrating luminously utopian visions of human possibility. And, as the bridge to "Moonshadow" puts it suggestively though somewhat obtusely, it is all about finding the "faithful light."

But other less familiar songs from his earlier work demonstrate a spiritual sensibility that is both ecumenical and genuinely edifying. "The Wind" is a wonderfully uncomplicated lyric about listening to the "wind of my soul," suggesting God's continual presence. "Miles from Nowhere" relates the heady desolation even in the midst of a patient and persistent journey toward some vague sense of "freedom." A song simply titled "Jesus" acclaims the hero of Christianity even as it apparently equates him with Gautama Buddha. "Katmandu" is an homage to the simple life of the Himalaya, with all of its spiritual connotations.

*An Other Cup* is a pleasant and mellow album with unmistakable echoes of the earlier career of Cat Stevens. If Yusuf is indeed to be remembered as a Man of Peace, then this record is a step in the right direction. He still seeks a human harmony for which he has worked long and hard in his philanthropic life. His religious sensibility is inclusive, alluding not just to Muslim belief but also to Buddhism and even good old-fashioned gospel truisms.

As a musical collection, the record is easy on the ears, a pleasure to listen to. The spare and finely rehearsed quality of these recordings, and the classic Cat-style of the guitar chording and finger-picking, mark these as reminders of Stevens's best achievements. A certain nostalgia is ignited just by hearing the mellow fifty-eight year-old voice again, one of the heroes of my own almost-lost youth. "Midday (Avoid City After Dark)" is a cheerful celebration of the simple things in life, like children playing in a park, and is the catchiest tune on the album. "Maybe There's a World" and "One Day at a Time" both rely upon an innocent, utopian vision that is characteristic of a person who has not become jaded or cynical about human possibilities. "In the End" is a wonderful song that confronts the listener with the certainty of judgment by some vague absolute: "You can't bargain with the truth." And his remake of one of his oldest songs, "I Think I See the Light," is far superior to the original and shares the thoroughly ecumenical spirit that is at the heart of this album. The only overtly Islamic song is called "The Beloved," which sings the praises of Muhammad—although the prophet is never named.

The most revealing cut is Yusuf's cover of the old hit by The Animals, "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood," which takes on new resonance given his run-ins with the law and mass media: "I'm just a soul whose intentions are good." The choice is striking, though the track is probably the least satisfying and production-wise the most overwrought of the album. What it does do is highlight the pain of being misperceived and the desire to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem. One of the western world's most recognizable converts to traditional Islam, Yusuf has had his share of being misunderstood.

The return of Yusuf Islam to the pop recording realm is a pleasant development for long-time fans, since the record is a good one. It also coincides with a moment in cultural history when Americans might be slightly more accommodating to those of an earnest though certainly not "radical" form of Islamic faith, which should be good news for Yusuf. The critical response to the record has been mixed, though most reviewers recognize the many fine musical qualities of the

album. It is not unthinkable that some of that mixed reaction has roots in baggage from his past, especially those charges of religious fundamentalism. In short, Yusuf has had to reckon with western society's quick prejudice against people of Islamic faith, a prejudice especially pronounced since 9/11.

As a result, his career, and now his musical comeback, almost make him the poster-boy for the peaceful qualities of his chosen faith, the unjust victimization of cultural prejudice, and more generally for the rapprochement of Christians and Muslims—a status he apparently welcomes. In an interview with Reuters, Yusuf explained his motivations for making a comeback:

But it's the people and the cause that matter, and right now there's an important need, which is bridge-building. I wanted to support the cause of humanity, because that's what I always sang about.... Music can be healing, and with my history and my knowledge of both sides of what looks like a gigantic divide in the world, I feel I can point a way forward to our common humanity again.... There's all this talk of the clash of civilizations. But if you do your research you find, for example, that coffeehouses came from Muslim civilization in Turkey and the guitar was developed from Muslims taking the *oud* to Spain. So culture and civilization is something we share, not something we should

fight about. That's the symbol of the cup. It's there for everybody to drink from. (Reuters, 17 November 2006)

Maybe America is reaching a time when healing and bridge-building between these clashing civilizations is in fact possible. If so, perhaps Yusuf can emerge as an ambassador in its service. A Christian could listen to "An Other Cup" and, not knowing that it is by a Muslim, enjoy it and even celebrate it as a "Christian" recording. Evidently, this was part of the plan: not to emphasize the differences but to foreground what we all have in common.

Thus, the American response to Yusuf and his new album bears watching. His reemergence is well timed, with pro-war sentiment at an all-time low, as the recent elections demonstrate. Although Americans may not be convinced by a pop cultural icon's well-meaning attempts to reconcile Christianity and Islam, if Yusuf's second coming does find success, this may bode well for the emergence of an increasingly tolerant stance toward peaceful forms of Islam in general. And that would bode well not only for Yusuf and Islamic believers, but also for America. ♣

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# film

## Everything Is Illuminated

I HAVE A FRIEND WHO DID NOT LEARN HER FATHER had escaped a Nazi death camp until she was in her twenties. Because he was a Ukrainian Catholic, it did not occur to her that he might be subject to Nazi depredations, and her father, quite understandably, chose not to volunteer stories of his painful past. Only after my friend's husband started asking questions was everything illuminated.

I thought of my friend and her father as I watched *Everything Is Illuminated*, written and directed by Liev Schreiber. Loosely based on a novel by Jonathan Safran Foer, the film follows an American Jew, named Jonathan Safran Foer, seeking information about the Ukrainian woman who saved his grandfather's life during the Nazi occupation. After he travels to Odessa, however, Jonathan discovers that the (dis)organization he has hired to trace his grandfather's Ukrainian past consists of a vocabulary-challenged translator named Alex, a Soviet-built tin-can of a car driven by Alex's grandfather who claims to be blind, and a "delusional" dog that Grandfather insists is his "seeing-eye bitch." The absurdist flavor of this scenario is intensified by the radical contrast between Jonathan and Alex. Though the two are similar in age, Jonathan's rigid, slow-moving body is always clothed in a black suit and tie, while Alex dresses and swaggers like a stand-in for the "two wild-and-crazy guys" made famous by Steve Martin and Dan Ackroyd on *Saturday Night Live*. As the movie slowly unfolds, however, we discover that Jonathan and Alex have much more in common than they realize. The title *Everything Is Illuminated*, we realize, applies not just to Jonathan's discoveries about his Ukrainian grandfather, but also to Alex's discoveries about his Ukrainian grandfather.

The film submits its viewers to a process of illumination as well. Just as both Jonathan and Alex undergo a paradigm shift as information

### Crystal Downing

comes to light, we are submitted to a paradigm shift as the film switches genres on us. The first half is surreal comedy reminiscent of *Amélie* (2001): odd close-ups and camera angles match odd characterizations and actions, a protagonist's voice-over commenting as though nothing were out of the ordinary. Alex supplies the voice-over in an accented English inflected with charming malapropisms: Grandpa's dog was "retrieved from a home for forgetful dogs" rather than "forgotten dogs"; named "Sammy Davis Junior Junior," the dog wears a tee-shirt bearing a hand written title, "Officious Seeing Eye Bitch." Alex asks Jonathan things like "Were you able to manufacture the ZZZZZs?" and "Were you proximal with your grandfather?"

The last half of the film, however, gets increasingly serious, tragically so, making the film feel like a visual malapropism: the two halves do not seem to fit together. Roger Ebert reports that the first time he saw *Everything Is Illuminated*, "I was hurtling down the tracks of a goofy ethnic comedy when suddenly we entered dark and dangerous territory." While some might see this discontinuity as the film's weakness, it may be regarded better as its strength. For just as Jonathan and Alex are experiencing illumination about their pasts, so we as audience experience illumination about the past of the film: absurd elements in the first half make much more sense once we get to the end.

THE FILM HINTS AT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN past and present with its opening shot: a cricket surrounded by amber fills the screen. The camera cuts to a close-up of an old photograph, implying a metaphoric match between the two shots: a photograph preserves a person's past the way amber preserves its contents. Next, as the camera pans over multiple old photos, we hear Alex's heavily accented English scathingly disparage not only the Jews who hire

his services but also the past: "I was of the opinion that the past it is passed, and that all that is not now should remain buried along the side of our memories." Ironically, as he makes this statement, a huge sheet of paper fills the screen as he writes the words we hear, establishing a parallel with the film's opening shot: a written document preserves the past like a bug in amber. Alex's act of preservation indicates he has changed his opinion, which is confirmed when he next states, "But this was before the commencement of a very rigid search, before I encountered the collector, Jonathan."

Alex's malapropism, "rigid search," seems appropriate as the shot dissolves from his written document to the back of Jonathan's rigid, black-clad body standing before a gravestone: another object that memorializes the past. The epitaph, bearing a Star of David, reads "Safran Foer, 1921–1989." While this image of Jonathan seems somber enough, huge coke-bottle glasses, magnifying the already large blue eyes of actor Elisha Wood (of Frodo fame), give Jonathan a comical look, especially when we see a flashback of him as a child—at the bedside of his dying grandfather—wearing the same outrageously huge glasses and somber black tie. When the grandfather dies, the bespectacled boy grabs an orange-colored pendant on the nightstand, and we immediately recognize the cricket embedded in amber. It has no meaning, either to the boy or to us, however, until the film returns us to Jonathan's present life. Now, fifteen years later, Jonathan sits beside the same bed, in the same room, watching his grandmother die. While appearing to turn her back to him (a significant gesture, as we shall see), the grandmother reaches for a photograph of the past. As she hands it to Jonathan, we see his grandfather as a young man standing in traditional Ukrainian dress beside a young woman who wears the amber pendant around her neck. The photograph sends Jonathan on a search to find this person who, he is told, saved his grandfather from the Nazis.

Though this is all quite serious, Jonathan is made humorous by his next move: just as he took the pendant from his dead grandfather's bedside, he now takes a set of false teeth from his dead grandmother's bedside. We witness both items placed in zip-lock bags and pinned to a wall that contains hundreds of other bagged items: photos,

a pair of men's briefs, crude drawings, a used condom, and so on. Jonathan, "the Collector," seems to be obsessive-compulsive, and throughout the film we see him whip out plastic bags from his fanny-pack in order to preserve items that cross his path: a bottle of hand lotion from the train lavatory, a bit of potato from his first Ukrainian dinner, a handful of dirt.

This is the scenario by which a man obsessed with collecting trivial elements to memorialize his past encounters a Ukrainian man obsessed with trivial elements that make him feel up-to-date with a not-so-trendy American present: "I am beloved," Alex tells us, "of American movies and hip hop music." The contrast in their perspectives is anticipated by views from the car as Alex and his grandfather drive to the Odessa train station to rendezvous with Jonathan. The Ukrainian past is repeatedly juxtaposed with an Americanized present: a view of the famous Odessa steps, made iconic by Sergei Eisenstein in his 1925 film *Potemkin*, follows a shot of MacDonald's yellow arches; after showing a woman sitting at a bus stop wearing a traditional "Babushka" scarf, the camera moves up over the hedge behind her to capture adolescents doing tricks on skateboards.

