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The Cresset (Vol. LXI, No. 1, Reformation)

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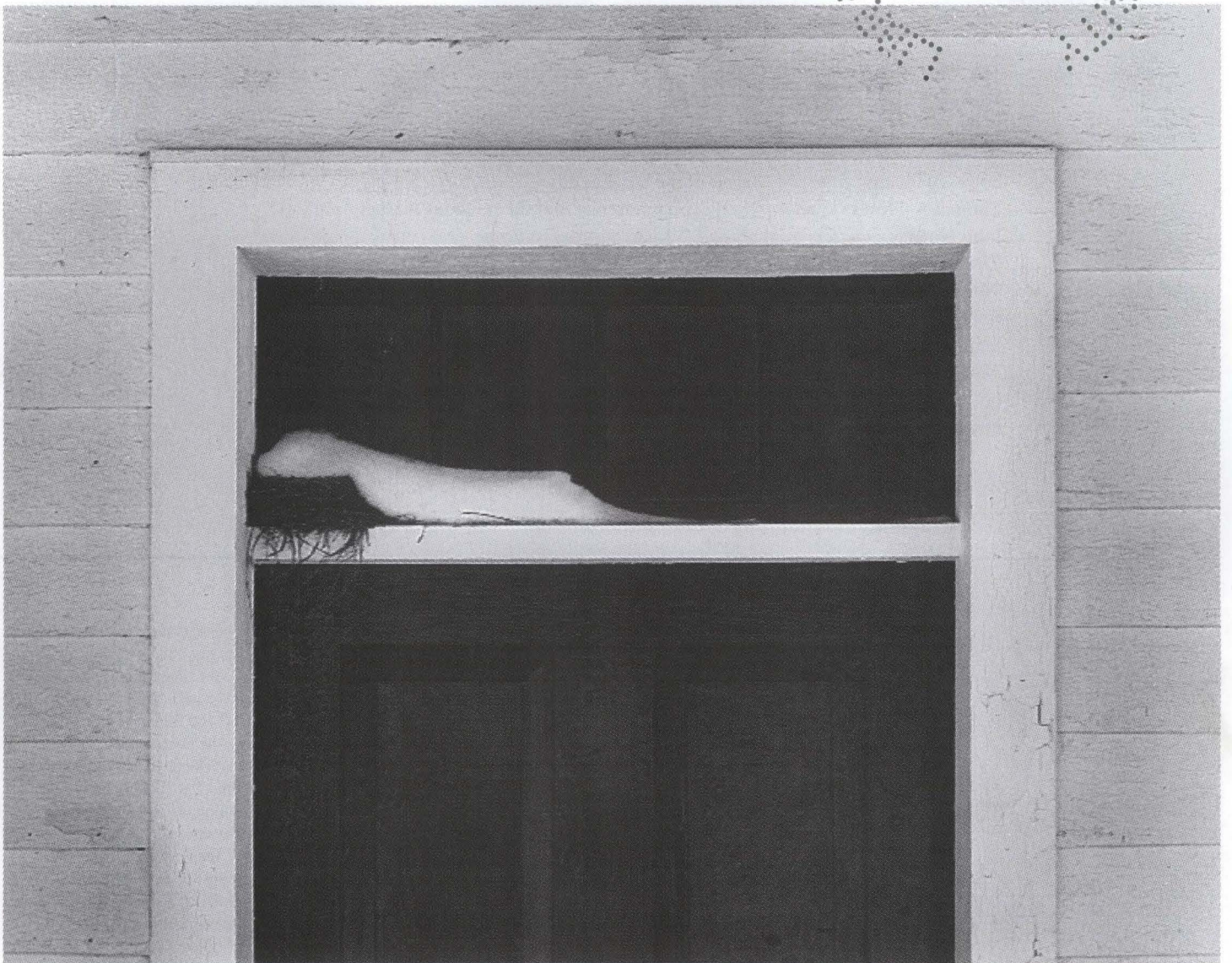
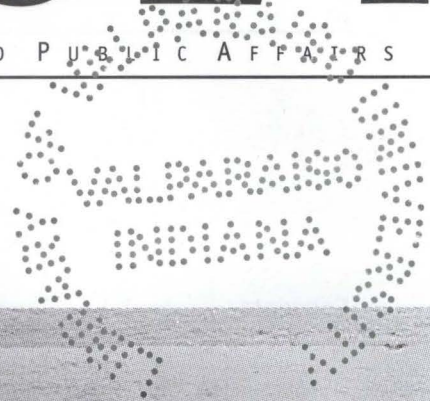
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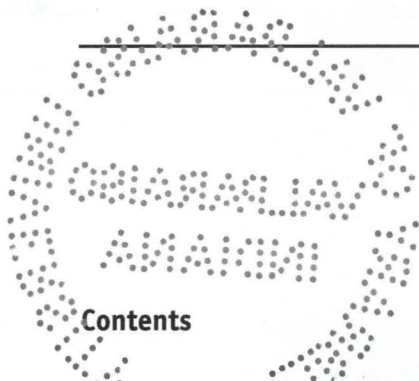
THE CRESSET

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE, ARTS, AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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THE CRESSET



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Alan F. Harre, *Publisher*
 Gail McGrew Eifrig, *Editor*
 October 1997, *Reformation*
 Vol. LXI, No.1 ISSN 0011-1198
 Valparaiso University
 Valparaiso, Indiana 46383

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These two images come from the newest book in what we hope will be a long series from the collaboration of Martin and Micah Marty. *The Promise of Winter: Quickening the Spirit on Ordinary Days and in Fallow Seasons* contains 47 pairings of photographs and text. Connecting psalm verses with themes of inner journey, writer and photographer focus our attention on the winter heart. Through words and images we are moved to

remember both our mortality and our hope.

The photographs were taken with black and white ISO 100 film, and prints made by the photographer using traditional darkroom techniques, without moving, adding, or deleting key elements except by cropping.

The Promise of Winter is published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K. ISBN: 0-8028-4436-7



THE CRESSET is published seven times during the academic year, September through June, by the Valparaiso University Press as a forum for ideas and informed opinion. The views expressed are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the preponderance of opinion at Valparaiso University. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Editor and accompanied by return postage. Letters to the Editor for publication are subject to editing for brevity. *The Book Review Index* and the *American Humanities Index* list Cresset reviews. Periodicals postage is paid at Valparaiso, Indiana. Regular Subscription rates: one year -- \$8.50; two years--\$14.75; Student subscription rates: one year -- \$4; single copy -- \$1.00. Entire contents copyrighted 1997 by the Valparaiso University Press, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383, without whose written permission reproduction in whole or in part for any purpose whatsoever is expressly forbidden. Postmaster send address changes to The Cresset, #10 Huegli Hall, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN 46383

In Luce Tua

game boy

He slouched in front of the video game machine like hundreds I've seen before, so I don't know what it was about him that made me notice and stare. With a casual, off-hand grace born of practice and natural talent, he jiggled the knob and things on the screen bounced and whizzed and popped, but he was unimpressed. He had the kind of blond crop that moved in a solid sheet of smooth gold falling over his eyes, the back of his head almost shaved, and he seemed scarcely to notice the smaller, more urgent littler boys jostling around him for a turn, a look, word of recognition. He was only eleven or maybe twelve, he was king of the hill, and though his manner was calculated to look as though he didn't know it, he knew it. A young prince in the Pizza Hut.

What made me look at him so closely was the weird opposition between his almost regal air—fine, chiseled features and slender, well-proportioned body—and his clothes. A rim of boxer shorts showed all around his middle above his baggy cut-offs, carefully torn at the bottom. Below the knees, his legs, with no discernable muscle as yet, stretched downward into shoes quite notably enormous, each certainly bigger than a breadbox. They were stunningly white and black, with elaborate patterns of stitching, a variety of textures and a vocabulary of messages in words, or parts of words. And they were huge. So was his shirt, a tank top which was supposed to belong to Scottie Pippen, and which would nearly have fit him, but dropped artfully down from the tiny shoulders of the boy, tucked in at places behind the boxers so that his audience could observe that the proper relation had been achieved between boxers, tank, shorts and body.

I really wondered if he could move at all in those shoes, but when his family's pizza came, and his mom called him over to their table, he went right away, and even seemed sprightly enough, if not exactly light on his feet. His quickness in answering the summons made me think he must be a nice boy, and, at this stage, even eager to please. I thought of him in a classroom, and wondered what could possibly be the connection between me and him.

Not *Macbeth*, surely, the work I was currently preparing for a first year class in Christ College this semester. Though Shakespeare is not, as we quaintly put it, my field, I know a fair amount about Shakespeare. I've made it a priority to see a lot on the stage over the years, and I've taught many plays in a number of settings. I like to see a play and argue with others about the ideas that have been embodied in front of us in the previous three hours. I love the florid richness and precision of Shakespeare's language, and I believe in what I think of as a connection made between me and others throughout ages who have also thrilled to his language and ideas. But can I make a connection between me, and Shakespeare, and the boy playing video games in the pizza restaurant in my neighborhood?

Some years ago I was surer that I could. But this boy seems to have moved away from me into a world whose rules and values are much stranger to me than those of Dunsinane or Arden. Take, just for instance, his shoes, which I estimate to have cost three times the price of the Riverside Edition of Shakespeare's complete plays. Is the difference in value which we would assign to those

*Can we
find the ways
to keep a
reformation
going?
A lot
depends
on it.*

two things a meaningful difference? What would make a person want to wear those shoes, I ask myself, and I cannot come up with an answer that makes the wearing of them comprehensible. And much more so for the boxer shorts puffing up around the pants, and the falling-off-the-shoulder tank top with someone else's name written on it. I choose to believe that the boy's choice of clothing has meaning, but I am lost when I ask what the meaning is, beyond an admiration of the current black urban hipster sketched in every line of the costume. Though the recent *Romeo and Juliet* with a Miami gang flavor shows an affinity between contemporary black city manners (at least those with which we are familiar via television drama) and Renaissance extravagant violence, I wonder whether these affinities will work for our young man at the video controls. And if we cannot teach him Shakespeare, what will we teach him and why?

Reformation is the season for which this issue is named, and in the issue are a number of things about church and nation, about the way public life is lived out in view of commitments of church and to the beliefs that the church sustains. Those beliefs, hammered out in a world more like Shakespeare's world than ours, must find expression in ways that make them not only teachable but compelling in our world. Because one imagines the boy, good-naturedly curious, looking at the odd bits and pieces of belief he manages to pick up as though they were shards of a civilization too strange to understand.

Let's hope he says something like, "Awesome!" and shoves off, shoelaces dragging, to find someone who can tell him what they mean.

Peace,

GME

THE CELLO

The cello cannot laugh.
It must cry and paint
old dreams and memories
around us.
Chrysanthemums withering
in snow.
Those are cello flowers.
A cemetery where
tears speak.
The cello sings
life's funeral,
feathers and birds
of death. .

Marion Schoeberlein

On the Image of God and Man in the Unborn Child

Richard Stith

Ronald Dworkin, who has been called the leading legal philosopher in the English-speaking world, has lately devoted his talents to the advocacy of death, especially in the influential New York Review of Books. Dworkin's 1993 book Life's Dominion: An Argument About Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom insists that the less profitable investment in each being, the less regrettable the killing of that being. Richard Stith's lengthy critique of Dworkin's theory appeared in the Maryland Law Review Vol. 56, No. 2 (1997) under the title "On Death and Dworkin: A Critique of his Theory of Inviolability." The following is a portion of Professor Stith's argument for equal human dignity before birth, part of his continuing effort to establish a grounds for communication between the Pro-choice and Pro-life camps.

