

MAY-JUNE 2022

The

“Instaurare omnia in Christo”

ANGELUS

THE VOICE OF TRADITIONAL CATHOLICISM

CATHOLICISM AND THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION

Review of *Longing for an Absent God* by Katy Carl

Paul Guenzel on Walker Percy

Flannery O'Connor: Vulnerability and Hope by Dr. William Gonch

Andrew Latham on the Gothic Revival Movement

Andrew Childs: Charles Ives and the American Voice

LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

Dear Reader,



Fr. John Fullerton
District Superior of the
United States of America

The history of Catholicism in America is complex. We commonly speak of the “American Founding” with the English in mind, though Catholic missionaries and settlements were present throughout the land. That story has been largely obscured. Similarly, the strong Catholic populations in colonies such as Maryland may be better known, but that, too, tends to get lost in the liberalized narrative of how the story of the United States unfolded.

What is better known, and certainly known to traditional Catholics, are the numerous attempts to suppress Catholic influence throughout the country, not to mention the sad compromises Catholics felt they had to make throughout the years to better “fit in.” The increase of immigration from Europe expanded Catholicism in America, but that also was met with bitter resistance by those informed by Protestant and Enlightenment prejudices. Yet Catholics, fueled by the spirit of their faith and the formation that came with it, persevered. In all walks of life, Catholics have had a powerful impact on American culture, from baseball to the Supreme Court; Catholicism is an integral part of this great country.

In this issue we explore a taste of the influence Catholicism has had in America. Despite protestations to the contrary, Catholicism is as much a part of this country as any other faith and, indeed, the best parts of its development come from those who took their faith and interwove it in their participation in this land’s rich political, social, and cultural environment.

As always, I ask you to pray for Angelus Press, which continues with your support as the publishing apostolate of the Society of Saint Pius X. Please pray for the Society’s priests and religious, and trust that we are all praying for you as well.

Fr. John Fullerton
Publisher

ON OUR COVER: “The Prairie is my Garden” by Harvey Dunn (1884–1952), the most well-known South Dakota artist.
(mnprairieroots.com/tag/harvey-dunn/)

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“To publish Catholic journals and place them in the hands of honest men is not enough. It is necessary to spread them as far as possible that they may be read by all, and especially by those whom Christian charity demands we should tear away from the poisonous sources of evil literature.”
–Pope St. Pius X

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Walker Percy's Search

Paul Guenzel

Clint Eastwood: *Well is that it, Major?*

Richard Burton: *Yes, that's it, Lieutenant.*

Clint Eastwood: *Do me a favor will ya? Next time you have one of these things, keep it an all British operation.*

Richard Burton: *I'll try, Lieutenant.*

So ends *Where Eagles Dare*, a blockbuster World War II movie from 1968. An impressive Allied team of agents rescue a U.S. general being held captive in a Nazi fortress in the Bavarian Alps and uncover a traitor in the process. Throughout the ordeal, tension is high, death looms around every corner, and people are united, despite the treacherous nature of the mission. With everything accomplished, the film ends happily. Or so it seems. Happy Hollywood ending or not, after reading *The Moviegoer* by Walker Percy, one wonders if these seemingly felicitous conclusions to films actually reflect reality.

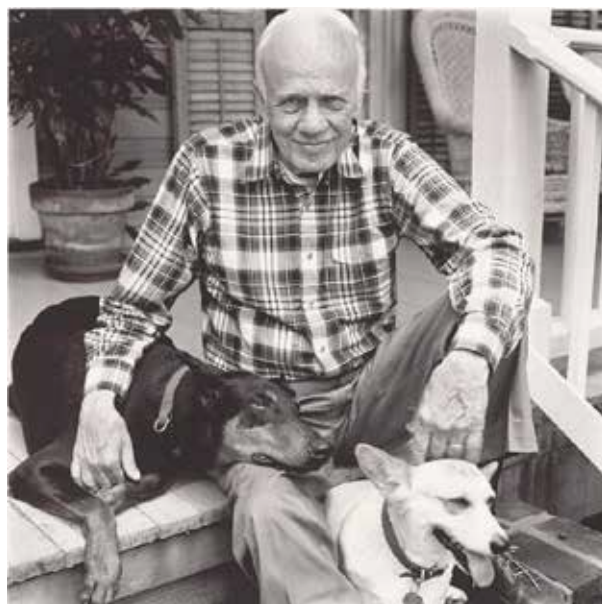
They accomplished the mission, but life is more than an isolated mission. Sure, the major is a brilliant commander. He's great at his job, so it's natural that the mission ends on a high note, but his experience of the world has left him cold and cynical. The American lieutenant is a deadly soldier, but he, too, is cold, even grudging in the help he affords his British allies. Only Mary, a crack undercover agent and the major's love interest, seems rounded enough to be successful at more than a military operation. And yet even her prospects don't look great side-by-side with a man like the major. If life were nothing but a military operation, these people would win. It's not, though, and their aggregate life skills are weak.