Like the head of Janus—one face turned to the past, the other to the future—the tin-can of a car, containing the differently directed faces of Jonathan and Alex, drives through Odessa and out into the Ukrainian countryside. Schreiber emblemizes their Janus-like perspectives with several repeated techniques. Numerous times he isolates Jonathan in the *mise-en-scene* with his back to the camera, whereas Alex almost always is facing the camera, often aggressively walking toward it. And several times Schreiber fills the screen with a view out the car window that frames the side-view mirror—such that we see in the mirror what is behind the car, where it has just gone, framed by a view of where the car is heading. This simultaneity of perspectives suggests that, in order to have a complete view of one's direction in life, one needs to see the relationship between past and present. One needs to *see* it.

The importance of seeing is mediated through an eye motif that touches all three primary characters: the film's first shot of Alex has an extreme close-up of only one eye as he writes his renuncia-

tion of the past; Jonathan's poor vision of the present is exaggerated through his almost neurotic dependence on his glasses; and the fiction of blindness perpetuated by Alex's grandfather is abetted by the dark wrap around sunglasses he wears as he drives. When they all come together in the Soviet-era car, however, they refine each other's vision, both Jonathan and Alex being given new perspectives on their respective grandfathers.

Alex's new perspective comes only moments after we see Grandfather putting drops into his eyes. Jonathan lays out a map on a hotel dining table and points to his grandmother's "shtetl." When Alex doesn't understand, Grandfather states, "It's a village," right before Jonathan explains "It's Yiddish; it means village." Alex stares at his grandfather for an inordinately long time, wondering how this man who relentlessly spits out anti-Semitic slurs could know a Yiddish word. The next one to stare is "blind" Grandfather, who seems to go into a trance when he sees the photograph of Jonathan's grandfather with the pendant-adorned woman. When Alex asks him whether Ukrainians were "anti-Semitic before the war," Grandfather remains quiet as he continues to stare at the photograph. We, the audience, realize that something has been illuminated, but, as yet, we aren't quite sure what.

As the film continues, however, we see more of Grandfather's eyes as he witnesses things on their journey. Several times we are given extreme close-ups of his eyes as he—inexplicably to Alex—seems to recognize things in the countryside. When a shot of his eyes in the rear view mirror fills the screen, we surmise that Grandfather is beginning to see his past: the place from which he has come. Indeed, immediately after we see his eyes in the rear view mirror, Grandfather suddenly stops the car to walk among abandoned World War II armaments rusting in a field. The shot dissolves to the same sepia-tone color of Jonathan's old photograph—letting us know that Grandfather is, in fact, picturing his own past. But, as yet, it is not the complete picture: the sepia-toned shot pans across several sets of legs only from the calf down. Whenever the camera pans right we see feet with either outworn shoes or none at all; when it pans left we see the crisp leather of spit-shined military boots. Going back and forth several times, the

camera seems to symbolize a Janus-like moment during the War: the vision of German soldiers versus that of their Ukrainian victims. Confirming this, the shot cuts to the midriff of a German cocking a gun, then to the midriff of a ragged suit, the camera tilting up until we see a Star of David at its breast. Finally, the camera is at face-level; but all we see is one eye, as in our first vision of Alex, this one looking over the barrel of a gun as it shoots. The screen goes white, as it often does in the film at moments of illumination, and we hear Alex's distant voice call "Grandfather!"

"Aha!" we think, "everything is illuminated! Alex's grandfather must have been a Nazi collaborator during the war, and this trip is confronting him with the enormity of his complicity. His past explains his anti-Semitic present!"

WHILE ALEX IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY DISTURBED about his grandfather, Jonathan still has learned nothing about his. The next day, however, Grandfather stops the tinny car by a tiny house and says "There: Ask there!" As Alex walks to the cottage through a gorgeous field of man-high sunflowers, we realize that the camera watches him from behind, hinting that Alex is heading toward an illumination of his past even as he inquires about Jonathan's. He asks a woman on the porch the question he has posed to numerous others: "Have you ever heard of Trachimbrod?"—the village of Jonathan's grandfather. After much prodding, the woman finally answers "You are here. I am it." This enigmatic response is explained only after the three travelers enter the cottage and see labeled boxes covering an entire wall, from floor to ceiling. The camera pans the labels, just as it did those of Jonathan's floor-to-ceiling zip-lock bags at the film's start, until we read the words *Spectacles . . . Menorah . . . Dust*. Drawing us back to the eye motif, the spectacles, juxtaposed with the other two words, anticipates what soon will be illuminated: due to Nazi guns, over one thousand Trachimbrod Jews, represented by the Menorah, are now dust. These boxes *are*, indeed, Trachimbrod—filled with remnants collected by the strange woman after Nazis destroyed her village.

We then are given a shot that graphically matches a shot from early in the film: we see

Jonathan's back as he faces the wall of boxes, standing in the exact same location on the screen when he faced the wall of his wacky bedroom collection. In both instances, Jonathan faces a wall memorializing the past, the repetition iconically reminding us of Jews that face the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. The connection between the two scenes is made explicit when Alex says of the woman's wall, "She is also a collector." This present somber moment thus comments upon the film's comic past. Jonathan's seemingly obsessive impulse to collect odd mementos helps keep the past alive. The dead live again in the memory of survivors.

The second wall-facing scene soon becomes more inclusive: the camera pulls back from its focus on Jonathan's back so that, when more of the wall is exposed, we now see the backs of Alex and Grandfather facing the boxes. Indeed, they are soon to face their own past.

Before their illumination, though, comes Jonathan's. It turns out that the photographed woman with the pendant was actually his grandfather's first wife, killed by the Nazis several days after his grandfather left Trachimbrod to establish a home in America. Significantly, Jonathan gets this vision of his grandfather's past only after the woman collector removes the glasses from his face and says his grandfather's name, "Safron"—indicating how much he looks like his forebear. Soon thereafter, Jonathan catches a cricket, placing it in his glasses case before dropping it in a baggie. When Alex asks why, Jonathan states, "I'm afraid sometimes I'll forget." Then, for the first time in the film, Jonathan cleans his glasses. Finally *seeing* the import of the cricket in amber, Jonathan collects a new cricket to serve as a memento of his (in)sight.

In contrast, Alex's vision is still murky. Grandfather seems to know the Trachimbrodan collector, but he will not speak to her until the two younger men go outside. As they wait on the porch, Alex gets unusually testy when Jonathan points out that his tee-shirt is "inside-out." Truculently protesting that he does not understand this term "inside-out," Alex seems to chaff under the realization that Grandfather's secret past may turn his own present life inside-out.

Finally, everything is illuminated. We discover that Grandfather was a Trachimbrod Jew left for

dead by the Nazis. The woman collector had watched him extricate himself from a pile of bodies and then run away, leaving behind his Star of David as he will leave behind his Jewish identity. And thus, once again, a comic element from early in the film is now explained: Grandfather's absurd proclamations of blindness, like his anti-Semitic proclamations, illustrate his willed blindness to his own past.

In radical contrast to Grandfather's rejection of the past, the Trachimbrodan collector rejects the present. When we first see her she is washing clothes with an old-fashioned scrubbing board. Later, never having been in a car before, she refuses to ride to the site of Trachimbrod, resolutely walking as the men's car follows her at a snail's pace. Finally, she asks the men, "Is the war over?" Significantly, the person who answers is Grandfather. As he moves closer to say "Yes; it is over," we sense that he has moved closer to his own Trachimbrodan past. After all, this woman "is" Trachimbrod. Grandfather's own war with the past "is over." As a result, he dies in blissful peace later that night, eyes fully open until Alex gently closes them.

IT IS NOW UP TO THE TWO YOUNG MEN, ALEX AND Jonathan, to reconcile the present with the past, balancing between the extremes of two Trachimbrod survivors: a grandfather blind to the past and a woman blind to the present. Schreiber symbolizes their balance with a series of significant shots. Ready to depart at the Odessa train station, Jonathan kisses Grandfather's "Seeing-Eye Bitch," and Alex accepts Jonathan's Star of David pendant. Back in America, Jonathan walks toward the camera through an airport tunnel, as though finally exiting his tunnel-vision over the past. Once in the airport lobby, he repeatedly stops to look at the Americans around him: those who people his present. Astute film viewers will see that the female gate attendant Jonathan notices is played by the same actress who served as a cook in a Ukrainian hotel; a young boy holding a mother's hand had been a goat herder in the old country; airport security guards are the same actors who played Ukrainian construction workers. Thus, in a nice bit of filmmaking, Schreiber not only brings together Jonathan's Ukrainian past

with his American present, but he brings the film's eye motif to bear on his audience, for only observant viewers will notice the doublings that make the past of the film relevant to its present moment.

The film ends with a graphic match cut that aligns the two men. Jonathan stands once again in front of his grandfather's grave, and we are given a close-up on his hand holding dirt he took from the site of Trachimbrod. We see the hand pour dirt on the grave, but then, as the camera pulls back, we discover it is now Alex's hand pouring dirt on his grandfather's grave. Like that of Safron Foer, Grandfather's grave is marked with a Star of David, and Alex wears not only a black suit and tie, like Jonathan's, but also a yarmulke, marking him as a Jew.

Alex finally has embraced the past, confirmed by the memoir he writes in ink as black as his clothes: "I have reflected many times upon our rigid search. It has shown me that everything is

illuminated in the light of the past. It is always along the side of us, on the inside looking out. . . . Like you say: inside-out."

And we might say something similar about this charmingly quirky film: it is a memorial to the past in which everything is illuminated in the light on the screen; for, in the hands of good filmmakers, the insight will out. ♣

Just as Schreiber closed his film with a dedication—"For Alex, 1906-1993"—I close this essay with a dedication:

*For John Kowaliw, born in the Ukraine, 1923; died in Pennsylvania 21 June 2006. For him, everything is illuminated.*

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# fiction

## Walter Wangerin's Unfinished Gospel

Chris Matthis

Walter Wangerin, Jr., *The Book of the Dun Cow*.  
New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

IMAGINE THAT EARLY ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb with spices for Jesus' body. Suppose they found the stone still in place, and when they managed somehow to pry it back, they beheld the maggoty corpse of Jesus rotting inside. What would they do? What would they say? Certainly not "He is risen!" There would be no "Peace be with you," no stigmata, no Pentecost, no Church, no newness of life. Jesus would have died as another failed Messiah, and his disciples would go back to catching fish and auditing tax returns. This is the similar, startling impression that Walter Wangerin, Jr., makes in his novel, *The Book of the Dun Cow*. In this allegorical bestiary, a messianic Dog offers himself up in death for the salvation of undeserving animals to rescue them from evil. He dies as their savior in their stead, but he is a redeemer who will not live again. Abounding in Biblical allusions, especially to Christ's vicarious atonement, *The Book of the Dun Cow* is clearly a Christian work drawing out Gospel themes. Yet without a resurrection, *Dun Cow* is an unfinished gospel, leaving the reader with irrepressible questions about faith and meaning in a world this is often chaotic and often meaningless.