The Editor

It seems to me obvious that people are reluctant to abort to the degree to which they think the fetus is like a baby, given the overwhelming consensus that infanticide is wrong. Moreover, discussing the nature of the newborn infant and of infanticide is about as close as we can get to the abortion controversy without entering into it. Therefore, an examination of our feeling of respect for newborn life is an appropriate way to begin to discern a possible basis for agreement with regard to unborn life.

Dworkin himself says very little about the dignity or inviolability of infant life. But he does bring up two major reasons traditionally given for why human life in general ought not to be violated: that another's life is her or God's property (*Life's Dominion*, hereafter *L.D.*, 214), and that it is made in the image of something noble or divine (*L.D.* 82).

The property explanation rings true to some degree. The fact that something belongs to another is a strong reason not to harm it. Of course, the assumption of divine ownership would make us quite a bit more reluctant.

However, a major problem for the property idea, particularly in its theistic form, is that it is too strong an explanation. The whole universe is made by God, just as much as are human beings, yet non-human creation does not share anywhere near the same degree of inviolability. If it is argued that God delegated to humanity his authority over his non-human possessions, this raises the question of why God would do so and amounts to an admission that the property notion cannot be a sufficient explanation for the special respect due to human life.

Moreover, the *feel* of property rights is too cool and insufficiently honorific to capture the sense of sanctity or inviolability. We just do not experience anything near admiration or awe for another's property. Nor do we think that the respect we owe another's property responds in any way to an intrinsic characteristic of that property. Being wholly extrinsic to the thing owned, ownership cannot explain our sense of the intrinsic dignity of the human individual.

Dworkin himself rightly lays much more emphasis on another explanation for the respect-worthiness of human life: that it is made in the "image" of God or of man. Certainly he is correct that the "dominant Western religious traditions insist that God made humankind 'in His own image' and that each individual human being is a representation, and not merely a product, of a divine creator" (*L.D.* 82). Moreover, the Hebrew scriptures (Genesis 9:6) give the fact that people are made in God's image as the reason that murder must receive the most severe punishment. And Dworkin is also right in discerning a secular analogue: that a human individual is an instance, an image, of a uniquely noble form of being. Each of us is at the least an image and presence of humanity, if not of divinity. To the degree that our species elicits wonder and respect, each instance

What do we mean
by "potential"
in the context of
human
development and
human worth?
And who owns
that potential?
We are asked to
reconsider our
assumptions.

of it must do so.

There is a yet deeper and perhaps even stronger reason for our respect for human form: recognition of self. We identify with others once they appear to be essentially like us. If they share our self-image, they are our “kind.” And as soon as another person is seen as “one of us,” she becomes a co-subject, an alter ego, rather than only an object—a source of value rather than a thing to be valued. She becomes, like our own ego or self, a given and inviolable starting point for premoral and moral reflection and action. Thus the Pope recently founded the dignity of others in a recognition of self: Adam knew Eve as a person because, unlike all prior creation, she was “flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones.” (*Evangelium Vitae* § 35, 24 *Origins: CNS Documentary Service* 689, 702 (1995), quoting from Genesis 2:23.) An attack on Eve was thus an attack on Adam.

We should note in passing that neither the theistic nor the nontheistic theories of the dignity of the human image are “speciesist” in the sense of evincing an arbitrary preference for humanity over other species. The first type of theory would respect the divine image not only in humans but wherever it might occur—e.g. in angels. The second would accord to every species capable of moral acts the duty to give special recognition to its own kind.

But in what way could it be said that a newborn infant is an image of God or of ourselves? What is that divine or human image or essence and how does it present itself in the infant? Mere body and facial shape cannot be the whole answer or we would feel a similar respect for the great apes and even for statues of humans. Nor can the reason be the infant’s rudimentary sort of consciousness or ability to feel pain, or endearing behavior, for these are shared by many beasts. Clearly, those attributes that may serve to distinguish our species—and which some of us would consider divine—do not arise until quite some time after birth. Human intelligence, speech, rational choice, principled conscience, sacrificial love: such qualities do not yet manifest themselves in the infant.

What the human infant does have, and other species seem not to have, is the potentiality for these things, understood not as mere possibility but as self-actualizing *design*. (I shall try to avoid the word “potentiality” in the rest of this article, because potentiality can stand ambiguously both for possibility and for design. We can say both “Every infant is a potential English speaker” and “Every infant is a potential speaker.” But there is nothing at all in any child specifically designed for English, whereas every child is designed, from its genes to its brain and tongue, for speech.) There is a human form or nature at work in every baby, latent but active. An infant’s smile is more than a bodily movement; it is a harbinger of communication and community. The image we respect and revere lies in what the child is designed to do, not yet in what the child does.

Put another way, that image is part of the infant’s being, though not yet of its appearing. But appearing cannot be crucial. If we were to say that the actual expression of speech or of some other specifically human quality were necessary for human dignity, then that dignity would be only an epiphenomenon, an ephemeral divine flicker emerging from otherwise profane matter. People would fade out of personhood as they tired each evening, and we would entirely lose respect for their lives once they were dreamlessly asleep. This we do not do. We respect the human image even when it is not appearing, when it is subsisting merely as a capacity or, in the infant, as a self-developing potentiality.

There is yet another, related way to understand the recognition of self, the image of humanity, present in the newborn child. *Pace* Dworkin, a child is begotten, not made. That which parents beget is an extension of their own being. Adam’s son Seth, like all sons and daughters, was “in his own likeness, after his image” (Genesis 5:30). Theological wars were once fought over whether Christ was made or begotten by the Father, precisely because it was thought that only begetting could found complete unity of image and thus of being. The bond of origin assures the bond of being. To question the humanity of a newborn infant would be to suggest that human being might be discontinuous, that humans might engender offspring of another species that only later turn into humans.

Moreover, the human image in an infant is active rather than passive. Because the child is

alive, its latent human image or nature strives to manifest and maintain itself. Of course, this is true of all life. We distinguish individual living creatures (whether or not they are human) from inanimate matter (and from nearby living creatures) by each creature's separate systemic autonomy, i.e. its capacity to regulate and direct its own equilibrium (homeostasis) rather than being entirely subject to external forces.

A pile of rocks has only a passive unity. It does not reconstitute itself if it is kicked over, does not regulate and control itself, does not respond and adapt to its environment. It is not an autonomous system. Any form it has is purely the product of external forces. By contrast, a living creature seeks to repair itself if it is disrupted by some external attack, not only in each part as crystals might do, but as a whole. It monitors and governs itself, so to speak. This is what makes it a unified being in the first place, rather than just a "collection of body parts," which is what Dworkin calls Frankenstein's pre-activated monster (*L. D.* 19). Of course, an external attack may overwhelm and destroy a living creature, but it retains the status of a life as long as it actively resists disintegration.

My dog is thus distinct from a pile of stones because it is a single autonomous system and the pile is not. And it is distinct from other dogs (i.e. is a separate life, a *particular* dog) because it and the others have unconnected maintenance mechanisms, are not part of some larger self-governing biological system. That is, it and other dogs are related simply in the way of rocks or in other ways which are far less perfectly integrative than biological unity.

Most living systems also *develop* (homeorrhexis). They do not remain static, but grow. As they grow, the parts of each system may be partially or totally replaced. The material in my cells now may be entirely different from that which I had as a child. But I am the same living individual because I am the same system, and I am the same system because I am still governed by the same image, the same form, the same nature. A being's historical continuity and identity is one of form, not matter.

Although we may thus feel respect for all life because of the inner dynamic shaping it, human life is unique because the power at work in it is unique. That power is designed and directed, even in the infant, toward human and (according to some) divine communion. The presence of the developing image of fulfilled humanity is what makes the infant one of our kind and accounts for our sense of the special inviolability of newborn human life over that of other species.

One source of our qualms about abortion is thus obvious and independent of any religious faith. The fetus is designed to be what the infant is designed to be. The human image is latent and active from conception, making the conceptus our kind of being, begotten by human parents and thus a member of our species. It, like the infant, is respect-worthy as an individual human "life developing itself," in the words of the 1975 abortion decision by the German Constitutional Court. Systemic continuity persists from conception to maturity and on to death.

Perhaps it would be helpful here to analogize fetal to photographic development. (The analogy is not perfect because photographs, unlike new life, do not monitor their own development.) Suppose I'm in the process of developing a picture I know I will prize and you come in part way through the process and destroy it. To claim that feticide is not so bad as ordinary murder is like you saying "But that photo was still in the brown-smudge stage. You don't care about brown smudges, do you?" Once it is realized that the basis for human dignity in the newborn infant lies in its developing human image, the idea that earlier stages of life do not much count seems outrageous, if not indeed mad.

In other words, the compelling reasons that explain the special dignity of human infants over other species also apply to embryos and fetuses. The bases of inherent dignity in the newborn apply equally to the preborn—and this throughout gestation. The dignity of each stands or falls with that of the other.

It was essentially the above argument that led the German high court in 1975 to conclude that no distinctions may be drawn, with respect to the right to life, between the born and the unborn, nor among the various prenatal stages of human development. To draw such distinctions would be

to hold that human nature, the latent but developing human image, is insufficient for human dignity, and that some actualized human perfection is needed—thus undercutting the inherent inviolability of neonatal as well as prenatal human life. In the Court's own words:

The process of development. . . is a continuing process which exhibits no sharp demarcation and does not allow a precise division of the various steps of development of the human life. The process does not end even with birth; the phenomena of consciousness which are specific to the human personality, for example, appear for the first time a rather long time after birth. Therefore, the protection. . . of the Basic Law cannot be limited either to the "completed" human being after birth or to the child about to be born which is independently capable of living. . . ; no distinction can be made here between various stages of the life developing itself before birth, or between unborn and born life (translated in 9 *J. Marshall J. Prac. and Proc.* 551, 558 (1976)).

In 1993, the Constitutional Court revisited the abortion issue and once again made clear that the protection owed to the fetus is independent of the stage of pregnancy.

Could one push this argument back further, to argue that if embryos are inviolable, then sperm cells and ova must also be? The answer is "no." Neither sperm nor egg contains a latent complete human image, nor does either grow. Dworkin writes "When I was a just-conceived fetus. . ." (*L. D.* 19), but he would be unintelligible if he wrote "When I was a sperm cell. . ." He is in fact a grown-up fetus, but he is not a grown-up sperm cell. Nor could he say "When I was still a separate sperm and ovum. . ." because, prior to conception, the sperm and ovum are far more like nearby rocks in a collection than they are like a single organism—in that prior to conception there was no immanent design directing those particular cells to form young Ronald. He was not there in them. They came together only through chance and external forces.

Put another way, latent potentiality in the sense of an immanent design (image, form, essence, nature, kind, species) is radically distinct from mere possibility, as mentioned above. Either may exist without the other. Prior to conception, a new individual life is *possible*, but an active *design* has not yet come into being. Likewise, in a severely disabled person, there may no longer be any possibility of human expression, although the striving for human perfection has not been lost. The paraplegic may never walk again. The comatose person may never again speak. Yet the body of the first is still designed for walking and that of the second still aims at speaking. Their human nature or design remains unchanged, even though it must remain unfulfilled. Insofar as the person with severe disabilities remains anything, she remains a human being, one of our kind. Her life remains therefore inviolable.