This question of happy endings looms large in Percy's award winning novel, *The Moviegoer*. The protagonist of the novel, Binx (or Jack) Bolling, is a twenty-nine-year-old stock broker of New Orleans. He, like the heroes from movies he spends his nights watching, has had his

share of adventure and drama previous to his ordinary life in Gentilly, a middle-class suburb of New Orleans. A World War II veteran who saw active combat and almost died in the Orient, he studied the Great Books, entertained noble ideals, and suffered the loss of both his father and brother at a young age. Like the characters from *Where Eagles Dare*, he survived the mission. The aftermath is the subject of the novel. Binx becomes a stockbroker, who loves going to the movies. He knows how to make money and likes doing it, and his life is largely confined to a regular cycle of routine duties and pleasures. In a way, he even likes his risk-free easy-going life. Down the road, he'd like to get married, settle down, and have kids. On the surface, his life looks like the American Dream, the happy ending, the reward for his noble ideals. He calls it despair.

Returning home after the war, there was no joy or happiness, as the movies he loves promise. True, he has attained freedom from the physical dangers of war, but not from the greater threat of depression and mediocrity. There's a void in the happy ending to his war story that robs him of meaning and forces him to settle for a counterfeit. He's lost his ideals and despairs of achieving anything more. There was no inner fanfare or peace for Binx upon his return. For him, life has become a horizontal plane of work and emptiness, which affords momentary escapes of relief, but not more. Unlike the war, no single triumph promises happiness.

To look for the root of his emptiness solely in the absence of his faith in God would be to miss the point. Indeed, the religious people in the novel have the same despair. The novel features a wide array of characters, and none of them escape it. His aunt is a champion of the Great Books and a philanthropist, his mother's family are all Mass-going Catholics, and his friends are war heroes and successful businessmen. There is no lack of religion, ideals, or heroism. Yet there is something missing. All have achieved that secure stage of life after the dangerous quest of youth and all of them *seem* to live a relatively peaceful life, though it is the apparent peace of the gas chamber, not the calm of the saints. Each one of them has attained the "happy ending" the movies promise—family, a good career, even a religious moral code—but none are actually happy. Some are comfortably wealthy, some are just getting by. There is some-



thing even more fundamental missing in the lives of Percy's characters.

Binx himself would still be living that noxious peace in his comfortable little Gentilly if it were not for something he calls "the search," and it is this search which forces him to realize that he has settled for too little.

What is the nature of the search? you ask.

Really it is very simple, at least for a fellow like me;

so simple that it is easily overlooked.

The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life.

Binx had settled. Rather than an active search for meaning, for his full potential as a human, he fell asleep in his everyday duties and enjoyments. Interestingly, this former term is fraught with misunderstanding. From the Chestertonian angle, the idea of the common and the everyday has a positive connotation. It refers to the nobility of very humble yet human tasks and joys. In no way rejecting the value of Chesterton's praise, Percy chooses to highlight a more insidious side to everyday things, more akin to sloth. With age and experience, a stable income and a family, often the tendency is to settle down, or rather, settle *for*. Whether our days are filled with roses or thorns, we are expert at getting accustomed to a situation in life. Youth naturally strives where age settles, and herein lies the key. The young hope, they have a quest, they

search for love, happiness, friendship, and this gives them vitality. With age and experience, however, comes a false sense of completion, a sense that we have quite a bit figured out, even if we wouldn't admit it. It's pride, to be sure, but in a most innocent looking form. Who doesn't have a growing sense of their own savvy about life after a few years? Legitimate growth and self-knowledge granted, the more we perceive ourselves to have, the less we think we need. Why search for something you already have, right? The problem is that the search shouldn't end until we meet Christ face to face at death. Even if we've found the Faith, the Great Books, and a family, the search isn't over. For Binx, the realization that life is essentially a quest, not a rest, showed him his despair. He had been acting as if he was made for the happy ending of this life that movies promise. This is true of the Christians in the novel, as well, who live as if their little regime of piety and good works were the prize, not the road. Indeed, believers are often just as guilty as non-believers.

Once we have finished the most formative stages of our youth, and have generally made the transition from the pursuit to accomplish any number of things—build up a career, an apostolate, a family, and we have achieved some success—then little by little, we often cease, unconsciously, the active quest, and begin to rest in what we have achieved. It's like an early retirement of the soul. As the term goes, we begin to “settle down.” Rather than a strenuous quest to the end of the journey, at a certain point it is just autopilot. It's a shift in focus, though not a conscious one. As St. John Henry Newman points out, in civilized ages such as our own, the evil one tempts us less directly. Instead of out and out murder, lust, and greed, he gets us to commit the same sins, but masked by different labels. We call greed making a good profit, lust, evolved sexuality, and murder, a responsible choice. So too with complacency. We call it getting older and becoming prudent and realistic, but that doesn't change what it is.

Really it is very simple, at least for a fellow like me ...

The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life.