The novel centers on the rooster Chauntecleer, "pastor" of a fledgling congregation, who guards his Coop against the unbound onslaught of irrational hatred and evil manifested in the satanic serpent, Wyrms. Like many Old Testament prophets, Chauntecleer is reluctant to assume his role. Imperial and impatient, he is an unlikely pastoral figure. As a youth he thieved, murdered, and raped before being banished from his homeland. Yet in a later incident

that alludes to Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, the Lord appears to Chauntecleer in blazing light and asks him, "Why do you hurt me?" The Lord calls him to pastor the animals in another land, to lead this community by means of his "canonical crows." The Rooster's dutiful lauds—prime, terce, sext, none, vespers, and compline—are the animals' daily prayer offices, giving meaning to their existence. Before Chauntecleer came, the animals lived "aimless lives, and days without purpose," but "order came...because the Lord was worshiped and welcomed daily, seven times a day, by seven crows which the Lord taught his Rooster" (158). However, even after his conversion, the Rooster remains proud, short-tempered, and vain. Chauntecleer is like the sinner-saint of Luther's anthropology with his dark past plaguing him in the temptations that follow.

The demonic enemy against whom Chauntecleer and his animals struggle is Wyrms. A dragon banished from heaven, Wyrms dwells beneath the earth's crust bound by animal keepers. Like the serpent of Genesis 3, Wyrms is bent on seducing the animals to his own purposes in order that he might cast off their watch and be free. Chauntecleer's first encounter with Wyrms is a temptation scene at a flooded river becoming a sea. Driven to the surging river by his loneliness, Chauntecleer dreams that he stands on a sinking island in a flooded water-world. Passing in boats, his deaf animals ignore his desperate cries for rescue. The tempter's voice tries to turn Chauntecleer against them, but when the Rooster rebukes Wyrms, he begins to drown—just before waking up. Later, Wyrms will call from the sea, urging Chauntecleer to curse God and give up. As Job's wife said, "Curse God and die" (Job 2:9). Chauntecleer's greatest temptation is to give up and despair, turning from God and his vocation in apostasy. Waking from his nightmare,

Chauntecleer struggles to convince himself that he “can choose against evil” (118).

As if to warn the reader of Chauntecleer’s precarious faith, Wangerin presents us with the Cockatrice, Chauntecleer’s foil or “mirror” (206–207, 221). A subtle tempter, Wyrms comes to an ancient rooster, the heirless Senex, entreating him with the promise of a son and new life. “You don’t have to die,” Wyrms croons in words eerily similar to “You will not surely die” (39; cf. Gen. 3:4). Senex eagerly believes these lies and half-truths, so Wyrms causes him to lay an egg and hatch Cockatrice, a horrific creature with the torso of a proud cock and the tail of a serpent. He is an aborted creature, the misshapen offspring of his father’s asexual reproduction, the image of what Chauntecleer was and could become again should he apostatize. Just as Chauntecleer was once thief, rapist, and murderer, so Cockatrice usurps Senex’s throne by patricide and roosts openly with his father’s hens. Whereas Chauntecleer accidentally slew his mother, Cockatrice assassinates his father and then unleashes genocide on his kingdom.

After a climactic duel with the Cockatrice, Chauntecleer is war-weary and embittered. He loses the spiritual battle. “He had lost hope. And with it went the Rooster’s faith. And without faith he no longer had a sense of the truth” (224). The Rooster slips into a coma. The role of savior falls to the mysterious Mundo Canine Dog. The Dog’s Messianic role is hinted at from the first pages of the novel. Mundo Cani arrives as an unexpected and unwelcome stranger much like Christ, who “came to his own but whose own did not receive him” (John 1:10–11). His Italian name means “a dog’s world,” and as the Christ figure who saves the world, he does lay claim to it. No reference is given to whence he comes or whither he goes (cf. John 14:8: “You have no idea where I come from or where I am going”). The dog has no kin. At Chauntecleer’s assembly “the Dog brought no family. He must have none” (153). Christ’s constant rejection is conveyed in Mundo Cani’s howling refrain, “Marooned.” Almost pitifully funny in the beginning, this cry becomes prophetic and somber when the Dog alone will be left to battle Wyrms. Mundo Cani identifies with Christ’s mission when he terms himself a

“walking sin,” reminding the reader of St. Paul’s words that “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). The dog declares that “no one should be troubled with the burdens which it is given me to bear.” The literal burden he means is his large snout, but as symbolic foreshadowing, this statement looks ahead to his vicarious death, to his “cross,” the battle against Wyrms.

When Chauntecleer awakes from his coma, Mundo Cani rejoices, but Chauntecleer bitterly denies and rejects the Dog. “I—disown—you.... I never—knew—you.... Get out of my—sight” (229). These words can only be an allusion to Peter’s triple denial of Christ in the courtyard outside the chief priest’s house. In his delirium, Chauntecleer suspects his own animals of treachery and proclaims with mad glee that they all will die. “There is nothing left to do.” But Pertelote, his wife, interjects, “There *is*, Chauntecleer. There is something yet to do.”

“There is something yet to do,” Mundo Cani Dog echoes as he lifts up the Rooster and carries him through the camp to the surging river-sea. Wyrms, the harbinger of chaos, speaks in threatening Latin, “*Sum Wyrms, sub terra...* I am Wyrms from underneath the earth, coming, coming! I mean to be free” (237). Chauntecleer abandons hope as Wyrms oozes the words, “The Keepers have failed.” Chauntecleer pleads, “God forgive me.” He has chosen evil. Pertelote responds, “He will. There is one thing left to do.” God will forgive Chauntecleer because of what is “left to do.” Chauntecleer begs to know what it is. As if in answer, and in an unusual show of bravado, the usually meek Mundo Cani Dog challenges Wyrms. Redemption is left to do. Arming himself with the Dun Cow’s broken horn, the Dog leaps into the chasm and stabs Wyrms’s black, lidless eye. As Wyrms thrashes about, the earth caves in above them, and both he and the Dog are sealed in their tomb. The satanic Wyrms dies, but so does the Christ-like Dog.

There is difficulty in finding Gospel after the Dog’s death. The redemptive act does not justify Chauntecleer or give peace to his conscience. He hates that he refused his fight with Wyrms and that the Dog had to take his place. “The Dog’s

good act stood ever in accusation of the Rooster's sinfulness" (249). Rather than alleviating his fear and troubled conscience, the Dog's righteousness only illuminates the Rooster's wretchedness.

"That should have been *me*," says Chauntecleer. "I should have gone down into the pit, not Mundo Cani. I should have died instead of him" (251–252). Chauntecleer is stricken with guilt that he rejected Mundo Cani Dog and did not have the will to kill Wurm. "Chauntecleer's story is unresolved," writes Rubel. "Chauntecleer is filled with guilt and resentment at the sacrificial death of Mundo Cani....Chauntecleer feels guilt because the dog he despised did what he wanted to but could not" (Rubel, 199). To heal her husband's wounded soul, Pertelote steps into the role of confessor, but tragically, instead of offering absolution, she orders penance: "You can tell him you are sorry. He will forgive you" (252). After leading Chauntecleer to confess his sin, Pertelote says, "Maybe one day you will say the same to Mundo Cani, and then he will be able to speak his forgiveness in your hearing, and that will complete the matter. Then you will be free of it." Unknown to her, these words cannot give comfort, for never again will Chauntecleer speak with the lifeless Dog.

**W**HY IS THERE NO RESURRECTION IN A STORY that in so many other ways appears to be a gospel allegory? Perhaps the marked absence of a resurrection is intended to leave us unfulfilled with what Warren Rubel calls a "disturbing sense of grace" (Rubel, 200). Alert to the Gospel themes, one expects a resurrection that never takes place. Christ atoned for our sin by his death on the cross. By means of his resurrection, he imparted new life, the benefit of such redemption. If Christ had not been raised, we would be forgiven, but we would not know it, living in uncertainty, unaware of our pardoned status. Mundo Cani Dog is not raised, so Chauntecleer remains grief-stricken and overwhelmed by guilt. He is like St. Peter, who denied Christ three times, but Chauntecleer receives no loving rebuke and restoration to fellowship by the Sea of Galilee. There is no "Do you love me?" or "Feed my lambs" for him; there is only silence. "Guilt and resentment haunt Chauntecleer at the end of this

powerful story" (Rubel, 199). Without resurrection and true absolution, *The Book of the Dun Cow* is an unfinished gospel.

Some devotees to Wangerin's work may contend, of course, that the reason *The Book of the Dun Cow* is an unfinished gospel is because Chauntecleer's chronicles are not concluded until the sequel, *The Book of Sorrows* (Zondervan, 1996). Without giving away too much, remember that Chauntecleer's journey to the Netherworld in *The Book of Sorrows* only confirms that this gospel story is incomplete.

The spiritual path Wangerin maps out in *The Book of the Dun Cow* is a rigorous journey for pilgrim readers. One laughs, cries, and gasps along the way in this gripping novel that elicits all the reader's emotional responses without ever approaching sentimental absurdity. Even though the characters are animals, they are transparently human, not at all remote like fables. Although it begins slowly, this fascinating story accelerates towards the climactic moment of Mundo Cani Dog's battle against Wurm. The dénouement does *not* untie all the knots, and one is left with the mystery of an absent resurrection and the collateral damage to Chauntecleer's heart. *The Book of the Dun Cow* invites careful attention from critics, theologians, teachers, and bibliophiles. How does one live after the waters of despair recede, leaving apostasy in the tide? How does one go on after the savior dies but does not rise?

Wangerin's "unfinished gospel" forces us to embrace the necessity of the resurrection. With much of the academy searching for a historical Jesus who did not rise from the dead and an America recently obsessed with Gnostic "gospels," some Christians attempt to make their faith palatable to the culture by believing in merely "spiritual" resurrection experiences. Wangerin's novel proves that these attempts neuter the Gospel, for without a bodily resurrection, there is no point at all to faith in the Gospel. What is redemption without resurrection? To quote Luther's *Small Catechism*: "Where there is forgiveness of sins there is *life* and salvation." St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). The Passion, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ comprise a divine



tragicomedy. Ironically, by offering the tragedy without the comedy, Wangerin reveals how essential the comedy is for our faith. During Lent, Stanley Hauerwas asked in this publication "Why did Jesus have to die?" Wangerin's unfinished gospel proves why Jesus had to rise again. For even after Mundo Cani Dog's sacrificial death, "there is something yet to do." †

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## SHELTER

The Bedouins cram  
into the church  
basement, bear plastic  
bundles, rusted dowers,  
to their cots, daily  
destination, home.