We use the idea of design in this way not only in regard to humans but in regard to all other living creatures. A dog that has lost a leg is still called a dog, even though it is correct to say that the nature of a dog is to have four legs and even though an otherwise dog-like animal belonging to some odd three-legged species would probably not be called a dog by us. A living entity does not join a different species by being crippled. It is thus false as well as demeaning to call a person with grave disabilities a "vegetable," as Dworkin repeatedly does (e.g., *L.D.* 180, 188, 212, 216). Indeed, it is only because she remains human that her condition is tragic. We do not feel saddened every time we visit someone's garden and observe all the tomatoes just vegetating there.

In *Life's Dominion*, Dworkin admits his inability to explain why so many feel that the fetus somehow acquires greater dignity and inviolability once it comes to "resemble" an infant (*L.D.* 86-89). This feeling is quite understandable, though ultimately incomplete, in light of the theory developed above. If it is self-developing human nature that elicits reverence and respect in the newborn, it makes perfect sense that many would have those same attitudes toward the unborn only after the appearance of a human form, sometime around eight to ten weeks after conception. It is only thereafter that ordinary human sensibility would say naturally "there is a baby growing in the womb." Prior to that time it is natural to think that a baby is only being made, rather than growing—i.e. that organs are being added one by one as the embryo is gradually shaped into a human being.

Such indeed was the nearly universal premodern theory of human generation. Knowing

neither of the ovum nor of conception in our modern sense, Job says to God, "Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese?" (Job 10:10). Only after this "curdling" was a human form apparently present. Before that moment, Job sees God as an external source of activity and design, giving human form to semen. Dworkin argues (*L.D.* 41-42) that Aquinas thought that the human individual began only after the fetus received a human form and thus could take charge of its own development, though he ascribed the prior organizing design to its human father rather than directly to God as does Job.

We should not be surprised if such theories find less inviolability in very early life. Essentially, they imagine that the early embryo is being constructed (by God or by another outside force) rather than developing. And things that are merely made lack inviolability at least until the point where they acquire form and thus unity; an amorphous collection of stones or of body parts cannot be violated.

In truth, however, waiting for the appearance of human form in the fetus is radically mistaken. As we noted, mere bodily similarity to us cannot be the reason for the importance of resemblance or we would likewise find apes and statues inviolable. Rather, resemblance is taken to mean identity of nature or kind, of the latent design for human community. But this design is in fact present from the first moments after conception-and not as some passive blueprint for some builder to use, but as an active self-directing power. The embryo derives only food, not form, from its environment. Of course, that inherent form is not yet visible; it at first subsists only as a moving, growing complex of DNA. But from the beginning a human image gives a human embryo a human nature and a continuity of being from conception to full development. Even in the conceptus, one can see an active human image with one's mind, though not yet with one's eyes. It is irrational to object to the destruction of a photo only after it has been partially developed but not while it is still in one's camera. Once one knows that the prized image is present, its stage of development is a triviality. ♣

Professor Richard Stith

is a

member of

the faculty of VU's

School of Law.

He retains

copyright

to this article.

WHY WE GO TO THE DOCTOR

People stop touching us.

We are like chiffoniers with tiny legs in museums,
wood that has lost its grain,
goldfish mouthing the surface.

Before the aspen trembles into June
and the creeper gets back its green,
a farmhouse will be abandoned
and those that once linked arms.

From pier to pier we go,
pigeons making their throaty sounds
under the bridge,
pods of homeostasis.

If words are flesh,
for just this moment let me touch your hand,
and look into your eyes,
and make the moment fast.

William Aiken

From the Chapel

of the same mind

Louise Williams

If there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that

*was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.*

*Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Philippians 2:1-13

Perhaps you know what it is like, at least a little bit, to have a long-standing relationship, a friendship where you have shared common experiences and values. Where each of you has given and received depending on who has needs and who has something to offer. A relationship where you have mutual respect and trust, where you know each other pretty well and can almost predict what will cause problems for each other along the way and what will give joy to each other. A relationship where you can say what is really on your heart. Maybe you have known such a relationship.

Paul, the apostle, and the Christian congregation at Philippi had just such a relationship. And now Paul in prison writes to his friends from the heart. But this is not a letter addressed to an individual. It's not even a kind of chain letter addressed to a series of individuals. Rather it is written to a community, a community of faith, a community in Christ.

It seems that Paul has heard that there are tensions, jealousies, disagreements, divisions in the community. And knowing them the way he does, he has a pretty good idea of what's getting them in trouble. He knows the stresses and strains that happen when people are jockeying for position and

thinking only of themselves. He knows the problems when people have differing opinions and points of view—over whether or not people have to be circumcised and become Jews before they can be good Christians, or over politics, or over what kind of music should be used in worship, or over residence hall visitation hours, or over the roles that women should have in leadership, or over the kinds of priorities a university like ours should really have, or over whatever. Differences like those can lead to bickering and jealousy and power plays and insistence on one's own way. Paul knew, and the Philippians knew, and we do too how easily things like that can tear a community apart.

Paul begins by reminding them of what they have in common—encouragement in Christ, consolation from love, sharing in the Spirit, compassion and sympathy—things that they have experienced in their community—marks of their life together shaped by the presence of Christ. If those things are there, then they have the capacity in faith to rise above their petty differences and to do the hard work of living the unity that is God's gift to them. Nothing would make their friend Paul happier, he writes.


And when we look around us here in this community we may note many differences, differences that can put stresses and strains on unity, but perhaps by God's grace we can also look around and see the marks of a community shaped by the presence of Christ, a people among whom there is encouragement in Christ when people grow weary, consolation when people are hurting, the kind of sharing in the Spirit that builds people up, and compassion and sympathy whenever anyone has need. And perhaps with the Philippian community, we can start there to begin to live the unity that is God's gift to us also.

At first glance—or even at second glance—it might seem that Paul is asking the Philippians—and us—to do the impossible. Or if it's not impossible, at the very least, it seems to be unhealthy. Is he asking us to all think alike—to have the same mind? Is he asking us to become doormats for other people to walk on? I think not.

Rather, the oneness of mind is to be found in the mind of Christ. And here Paul quotes a beautiful hymn—perhaps a favorite piece of the liturgy that he and the Philippians sang together—a hymn that describes so beautifully Jesus Christ's self-emptying servanthood that led all the way to the cross. There is no self-deprecating, false modesty here, only fulfillment of the true vocation of Jesus, the Christ. And what seems to be the end is really the beginning of Jesus' exaltation by God, an exaltation that ends with everyone in all creation worshiping Jesus Christ as Lord. You can almost hear the hymn—the organ with all the stops open and brass and tympani and the huge congregation singing with one voice.

But that promise is not yet quite fulfilled for the Philippians or for us. We are still here in this fragile community trying with fear and trembling to live the unity that is God's gift.

Perhaps you have known a relationship where you were so tuned in to each other that you almost knew what the other one was thinking and sometimes you even found yourselves thinking the same things at the same time. Perhaps you have known such a relationship. Paul encourages the Philippians and us in such a relationship with Christ Jesus.

We who are in Christ Jesus have access to the mind of Christ. As we attune ourselves to that one through hearing the word, using the sacraments, praying, being part of the give and take of the community of faith, talking with each other, more and more the mind of Christ becomes our mind and we can see those other people—even with all our differences—not as threats or competitors, but as people in whom God is also working, as people who like us are trying to become attuned to the mind of Christ—people whom we can love, at least once in a while, with Christ's own self-giving love. Nothing could make God—or us—happier. May it be so. Amen. 

*Louise Williams,
Executive Director
of the Lutheran
Deaconess
Association,
gave this homily in
Morning Prayer
at VU in the
Fall
of 1996.*

Late Modernity and the Religious Marketplace

a review essay

Thomas A. Howard

James D. Hunter, "The Changing Locus of Religions," *Partisan Review* LXIV 2 Spring 1997: 187-196.
Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: from Cathedrals to Cults*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

That liberal consumerist culture often exploits and trivializes religion is a criticism that many of us have probably heard before. Yet what distinguishes these two sociologists from other critics is their gloomy judgment that present-day liberalism and consumerism have utterly and unprecedentedly transformed—and deformed—Westerners' religious sensibilities in the late twentieth century.

Despite different personal viewpoints (Bruce is an avowed agnostic, Hunter a committed Christian), their evaluations of the contemporary religious scene are strikingly similar. Both anchor their analyses in a historical sketch of the emergence of liberal-capitalist culture; both see a consumerist ethos and a liberal emphasis on "tolerance" and "choice" as powerfully reshaping religious sensibilities in general and attitudes toward church authority in particular; both paint an exceedingly bleak (though not necessarily secular) picture of the future of organized religion.

The linchpin to both arguments is the claim that the emergent, American-led global consumer culture ("McWorld") and the liberal commitment to privatizing religion and "autonomous individualism" threaten to undermine and stigmatize all forms of traditional, "external" religious authority. Religious authority, argues Hunter, has been privatized, subjectivized, and fragmented in contemporary society: a market-driven cacophony of individuals' choices establishes the sole conditions of possibility for modern-day religious belief and behavior. The ever expanding extension of private choice to religious matters, according to Hunter, has greatly attenuated the "serene certainty" and "binding address" that comes when religious views are transmitted from one generation to the next in a particular religious tradition. Hunter identifies the "seeker church" movement within American evangelicalism as exemplary of the corrosive effects of "late modernity." To quote Hunter at length:

In this [seeker church] movement, the shopping mall becomes the paradigm of organizational effort. Marketing research is used to determine what insiders call the "felt needs" of the consumers. Rather than preaching what the tradition always held to be true, ministry has now come to be oriented toward satisfying the psychological and emotional needs of those in the pew. . . . The very content of what is preached is determined less by the historical traditions of the church as by the felt needs of the parishioner. In this, the organizational seat of authority is no longer the church but the parishioner him or herself. The consumer, even of truth, has become sovereign.

If conservative American evangelicalism has so succumbed to the cultural imperatives of modernity, Hunter reasons that his analysis is even more applicable to traditions such as liberal Protestantism or Reform Judaism, which long ago ditched orthodoxy for cultural accommodation. Although religious conservatives still reject modernity in their rhetoric, Hunter concludes that their behavior tells a different story; they too have drunk deeply from the wells of modernity and are, ironically, contributing to the "functional nihilism" which is our public culture.

Bruce's analysis is similarly negative, but as an agnostic his tone does not betray Hunter's

Perhaps our
particular
culture wars
are best seen as a
revived
skirmish in
a long history?
Professor Howard
brings some
perspective to the
topic.

prophetic anguish. Moreover, since Bruce focuses more broadly on the religious climate of the liberal West, instead of just America, his analysis has more sensitivity to particular nationalities and political cultures. Nonetheless, the driving force of his argument is similar to Hunter's. For Bruce, the legacies of the Reformation and the Enlightenment bequeathed to Western culture a pervasive spirit of individualism. When coupled with the market imperatives of industrial and postindustrial capitalism, this spirit becomes an acid that dissolves religious communal bonds and traditional authority. "[P]eople who get involved in religion [today]," notes Bruce, "do so in a highly selective and picky way. Like the sovereign consumers they believe themselves to be in other spheres of their lives, they decide what works for them and how involved they will become. . . . There is no longer the idea that there is one truth, one correct body of knowledge. If it works for you, it is true."