Timely as Percy's themes are, a word is necessary on the author himself. He suffered and profited from this search and its lack. Struggling to make sense of his own life, he had a difficult time trying to reconcile his family history with his interests in literature, his gift for medicine, and his knowledge of the ills of the time. His grandfather committed suicide, as did his own father and mother. This left an ominous foreboding on his own destiny. He was reared, however, by the poet-lawyer William Alexander Percy and was a lifelong friend of the celebrated historian of the Civil War, Shelby Foote, and he could not be ignorant of something higher. But who was he? Would he be like his parents or his role models? Like Binx, Percy felt the modern listlessness, and this drove him to the realization that man is essentially a *homo viator*. He was on an urgent quest, but it seemed it wasn't to be found where everyone was saying it was. Sex, financial security, health, and career just weren't cutting

it. What many of his peers seemed satisfied with, he couldn't settle for. He needed more, and eventually found it in the only authentic quest for meaning, the search for the Lord. And then he started writing.

Why, then, one might fairly ask, does a man grown ill from modern culture choose to write about nothing else? Because he wants his sickness to be contagious. Not content to simply lament the hollowness of decadent culture of twentieth-century America, Percy shows it. Far different from the voyeurism elicited from recent romance novels, Percy is not trying to shock us into sin, but to frighten us away from it. Like Dante before him, Percy uses grotesque and sexual imagery to unmask the emptiness and despair of lifestyles that contemporary culture terms liberated and enlightened. Sin always has its draw, no matter what; the young can hear a thousand good sermons about the evils of lust and still see it as attractive. But a day in the empty lives of one of Percy's alienated characters, and they'll feel the waste and shame of sensuality.

One shouldn't start with Percy until late high school to early college, but to neglect him on the basis of his themes would be to deprive oneself of a poet capable of winning our senses away from the modern culture of death. Perhaps even more importantly, he challenges us to think deeply about the nature of being a pilgrim in this life, of being travelers in a foreign land. The Evil One very easily hides the true nature of our sins, and it takes good literature to reorient us. Percy rinses away Satan's smudge on our vision of this world and this life. Practicing Catholics or not, we often settle for this world more than we actually know. Intellectually, we profess to be only temporary wayfarers on this earth, but we live as if it were our lasting home. We would be hard pressed to be torn from it. Though it is legitimate to have levels of attachment to things

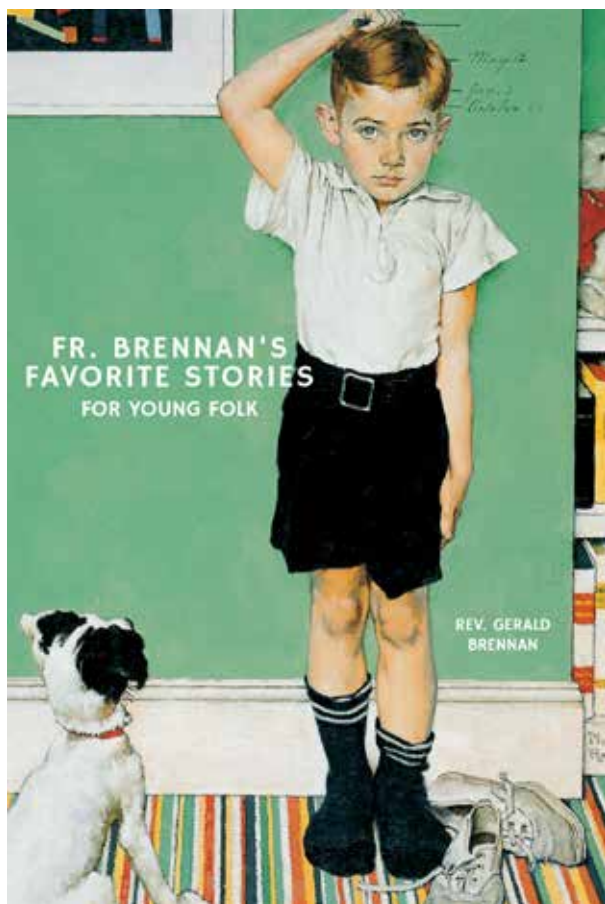
here below, such as family, friends, and home, we become too attached. Like Job, were God to take it all away, we must still be able to praise Him, to realize that all of the good gifts we have come to us only through Him. Those who settle for this life, rarely admit it to themselves. How do we know if we have settled? Literature puts flesh on the bones of our metaphysical questions, and Percy's fiction allows us to ponder on just what the complacent look like.

Images:

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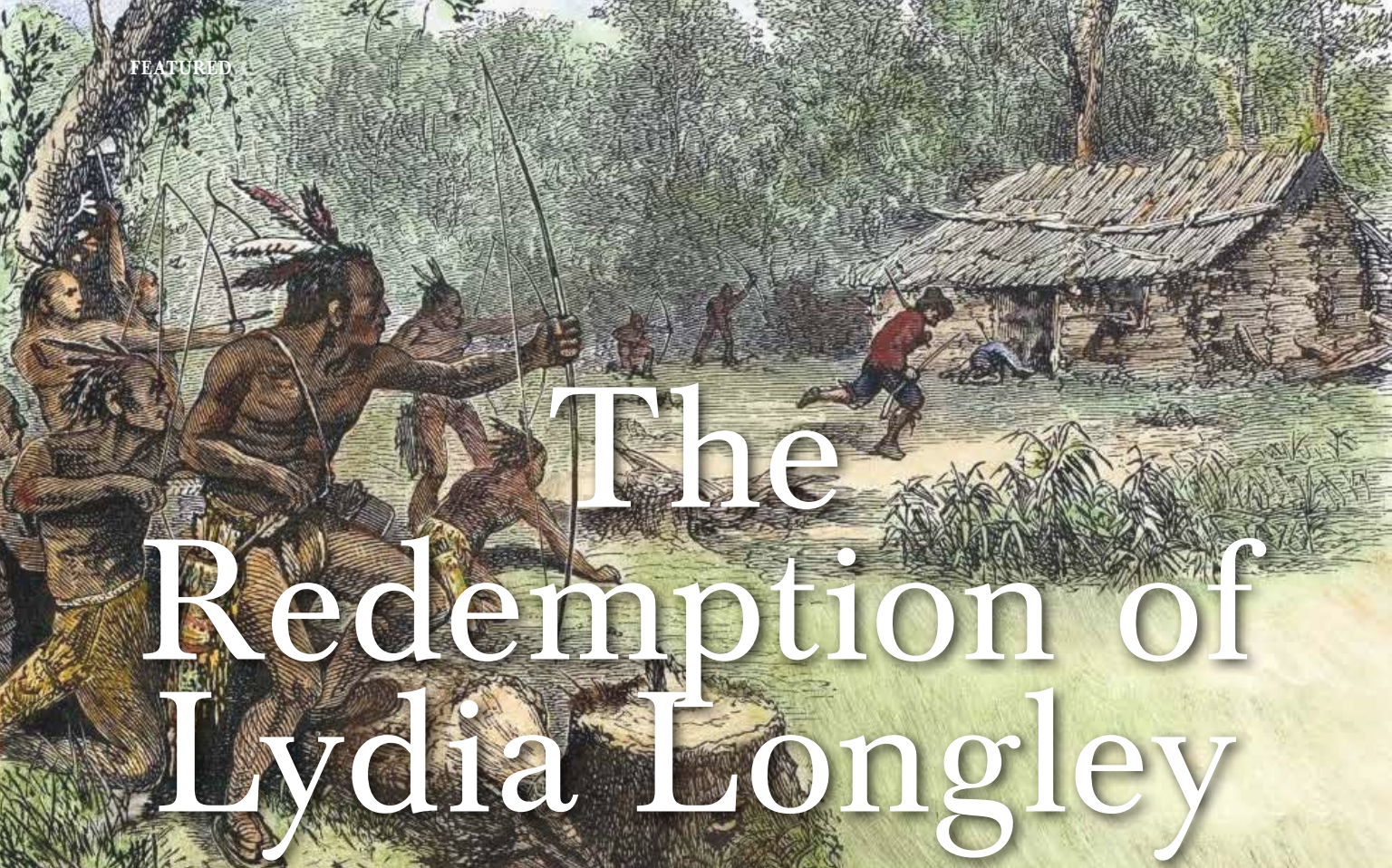
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The Redemption of Lydia Longley

Dr. William Edmund Fahey

Within about five minutes half of her family had been slain. Lydia Longley, aged 20, entered into the strange journey set for her by divine Providence in the quiet morning heat of July 27, 1694, a quiet broken by the lulling sound of cattle lowing as they seemed to wander free from their customary confinement. A quiet broken by the sound of the tomahawk striking down her father as he thought to move the cattle back. A quiet broken with a war cry and the sound of running as Abenaki warriors rushed through the farm and struck down the entire Longley family apart from Lydia and her two younger siblings, Betty and John. Victims and prisoners of a war for New England and the destiny of a Continent. And yet, it proved to be a quiet broken by a God who wills our good, even through the evil that men might will for one another.

The Longleys lived a little over a mile north of Groton, Massachusetts. Lydia's mother had died nearly a decade earlier, and her father William

had taken as a second wife Deliverance Crispe to assist him in raising the children; several more had been born, the youngest was a year old in 1694. Their farmstead marked the limits of British and Protestant culture, a point on a border stretching along the north east quarter of the current Commonwealth, and skirting the coastal corner of New Hampshire and southern Maine.

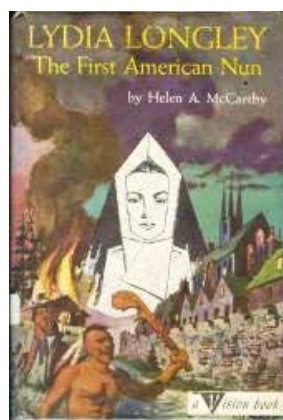
Since the arrival of the first Puritan Longleys half a century early, the family consistently moved away from the maritime center of the Bay Colony into the wilderness. The Longleys were staunch Congregationalists—common folk of the stock who understood their exceptional role in continuing the principles of the Reformation. They were men, in the words of Puritan historian Edward Johnson, who “for this their great enterprise counted as so many cracked brains: but Christ will make all the earth know the wisdom He hath endued them with shall overtop all the human policy of the world.” In a word, the Longleys were not simple pioneers,

but militant Protestants, political and religious zealots confident of their righteous cause.