They don nightgowns,  
bum smokes, drink mud.  
Two dispatch me  
in gin, gab about the nature  
of wisdom. At ten they  
bed down in stale linen:

Dream of winning  
lotteries, Christmas  
at Bellevue, a cache  
of cans.      Dark nuzzles  
the sleepers, gentle  
light from the street.

Paul David Steinke

# things catholic

## Whose Faith? Which Rationality?

David Weber

Alasdair MacIntyre. *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue, 1913–1922*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

“WHY TAKE AN INTEREST IN EDITH STEIN AS a Philosopher?” With this question, Alasdair MacIntyre begins his intellectual biography of Edith Stein. One answer to this question was indirectly given in John Paul II’s homily at Stein’s canonization in October of 1998 when he declared that Stein “is to be venerated in the whole Church as one of the saints.” As a Lutheran I can raise theological questions about particular aspects of the veneration of the saints, this biography demonstrates why it is so important for the church to pay close attention to lives such as Stein’s, who was born a German Jew in 1891, rejected God in her teens, studied phenomenology with Edmund Husserl, and died Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (her Carmelite monastic name) in Auschwitz in 1942. This biography focuses attention on that part of Stein life in which her academic study of philosophy related to her conversion to Christianity.

Another answer is that Stein as a philosopher followed an opposite direction from her younger colleague, Martin Heidegger. Heidegger also studied under Husserl, only to reject his phenomenology along with traditional metaphysics and faith in God, while making common cause with the Nazis on his way to becoming the most influential philosopher of the twentieth century. The philosophical ideas Stein maintained, modernity rejected. To pay attention to Stein is to imagine a counterfactual history in which philosophy becomes much less hostile to Christianity. This hostility was sharply stated in a 1964 essay called, “Is Understanding Religion Compatible With Believing?” The author argued that, given what we know of scientific rationality and what we know of Christianity, one can either be rational or

be Christian. One aspect of his argument was that the Christian faith depended on certain medieval philosophical and theological beliefs that modernity had found to be untenable. The author was Alasdair MacIntyre who, sometime in the 1990s, converted to Roman Catholicism after arguing his way back to these medieval truths that were not so buried in the past as he had once believed.

MacIntyre’s actual answer as to why we should pay attention to Stein the philosopher is threefold. It is because of the theoretical questions that occupied Stein’s mind, because of the community of thinkers and friends with whom she struggled with these questions, and because of the conversion which followed from these questions. One of the most important of Stein’s questions was inextricably connected to a character in Stein’s life, the little known phenomenologist, Adolf Reinach. Reinach, MacIntyre notes, was unique because he “had the rare gift of being able to explain Husserl to Husserl,” and because he was a gifted teacher who understood that “no philosophical position has been adequately stated until it has become teachable” (9). Reinach’s road to faith began with his flash of understanding that Husserl’s phenomenology had given philosophy a new starting point. This new starting point generated the questions that MacIntyre claims makes Stein worth studying.

So, what was this new starting point? To put it too simply, at the time philosophers incessantly debated the relationship of the subject to the external objective world. This debate reflected a problem inherited from the Scottish philosopher David Hume whose skepticism about our ability to know the external world led him to conclude that knowledge was not really about knowing the objective world but was concerned with the subject’s perception of the world. Reinach rejected this skepticism because his studies led him to the conclusion that our relationship to the external world could not be reduced to *perception* but was rather *recep-*

tion. Once the move from perception to reception is made, philosophy became less an explanation of how the human mind imposes “form and order on objects” (33) and more of a disciplined “way of seeing” the world so that we could better understand how we relate “to the things themselves”(22). The new starting point was a Trinitarian account of knowledge as pertaining to (1)the seeing subject, (2) the seen object, and (3) the act of seeing which joins subject to object.

So what? The difference this new starting point makes can be illustrated by considering what a promise means. If a promise is merely about the subject, then the words “I promise” only mean, “I am giving a report on how I presently feel, though present feelings do not indicate future performance.” But, argues Reinach, this is not a promise. A promise must be verbalized and is not completed unless and until it is received (a successful promise) or rejected (an unsuccessful promise). Moreover, if the promise proves successful (i.e., received by the hearer) a real relationship *between* the giver and receiver establishes real social consequences and obligations. Reduce a promise to a thing inside the subject, and you are no longer talking about a promise.

But to reply fully to the “So what?” question, we have to recognize that what we see in promising has bearing on how we understand loving. If love is only about the subject, love is fundamentally self-centered. This is, of course, an incomplete account of love because it fails to account for the beloved and the act of loving which binds the two. The practical upshot of this new starting point in philosophy is especially evident in Stein’s attention to the relationship of the individual to community.

MacIntyre says that Stein’s studies led her to become interested in “the question of defining the possibility of mutual communication between human beings, in other words, the possibility of establishing community” (97–98). To ask, “What kind of person would I become?” depends on the answer to another question, “Of what kinds of community should I be a member?” (122). As she came to see that true community aimed to cultivate the character of the single individual, Stein increasingly grew suspicious of complex top-down bureaucratic plans to better society which led to a readiness to demonize external enemies

and to make scapegoats of some within a society. Political unity depends “on the use of coercive force,” while authentic community arises from “the free agency of the individuals” (96). As politics is finally defined by the use of coercive power, it cannot create the goods created by authentic community. The limited and modest role of the political is to maintain the freedoms necessary for true communities to flourish and to preserve the goods these communities create.

Having moved quickly from the new starting point to promises, to love, and to community, MacIntyre brings the story of Stein’s life as a philosopher to a point when he gives two chapters to discussing conversion. Bluntly put, conversion is the authenticating mark of true community. Because rational community gives priority to the character (soul) of distinct individuals (122), it eschews coercion and embraces conversion as the most free and rational act of the individual. MacIntyre is well aware of those modern prejudices that have trained us to think of conversion as being neither free nor rational. So he dedicates two chapters to explaining conversion, first in terms of sociological rationality, and second in terms of theological rationality. As a sociological phenomenon, conversion is the result of the slow cultivation of character whereby an individual is able “to attain that standpoint” that was once not her own. A community in good order is confident that its central convictions are vitally present in the attitudes and actions of those in the community, and it is confident that its moral and intellectual instruction is capable of making outsiders insiders in the community.

But this sociological account does not adequately explain Stein’s conversion. I summarize this chapter with a bad conscience as this story of how the consolation of philosophy leads to faith is too good to condense. After Adolf Reinach died, in 1917, in one of the senseless battles at Ypres, Stein resigned her position with Husserl and turned her attention to publishing Reinach’s philosophical writings. In two letters from the front to his wife, Reinach poignantly expressed the relationship of his philosophy to his faith, stating, “The first weeks were terrible; then God’s peace came to me too, and now all is well.” Then, about a year later, in another letter Reinach mapped out his intention

to philosophically contemplate his relationship with God, saying, "I should like to start from the inner experience of God, the experience of being sheltered in Him, and shall be content to show that 'objective science' cannot gainsay it. I should like to expound the full meaning of this experience, to show how far it can claim objectivity, to demonstrate why it is genuine cognition, though of its own kind; and finally, to draw the conclusions... To do such work with humility is most important today, far more important than to fight this war. For what purpose has this horror if it does not lead human beings closer to God?" (145-46). How then does Stein come to make Reinach's task her own?

After Reinach's death, Stein visited Anna his widow and was deeply affected by her "calm demeanor and inner peace," which she attributed to a life-power that had "transformed her grief" (163). Stein states, "It was my first encounter with the cross and the divine power that it bestows on those who carry it. For the first time I was seeing with my very eyes the church, born from its Redeemer's sufferings, triumphant over the sting of death. That was the moment my unbelief collapsed" (164-65). The faith that was so powerfully embodied in Anna Reinach, was "a state of resting in God, of complete relaxation of all mental... activity, in which you make no plans at all, reach no decision, much less take action, but rather leave everything that is future to the divine will... (where there is) a feeling of being safe, of being relieved from anxiety and responsibility" (165).

How can we too come to see the world in this way? Stein's answer was, "The sole prerequisite

for such a mental rebirth seems to be a certain *receptivity*" (165). *Receptivity* turns out to be not only the starting point of philosophy, but also the starting point of faith. MacIntyre's story of Stein the philosopher ends where the story of Teresa Benedicta begins. This is not a story of an irrational leap to religion but a rational progress from questions posed by philosophy to a practical way of living in relationship with God and others. In another essay, when MacIntyre himself was in the thick of reconsidering the faith he had previously rejected, he states that there is a way of moving through troubling philosophical questions that leads to the discovery of God's grace and mercy. When this discovery happens, we can see how the end of our philosophical progress turns out to be "the beginnings of a pilgrim's progress."

This account of how Stein the philosopher became Theresa the saint is a study of the rationality of conversion, which is neither a flight to subjective religious experience nor a flight from the puzzles and pains world. For Stein, conversion was the rational end to that receptivity which was the new beginning of philosophy and then of faith. This book goes a long way toward showing why the church need not continue with its current lack of confidence in the rationality of conversion, as it also helps us imagine what such a confidence would mean for the academy and the church. †

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# pulpit and pew

## Praying for Peace

Joel Kurz

IT WAS A SUNDAY MORNING DURING THE FIRST WAR with Iraq and the mandatory hour of worship in this college chapel was drawing to a close. Seated toward the front of the long Gothic nave, I had been distracted by the yellow ribbons which adorned the pulpit and lectern hangings and obscured the symbols of Christ. The chaplain asked all to rise and sing “God Bless America” as a parting prayer for victory in the Gulf. I stayed in my pew and feared scrutiny for this act of quiet defiance.

Other such incidents have come and gone since then, yet it still amazes me how easily “a house of prayer for *all* people” (Isaiah 56:7) can become the misguided platform of *one* people.

TO PRAY IS TO ASK OF GOD, BUT FALLEN IN PRIDE as we are, we seldom ask for the right things, and if we do, we subvert divinely noble words with our own freighted meanings. I know that I am not alone in hearing petitions for peace accompanied by the expectations of military triumph. So often I think of Siegfried Sassoon (himself a wounded veteran of World War I) and the mock pleas of his poem “Asking for it”:

...  
Lord God of blockheads, bombing-planes, and bungle,  
Assist us to be adequately armed.

Lord God of cruelties incomprehensible  
And randomized damnations indefensible,  
Perfect in us thy tyrannous technique  
For torturing the innocent and weak.

...  
Grant us the power to prove, by poison gases,  
The needlessness of *shedding* human blood.

Can we not honestly say that many of the prayers said during time of war amount to such? To be true, we must admit that the prayers of Christendom are a mixed bag. Despite the orisons (no matter how numerous) that assault the throne of the Divine with military precision, there are those that rise from lack of presumption.