Bruce offers a fourfold schema of religious development in the West since the Reformation: the period of the church, the sect, the denomination, and the cult. Each era represents an increase in individualism and subjectivism from the one which preceded it. In place of a bygone ideal of the "one true way," we face a "cultic milieu" today in which a radical religious individualism fully reflects the ascendant market economy and liberal political ethos. To clarify, Bruce does not define "the cultic" solely as fanatical groups cut off from society; rather he refers primarily to the piecemeal and individualistic way in which people "do religion" in a consumer-friendly, liberal society. For him, "New Age" spirituality typifies the present religious moment. In his analogy, New Agers (but also those in search of traditional religious experience) behave like customers at a candy counter. Their desire for a "mix of sweets" suited to personal tastes represents for Bruce "the dominant ethos of late capitalism: the world of options, lifestyles, and preferences."

Furthermore, Bruce comments that the idea of liberal tolerance supporting such "New Age" eclecticism, though encouraging individual belief, paves the way for the disintegration of any sense of shared communal truth. As Bruce puts it:

There is one major sense in which the New Age is a perfect product of its time: an exemplification of modernity. . . . It is individualism raised to a new plane. The eclecticism of the New Age is not just a matter of being tolerant of behavioral differences or of supposing that we all have an equal right to act as we wish provided it does not harm others. It is going further than that to suppose not only that we can all discern the truth, but that we all variously discern the truth. The individual consumer is not only the final arbiter of what he or she wants to believe and practice but also the final arbiter of truth and falsity.

Bruce aptly calls such behavior "individualism taken to the level of epistemology" and, similarly to Hunter, doubts whether any form of traditional religious authority, or community, can weather this "complete relativism."

On many points, Hunter and Bruce persuade: along with other like-minded critics, they have identified a central "cultural logic" of our time and have insightfully demonstrated how this logic plays out in religious affairs. Yet one also cannot help but ask if their near apocalyptic tone is justified. For one, I am a bit skeptical whether liberalism and consumerism are quite the grim reapers to traditional religion that Hunter and Bruce suppose them to be. For historical perspective, it would be instructive to compare Hunter and Bruce's analyses to those made by another astute observer of religion of the last century: the Swiss-German émigré, Philip Schaff (1819-1893). Born in Switzerland, Schaff came to America in 1844 from Germany where he had studied and taught theology. Unlike Bruce and Hunter today, Schaff gave unreserved praise for the American "voluntary principle" in religious matters. While he recognized that the First Amendment and the nascent capitalist spirit were rapidly turning America—and today the world—into a complex religious marketplace, the memory of the state-dominated and bureaucratically authoritarian churches of Protestant Germany were fresh enough in his memory for him to pen the following:

The glory of America is free Christianity, independent of the secular government, and

supported by the . . . free people. This is one of the greatest facts in modern history. Its significance can only be fully estimated by a careful comparison with the state-churches of Europe, both Protestant and Catholic. . . . Whatever the defects and inconveniences of separation of church and state, they are less numerous and serious than the troubles and difficulties which continually grow out of their union. . . .

If Schaff could visit our age, I'm sure that he would find the pessimistic visions of Bruce and Hunter insightful, but I'm also inclined to think that he might ask these sociologists some revealing questions. Above all, he would want to know what alternative religious authority could forestall the religious anarchy brought about by the privatization and subjectivization of belief. Historically, Bruce and Hunter might opt for a Puritan-like theocracy, the caesaropapism of the Orthodox Church, or a Church-State union as in the German lands, among many other questionable, illiberal solutions. Schaff would surely query Bruce and Hunter to see if they thought these options were more suited to the practice of genuine religion. If we were to allow Soren Kierkegaard to join their conversation (why not?—let's indulge our historical fancy), he might thicken the controversy by asking if "Christendom [read: traditional external authority] was only mankind's centuries-old, progressively successful, prolonged struggle to protect itself against Christianity?" Indeed, an encounter with Schaff or Kierkegaard would make clear that "binding external" religious authority often did not have the effect of encouraging genuine piety anyway. Further, these visitors from the past might reveal that while modern sociologists have many virtues, a broad historical sense is usually not their strongest one.

The locus of religious authority has never been unproblematic. Again, one thinks of medieval popes endorsing the Crusades, of Lutheran Princes and the Peasant's War, of the delusions of Anabaptist prophets, of the Salem witchcraft trials, or of Louis XIV and the "divine right of kings." Arguably, the historical record of external religious authority is one of Christians' most convincing testimonies of human fallenness.

But this is not to say that Bruce and Hunter have failed to identify a disquieting aspect of our liberal-capitalist times: namely, an often facile abjuration of all normative claims of authority in celebrating "tolerance," "choice," and the gratification of the "autonomous individual." Certainly, some distress is justified. Still, sociologists might want to consider the past more carefully before they pronounce the present uniquely derelict. They might then discover that the present is only the latest episode in what Christians for centuries have known as "the world." ❀

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Notes:

Hunter's essay was first delivered as a paper at a *Partisan Review* conference in Austria entitled "Breaking Traditions: Fin de Siècle 1896 and 1996." Two further books that describe a consumerist ethic at work in the American contemporary scene are R. Laurence Moore's *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*, New York: Oxford, 1994; and Stephen L. Carter's *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion*, New York: Basic Books, 1994. Philip Schaff's *Germany: Its Universities, Theology, and Religion* was published in Philadelphia in 1857, and the quotation in this review is on p. 105. On the Danish philosopher and established religion, see Kierkegaard, *Attack upon Christendom*, trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton, 1966.

Letters from Abroad

Valparaiso goes to Rome

John Nordling

The program brochure said that *Aestiva Romae Latinitas* (Summer Latin in Rome) is not a “crash course or rushed Latin nightmare,” but rather a “complete and direct, concrete and gradual experience of the entire Latin language itself . . . covering the past 2200 years.” It has been held in Rome for 8 weeks every summer since 1985. As a Latin professor who had never been to Rome before, I was in need of a cultural encounter with the lands and peoples about which I teach, or so I reasoned in one of several grant proposals submitted to colleagues at Valparaiso University. This essay is dedicated to those committee members who, after reading my proposals, did ultimately agree not only that this “cultural encounter” was necessary for me personally, but that Latin, and the great texts of western civilization transmitted in that language, remain important possibilities for study at Valparaiso University.

The man who had organized Summer Latin was Father Reginald T. Foster, O.C.D. A much younger Foster had come to excel in Latin at precisely the time that the Catholic Church was reducing Latin’s significance in mass and curriculum. Today he serves in the Vatican as the head of a small college of churchly Latinists who convene each day to translate papal documents into a polished Latin prose.

I. the first few days—*de primis diebus*

I came to Rome five days before Latin instruction began so that I could experience Rome on my own terms. One commonplace of ancient and medieval biography is that of the wandering pilgrim or scribe who finally encounters Rome for the first time. How will my direct encounter with “the city” (as the ancients designated Rome

in antiquity, simply *urbs*) compare to the image of Rome in my mind, shaped by Latin texts for many years? The writings of Augustine, Jerome, Aquinas, Luther, Gibbon, *et multi alii* record such Rome encounters, and I had envisioned a similar process of discovery for myself.

In those first few days I saw the Colosseum, Campidoglio, Piazza Venezia, Pantheon, Trevi Fountain, Spanish Steps, Castel Sant’ Angelo, and the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli. Like every overwhelmed traveller, I revelled in the symbiosis between things ancient and modern. One can expect at any moment to turn a corner and find crumbling Servian Walls (378 B.C.E.), columns of a temple built right into a modern substructure, or Latin inscriptions above the open, free flowing fountains. I enjoyed transcribing Latin inscriptions into a notebook kept for that purpose, for Latin writing is everywhere, even on the most modern of buildings. Copying these contrived texts, I prepared myself for the eventual encounter with Father Reginald.

On June 9, in front of the Basilica San Pancrazio, located on the Janiculan Hill of Rome, a group of perhaps 45 people surrounded a stout, red-complected man whose blue eyes glowed piercingly from deep within a balding skull. Instead of priestly garb he wore denims and a long-sleeved work shirt buttoned all the way up, so that he seemed to exude sweat from every pore in the blazing sun. This was Father Reginald—*Ecce! Reginaldus erat*. As I walked up, Father Reginald was engaged in a frequently self-interrupted roll call, enjoying old friends and making new while checking the names of newcomers against a master list. The list itself seemed to provide him considerable

Letters from Abroad
provides a
space for VU
travellers to share
their reflections.
A VU classics
professor
ruminates here on
his time
among others
(inter alia)
and on the meaning
of
Latinity.

glee, indicating as it did that some half of the original inquirers had been “scared off and eliminated” by the high demands of the coming session of study. But those who had braved the call (now somewhat nervously twittering) would in a few minutes cross the street and “begin immediately. . . [glimpsing] the whole Latin language, in active and passive exercises and fun, from the first hour” (final letter to participants, April 1997). And that is exactly what happened.

II. daily instruction—*de institutione cottidiana*

The hours of Latin instruction were to take place in a children’s school run by the Sisters of the Divine Love from Italy and Peru. All 40 to 60 people who might comprise the group at any one time (participants, sweethearts, occasional parents, friends from previous years, and curious hangers-on) would convene in the school’s auditorium, seated at desks and tables sized to elementary school aged children. It was hot, and noisy, but Reginald thought street noises and children screeching outside honed the ear to listen more carefully to instructions spoken in both Latin and English—rather the way children were taught the Latin language long ago, right off some busy thoroughfare. Instruction for the *Iuniores* (“Junior Latinists”) would begin each day at *hora secunda post meridiem* (2 p.m.), Father Reginald explained, and would extend until 3:30, at which time there would be an *intervallum* of perhaps 30 minutes. At 4, instruction began for mixed Juniors and Seniors, and at 6, for the *Seniores*. Participants were free to attend any or all of the sessions they desired, but teaching would be adjusted to the two levels identified. And for those who could not get enough at the regular sessions, there was the more informal setting known as *sub arboribus* (“under the trees”) where, from 8 till dark, the really hard-core Latinists could gather around a jug of wine, randomly chosen texts, and spoken Latin fellowship as the sun sank upon the darkening hills.

No textbook existed for any of the sessions. Each time he teaches this course, Father Reginald ransacks monastic libraries and archives to bring together a great chorus of Latin texts and authors from throughout the ages. For our reading pleasure he had assembled a few,

rarely read “classical” texts (for example, Cicero letters, Lucan, Publius Syrus, Plautus), and a lot more ecclesiastical Latin texts from every period of church history (hagiographies, papal pronouncements, canticles, medical texts, epitaphs, abecedaria, etc). 54 sheets *in toto* had been prepared, each sheet twice the size of a legal pad, completely covered with fine Latin script on one side. “Lest we run out,” Father Reginald said. “And there’s a lot more where that came from!”