The Indians that attacked Groton in 1694 were not some indiscriminant raiders. They were warriors of the Abenaki nation that stretched through Acadia—the territory between New England and New France, claimed by both. The raid on Groton was the culmination of nearly a year of diplomacy at its most critical moments undertaken by the Jesuits Fr. Vincent Bigot and Fr. Louis Pierre Thury, who had seen the territory and political autonomy of the Abenakis being eroded by colonial English incursions and understood that the nascent Catholic faith of the region was threatened by the new settlements. Also, critical in the discussions was an Abenaki prince, who had just returned from the Court of Louis XIV. The raid would be one military extension of the many wars initiated by the Sun King. The chief military allies of France in the New World were the various Indian tribes south of Québec and Montréal. Indeed, French military power rested almost entirely on the participation of the Indians. With the guidance of a small group of French men—including Fr. Sebastian Râle, newly arrived in Norridgewock, Maine—the Abenaki Indians united their sundry tribes gathered representative warriors and moved men and supplies over 250 miles to strike at targets along the frontier. Nearly 300 elite Indian troops undertook the campaign with fewer than half a dozen French and Canadian companions. The most effective moment in the campaign occurred on July 18th at the English plantation of Oyster River (near modern Durham, New Hampshire). The settlement was successfully assaulted and ruined.

While the Jesuits and other Catholic authorities did not encourage violence against civilians, the frontier warfare of the 17th and 18th centuries contained a level of violence perhaps shocking to modern readers so removed from the hardness of war and the desperate nature of defending your homeland against the odds. Catholic religious leaders—such a Fr. Sebastian Râle—did what they could to encourage the Abenaki people to move to war only reluctantly, if their faith and homes were directly threatened, and after the conflicts ended, they oversaw the civilized treatment of captives and the return of these prisoners to their New England families.

The first two recorded Masses celebrated on New Hampshire soil were offered by Fr. Bigot



and Fr. Thury for their Indians immediately after the battle. The group of warriors that captured Lydia and her siblings were a unit from this larger military force which determined to continue to advance for another fortnight.

After the raids, some 40 or more prisoners were taken north. At some point in the journey, Lydia's sister Betty perished. As was the custom, men and women were separated. (Lydia's brother John was trained as a brave and spent four years with the Abenakis living freely and learning their language and customs. He was eventually—against his own desire—ransomed by family from Boston and sent back to New England). Lydia's journey with the small war-band took her up the Nashua river into New Hampshire, thence along the Merrimack river across to the feet of the White Mountains and into Maine, and finally to Ville-Marie (Montréal). Travelers of this route now find it charming or invigorating. For Lydia, the woods and rivers held no such comfort. Beneath her own personal suffering was a vivid Puritan imagination, which from its earliest conception had seen New England as—in expression of William Bradford, “a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men.” But then, as William Stoughton, chief justice during the Salem witch trials had said, “Whom hath the Lord more signally exalted than His people in this wilderness?”

Montréal may have shocked Lydia as much, perhaps more—for the Puritan categories of the wilderness would have been fulfilled during trials of her journey, but what vision would have prepared her for Catholic Montréal? Unlike the white-washed angularity of Groton, the roads of Montréal moved along natural contours; the 200 wood homes were not of painted, but weathered wood, and stone buildings rose up above the main civic district, giving the place an older, rock-like solidity. The Streets and markets took their names from the saints; men, women, Indians, and blacks moved about the city with little segregation; and signs of color and hierarchy abounded. As a Protestant woman, a Congregationalist and a New Englander, Lydia came

from a culture in which an egalitarian monotony of clothing and goods cloaked an exclusive spiritual hierarchy, where an unseen destiny separated God's elite from the unwashed. Here, expressive colors, troubling cuts of cloth, religious habits, and the acceptance of Indian accoutrements by Europeans bore witness to both a freedom and a social hierarchy, while beneath it all—as she would learn—there was a radical sense of spiritual solidarity.

Lydia was ransomed by Jacques Le Ber, one of Montréal's worthies—one of among the half-dozen wealthiest men in Canada. Le Ber was a veteran of the Mohawk wars in defense of Montréal. In 1694 he was at the pinnacle of the merchant class. He belonged to that particular group of men who would ransom Anglo-American prisoners and then work with the government and the Church authorities to find out if relatives in New England survived and wished to reclaim them. Widowed, Le Ber lived on St. Paul Street with his adult daughter Jeanne. His son Pierre resided nearby. Within the household were two other ransomed prisoners, John Lahey, an Irish-born colonist from New York, who was now a domestic servant to Le Ber and permitted to remain Protestant. Le Ber had one personal slave, brought from Africa to New England, captured by Indians, purchased by Le Ber, and now a permanent member of the household. The slave had embraced the Catholic faith and had recently been baptized. He took the name Jacques.