As people who follow the Prince of Peace, it is incumbent upon us to intercede on behalf of all whose lives are ruined by war—whether they are “our” soldiers or “the enemy,” whether they are civilians of our country or of the other nations. Here we must remember Jesus’ conveniently forgotten admonition to love our enemies, bless them, do good to them, and pray for them so that we might be the children of God who makes the sun to rise on the evil and good, and sends rain on the just and unjust (Matthew 5:44–45).

Our prayers are not to be for victory or domination, but for acceptance and practice of the will of God (which won’t always be to our liking). Although not faultless, I find instructive “A Bidding Prayer for the Time of War” from the 1941 altar book *The Lutheran Liturgy*. The prayer is comprehensive in its intercessions: for all in authority; for those in the armed services; for the sick, imprisoned, wounded, and dying, *whether our own or of the enemy*, and all who minister to them; for those who are anxious or troubled; *for those engaged in warfare against us; that a just peace may follow the present conflict; that the Church’s work may continue; and for all God’s future mercies* (278–81).

A prayer from the same book (“In Time of War”) asks concerning “our enemies” that God would “...abate their pride, check their malice, and confound their devices...” (301), while yet another acknowledges that “...from the lusts of our own hearts come wars and fighting amongst us ...” (302), and another implores God to “Teach us to search the depths of our own hearts, so that we, too, may realize how depraved our natural hearts are and how inclined toward envy, malice, hatred, and enmity...” (310). There are leveling pleas that the Lord would remove “...all causes and occasions of war...” (302) and “...break the bow and cut asunder the spear of those who delight in war and bloodshed...” (310). Do our prayers even approach those marks?

WHILE VISITING A PARISHIONER IN THE THROES of cancer several years ago, I gave a reflection on the Collect for Peace (“O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed, give to your servants that peace which the world cannot give...”). That dear and dying saint added, “Like Twain’s *War Prayer*.” “What?” I responded. “You don’t know it?” she asked. I shook my head. “I was sure you did... here, take it home and read it,” she said as she pulled it from her shelf. On reading it that night, I knew exactly what she meant—our conceptions of peace are often far from the peace God gives; they are the “empty peace” of a world sold on strife.

Written as a rebuke of nationalistic religion typified by pastors who preach “devotion to flag and country” and invoke “the God of Battles... in our good cause...” (Twain, 156–57), Mark Twain’s satire is a timeless corrective. The sketch takes us into a house of worship on a Sunday morning—the day before soldiers would be leaving for the latest war. The minister prayed for the soldiers’ safety, then went on to plead that God “would encourage them in their patriotic work; bless them... help them to crush the foe, [and] grant to them and to their flag and country imperishable honor and glory” (158). An aged stranger, with the ghostly look of an ancient prophet, proceeded up the aisle and stood silently at the minister’s side until he finished the prayer. He tapped his arm, motioned him to step aside, and announced himself as a messenger from the throne of God.

The stranger stated that God had heard the prayer and would grant it, if they still so desired, after learning their words’ true meanings. He continued, “When you have prayed for victory you have prayed for many unmentioned results which follow victory—*must* follow it, cannot help but follow it” (159). While not specifically articulating as much, he made clear the prayer’s *implied* petitions:

O Lord, our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells... help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with their little children to

wander unfriended... broken in spirit, worn with travail... for our sakes who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage.... We ask it in the spirit of love, of Him Who is the Source of Love, and Who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Amen. (159–160)

No one dared to change a single portion of the public prayer, so the messenger left. All who heard him that day were sure he was a lunatic “because there was no sense in what he said” (160). Eternal truth is scarcely recognized in madly warring times.

Twain wrote *The War Prayer* in March of 1905. King Leopold of Belgium had been having his bloody way in the Congo; the US had annexed Hawaii and had emerged successfully from the Spanish-American War with Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines under its belt. Twain was especially outraged by the Philippine-American War which ensued when the US “freed” the islands by purchasing them from Spain, reneging on a promise to secure Filipino independence and embarking on a violent conflict that lasted from 1899 to 1902 (and continued through various uprisings for nearly a decade).

My father’s bookshelf holds the slim photographic volume *Fighting in the Philippines*. There I see such images as a neck-screw being turned on a Filipino “freedom-fighter” and a ditch of thirty-eight dead bearing the caption, “The American Artillery did wonderful execution in the battles with the insurgents.” It comes as no surprise to me that I was jeered *Americano* as a child growing up in those islands nearly thirty years after their eventual independence—during the days of Marcos’s martial law, his friendly relations with the US, and the nearby waging of the Vietnam War.

Yet it was there, in the Philippines, that I came to know an American who taught me much about praying for and living in peace; a man in many ways the messenger of Mark Twain’s tale. A skilled agriculturalist and forester who spent more than fifty years in those islands, three of which were as a prisoner of war during the Japanese occupation,

Hugo Curran knew how to carry on in obscurity and seek the will of God in humility. Beyond his grave, on an old cassette of his poems, he has given me a concluding couplet that has become a refrain: "Put not your faith in weapons mad, nor worship gods of war, / Seek Him whom all the angels praise, and paths of peace implore!" Those words can indeed remind us all what is demanded of us as people whose feet are guided "into the way of peace" (Luke 1:79). †

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# life together

## Mary's Turn

I AM A MARY, NOT A MARTHA. UNLIKE JENNIFER Ferrara ("The Martha Syndrome," *The Cresset*, Trinity 2006), I always have identified with Mary in Luke's account of the two sisters. In the story, as Ferrara reminds us, Martha is the hard-working sister who provides for her guests, Jesus and his disciples, while her sister Mary merely sits at Jesus' feet and listens. When Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary to help, he instead replies "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42).

I can understand how a Martha would resent this seeming favoritism. As Ferrara rightly points out, the world would grind to a halt without its hard-working, responsible Marthas. However, Jesus may be pointing to an issue that goes beyond these two sisters, for this story follows in a long tradition of tales about the hard-worker versus the loafer or dreamer, and it is often the loafer who is strangely favored in these tales. In Genesis, there is the story of Esau and Jacob and of Joseph and his brothers. From the New Testament, we might add the story of the Prodigal Son, whose responsible brother understandably resents the fuss made over the prodigal's return. In folk tradition there is Aesop's tale of the Ant and the Grasshopper in which the careful ant lives in the winter off the stores he has saved over the summer while the playful grasshopper, who spent the summer making music, dies of hunger. Aesop for once sides with the hard-worker, ending his fable with the Marthaesque declaration: "It is best to prepare for the days of necessity."

So why do these contrasting pairs keep coming up in our stories and fables, and what do they have to say about spirituality? To begin with, as Ferrara points out, there simply *are* these two types of people in the world. Each of us could probably name

Cynthia L. Rutz

several Marthas and Marys of our acquaintance. In Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, he describes a split between the "Marthas" who have bought into the Protestant work ethic and the Irish Catholic "Marys" who have not. As a Mary, I admit that I cheered when Weber described the Irish Catholic workers who, when offered the chance to make twice as much money per day by increasing their efficiency, worked twice as efficiently in the morning, then took off the afternoon and went to the pub.

The reason, then, that these tales and fables tend not to favor the hard working responsible Marthas, is because the world favors them so much. Indeed, we Marys look on in dismay as we watch our world increasingly succumb to what Ferrara calls "the Martha syndrome." The domestic Marthas who used to shame us by maintaining a spotless home, cooking homemade meals, and volunteering for the PTA are now corporate Marthas who multitask at the office, check email while eating lunch at their desk, and put in hours of overtime. Even worse, that ultimate Martha by the name of Stewart holds up the impossible ideal that we can somehow be both domestic and corporate multitasking goddesses. *Newsweek* recently did a cover story on ambition, highlighting how successful people have made it to the top and offering tips on how we can train our kids to be more ambitious. To my surprise, there was no sidebar from the silent, unambitious minority extolling the virtues of slowing down, smelling the roses, not keeping up with the Joneses and, horror of horrors, not "living up to our earnings potential" (a Marthaesque phrase if there ever was one). Globally, we see creeping Marthaism as capitalism takes hold in Catholic, Mediterranean cultures such as France, Greece, and Italy where they are abandoning their leisurely cooking and dining, their two-hour lunches, their *dolce far niente* ("how sweet it is to do nothing") for the fast pace, long



work hours, and hurried meals of what Ferrara rightly characterizes as the modern life of distraction. As Ferrera points out, there is little room for spirituality amidst all this worldly ambition.

Meanwhile, we remaining Marys stubbornly dig our heels in and rebel against this prevailing culture of ambition. We never, repeat, never multitask. Like Weber's Irish workers, we even take an afternoon off now and then *during the workweek* to take in a matinee or go to the beach. We use our weekends for leisure, not to do work we have brought home or to run errands. In fact, we don't run at all and rarely work out, but we do "exercise" by doing activities we love. When we volunteer, it is to do low-key things that we already love doing. Our kids are rarely in band or sports, so they too have time to, as Whitman says, "loaf and invite the soul." And yes, unlike Ferrara and other Marthas, when we are in church we are fully present there, not making shopping lists for the week in our heads.

Ferrara's solution for the dealing with the "Martha syndrome" is very Marthaesque. She doesn't suggest subtracting some of the busyness from our lives, but rather adding spirituality to our already overloaded "to do" list. She cites as her models spiritual leaders who "maintain an almost inhuman pace" and yet also spend "long hours each day in prayer." No, no, and no again. Jesus holds up quite a different example:

Be not solicitous therefore, saying: What shall we eat: or what shall we drink, or

wherewith shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the heathens seek. For your *Father* knoweth that you have need of all these things. Seek ye therefore first the *kingdom of God*, and his *justice*, and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:31-33)

What Marys instinctively intuit is that seeking the kingdom of God requires true leisure time to consider the lilies of the field (which "toil not, neither do they spin"), to greet the dawn, to stop and notice the beauty of a sunset, in other words, to dwell with God. According to the Trappist monk Thomas Merton, such solitude gives one "a sense of one's own reality and of one's ability to give himself to society—or to refuse that gift." I used to joke with a worrying Martha friend of mine that at the gate of heaven we will be held accountable for every beautiful sunset, every glorious autumn maple tree in full array, every field of lilies that we ignored because we were busy rushing from here to there and worrying about things that never come to pass. All of these are opportunities to dwell with God and He makes the offer all the time, but we must be un-busy enough to accept the invitation. ♣

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BLUE LANTERN MOTEL  
Ashcroft, AZ  
(Route 66)

for Tim

She shows me a Burma Shave sign  
with the initials m.d. carved on it,  
but says it's not for sale at any price.  
Well, hardly any price...what'll you give for it?

There used to be fun here, she says, and chucks  
a salt-cellar at a cat on the counter.  
I blow on my coffee and study a picture of four kids  
in a convertible. I'm the girl in the back seat  
with Donnie, she says. We were going to Flagstaff,  
but we never made it. Donnie made it to Viet Nam.

She wipes the counter, watching for the cat.  
Coyotes come in from the desert at night,  
so mothers sit on porches to watch the children,  
she tells me over her shoulder, pushing the cat  
out the door with her broom. Can't sleep anyway,  
with a hot wind blowing and the Motel sign  
blinking on and off in my window.  
A fellow from Needles said he could fix it.  
He stayed a month. I thought we had something there.