So vast a collage seemed to suggest that there is much more Latin in the world than any one person can possibly read, even in a lifetime as completely devoted to Latinity as Father Reginald’s. Yet Latinists ought to become aware of this abundance because it will all become so excellent, superb, brilliant, and worthwhile for our students (evaluations proffered by Reginald, no matter the text). The study of Latin everywhere has suffered from the emergence of so-called “classic” texts which all readers of the language are expected to “master.” An unfortunate emphasis upon the rote memorization of standard forms for their own sake, and boring vocabulary and grammar shoved at students for many years, produce the same slog through hackneyed passages of Virgil’s *Aeneid* or Caesar that one’s own pitiable ancestors made. What is needed today, fulminated Father on more than one occasion, are teachers who courageously dare to have students read, speak, and even think living Latin thoughts from day one! Put the “standard texts” away and pull out something else. Allow your students to see that Latin has many forms and colors and textures, like music resounding down through the ages. Should they begin to yawn at Bach and Haydn (cf. Cicero and Caesar), let them indulge in the language’s other styles and textures and rhythms. This way they’ll teach themselves the forms and grammar with which we used to punish them. Get out of the way, O stodgy Latin professor, and trust that the Latin language itself will motivate, heal, convert and inspire your diverse students just as it always has, long before you came along! Know what texts to use and how to present them, but allow your students to rise to the high level Latin requires. They will rise, you know; they have to. Trust me in this: *Credite id mihi!*

Frequent tirades along these lines were

intended—obviously—for the Latin teachers of our group, and Reginald's whole attitude implied that if you weren't teaching Latin yet, you soon would be; it was thus the sacred duty of each of us to export *Latinitas* to the four corners of the world, like triumphing legionnaires in Caesar's army. Though most participants were in fact high school or college teachers, graduate students seeking to internalize the language, and undergraduates from throughout the United States who contemplated a career in classics, not everyone fit this profile. Several more were Roman Catholic parish priests, monks, seminarians-in-training, and area students attracted to Summer Latin from the Gregorian University in Rome. One was a Supreme Court Justice from Sydney, and others were from the great universities of England. The Germans in attendance came to add English as much as Latin to their arsenal of active languages.

A young Russian with fluency in 5 modern languages, Igor looked like Mick Jagger, and still supports himself occasionally as a musician in a rock band. He was preparing to take monastic vows and needed Latin to understand the divine liturgy. He argued that the mass should always be conducted in Latin, no matter where public Christian worship may occur on earth. Always trying to understand the mysteries, or to get a lot out of the service, or to enjoy the sermon were for him annoying Protestant intrusions which should be recognized as such and so expunged. The beauty and the majesty of the Latin mass will sustain the worshippers, he argued, elevating them from petty contemporaneity to what is timeless, holy, eternal.

However, Father Reginald told the idealistic Igor not only that he disagreed with such views himself, but that Igor was crazy for holding them: *amentissimus es!* ("You are quite out of your mind!") Father Reginald enjoyed locking horns with people on any subject, for only Latin mattered. All other opinions, convictions, and even heresies could be tolerated, provided only that they contribute positively to the learning environment. We approached texts spontaneously, as if for the first time. Reginald would help with the problem areas, but he was far more interested in our

coming to terms with the fine points of a Latin passage, or appreciating a style, than simply deciphering broadly what it meant. Therefore, actually say, in Latin, the passive of that active form, the plural of that singular. How might that verb sound in the subjunctive mood? in the indicative? What would it look like in the infinitive, future active participle, gerundive, supine? Given this English sentence "He loved the Latin language the older he became," Latinize it now and do so correctly! After the shock of such a confrontation, and the chilling effect of fifty pairs of eyes as witnesses, the mind would kick in and Latin would come welling forth from deep inside: *Latinam eo magis amabat linguam, quo senior fit*. "Good!" Father Reginald would beam, "You can't go any further in Latin than that!" But those who put on airs of Latin superiority could be humbled, quickly. He knew each Latinist's name and breaking point by the end of the first week, encouraging the weak, challenging the strong, ignoring no one. Our collective goal was to become "the best Latinists in all the world"—*ut fiat optimi discipuli Latini omni in mundo*.

III. trips and other activities—*de itineribus aliisque actis*

Provided that one was a properly prepared Latinist, could get to Italy on one's own, and feed and house oneself somewhere in modern Rome, there was no charge for the Latin instruction itself—although "free and totally anonymous contributions" to the purse were certainly acceptable (program brochure). Two sets of worksheets were prepared each week, and meticulously corrected, but there were no grades assigned and absolutely no academic "credit" given for the class ("damnable obstacles" to the cause of true learning, huffed Reginald when asked about this once).

The schedule suggested that there should be six days of Latin instruction to one day of travel. Early Sunday morning was Father Reginald's preferred time for gathering the group at one of Rome's train stations and then leading us off on an excursion to some famous locale. Although these trips constituted a refreshing change from the regular routine, they were not a vacation from the Latin enterprise. Far from it. Each trip was "scripted" (*iter*

litteratum), meaning that archaeological site plans, relevant pictures, and pages of pertinent Latin verbiage had been compiled beforehand into neat little booklets for every tour. To the casual eye we were just one more tourist group to accost the monuments of Italy. But our guide was different: a Latin instructor who used the very ruins to elucidate the Latin texts we held in hand. This method of teaching Latin had an impact even upon complete strangers. Tourists craned to listen. Museum curators and archaeological site directors paused in their work to say hello, for most of them knew, or had heard of Father Reginald. Even children came running to listen to this man who could prattle on and on in *lingua Latina*.

At Ostia we sat amid the weedy ruins of the inn where Monica, St. Augustine's mother, died, and read the full account of her death in *Confessions* 9. Looking up, I was startled to see several of my colleagues weeping at the beauty and humanity of the piece. We concluded the Caesar tour beneath a massive bronze statue of Julius Caesar overlooking the Forum, right hand raised in the posture of *adlocutio* (address). Chaplets had already been set adoringly at Caesar's feet by modern Romans, so we added a burning votive candle and toasted Caesar's ghost with a fine red Falernian. Our tour of the abbey at Fossa Nova where St. Thomas Aquinas died in 1274 was capped by a hearty banquet of pasta, vegetables, cheese, stone-baked pizza, and gelato.

Rome's Catholicism continues to draw pilgrims from throughout the world. Monks and nuns, many in bright robes and habits, flock regularly to the city to keep in touch with monastic superiors, consult the Vatican archives, fulfill spiritual quests. Most of the Latinists in my immediate group were devoutly Roman Catholic and I came quickly to realize that I was the only Lutheran of the bunch. So I became something of a sounding board for the Lutheran faith. Many of the undergraduate Latinists had never engaged "a real Lutheran" before and some came to me with specific questions. Such learning is always a two-way street, of course. So I'd ask members of our group about specific items in the ecclesiastical texts we were reading, or about rituals of the daily office I had observed in churches throughout the city. One evening

after supper I witnessed a spirited discussion among my Catholic friends as to whether the (traditional) Tridentine Mass, or the (more innovative) *novus ordo*, is best suited for the church at this time. A similar debate rages in Lutheranism between church-growth proponents and liturgical purists.

Father Reginald realized that, in my case, a Lutheran minister had been admitted into his fold of mostly Catholic sheep. For the most part I comported myself appropriately, although I could not keep from wincing visibly at the "works righteousness" evident in a series of sermons prepared by Pope Leo the Great to inspire the faithful to generous almsgiving:

"...by your offering God will liberate the poor man from his toil, and you from the multitude of your sins" (*Tractatus* 6.11). There is an accent here which many Lutherans must find disconcerting, as though one's forgiveness before God depends on almsgiving. The good works proceeding from Christ-centered faith do, to a point, "liberate the poor man from his toil," as Leo says, and may even exert a salubrious effect upon the structures of this world. But moral and social improvements are always secondary, incomplete, and provisional—even among Christians, who remain sinners until the end (Luther, *Large Catechism, Creed*: 57-58). Good works are holy in God's sight only by virtue of a faith which clings to Christ alone, and thus only Christ remains forever. This is the type of theological reaction a Pope Leo sermon on almsgiving might evoke from many such Lutherans as myself.

Reginald noticed my discomfiture and asked if it was a case of Lutherans not paying alms for theological reasons, or perhaps they were just plain greedy! Father Reginald avoided "pointless theological argument" (as he called it), yet was constantly on the prowl for those Latin texts which he knew would stir the feelings of individual members of our group. So, for my benefit, we read a superb Luther-Erasmus exchange. Another Latin/Astronomy major from Harvard insisted that we read a portion of the *Sydereus Nuncius* in which Galileo excitedly describes his discovery of the *perspicillum* (telescope). Still another college student recited perfectly from memory a large chunk (one legal-sized page, very small script) of Laurentius

Valla's *In Sex Libros Elegantiarum Praefatio*. Marvels of memory and other feats of Latin virtuosity were not uncommon in a group so completely devoted to the one passion. Several of the participants were resolved to converse only in Latin during class, at meals or on a trip, and I myself delivered a 20 minute oration *de Latina tradenda lingua apud Universitatem Valparaisiensem* ("About Teaching the Latin language at Valparaiso University"). This talk by "the Lutheran boy" (*puer Lutheranus*) was enthusiastically received by an overflow crowd in the auditorium, but colleagues spoke with equal facility on a variety of other themes.

IV. the final day and return home—*de die ultimo et domum reditu*

My time in Rome was over almost as quickly as it had begun. Time passed rapidly because every available moment was spent to the full on Latin endeavors. Four days before departure I was pickpocketed late one evening aboard bus 64. It is especially this bus which conveys first-time pilgrims from Termini Station to St. Peter's Basilica; on it wolves often fleece the unsuspecting lambs. Thus was I obliged to spend several prime hours of my last days finding the *Divisione Stranieri* ("Aliens Department") where I filed a police report.

On my final day Father Reginald insisted that I be the last to translate a bit of *De Apostolatu Maritimo*, a papal encyclical Reginald and his associates had Latinized earlier this year. The paragraph describes how even sailors, far out at sea, can "earn a full indulgence" (*indulgentiam plenariam lucrari*) by attending to various disciplines a pope may impose. This was Father Reginald's way, I think, of saying goodbye to the lone Lutheran Latinist. Friends of the summer crowded around to wish me well: *Vale! Fac ut valeas!* Then the flight

home and preparations to teach Latin here.

This business of teaching Latin is a holy undertaking, and important, at a university *sub cruce* ("under the cross") such as Valparaiso is. The Chapel is not St. Peter's Basilica, nor is Valparaiso Rome, but pilgrims and scholars are drawn here too, and the glories of Latin literature ought to be taught well on this campus for serious minds to ponder and engage.

Why Latin in 1997? Why should such diligence and effort be expended nowadays upon a discipline which apparently has no immediate, tangible, or financial reward? This essay has been a kind of response to that question. If education is only a means of making a living, of acquiring skills needed to succeed in today's workforce, then Latin (and related courses) may seem indeed to be a waste of time. But if education is more than this, if it is a precious time in one's life to consider what other men and women, in other ages, believed was good, holy, and true—then disciplines like Latin still have much to offer. With them we acquire the ability to see the world from the perspective of the ages, *sub specie aeternitatis* ("under the gaze of eternity"). It is a curious fact that most of what mattered to Cicero thousands of years ago matters still today—and always will matter.