Jeanne Le Ber had a profound influence on Lydia. Jeanne chose to live first as a voluntary recluse within the Le Ber house, appearing only for Mass and the sacraments. Jeanne, one of Canada's wealthiest and most attractive women was known throughout the city for the wealth she



Memorial to the Longley family, located on Longley Road in Groton, Massachusetts bearing the inscription: "Near this spot dwelt William and Deliverance Longley with their eight children. On the 27th of July, 1694 the Indians killed the father and mother and five of the children and carried into captivity the other three."—Groton Historical Society 1946.

personally commanded and for her rigorous mortification and fervent prayer life. Always an elite, she retained a servant, directly managed her own property, and financed the construction of the convent and church for the Congrégation Notre Dame de Montréal. A year after her arrival, Lydia participated in a long religious procession through the streets of Montréal—down St. Joseph Street, along that of St. Paul, and ending at St. Jean Baptiste Street—escorting Jeanne Le Ber to the new convent. Behind the chapel's high altar, Jeanne had built an apartment that would allow her access to the convent gardens and the Sacraments. There, after making a solemn profession before the religious authorities, Jeanne spent the rest of her life as a recluse, gazing in benediction upon Montréal, but removing herself from the loving glance of any but her spiritual Spouse and a few sisters.

Whereas Jeanne Le Ber gave witness to the Catholic contemplative tradition and the graceful place of women within Christendom, Pierre Le Ber introduced Lydia to another side of civilization. Pierre was Lydia's senior by only two years. He was an artist by training, a rarity in Canada, but something unknown in New England at the time. The churches and religious buildings of Montréal were filled with the decorations and pious art of Pierre Le Ber. Heir to the wealth of one of New France's wealthiest families, Pierre constantly funded and eventually pledged the majority of his inheritance to help finance the Congregation Notre Dame and construct the Hôpital Général of Montreal, run by the Brothers Hospitallers of the Cross and St. Joseph. The Brothers had been established by Pierre Le Ber and his associate François Charon de La Barre, or simply Charon, as he called himself. Le Ber and Charon poured massive personal resources into the creation of this religious community, and in so doing established throughout Montréal and Quebec the principle amongst both merchants and commoners that religious and social institutions should be funded by the entire local Catholic community and not simply the Crown or the aristocracy. The Hôpital—a three story stone building with 24 spacious rooms and slate roof—was completed two months before Lydia's arrival. It was the second hospital built in New France. Its chief purpose was to care for orphaned boys, disabled men, and the infirm. Those who were able-bodied were taught crafts so that they could ultimately become self-supporting. In the Anglo-American colonies no such

hospital would be built for over half a century until the Pennsylvania General Hospital, undertaken by Benjamin Franklin in 1751. Although Pierre never took final vows with the Brothers who ran the hospital, he divided his days between painting, helping the poor and infirm, and living the devotional life of the brothers. He would live out his life a celibate in communion with the Hospitallers.

While John Mather and other Puritan divines were attempting to resolve the tension between faith and works in Calvinist theology (and in so doing fashioned that compromise dubbed by Max Weber “the Protestant Work ethic”), Jeanne and Pierre Le Ber were living out fully-Christian lives—each in his and her own way celebrating faith *and* works, contemplation *and* action, and never forcing a wedge between them. It would have been inconceivable to the Le Bers or any other ordinary Catholic in New France to be troubled over a perceived dichotomy between public and private virtues, between the inner religious man and the outward civic man; and how they would have chuckled at Mather’s novel conclusion that “a true believing Christian...lives his vocation by his faith.” Was there another alternative?

Less than two years after her arrival in Montréal, Lydia Longley requested to live in the Congrégation Notre-Dame so that she could make final discernment about embracing the Catholic Faith. The Puritan captive was finding her true ransom. Le Ber, of course, granted permission. One month later, on Tuesday, April 24, 1696, Lydia was baptized, taking the name Lydia Madeleine, taking the name of her sponsor Madam Marie Madeleine Dupont du Neville, wife of the local Marine commander Paul Le Moyne de Maricourt. Le Moyne was beloved by both many Indian nations for his mastery of language, culture, and his fair representation of Indian interests within the French empire.

Lydia was now positioned to rise to the very heights of Canadian society. Jacques Le Ber had assisted in several high-level marriages—most of former Anglo-American colonials. Instead, Lydia Madeline chose to continue her journey as a nun. In so doing, she slips beyond the envious eye of History. We know that with some other Anglo-English captives, she joined the Congrégation Notre-Dame under the tutelage of Marguerite Bourgeoys—canonized Saint Marguerite in 1982. The Congrégation brought together French, Canadian-born, Anglo-Ameri-

can, and Indian women into one religious order. The nuns ran schools for both the elite women of Canada and impoverished girls. Additionally, they lived out part of their lives as *soeurs fermières*—“farming sisters,” who oversaw and themselves worked on various small agricultural estates along the St. Lawrence River.

The sisters of this community expressed their lives as a *vie voyageuse*. Modeled on the life of the Virgin Mary, it was both contemplative and yet determined to address the immediate needs of men and women in New France. The mission was simple. According to a dictum of Saint Marguerite: “act as an advocate of the Church and its own baptized members will be converted and unbelievers as well.” In prayer and in action, these women slowly illuminated the darkness of their age through their advocacy of the Church.

We know very little of Lydia Madeleine after her entrance into the Congrégation Notre-Dame. She was faithful and promoted to office. She personally seems to have overseen the religious instruction of young women and her name appears on the confirmation records of the period as a sponsor. During the 1720s Lydia maintained contact with her family in Groton. She sent pincushions to a niece and communicated to her brother John that she would continue to pray for him that he would be able to embrace the Catholic Faith. Although she never wished to return, she never forgot New England, nor ceased to pray for its conversion.