About midnight I raised on an elbow and listened  
to her breathing. I looked through the trees the moon  
had frozen to the window at the cat asleep on the hood  
of my car. Things blow away, she said.

J.T. Ledbetter

## The Myth of the Global Citizen

**T**IP O'NEILL ONCE FAMOUSLY QUIPPED, "ALL politics is local." In contrast, German sociologist Ulrich Beck argues that the realities of the global economy require a new kind of politics, a politics he calls "cosmopolitan republicanism" (*New Statesman*, 6 December 1999).

It is tempting to think of O'Neill's local politics as expressing a parochialism that betrays a narrow moral immaturity and Beck's cosmopolitanism as expressing a generosity characteristic of the highest developmental stage.

But this would be to misunderstand the issue, for in a very important sense cosmopolitanism understood as a sort of global citizenship is impossible. And even if it were possible, it would be undesirable.

Cosmopolitanism is not a univocal concept, so it is important to note which of its formulations one accepts or rejects. In its original meaning as understood by the Stoics the term denoted a belief in a universe that is intelligible, structured by cross-cultural moral norms, such as human dignity, and in which all men—high born or low, citizen or foreigner—are bound by the natural law. This is a compelling position.

But the cosmopolitanism that is on offer today is of a substantially different sort. We are a long way from the magnanimity of Zeno, Seneca, and Epictetus. Today's version takes globalization—both of politics and economics—not only as an empirical fact but as a normative aspiration. It seeks to form "cosmopolitan citizens" whose identity is shaped not in the first place by familial, local, or even national ties—indeed, in its most radical forms, it sees these as morally irrelevant—but rather by an attachment to international affairs and transcultural social movements.

This, it seems to me, is to fashion an identity based upon a dangerous abstraction. There is no such thing as global citizenship. Citizenship—and, indeed, all human relationships—are always

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instantiated in the particular. I cannot be a citizen of the world any more than I can be a brother to mankind. Tocqueville incisively recognized the danger of such abstractions when he noted that "[i]n democratic times...when the duties of each individual to the race are much more clear, devoted service to any one man becomes more rare; the bond of human affection is extended, but it is relaxed." So relaxed does this bond become, in fact, that Americans forget their forbears and their descendants: "The woof of time," he observes, "is every instant broken and the track of generations effaced. Those who went before are soon forgotten; of those who come after, no one has any idea...Thus," he concludes, "not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart."

This is a sober picture. And I think it captures a problem in our own time. We are a people possessed of more information, more data about events and suffering across the globe than ever before. But, if observers like Robert Putnam are reliable, we are also less and less attuned to the needs of our neighbors.

Granted, the question "Who is my neighbor?" is not a simple one—as Jesus' example demonstrated. But this is only to say that it requires reflection. And the most profound thinkers in the Christian tradition have given the question sustained attention. Let me note here Aquinas's articulation of the *ordo caritatis*, or "order of love," nested within his treatment of the theological virtues. While a full elaboration of Aquinas's treatment of the law of charity is not possible here, one of his central principles deserves mention, since it is overlooked easily in a globalized and technologically "connected" environment: in

a decisive respect, we are not bound to love everyone equally.

In response to the question, "Whether we ought to love one neighbor more than another?" Thomas entertains several potential objections found in Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, each of which yields the same conclusion: Christians are called to love all men equally. Now some, he notes, interpret this to mean that we ought to have the same inward affections, ties of the heart, to all men equally, including our enemies. It is only human finitude, so the argument goes, that requires us to confer more "outward favors" on those with whom we are most closely associated. Interestingly, Aquinas rejects this view and vindicates particular attachments not only on account of the constraints of time and space, but also, it seems, in principle. He argues that "one's obligation to love a person is proportionate to the gravity of the sin one commits in acting against that love" and adds that "it is a more grievous sin to act against the love of certain neighbors [such as father and mother], than against the love of others." So he concludes, "[W]e ought to love some neighbors more than others" (*Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 26, Art. 6).

With characteristic subtlety, Aquinas nuances this point so as to show that the universal scope of charity is not abridged by this principle. We are obliged to love all men equally according to charity, that is, to wish them all the same good, namely, eternal life. But as to our beneficence, we have differentiated obligations. There are "those to whom we ought to behave with greater kindness" (*Summa Theologica* II-II, Q. 26, Art. 6).

Two factors that may seem hopelessly quaint in an era of sperm banks and space shuttles inform the structure of these obligations: biology and geography. One's kin and those in proximity to us have an immediate claim on our affections and concern that cannot become attenuated without injustice. This is not to say that we are to be exclusively concerned with our families and neighborhoods, but it is to say that in the ordinary course of things, the *needs*—which are usually substantially different from *wants*—of these people come first, and our identity should be bound up with them throughout the course of the life-cycle.

Two literary works that poignantly reveal the moral profundity of family and communal

bonds, centering specifically on parenting and place, are Flannery O'Connor's "The Lame Shall Enter First" and Wendell Berry's *Hannah Coulter*. Both, it seems to me, provide object lessons on the peril of disordered love, no matter how generously conceived. In the first story, Sheppard, a newly widowed father of a young son, attempts to evade the clutches of grief by attending to others. He undertakes the social reform of a hooligan named Rufus Johnson, whom Sheppard—an atheist who believes in large categories like "humanity"—thinks he can save because of the young man's intelligence. Immersed in his attempt to save Rufus, Sheppard is oblivious to the suffering and desperate longing for fatherly attention of his own son, a fact that results in his child's tragic death.

A less dramatic but nevertheless affecting portrait emerges in Wendell Berry's *Hannah Coulter*, a novel that slowly but definitively impresses upon us the risk of abandoning close attachments. One of the most striking dangers Berry illustrates is the loss of story that awaits men and women who, in their own ways, attempt to live a rootless, one might say, *cosmopolitan* life. Persuaded by their college professors to seek "a better place" and more exciting experiences, Hannah Coulter's children forsake their native ground for more interesting and sophisticated lives—elsewhere. Each bears the marks of such deracination, whether it be in the form of a broken marriage, a lucrative but hollow career, or alienated children. By contrast, the picture of Hannah and Nathan Coulter's lives illustrates the wholesome—in the fullest sense of "making whole"—an intense attachment to people and place. Hannah reflects upon this difference thus:

One of the attractions of moving away into the life of employment, I think, is being disconnected and free, unbothered by membership. It is a life of beginnings without memories, but it is a life too that ends without being remembered. The life of membership with all its cumpers is traded away for the life of employment that makes itself free by forgetting you clean as a whistle when you are not of any more use. When they get to retire-

ment age, Margaret and Mattie and Caleb [her children] will be cast out of place and out of mind like worn-out replaceable parts, to be alone at the last maybe and soon forgotten. "But the membership," [Hannah's neighbor] Andy said, "keeps the memories even of horses and mules and milk cows and dogs."

Indeed, it is only our thick commitments to *these* people in *this* place over the course of a life that gives rise to stories and a sense of a personal

history that is integrated, not dissipated. It seems that this is precisely the kiln within which generosity, expansive loyalties, and an openness to the stranger is forged, which is another way of stating the old Christian adage: charity begins at home. ✝

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# nation

## American Exceptionalism: Religion, Marriage, and Babies

Robert Benne

MY TENNIS PARTNER ANGUISHED, "I DON'T know how I can bring a child into this world with all its troubles." He went on: "Why should I bring a child into this marriage either, since both of us want careers as well as a high standard of living. So I think we should remain childless." Over thirty years after the conversation took place, it sticks in my mind. Dan and his wife finally did have a child but split soon thereafter.

His anguish struck me as odd and debilitating. My wife and I already had three children and soon were to receive an "unexpected blessing" nine years after our third was born. We certainly did not agonize over having children, even though we were just as aware of the world's travails. It seemed the natural thing to do, and we rejoiced in them.

### I

It is no longer the natural thing to do in Western European countries where the native people seem to be committing demographic suicide. Among native Europeans, not one European country has a fertility rate approaching replacement. In order for the population to be replaced, each woman must have on average at least 2.1 children.

Notice these current fertility rates in Europe: Sweden—1.66; the UK—1.6; Germany—1.39, Czech Republic—1.2; Italy and Spain—1.2. Our neighbor to the north, Canada, seems to follow the European pattern with 1.6. Less than 1.5 is a "crisis level" for demographers since at 1.5 (slightly more than the European average) the population is cut by half every 65 years. At 1.3, the population gets cut in half every 32 years.

Ben Wattenberg, the author of *Fewer: How the New Demography of Depopulation Will Shape the Future* (Ivan R. Dee, 2005), says that "Never in the last 650 years, since the time of the Black Plague, have birth and fertility rates fallen so far, so fast, so

low, for so long, in so many places." This demographic disaster will have many repercussions, not least of which will be the expansion of the more fertile Muslim immigrant population that will replace the receding native population. Western Europe had 250,000 Muslims fifty years ago but has 20 million today, a number that will double by 2025.

The United States seems to be an exception to this demographic slide, at least some segments of it. The overall fertility rate has recently rebounded to 2.08, which is very near replacement level. Not only has the rate been helped by Hispanic immigrants, but also by the more intensely religious sectors of the population. A very interesting article in the journal *Demography* entitled "Religion and Fertility in the United States," (Mosher, Williams, and Johnson, v. 29 (1992), 199–214) points out that weekly attendance in worship among all religious groups tends to raise both the marriage and the fertility rate. Those who claimed no religion occupied the bottom rungs of the marriage and fertility ladder. Jews as a whole also were near the bottom, but I would wager that the fertility rate among the Orthodox Jews was far higher.

All this seems to suggest that there is a strong correlation among intense religion, marriage, and procreation. Unsurprisingly, the rate of religious participation in Europe plummeted long before the collapse of marriage and fertility rates. However, the rate of religious participation in America has remained amazingly stable. Even though American marriage and fertility rates have fallen, they have not fallen nearly to the degree that the European rates have. And it seems that intense religious participation lifts both the marriage and fertility rates.

### II

Why is it the case that Evangelicals, classic Catholics, Orthodox Jews, and traditionalists of many religious denominations tend to marry

frequently and have more than two children? This is not hard to figure out. For one thing, such groups try to live closer to biblical norms and patterns. Thus, the First Institution (or Covenant) that God gives the newly created Adam and Eve is taken as a normative pattern. These classic groups hold that marriage is to be expected among their young, even as they respect those who are called to the single life. After all, Jesus and Paul were not married, no matter what *The DaVinci Codes* claims. Nevertheless, Luther and Calvin thought it was the duty of Christians to marry and to bear children. Traditionalists also tend to keep their marriage vows tenaciously. The intense among them have low divorce rates.