Why Latin? Here is my parting shot, drawn this time from the latest syllabus revision of Latin 101 (I had my students stand and recite this paragraph on the first day of class):

Our goal: A stimulating, joyful and experiential encounter with the Latin language and just a few of those millions of people who thought, spoke and wrote in this glorious language. . . . It is a rare privilege and a priceless honor to study Latin at all in this day and age. Therefore, we shall engage ourselves to the full as we embark upon this lifelong adventure! ✠

Letters from Dogwood

jell-o® wrestling

Charles Vandersee

Dear Editor:

"It just isn't going to go away," Moebie said, looking as if she wanted a cigarette. Moebie has never smoked, to my knowledge, but there seemed in her eyes a sort of longing for oxygenlessness. In that condition the world might seem other than it is.

We had been talking about the state of the nation. Moebie tends to think, year after year, that its condition is terminal, whereas I, the temperamental optimist, like to assume things are in brief remission. The principle of our relationship, Moebie's and mine, is that a host of differences between us together constitute a solid foundation for massive misunderstanding. This is good, because in our conversations we sometimes seem to cloud each other's minds so thoroughly that outside our mutual murk the rest of the world takes on a luminous clarity. It is as if (and this is her savory analogy, not mine) one emerged from a tub covered with brown pudding and gazed thankfully at a lifesize cube of clean sunlit lime Jell-o.

What wasn't going to go away, in the nation, was the assertion by some large-mouthed bastions of misbelief that the US was a "Christian" nation. This was Moebie's complaint. Moebie is a student of contemporary cultural practices and not thrilled by the persistence of supposedly discredited phenomena. It pleases her that alchemy has been passé for some time, but TV psychics and cheap cologne distress her, also the unfading popularity of Andrew Wyeth. I somewhat agree on Wyeth, having seen his show last summer at the Portland, Maine, art museum, where pictures were accompanied by some of his breathless pseudo-philosophical pronouncements, making

one cringe and lunge backward into people.

"It's clear as can be," said Moebie, speaking limely, "that some of the desires the nation has always been driven by happen to overlap with Christianity, but they do not arise from Christianity, or constitute it." "People in the US generally live by the Golden Rule, for example, and affirm the Ten Commandments," she said, "and expect to lay up for themselves treasures on earth, but two of these principles are ancient Hebrew notions, and the other is secular monotheism."

She had me murked already. "I don't recognize that expression," I ventured. "Secular monotheism?"

"You can call it something else," she said. "You can call it materialist narcissism." "Or," she said, "Sheila-ism." "The woman," she explained, seeing the murk in my eyes, "who, like a lot of other Americans, was unabashedly her own god, in Robert Bellah's *Habits of the Heart*." "Mox Vapor," she said, "got it about right."

The lime Jell-o slowly resolved itself into the unsmiling visage of the German sociologist Weber, whose *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* had been the astringent aftershave of the day. We had all looked upon our naked countenances and then shuddered under a splash of fierce alcohol. Weber had shown that we were no longer complexly Puritanical, sinful but virtuously weeping and self-flagellating. Instead we were one-dimensional self-aggrandizers, parlayers, gleeful accumulators, shaking hands with God and patting him on the back in that comfortably mindless boosterish way. I keep meaning to read Weber; probably this digest is not doing him justice. We went to church in order to get rich. And we had to accept getting rich because it was rude to reject God's

VU alumnus
Vandersee,
at the University of
Virginia,
has a paper on
the Website
of the Rutgers
conference
on "Poetry and the
Public Sphere."
At a meeting in
December
he will
deliver as a paper
parts of a new
poem concerning
Wallace Stevens.

American promise.

"Why isn't it going away, ever?" I asked, reverting to Moebie's complaint. "People these days are surely," I said, "getting clear in their minds that this is a mixed nation, influenced to some degree by Christian teachings of one brand or another, but also driven by desires that have no theological grounding." "People are surely not saying that the US was founded as a Christian nation," I said. "Americans do not study history, and therefore are not in a position to say what the Founding consisted of."

I went on in this vein, being acquainted with some American thoughts and practices, as a teacher of American literature. "Try these three propositions," I said helpfully. "All are foundational for the United States, but none is Christian, and indeed all are in a sense anti-Christian." Moebie's eyes lit up without evident sincerity, like the self-conscious glary light in a Wyeth picture.

"Anybody," I said, "will cite as foundational these three things: Equal Justice Under Human Law; Government by Consent of the Governed, Through Franchise; and The Right of the Individual to Live Unoppressed." "But none of that is biblical," I pointed out. "In the Bible, justice is conferred only by rulers obedient to the imperial ordinances of God." "Franchise," I went on, "is not in the picture at all; instead, authority is." "And finally" (I swept on with impressive clarity), "while the Bible thinks freedom from oppression is a good thing, it does not suppose that it's some sort of civil right."

"All this may be true," responded Moebie, "but people still misbelieve that with America God tried something new and did His/Her best. He/She founded the nation, and set it upon a hill and blessed its undertakings, and confirmed its providential design by having Adams and Jefferson die on the same day, July 4, 1826, exactly 50 years after the Declaration." "They keep saying this," she said, "and they will keep on saying it." "People are not interested," she said, "in the murky confluence of circumstances at the time of the Founding, but only in a few glary occurrences such as Franklin's sometime use of the word 'God.'"

"They did sometimes use that word," I mused. "Even, I think, the indifferent deist

Jefferson and several of the other important inscribers."

"They were not above guile," she said.

I thought this a bit harsh. None of the books I read as a middle-schooler, about the Presidents or the Founders, would have introduced guile. This was a sort of 10th-grade word, I supposed, the year in which pupils are supposed to learn to be skeptical, even a bit astringently antinomian. Instead, though, in 10th grade they lose their bodies in baggy outfits and their minds in video arcades. Even in pre-mall, pre-loosefit epochs Americans have historically eluded 10th grade, and thus have never felt a wake-up splash on their minds.

Guile would mean that the Founders sometimes used language as pudding, to comfort early citizens, whether or not they themselves sincerely affirmed its sugars and starches. "Yet the Founding generation," I said, "reputedly was driven by motives more noble, on the whole, than most generations, even if not overwhelmingly Christian."

"Ah!" said Moebie, prolonging the syllable sententiously. "You believe then, heretically, that there is something new under the sun." "You think," she said, "that guile in politicians appeared only later, a phenomenon arising after this reputed purity of the Founding generation had run its course." "I think it was not," she said, "that way."

I had to agree with her to some extent. Astringent words of historian Henry Adams splashed into my mind—his characterization of Alexander Hamilton as "equally ready to support a system he utterly disbelieved in as one that he liked." Right behind Hamilton splashed Jefferson, whom New Englanders considered "a moral coward. Justly or unjustly they thought he did not tell the truth."

Others I was willing to mention out loud. "Henry Adams, whose judgment is worth something," I reported conscientiously, "thought very highly of George Washington and John Marshall." "And," I added, "of his great-grandfather John Adams."

Moebie glared, then faded. "Show me how often these estimable men spoke sincerely of Jesus Christ their Savior," she said, "and having done that, remember that that in itself does not establish a Christian nation, any more than

rampant church attendance did, in the olden days.” “As I stated,” she said, “there is some overlap between Christian and secular practices, and public figures mouthed pieces of Christianity to serve self-interest.” “I might add,” she said, “that they wanted to look a bit spiritual in case posterity leaned that way.”

Her notion of rampant church attendance was not entirely correct; I had accidentally acquired some information on that subject. Before stopping in Portland, Maine, I had spent a few days in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and browsed used bookstores. Planning to visit Cooperstown, New York, I bought *William Cooper's Town*, which won Pulitzer and Bancroft prizes for historian Alan Taylor. It turns out that in 1795, in the frontier county of Otsego, in upstate New York, less than a quarter of the adults belonged to a church. The founder and patron of Cooperstown village had not been spiritually avid. “If the judge had shown the same initiative and generosity for founding a church that he lavished on the waterworks, brewery, library, academy, and Freemasonic lodge, Cooperstown would not have gone so long without a settled ministry.”

It was a village “dominated by profane rather than pious men,” and the “worldly institutions” they established “rendered more difficult the prospects of establishing a church.” The stores “retailed alcohol by the gallon,” and Methodist circuit-riders saw the yokels as “a Sabbath-breaking, irreligious race,” about the same picture of the frontier as Crèvecoeur depicted in his famous *Letters from an American Farmer of 1781*.

“So,” Moebie said, tuning in on my musing, “we can doubt not only that the Founders were notably Christian, but that the early settlements were notably pious.”

“Look,” she said. “To call this a Christian nation, you establish three propositions. First, show that some founding principles and practices were distinctively Christian,” she said, “not just routinely consistent with secular desires.” “You also,” she said, “have to show that the founders, when they mentioned God, were more than deists and guileists.” “Finally,” she said, thinking of Alan Taylor, “you show that the preponderance of citizens

in the founding generations were, on the various wilderness frontiers, North and South, as serious about Christian doctrine and praxis as the Massachusetts Puritans had been on their seacoast, citing evidence other than fair prices on distilled spirits.”

She added, on a sort of roll, “If you discover the nation was not Christian by founding, then what? The US just sort of became Christian at some later date? And how and why?”

While she was delivering her trinity of propositions, like three formidable pans of Jell-O, I silently offered a prayer of thanks that I had not mentioned Taylor’s passage about William Cooper in later years: “Formerly contemptuous of churches, Cooper became their ardent supporter—but for social and political purposes rather than out of any personal piety.” He and “many other Federalists driven from office” began to hope that “churches would reclaim the common people from their infatuation with democracy.” This was the first decade of the 19th century, and Moebie would surely have confused this founder’s pragmatic or sly ardency with guile.

“You are now asking, ‘So what?’” said Moebie. “So why is it a bad thing that it isn’t going away, this notion of the US as a Christian nation?”

“Yes,” I said, perhaps too inardently. “How much does it matter if people go around thinking and saying this is a Christian nation.” “Christianity is, after all,” I said, “the dominant religion, and will be more so as we become more Hispanic.” “To call the US Christian,” I explained, “is to tell the world that the US is not predominantly Jewish or Muslim or Buddhist or animist or pagan, or secular monotheist, or a combination thereof.”

Moebie responded brutally, as if to a fly on one of the nonexistent gelatin slabs. We were chatting in the breakfast nook, a distinctive site marking the house as having been foundationally a Christian house of the Christian 1950s.

“You now have Christianity defined as the space not occupied by other faiths and nonfaiths,” she said. “You call this, I suppose, a solid foundation on which Christians may

badger and intrude on everyone else, and legislate and moralize to suit themselves." "Accepting this lamely murky definition, we then will have to be content," she said, "with any other approximations and distortions that people may produce in arguing about religion and the nation." "That, I suppose," she said, "suits your notion of adequate public discourse?" She swept her arm across the table where the Jell-O in my mind's eye had now gained a foundation of limp lettuce leaves and a superstructure of white Cool Whip. The nook was becoming more Christian by the moment.

I wondered whether to tell Moebie I had to agree. It wasn't going to go away, this

unstable and nutritionless notion of America as a Christian nation. As an old friend, temperamentally cursed with optimism, I wanted to assure her that by halfway through the next millennium we would revive 10th grade, and thus gain a more incisive critique in the US of relations between church and nation. But it wasn't going to happen soon. The immediate future in the US was going to be agitated and messy, like pudding on the palms and fingers of unutilized alchemists. Not a pretty site.

From Dogwood, faithfully yours,

C.V.

AT THE POST OFFICE, TRURO

One can tell those that are dying
by the way they tend to linger
in conversation. Their eyes smile
at some far reach in their memory of you,
gliding past the abrasiveness
to perch on a flowering limb.