Lydia Longley, or Soeur Sainte-Madeleine as she spent her days, was grafted to Christ through the graces of many Christians and through the unseen and merciful hand of God. For 62 years she lived as a faithful Catholic nun in Montréal and at Sainte-Famille, Île d’Orléans, the community’s smaller convent and school in the midst of a farming community, where she acted as superior of the mission. Sainte-Famille—what a beautiful irony that a young woman whose family was cut down in war and who was led captive into the terrifying wilds of New England should mature into a woman overseeing a group of religious women and ministering to the needs of farming families on an island dedicated to the Holy Family. And a woman whose mother had died in her youth, lived out her days under the patronage of Our Lady—a living testimony to the unity of contemplation and action in Christian life.

Images:

Indians, www.amazon.ca/American-Americans-Attacking-Plantation-Engraving/
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Innovation and Isolation:

Charles Ives and the American Voice

Dr. Andrew Childs

In 1828, at the age of 70, Noah Webster published his *American Dictionary of the English Language*. When considering the American Imagination, and certainly the conception of a distinctly American culture, few figures loom larger than Webster.¹ Webster's contribution to the cause of establishing an American culture un beholden to Britain in particular and Europe by extension deserves a separate consideration, but he understood keenly that establishing a new cultural identity begins with controlling language. This profile of American composer Charles Ives (1874-1954) begins with Webster's definition of Imagination, either "the action or faculty of forming mental images or concepts of what is not actually present in the senses," or the "ability to face and resolve difficulties; resourcefulness."² While the latter of these two definitions hints at the American spirit of ingenuity and resiliency, the former highlights, as applied to cultural development, the pioneering aspect of the American mind, unafraid to consider the unknown, and unashamed simultaneously to appropriate the contents of the European cultural edifice while rejecting much of the identifiable external structure.

Though Charles Ives was one of the first American classical composers to establish a national and international reputation—he won

both a Pulitzer Prize and a Grammy award for his work—much of his music remained unknown and unperformed in his lifetime. He gained professional recognition during his career for his pioneering work not in music, but in the insurance industry. Accolades for his music, and the shamefully grudging respect from his peers came long after he had stopped writing. Now recognized for his technical boldness and innovation, another aspect of his compositional career stands out as truly remarkable—his near-total isolation, both personal and professional, from the musical establishment. Professionally, his choice to pursue finance rather than composition as a career gave him freedom to develop truly innovative and groundbreaking methods, and the means to publish and disseminate his works. Personally, his deeply conservative political and religious views and patriotic temperament—not to mention his refusal to abandon traditional techniques—alienated him from the modernist American composers who followed him, most of whom had no idea the debt they owed him. Duty and patriotism were concepts he applied to his art and his trade with equal zeal. He wrote publicly in support of the American effort in World War I, and even drafted an amendment to the Constitution. In many ways, he is the ultimate American composer, fiercely independent yet grounded in tra-

ditional values, sentimental and experimental, equally comfortable with cultivated and vernacular styles, unafraid to break with European models—and a successful capitalist.

Ives was born October 20, 1874, in Danbury, Connecticut. His father, George, served as a bandleader for the Union army in the Civil War. Often portrayed as a sort of musical “mad scientist,” George Ives devoted himself to breaking down what he considered artificial technical barriers and to extending musical boundaries, traits Charles naturally absorbed. Delightful vignettes exist of father and son: the toddler Charles listening to his father practice the fiddle, banished to the barn by an exasperated Mrs. Ives; polytonal family hymn-singing; contraptions rigged to find partial tones; George’s nurturing toleration and discipline of Charles’s more radical rhythmic and tonal departures. A famous story goes that one day, Charles stood in the middle of the large town square for the purpose of hearing two bands playing simultaneously while marching towards each other from opposite ends. For George and Charles, music was as much about play as technical mastery. ‘Radical’ techniques such as polytonality and polyrhythm came naturally to Charles, and in his music never sound academic or contrived.

Education in late-19th-century New England represented one of the more glaring hypocrisies in American democratic experiment. Boys from the right families went to the right schools in preparation for professional careers predestined for them. Ives began composing and performing as a child. Though not a prodigy in the classical sense, he wrote his first known complete song, “Slow March,” at age 12 to commemorate the death and burial of a family pet. He took his first church organist position at 14 and composed hymns and organ music for services. Though clearly more than a simple hobby for Ives, music nonetheless just as clearly did not qualify as a legitimate profession for someone of his evolving educational pedigree. He finished high school at Hopkins preparatory school in New Haven, Connecticut, and enrolled at Yale University in 1894. Charles and George no longer played musical games together, and for some time, George had felt the pain not of physical but psychological separation. It was an uncle, Lyman Brewster, who had established and sponsored Charles’s educational and future professional plans in finance, and George



Boy Charlie, around 1889.



Charlie (left) at Hopkins School, circa 1894.