The intensely religious married couples among these groups also take to heart the injunction in Genesis 1:26 to “be fruitful and multiply.” For traditionalists, this obligation to marry and to have children is not a burden; rather, it goes with the grain of the universe. God’s commands are reflected in the underlying dynamics of life since he put them there. His commands reflect the pattern of his creation. Even non-religious people participate in this underlying pattern and thereby derive profound joy and satisfaction for it.

People who take their religion seriously also tend to trust God with their futures, both in this world and the next. We do not know or control the future; God does. Whatever happens, we are in his hands. Thus, when asked what he would do if he knew the world would end tomorrow, Luther said he would plant a tree. This confidence in God’s future moves people to bring forth babies as well as plant trees.

Finally, Christians are taught that sacrificial love for others is central to the faith. Such sacrificial love loves without any guarantee of return, responds to the needs and claims of the most vulnerable, is hospitable to the stranger, forgives, offers unconditional commitment, and is willing repeatedly to go the second mile. What is a better demonstration and exercise of that love than the parental love that begets and nurtures children?

### III

It takes these sort of religious motivations to counter the individualistic hedonism of modernity. Such hedonism is a powerful product of the

modern combination of widespread affluence and freedom. It quickly can free itself from the guidance system of sacred tradition if that tradition is not deeply embedded in its participants. As that wise economic historian, Joseph Schumpeter, put it in *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, “As soon as men and women learn the utilitarian lesson and refuse to take for granted the traditional arrangements that their social environment makes for them, and they introduce into their private lives a sort of inarticulate system of cost accounting, they cannot fail to become aware of the heavy personal sacrifices that family ties and especially parenthood entail under modern conditions” (157). Such prospective mates and parents are likely to ask the pointed question: “Why should we stunt our ambitions and impoverish our lives in order to be insulted and looked down upon in our old age?”(158)

Unencumbered by religion, such a spirit leads directly to the marriage and birth dearth. This is not to say that modernity has no effect on the way that more intense Christians have lived out these traditional patterns. Marriages among them are more egalitarian than earlier, and the obligation to have children means more like three or four children than a half dozen. Traditional patterns are observed in new ways.

### IV

What is the upshot of all this? First, we should welcome regulated—but generous—legal immigration. America always has welcomed immigrants who inevitably have had high fertility rates and thereby have replenished its population and added new energy to our common life. America’s capacity to assimilate such immigration is enormous, and we should not react defensively to the regulated legal immigration of Hispanic groups.

Second, we should appreciate and protect free and voluntary religion. The First Amendment has prohibited the establishment of any church, and thereby required religious institutions to survive and flourish on their own. This has resulted in vigorous, responsive religious institutions and an involved laity who support those institutions. This unusual American arrangement has ensured a lively, diverse, and often messy religious life in which more intense religious movements come to

the fore while more accommodated institutions diminish. While some flourish, others recede. That reality will mean that America can count on a continuing supply of vigorous religious organizations, which will in turn encourage higher marriage and fertility rates. Spirited religion is certainly a key factor shaping American exceptionalism in the practice of marriage and the birth of children.

Finally, law and culture should support the American strengths mentioned above. Legal immigration should be closely regulated and open-handed, but immigrants should be expected to take steps toward citizenship. Religion should be kept free from government intrusions except in cases of sedition or direct harm to persons. Traditional marriage as well as child-bearing and child-raising should be protected and encouraged by law. Both are crucial to the well-being of children and society. Other arrangements—co-habitation, same-sex marriage, single parent-

hood—have been shown by a good deal of evidence not to be as effective as the traditional ones.

Culture—the pattern of guiding meanings and values—is another matter. It is influenced by law but has deep sources in the ways of life of the people. There are many currents in American culture—its pop culture, its Hollywood decadence, its elite cynicism—that undermine the strengths I have outlined above. But there are many countervailing currents, especially but not exclusively among religious movements and groups. If Paul Tillich was right in saying that culture is the form of religion and religion is the underlying substance of culture, we can be thankful that America has ample supplies of spirited religion. †

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## DESERT SONG

One day your teacher will turn  
his dusty wagon onto the washboard  
road at the edge of your acre of land.

He will lift his red and corded arms  
like a Joshua tree. He will bless  
the desert sand, the fish-hooked thorn

of barrel cactus, the desiccated  
pilgrimage of tumbleweed. He  
will whistle to the desert wren,

spirit of sage and chaparral.  
Offer him your calloused hand.  
He is your old friend, returning

with the gift of a needle plucked  
from the sun-drenched tip of a prickly  
pear. He will lift the barb into

the bleached and broken air. He will sink  
it like a shard of stone into your coiled  
muscle and twisted bone. And now

the desolation of your decades  
will unwind. In the hot wind  
you will attend to the groan of God.

You will learn to wail the wail  
of your desert time. You will sing  
like the rabbit clutched to the breast

of a red-tailed hawk. Your old friend  
will smile and nod. He will shimmer  
like a mirage in the heat of the open road.

He will disappear, tiny tornadoes  
of fire and dust whirling like dervishes.  
And you—ecstatic in the pain of his passing.

Stephen McDonald

# books

Thomas Albert Howard.  
*Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

THOMAS ALBERT HOWARD'S *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* is a lucid introduction to the under-explored role of theology in the development of the modern university or, in time, to the research university as it came to be known in the United States. Those who have read George Marsden's *The Soul of the American University* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) and Mark Schwehn's *Exiles from Eden* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) may come away thinking that Howard's book is in some ways a prequel to these two texts. On one level, Howard's book is a first-rate contribution to German intellectual history. On another level, Howard's book provides a welcome sense of context to scholars seeking to understand the origins of the institutional and vocational crises respectively described by Marsden and Schwehn.

One larger argument or motivating impulse running through much of Howard's work is his conviction that historians have failed to recognize the role of theology in the

development of the modern or liberal understanding of the university and of the academic vocation. This theme emerges from the very beginning and runs through the course of *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University*. In the introduction, Howard explains that "In treating Protestant theology and university development together, I aim to remedy a scholarly oversight and suggest ways in which debates about both phenomena might be fruitfully reconsidered" (7).

The more specific concern of this book is "the development of Protestant university theology from an apologetic, praxis-oriented, confessional enterprise in the post-Reformation period to one increasingly 'liberal,' expressive of the ethos of modern critical knowledge, or *Wissenschaft*" (7). The transformation took place primarily during the nineteenth-century—the age of German Idealism and influential figures such as Immanuel Kant, J. G. Fichte, F. W. J. Schelling, G. W. F. Hegel, and Friedrich Schleiermacher, to name but a few. Howard writes that "since theology, in the eyes of its critics, properly belonged to a vanishing world, [the University of] Berlin's theologians were all the more determined to confer

upon their discipline new legitimacy" (198). This sense of legitimacy was sought by bringing the spirit of *Wissenschaft* to the study of theology, particularly in terms of the methods such scholars chose to employ. This led to what Howard calls the "Janus-faced reality" of the German academy—one which witnessed simultaneously an "...institutional diminution and influential acclaim of German academic theology" (7). Theologians continued to be marginalized within major German universities, but, after accepting the critical scientific approach of the German academy, they gained a new influence that allowed them to transform the study of theology and the academy in places such as the United States.

Howard's own methodology is that of intellectual history. He certainly provides enough detail in the form of dates, places, and institutions which define this era of history; however, his ability to engage the primary sources of this age is what gives his book its lucid quality. Howard is able not only to grapple with the full complexity of the works of such philosophers and theologians but to work with them in such a way as to make them accessible even to

individuals coming to them for the first time.

Beyond its significance as a contribution to the field of German intellectual history, Howard's book provides a useful prequel to the arguments made by Marsden (1994) and Schwehn (1993) in their respective books. Marsden's *The Soul of the American University* offers elaborate detail concerning how religious identity went from being a matter of central concern to a matter of peripheral concern at best in the American academy. While Marsden offers that he cannot come to exact terms with the influence of the German academy on the American academy, he nonetheless argues that the German academy had a decisive influence on the symbolic understanding of academic excellence held by American scholars. We know that, during the nineteenth century, many students went to Germany to complete their education. In addition, several of these students became leaders within many of America's leading colleges and universities. Howard contends that "The country destined to absorb the most extensive influence from German universities was neither Great Britain nor France, but the United States" (363).

If the institutional identity of the American academy changed, perhaps this reflects prior changes in the nature of the academic vocation. Schwehn's *Exiles from Eden* diagnoses the troubled nature of the academic vocation in the United States by seeing it through the

conceptual framework of Max Weber's understanding of science as a vocation. Howard offers an understanding of how such a sense of vocation originally developed. Again, his text goes to great lengths to explore the origins of the notion of *Wissenschaft* and how it came to be embodied not only by scholars in Germany but also by scholars who came from the United States to Germany to complete their education. According to Howard, "The list of distinguished Americans who spent time in German universities reads like a survey course in nineteenth-century American intellectual history" (363). Through these individuals and the influence they eventually held, the academic vocation in the United States migrated towards that of Weber's understanding of science as a vocation, even if it was refracted through the prism of American pragmatism.

Thomas Albert Howard's book stands on its own merits as a significant example of intellectual history. However, his book also stands as a necessary prequel to Marsden's exploration of institutional identity and Schwehn's exploration of the academic vocation. In either case, Howard's commendable effort is essential reading for anyone concerned about the past and thus the future of both theology and the university.

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Giorgio Agamben. *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*. Patricia Dailey, trans. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005.

READING THE ITALIAN INTELLECTUAL Giorgio Agamben is an experience similar to (re)reading Helene Cixous, or for that matter, (un)reading Jacques Derrida. In his 1993 text, *La comunità che viene* (The Coming Community), he examines Aquinas's "*quodlibet ens est unum*" and theorizes a new "whatever being," that is, being, not that it does not matter which, but, being *such as* it always matters. In his 1995 work, *Idea Della Prosa* (Idea of Prose), Agamben explores the *glückliche Mitte* (happy middle) of Hegel and observes that, "For the poet, the element that arrests the metrical impetus of the voice, the caesura of voice, is thought." He imagines a prose that does more than merely speaks but that both speaks *and* thinks. In *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, it is the Apostle Paul who commands Agamben's attention "now," however. For Agamben, Romans is not the commencement of a new religion, but the extrapolation of messianism, or how one should live in the days of the messiah, or the messiah time. "The restoration of Paul to his messianic context therefore suggests, above all, that we attempt to understand the meaning and internal form of the time he defines as *ho nyn kairos*, the 'time of the now.' Only after this can we raise the

question of how something like a messianic community is possible" (2).