And there are poets who die
and are celebrated in their magazine
with lines that made it
through the controversies,
brief epigraphs from a life of reaching out:
"Love? Ah yes, ah yes. I remember."

These people pause at their mail boxes,
turning towards you as they work the little doors.
Their eyes fill with tears.
Their hands do not hurry.
One last time
they ask to be your friend.

William Aiken

The Nation

all above average

Robert Benne

Robert Benne, Jordan-Trexler Professor of Religion at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia, regularly writes *The Nation* column for The Cresset. Here he looks at the Lake Wobegon syndrome.

That great proponent of Social Gospel activism, Walter Rauschenbusch, made this exasperated assessment of early Twentieth Century Lutheranism: "Thus far Lutheranism has buried its ten talents in a tablecloth of dogmatic theory and kept its people from that share in the social awakening which is their duty and right" (*Christianizing the Social Order*, 1913).

It seems that things have not changed very much. Many heavy hitting theologians have more recently criticized the alleged "quietism" in Lutheran theological ethics. Among them number Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr, Paul Tillich and Karl Barth. Contemporary Lutheran theologians have spent a good deal of time and energy defending Lutheran ethics from such charges. As a Lutheran, you cannot easily escape the "weak on social ethics" designation. Indeed, when I criticized the undue enthusiasm for American democratic capitalism of several of my ethicist colleagues, they retorted that it must be a difficult thing to try to live up to that slightly oxymoronic calling—Lutheran ethicist.

Sociological studies have indicated that Lutherans, members of perhaps the largest European heritage group in America (the German-Americans), are underrepresented in high political office. Lutherans can't claim a President, even though a much smaller German sect, the River Brethren of Kansas, brought forth Dwight Eisenhower.

When one looks at the highly visible elite sectors of American life, one is tempted to come to the conclusion that Lutheranism simply doesn't produce "winners." Perhaps there are some anonymous Lutherans occupying them, but by and large the positions at the highest level of politics, media, business and education seem rather unpopulated by identifiable Lutherans.

We simply don't seem to incubate the kind of people who show up on the cover of *Time* or *Newsweek* magazine.

While I will qualify this judgment in a bit, it does seem that Lutherans are not the public hero type. A number of reasons have been put forth as to why this is so. One is that our strong ethnic traditions have kept us isolated from the mainstream. Even our heroes who could have perhaps "made" it in the larger world remained within the friendly confines of their ethno-religious cultures. Another is that our leaders and theologians have been rather in-grown and church-centered. They do not seek a wider public visibility. A third is that the Lutheran theological tradition itself leads toward a grateful acceptance or tolerance of what is given. Lutherans do not rock the boat with public social criticism or activism. Closely related to that religious quietism is a cynical view of politics and public life in general that is attributed to Lutheran theology; the authorities are ordained by God and must be obeyed but that doesn't mean we have to like them.

For the most part the authorities have the thankless but necessary job of providing "dikes to sin." Finally, there is a genuine humility and diffidence in the Lutheran ethos that shuns attention or ostentation, let alone glory. How many Lutherans have bumper stickers on their cars? Not as many as Baptists or Methodists, I'd wager.

Does this mean that our permanent destiny is that depicted by Garrison Keillor in his Lake Wobegon stories? Does Lutheranism shape the ordinary people of small town and rural, and now suburban, America in such a way that they remain invisible Everyman and Everywoman? Or, if they rise above that level of ordinariness,

do they soon lose their souls or their Lutheranism?

Now I will begin my counter-attack. Lutheranism in America *has* produced a significant number of the visible elite, and many of them publicly identify themselves with the Lutheran ethos. In the following I will submit a number of candidates in this category, though I hasten to add that my list is limited by my own knowledge and *Sitz im Leben*. Certainly others might come up with many more possibilities, which suggests that we Lutherans should take up a more systematic account of our "elite laity" to use a phrase of the late Mark Gibbs. In the following I will list only those of roughly contemporary times; a broader historical survey would turn up many more.

Interestingly enough, the most visible Lutheran elite seem to be clustered among the intelligentsia. This is not so odd when one considers the intellectuality of the Lutheran tradition. "How dare you not know what can be known!" roared Luther. The intellectual attitude has a long history among us. Among our kin it tends to be preferred over politics.

No doubt one of our most famous contemporary intellectuals is Martin Marty. A fellow townsman from that abode of smart Germans at West Point, Nebraska, Marty is one of the most recognizable names among public intellectuals. (Others who have been connected with West Point are the Bohlmann brothers, Fred Niedner, Oswald Hoffmann from Snyder, a suburb of West Point, and yours truly.) Marty's intellectual work and commentaries on historical and contemporary religious life in America are constantly sought by the elite and popular centers of American culture.

Though more known in elite than in popular centers, Jaroslav Pelikan is certainly as formidable a public intellectual as Marty. Pelikan has occupied a number of prestigious academic positions in two of America's great universities, and his scholarly work is greatly respected and widely known among the highly educated. He played an important part in insisting on the irreducibility of religious conviction and activity in the midst of a secularizing intellectual culture. He has also played an important role in the critique of American religion in its manifold forms.

Kenneth Thompson is a major scholarly figure in the field of international relations. He writes important works and administers the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia. Jean Bethke Elshtain is increasingly visible as a public intellectual.

In theology, national figures include George Lindbeck, George Forell, Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, though we have others of like quality whose voices are more limited to Lutheran circles. We have a number of high-level Lutheran educational administrators, perhaps the most visible among them the retiring chancellor of the University of Minnesota, Nils Hasselmo.

Among the "harder to categorize" is Richard Neuhaus, who, in his earlier Lutheran incarnation, was a Lutheran public theologian of high visibility. Indeed, in the field of religion and public life it is difficult to name a more influential figure in American life. Neuhaus' ventures into social activism, organization-founding, writing and editing have earned him a place among the American elite.

Lutherans have produced a number of notable contemporary writers, foremost among them, John Updike. While no longer a member of a Lutheran congregation, Updike was nurtured in a Pennsylvania Lutheran culture that appears repeatedly in his literary work. He expresses a number of Lutheran themes, among them the paradoxical character of human nature and history. Walter Wangerin is an increasingly celebrated writer whose work is shaped by the Lutheran perspective. Garrison Keillor, now a Lutheran but always an accurate evoker of Lutheran ways, has gone a long way to make the Lutheran ethos winsomely familiar among radio listeners across the country.

Though Lutherans are under-represented among the country's political elite, we do claim the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, William Rehnquist. Ernest Hollings and Paul Simon have been well-known Lutheran senators. Edwin Meese was a major figure in the Reagan administration. The Chaplain to the Senate is James Ford, who has held the position for many years. Other senators and representatives come from states with large Lutheran populations, who also frequently elect Lutheran governors, the most visible among the current crop being Arne

Carlson of Minnesota.

The military, including its chaplaincies, has had its share of Lutheran leaders, but the names of those Lutherans have not been highly visible to the general public. Lutherans have “made a name” for themselves as leaders in the voluntary sector. Charles Lutz has recently published a book entitled *Loving Neighbors Far and Near* in which he recognizes Lutheran leaders like Arthur Simon and David Beckmann. The former founded Bread for the World while the latter, after important positions with the World Bank, is currently executive director of Bread for the World.

Although certainly not household names, there are major leaders in the business world who are Lutheran in a serious way. William Diehl, himself a well-known writer on lay ministry, has profiled some of those leaders in his *In Search of Faithfulness*.

Garrison Keillor depicts the Lutheran folk of Lake Wobegon as ordinary farmers, teachers, pastors, storekeepers, wives, husbands, mayors, bankers, n’er-do-wells, and other assorted types. They work out their Christian lives in ordinary places but sometimes have extraordinary insights into mortality, sin, grace and duty. Keillor is onto something.

Lutherans, as well as other Christians, I have argued in another book (*Ordinary Saints: An Introduction to the Christian Life*) are “ordinary saints.” They are ordinary in two basic ways. They are regarded as saints (holy) before God, not because of their extraordinary deeds or even unshakeable faith, but rather because of the extraordinary grace of God in Christ that holds them fast even in their weakest moments. Lutherans believe they are justified by grace through faith on account of Christ, not by their deeds. They are also ordinary saints in their relation to their fellow human beings. They live out their faith, love and hope in ordinary places of responsibility that God has given them. They accept their “given” locations with gratitude and their faith becomes active in love and justice in those places.

Thus, Lutherans are not only receptive in terms of grace; they show a similar posture in the categories of time and space. They receive with gratitude the “places” they have been given. In them they express a marked “dailiness” that is often unrecognized by a world that celebrates the unusual and dramatic. It is in the ordinary times of work, play, love and worship that the Christian life is lived.

Add together these three elements—justification by grace, locatedness, and dailiness—and you do not have the formula for world-beaters in the public sphere. Glory and power are not Lutheran concepts; bearing the cross is a more likely one. Further, they do not worry overmuch about their election and signs of the same. They are less likely to think they are glorifying God in their callings than humbly helping their neighbor. They shun the schemes of works righteousness so heavy in some forms of Protestantism. They don’t even make the “decisions for Christ” that some of our more Pelagian brothers and sisters are wont to make.

Indeed, the Lutheran tradition may tend to make them footsoldiers of the Lord rather than his generals or colonels. Certainly, they may have a few of those elite and perhaps a few more sergeants and lieutenants. But their piety is more fit for humbler things. They take seriously the paradoxical nature of life on earth.

But not to worry. They will get their measure of heroes and luminaries. Some will step forward in times of crisis. There have been a goodly number and there will be others. But in this era of an unraveling civil society, the real heroes might well be those who exercise and maintain their public and private commitments in less auspicious ways. The most helpful engagement with the public world might be through faithful husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, workers and teachers, doctors and lawyers, volunteers, pastors, and laity. Without the healthy “small platoons” that these Christians sustain, there won’t be any public life worthy of the name anyway. ✠

liberalism's last supper

Jennifer Voigt

The question "What constitutes political action?" has a rhetorical texture though it demands hard answers. What do you do when the political situation becomes unbearable? What do you do to keep it from becoming so? Is it enough simply to think and write or does devotion to ideals and causes require greater sacrifice? It muddles our subtlest minds. The British Romantics were divided on the subject. Wordsworth's greatest contribution to that era of enormous political upheaval was largely aesthetic, and in fact, he left France just as the Revolution was heating up and just as Mary Wollstonecraft arrived. Coleridge was paralyzed by words, and we all know what Byron chose to do. The question perplexed William Godwin his whole life. He settled for writing, though his choice failed to satisfy him.

Neither is political neutrality an answer to our question. Nikita Mikhalkov's sad *Burnt by the Sun* likens political statement to nourishment when his characters posit two equally unhealthy visions of neutrality. Like Switzerland, one character says to another who vows to remain neutral in a small domestic dispute, the neutral person is "overfed and apathetic." On the contrary, the neutral character replies, "I'm starving and impassioned."

Burnt by the Sun may not find neutrality acceptable, but it also reveals the consequences of political action. No one survives that film intact, if they survive it at all. Taking action requires a type of surrender to one's cause, an acknowledgement that it is a force larger than oneself. The question hiding behind "What constitutes political action" is "What sacrifice does my cause require?"

The Last Supper, a black comedy directed by Stacy Title, answers these questions with a

third question: "How are we to go about taking action?" Delightfully, Title and screenwriter Dan Rosen leave the camera to ask this question, as it watches the characters get stuck, and then finally sink into the quicksand of the former two.

Though about twenty years ago Thomas Gutierrez Alea made a film called *The Last Supper*, based on a true story, which reenacts a Cuban slave owner's act of penance, Title's *The Last Supper* is about a group of five graduate students, Luke, Paulie, Jude, Pete, and Marc, who, after accidentally killing a racist dinner guest, decide to invite other people with whom they share a difference of opinion to dinner, and poison them with wine laced with arsenic. These five justify their extreme measures by evoking our first question. Deciding that buying cruelty-free mascara is not enough of a sacrifice to "liberalism"—which they define loosely as a group of causes and ideals that are largely green, pro-choice, anti-homophobic, and anti-racist—they agree to practice "justifiable homicide" as a way to extinguish "evil force[s] in the world."

The students, however, appear more comfortable with liberalism as a lifestyle rather than a belief system. The students lead the life of the educated bourgeois, full of good food, good conversation, organic gardening, and eating the salad after the main course, "European style." It is the life that Kotov, in *Burnt by the Sun*, can never enter, despite the Communist Revolution, despite his honors, despite his marriage into a well-educated family, because he does "not speak French." The same class-barrier that exists between Kotov and his wife's family divides the students from Zack, their first victim. The students first smell blood when they discover Zack's occupation (truck driver), and when they study his accent and demeanor. Even before he

brings up a sensitive topic the students have insulted him, suggesting sarcastically, "I'm sure you're a lot smarter than we are, Zack." When Zack mentions that he fought in the Gulf War, the film glimpses the privilege of place that the students' liberalism allows them. They can despise war because for them, unlike for Zack, participation in a war is not a career option.

The class hatred that erupts during that first dinner emphasizes the students' immaturity when it comes to ethics, which is only underscored by their decision to justify Zack's death by killing more people. These may be graduate students, but every Sunday night they appear to be reliving the Philosophy requirement from their freshman year. They equate each one of their victims with Hitler, believing that if they poison say, the teenager suing her school for making her take a sex-education class, that they will spare the world another Holocaust. The students do not realize, as the film does, that their perennial question, "If you were a time traveller, and you met the young Hitler in Austria in the twenties, would you kill him?" requires something beyond a yes or a no. The students confuse the hypothetical with the real. In response they fight fascism with fascism. Though they invite their guests to dinner for "conversation" no conversation actually occurs. The desire to eradicate ideas other than their own seduces them into committing more and more murders until the object of the meal becomes death itself.

Rosen's screenplay plays with the word "conscious," utilizing it in various ways to connote political, moral, and even physical consciousness. When Jude reflects on the events taking place around her and asks herself "Am I conscious. . . am I here?" her question's significance equals in weight Paulie's linguistic blunder by which she declared that she "died" long ago. These are, of course, ways the film announces the students' spiritual unconsciousness, the death of their souls. As they concoct their plan to rid the world of the forces of evil, one of them offers a protest, crying, "You cannot shake your fist in God's face and get away with it!" But their spiritual deaths come as the result of shaking their fists in God's face. When Luke confronts Sheriff Stanley in the tomato garden we see Adam hiding from God.

And in that confrontation Luke brazenly strikes down the law.

So why is the law there anyway? Though the students refuse to pray they are conscious that perhaps their actions are not as justifiable as they think. They know that they cannot get away with shaking their fists in God's face. Marc paints a tribute to Michaelangelo on the dining room ceiling. There, above the table that doubles as a sacrificial altar, we see God giving life to man. The secondary plot, about a local Sheriff who won't give up the search for a missing girl, functions almost as an overlay, a transparency which, when laid over the main plot, helps to create a larger meaning. Sheriff Alice Stanley is really more a metaphor than a character. Her refusal to end her search for the little girl represents an uncompromising search for the truth. God searches for Adam and Eve in the garden.

But what of those of us who share the students' concerns? What of those of us who, before the 1996 election made it a bad word, called ourselves liberal? Are we to believe, like Luke, Paulie, Jude, Marc, and Pete, that unless we murder our enemies we contradict ourselves? Is this a reactionary film? Does it allow the right wing to triumph? Some critics find *The Last Supper* undermining itself, and have charged it with alienating its audience—liberals—by laughing in its face. But I fear these critics let the film confuse them, not realizing that it uses its characters' ethical dilemmas to consider larger ones, and it does it subtly, without an overwhelming didacticism. *The Last Supper* identifies in its protagonists a need to ground their actions in a sense of morality. It says, in other words, if faith without works is dead, action without faith is equally moribund. The students' refusal to say grace before meals is not merely a political statement which aligns them against the sins and abuses of the Church, but a refusal to acknowledge what their conscience tells them—that their true hunger is one for sustenance beyond what sits before them on the table. As the number of bodies fertilizing their tomatoes grows, the quality of food they serve diminishes: they begin the film with sumptuous meals and end ordering pizza and eating off paper plates. Their blood lust increases, the cobalt bottle with the bad wine glows in the middle of the table.

When I use the word “morality” in connection with “belief” and “faith,” I don’t mean to imply that the students lack a sense of right and wrong. Indeed, their sense of right and wrong is strong—how else could they do what they do? What they do lack is something to shape them, to direct them, and to inform their actions. The Christian emphasis on grace often leads us to forget that grace itself is a gift, and that equally important is the all to live our lives within certain parameters. We are to derive a greater sense of right and wrong from a basic sense of right and wrong—like the Commandments. No matter how well “intentioned” the students’ sacrifices (clearly, preventing new Holocausts is a virtuous goal), their actions are hollow, their souls are dead, and it isn’t long before they become the very people they set out to conquer. When they do finally encounter “Satan” they lack the vision to know how to behave. They fail to realize that action, like faith, comes from deep

within the person. It is organic, a way of facing the world, and not reactive, a form of defence.

Talking about *The Last Supper* without giving away the ending is difficult because so much depends on the climax and denouement. It is a black comedy, however, which means that it takes pleasure in its protagonists’ hubris. The film makes sure that triumph and defeat accompany each other during its own reenactment of the Last Supper.

So how are liberals to behave to ensure that good triumphs over evil? What is a liberal to do when the political situation becomes unbearable, or even when it appears fine? *The Last Supper* watches its characters through a lens colored by a strong belief in a moral universe, and it calls for a sacrifice of humility, rather than pride in one’s own self-righteousness, before one’s beliefs. ♦

COMING HOME

Lucky in love, I ride the same flat plains
I rode before they sent me overseas
to burn in jungles, humming the same
sad country words. I might have been a sheik,

born rich with tawny, long-veiled daughters,
oil wells and sons enough for an army.
Aging, I might have strolled rose gardens,
raising and picking hybrids for parties.

After the madness of Saigon, I flew home
to help raise babies who have moved away.
My wife’s green eyes are jade and rainbows.
We glide on porch swing chains we didn’t hang,

the sagging house and barn Grandfather gave,
my wife rocking, looking down, patting my face.

Walter McDonald

Books

Bruce Kuklick and D.G. Hart, eds. *Religious Advocacy and American History*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1997. 233 pp.

These days, Wheaton College is seeking rather assiduously to overcome "the scandal of the evangelical mind." With scholars like Mark Noll at the helm, the college has attained an intellectual self-confidence that has made it an important locus of Christian scholarship in the United States—and a place of engagement with intellectuals outside the evangelical orbit. One evidence of this shift is the recently-held "Consultation on Advocacy and the Writing of American History," a conference which featured not only prominent evangelicals but non-evangelical and non-Christian historians among the participants. Their papers largely form the basis of *Religious Advocacy and American History*. All of the book's essays deal, in one way or another, with the marginalization of religion and its Christian interpreters by the American historical profession, the causes of this condition, and what can or ought to be done about it.

The result is a book whose strength is at the same time its weakness. On the one hand, it is striking to see Eerdmans publish

essays of Noll and George Marsden alongside those of their secular critics, Bruce Kuklick and Murray G. Murphey. It is no less remarkable that the editors of this volume are Kuklick (University of Pennsylvania) and D. G. Hart, the librarian and church historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's Westminster Seminary (East). It demonstrates that American evangelical scholars are serious about engaging both their sympathetic allies and not always sympathetic opponents on the role of religion in higher education. But—like many first efforts at conversation—there is no particular cohesiveness to the discussion, something which the editors readily admit. Indeed, the author of the trenchant afterword, Leo Ribuffo, notes that many of the authors talk past each other, rather than directly engage their respective arguments. This does not prevent several authors from bringing new perspectives into the issue of why religion is neglected in historical writing—Paul Boyer's analysis of why religion is frequently omitted in history textbooks is one such case—but the book's rather disparate character may be frustrating to some readers.

Much of the book's value, then, rests on the exploration of several subthemes within the book. The

most persistent of these subthemes—really the subtext of the book—might be called "how a Christian can be a good historian." This topic is most thoroughly explored by Noll and the humorous Grant Wacker, as well as voices outside, or at the edges of, the evangelical world, including contributions by Catherine Albanese, Paul Carter, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Leslie Woodcock Tentler. Kuklick's critique of Christian history-writing, while cryptic, is also a stimulating contribution to this issue. *Religious Advocacy and American History* may be most useful for Christian historians interested in the philosophy of history.

Another compelling subtheme concerns the prospects of Christians finding their own recognized niche within the academy. Marsden, whose essay leads the book, champions the right of Christians to participate as Christians in the research university, much the way other "advocacy" groups, like feminists and African Americans, do. In an age of perspectivalism, Marsden argues, there is no basis for excluding explicit Christian perspectives, provided Christian scholars distinguish themselves as scholars. *Religious Advocacy*, however, casts more doubt about Marsden's chances for success than

he might have hoped. The non-religious contributors to the book, Eugene Genovese, Kuklick and Murphey, are all senior scholars, hostile to the multicultural identity politics of the academy, and think truth-loving Christians fools for trying to find common ground with post-objectivist scholars. It is telling, perhaps, that secular postmodernists and champions of other advocacy groups are not represented in this book. Marsden, Noll, and others have tried to find a sensible middle ground between the old rationalistic science and the rather fluid notions of truth now *au courant* in the humanities, but it seems that only

the losers—the defenders of the older, more rationalistic, paradigm—are ready for a conversation.

Among the Christian contributions, it is Hart's article which diverges most from Marsden's vision, and is entitled, "What's So Special about the University, Anyway?" Hart argues that the modern society in general and the modern university in particular are, given their socioeconomic aims, congenitally incapable of generating Christian minds like Edwards, Luther and Wesley, or, for that matter, any higher intellectual life. Not surprisingly, Hart is pessimistic

about the possibilities of a turnaround as long as consumer capitalism triumphs, and his affection for medieval universities and antebellum seminaries as the models for Christian intellectual community only demonstrates the apparent hopelessness of our situation. But for those of us in Christian higher education, it is Hart's essay which most directly points to the need for a countercultural, church-related college, and its promise of human wholeness, intellectual vision, and spiritual redemption.

James Kennedy

on poets—

William Aiken

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Walter McDonald

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Marion Schoeberlein

sends poems from Evanston, Illinois. Her most recent publication in *The Cresset* was "Samson," in last year's Reformation issue.

on book reviewers—

James Kennedy,

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