Also for Agamben, understanding the messianic community in the messianic time means understanding Paul's conception of law and faith. "If we want to comprehend the meaning that underlies the opposition between *pistis* and *nomos* in the Pauline text, we should keep in mind this rooting of faith in the sphere of the law—or rather, in prelaw, that is, where law, politics, and religion become tightly interwoven. In Paul, *pistis* retains something of the *deditio*, the unconditional self abandoned to the power of another, which obliges the receiver as well" (116). Paul's messianic community, according to Agamben, does not merely separate Jew from non-Jew, but from this a third contingent emerges. Agamben looks to the importance of "I Corinthians 9:20–21, in which [Paul] defines his position with regard to the division Jew 'under the law,' and non-Jew 'without law' according to the expression 'as without law, not without the law of God, but in the law of the Messiah.' [In other words] He who keeps himself in the messianic law is not-not in the law" (51). The messianic community in messianic time are the "non-non's" in the "now" time. But what does it mean to be a non-non in this

now time, as opposed to being under the law or to being without law? For Agamben, Paul's interruption of the law, this caesura, is the answer. "I think at this point it becomes clear why we can say that in Paul's setting *pistis* and *nomos* against each other, he does not merely oppose two heterogeneous elements. Rather, he brings into the fore two figures, two levels, or two elements that are present within the law—or within prelaw—in order to play them against each other, so to speak" (118). By putting both the law and faith in tension, Paul does not suggest a "chronos" time: first law, then faith, but a "kairos" time, faith and law existing simultaneously. It is thus through messianic time, the time of the now, that history, law, and religion find their commonality. What is that commonality? For Agamben, their "strength is found in weakness," i.e., their inability to fulfill themselves.

"The messianic is the instance, in religion and equally in law, of an exigency of fulfillment which—in putting origin and end in a tension with each other—restores the two halves of prelaw in unison. At this same moment, it shows the impossibility of them ever coinciding. But in this, it points, beyond prelaw, toward an experience of the word, or taking itself as a thing, without

ever being infinitely suspended in its openness or fastening itself up in dogma—manifests itself as a pure and common potentiality of saying, open to a free and gratuitous use of time and the world" (136).

As one can see, *The Time That Remains* is first an exercise in translation, in hermeneutics, and faith, at least according to Agamben's definition. His messianic claim for Paul may not be easily understood, and certainly Agamben himself does not make this an easily accessible position. In many ways, then, *The Coming Community* (Minnesota 1993) is a much better entrée to Agamben's thought on potentiality and the caesura which seems to drive his understanding of Paul. Second, this conception of the messianic community in messianic time now opens up the ambivalence of Paul's stylistic constructions, such as "I am crucified, nevertheless I live, yet not I...." For while *The Time That Remains* is a fruitful contribution to Pauline criticism, its main strength lies in demonstrating how complicated "proclaiming Christ crucified," actually was for Paul, in a time when "Judeo-Christianity" was a more fluid concept than we understand today. ♣

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# the attic

## The Surprise of Christmas

(first published December, 1948)

IN THE SILENCE AND HOLINESS of Christmas Eve men everywhere will gather to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. It is good that they should do so, that at least once a year their hearts might know the joys of children, open-mouthed and amazed at the mystery of the God made flesh.

More and more in recent years men have become sensitive to the wide gulf that separates the first Christmas from the Christmases we celebrate. Not only the external differences between New York and Bethlehem, between the luxury and warmth of our homes and the crudeness and cold of the manger. There is a more profound difference than that.

We seem to miss much of the meaning of Christmas because we know that it is coming. For months ahead we prepare for it, with buying and baking and bustling. It is marked in red on our calendars and we set it aside in the programs of our businesses, schools, and churches. Children are taught to expect Christmas and its gifts and to look forward to it. All the advertising companies have been busy for months plotting their Christmas campaigns, and our radios have been droning "White Christmas" night and day.

And so it is no surprise to anyone when Christmas comes. One has only to read the Christmas story in the Gospels to note the suddenness of it all, the moment when all nature and all humanity held its breath as God stepped down into human form: "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

It was all so unexpected. In the palace of Herod there was consternation, in the inn there was no room, and even in the heavens there was excitement. No preparations, no elaborate fixings, no tinsel, no holly—only the Mother and the Child and the shepherds and the angels. Not as the dawn creeps up on the world, with a pink light here and a streak there heralding the morning—not like that did He come. But—

*How silently, how silently, the  
wondrous Gift is given;  
So God imparts to human hearts  
the blessings of His heaven.*

### **What's Wrong with Christmas?**

But what is wrong with the Christmas we celebrate in America? All the children's eyes are shining and everyone seems to be happy. There is good

### *O.P. Kretzmann*

cheer and fellowship, and even the policemen seem to be touched by the spirit of the season. Surely this is Christmas.

Or is it? It sometimes seems as though all of this is as far from Christmas as possible. For the only way we can make the difference between the first Christmas and this Christmas less painful is to bring back the surprise and the breathlessness of Christmas. That means that any part of Christmas we expect and know is coming cannot be its real meaning. Trees and gifts, lights and tinsel, Santa Claus and carols—all these may have their place, but they will not reduce the aching void between Christmas as it was when the Child was born and Christmas as it is when men gather to sing that the Child was born.

Christmas will mean tragically little to me unless it is something intensely personal for me, unless the light of the Christmas star shines to me and for me, unless above the night and the darkness of this world I can see the light of His face—yes, unless I can see His light shining even above the lights of this world. For a light can be seen easily in the darkness; it is harder to see in the light. We must come as did the Magi: "For we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him,"

and we must see the star shining brightly over the lights of the trees and the neon signs. Only then will Christmas be ours.

Another way we masquerade Christmas is to think of it first of all as something between people: the family comes together from various parts of the country, I give you a present and you give me one, as though these horizontal relationships were what makes Christmas. What makes Christmas is not men, but God; not the fact that our family is together, but that in the Gift of Christmas He is given to us in whom the whole family of heaven and earth is named. Christmas is more than a family reunion because in it God tore open the heavens and came down the ladder of heaven with a Child in His arms and gave the Child to men that through Him they might receive the eternal sonship of God.

If Christmas has lost its flavor and its taste, it is time we look deep into our hearts to find out what we are looking for in Christmas. A Christmas of people is no Christmas at all. The true meaning of Christmas is in the condescension of God, stooping down to help the children of men, bending low to light the candles of His mercy that those who have wandered far and alone and whose feet are bruised with the stones of a hundred paths might be guided to the rest of His eternal mansions.

And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us—an eternal surprise! Into the cheapness and the shallowness, the

dirt and the filth of our world He deigns to come and be born. Men were looking for Him in palaces; He came in a manger. Today men look for Him and His security in military might, and He comes in the heart of a Child to grant His peace. Men sat in Athens and in Rome disputing over profound and learned books, and He was born in the uneducated and illiterate masses of the Empire. Today men seek wisdom and knowledge in the laboratory and the library, while the wisdom that cometh down from above is to be had in the mewing of a Babe in Bethlehem long ago and far away.

### **The Burning Light**

The trouble with Christmas as we celebrate it is that we think of it as something soft and sweet, when Christmas is hard reality—so hard and so real that it hurts. Just because Christmas is a shock to every proud and overbearing thought, men take refuge in sentimentality. It is not pleasant to hear that men were in such a state that only the coming of God into the flesh could redeem them: “Unto you is born this night in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord.” But why a Savior except for sin and hell and death?

Christmas comes to tell us that except for Christmas and its Gift we are lost. People prefer not to hear that, and so they run to Santa Claus and sweetness and light, all in the vain hope of saving their pride and coming out unscathed. We need Christmas to tell us that our

lights and our shining candles are weak and useless, and that only He who is the true light can shine in our world to drive away its darkness. If Christmas is only a brighter light, but still just another light, then there is no point to it at all. But Christmas is a new and a different light, brighter and better and stronger so that all our light becomes darkness in comparison. It comes to tell us to throw away all our little lights, for the eternal Light has come to claim our loyalties and our hearts. And when the Sun of righteousness is shining let the candles of unrighteousness be snuffed out and let every knee adore Him who came in the flesh to redeem our flesh.

For those who come with humble hearts, Christmas can be a source of eternal blessing. On that silent and holy night, the darkness of human life was pierced by the light of heaven, and upon the night of our hearts the dawn of eternal glory has begun to shine. Christians of all centuries unite their wonder in the words of the ancient collect:

O God, who hast made this most holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light, grant, we beseech Thee, that, as we have known on earth the mysteries of that Light, we may also come to the fullness of its joys in heaven: through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. ✠

## DECEMBER ROLL CALL

Bright sun gives way to gray  
the back and forth of day  
of mid-December.

Last month, least month  
of the dark-long year.  
Ghosts gather, the dead and dear.

Merton, holy soul on fire.  
Juan de la Cruz, in love with desire.  
Mozart, martyred by music.

Calling the lost to order  
who left behind the brief life  
crossed soft that blind border

and perished like the snows  
that lace the stalwart holly  
and then go.

Angela O'Donnell

**on the cover—**

Vaino Hannell (a.k.a. Vin Hannell) was a Chicago modernist who lived and worked for many years with his wife, artist Hazel Hannell (1895–2002), in the Furnessville area of Chesterton, Indiana. Prolific in painting and sculpture, the two of them in their creations reflected both on the sights that surrounded them and memories of various life events, skillfully using the language of art-making to produce pieces of visual poetry.

Vin Hannell's *Team with Sled* perhaps relates to a sight he observed during his early life in Finland. Hannell in his works made frequent reference to Finnish history and mythology, as well as to his experiences in that country.

The Brauer Museum of Art is grateful to the Friends of Art, who have enhanced the museum's collection by their donation of a work that presents an adventurous trek through a lovely snowscape, perfect for the holiday season.

**on reviewers—**

Todd C. Ream

is Director of The Aldersgate Center at Indiana Wesleyan University. He, along with Perry L. Glanzer (Baylor University), is author of the forthcoming *Religious Faith and Scholarship: Exploring the Debates* (Association for the Study of Higher Education Report Series—Jossey Bass).

James Beasley

teaches advanced style and first-year writing at DePaul University. His article, "F. C. Ward, Kenneth Burke, Henry Sams and 'Extraordinary Understandings' of Composition at the University of Chicago" will be published in *College Composition and Communication* this spring.

**on poets—**

Charles Strietelmeier

is an ELCA pastor in Hobart, Indiana.

Fredrick Zydek

has retired from teaching creative writing and theology at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and the College of St. Mary, Omaha. He has published more than eight-hundred works, including four books of poetry, personal essays, fiction, plays, academic articles, and reviews.

Paul David Steinke

is the Supervisor of Clinical Pastoral Education at Bellevue Hospital Center in New York City. An alumnus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, he keeps his feet on the ground by writing poetry and kayaking.

J.T. Ledbetter

is a retired professor of English at California Lutheran University. He has published poetry, fiction, and essays.

Stephen McDonald

teaches at Palomar College in San Marcos, California. He has published poetry in *RATTLE*, *Blue Unicorn*, *The Crab Creek Review*, *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *Passenger*, and *Pinyon*.

Angela O'Donnell

teaches literature and creative writing at Fordham University in New York City. Her poems have appeared in *America*, *First Things*, *Runes: A Review of Poetry*, and *Windhover*.



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