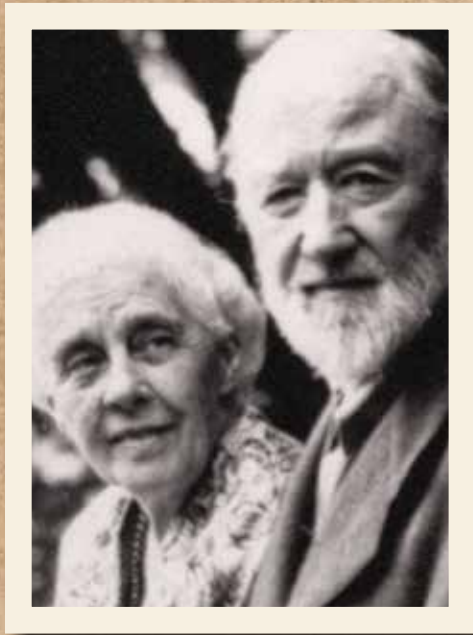
Yale graduation photo, 1898.



Harmony as a nurse, shortly before marrying Ives.



Charles and Edith.



Charles and Harmony later in life.

felt left behind. Father and son recognized the tension, and one evening in the fall of 1894, Charles began a letter to his father that would be his last; he left this unfinished to go hear a talk given by Joseph Twichell, noted preacher-philosopher and friend of Mark Twain. No one could have scripted what transpired among these three men on this night. Charles knew at the time neither that he would soon lose his father, nor that he would gain as a surrogate father the man he had gone to hear. When he returned to his room that night, he wrote a final request in a postscript, "Send Harmony," referring to a textbook he had left at home. George died on November 4, 1894. In 1908, Charles Ives married Joe Twichell's daughter—Harmony.

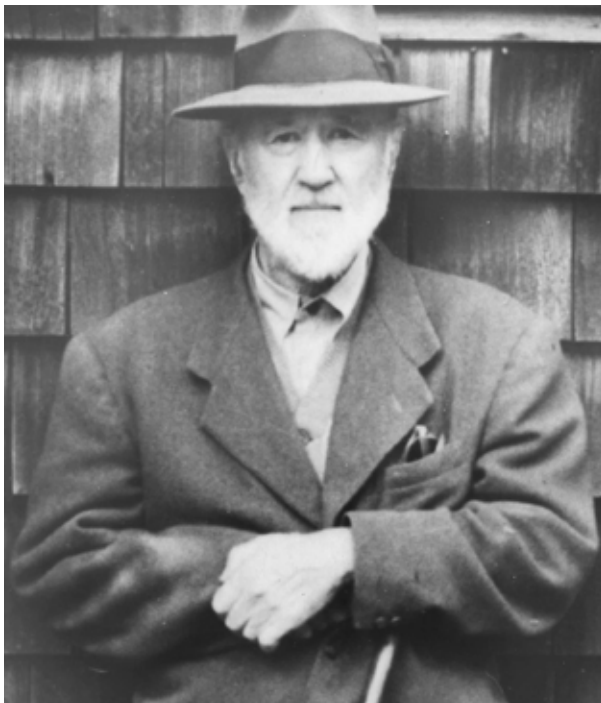
At Yale, he studied composition with Horatio Parker, one of the most important figures in American music, but whose methods and compositional philosophy remained thoroughly European. Ives absorbed the techniques but strove always to apply them in unique and spontaneous ways. He took as much inspiration from hymn tunes, folk songs, and Stephen Foster as he did from classical models. "The 'unity of dress' for a man at a ball," he wrote later in his life, "requires a collar, yet he could dance better without it."³ Ives refused to commit entirely either to the classical or the vernacular idiom, long assumed to be antithetical in form and function, and by exploring the common ground between them, created new synthetic procedures using experimentation as the catalyzing force and bonding agent. In his estimation, cultivated music might "dance" better without a collar, and vernacular music lost nothing of its character by dressing up a little. Though he acquired a real mastery of classical techniques, for Ives, putting on a collar never implied putting on airs. He and Parker developed a mutual respect and appreciation for each other, though Parker had his limits. He would patiently tolerate even the most outrageous of Ives's compositional flights of fancy and gently remind him that it 'wasn't polite to hog all the keys,' or something to that effect. Ives came to recognize when he had crossed a line with Parker and would quickly provide him with something more "correct" to make amends.

After graduating from Yale 1898, he began his career in finance and insurance in New York City as a clerk for New York Mutual. He founded his own firm in 1907 and was remarkably

successful, credited as pioneer in estate planning and mutual funds. By the late 1920's Ives drew a salary of nearly \$500,000, and he supported the careers of many avant-garde composers, without their knowing it. Some later criticized and deride Ives's music as amateurish or fraudulent, never knowing that he had made their own careers possible. His artistic isolation resulted not only from his desire to write experimental music, but also to be a good American, which for him meant providing for his family. He wrote, "If a man has, say, a certain ideal he's aiming at in his art, and has a wife and children whom he can't support, should he let his family starve and keep his ideals? No, I say—for if he did, his 'art' would be dishonestly weakened, his ideals would be but vanity."⁴

Harmony Twichell was thirty-two when she and Charles wed in June of 1908, married by her father. She had worked as a nurse for several years and was artistically gifted both as a musician and poet. They had known each other for a dozen years, first introduced by her brother, Dave, Yale class of 1897. For Ives, the marriage represented the realization of countless dreams, known and unknown; fatherhood, the fulfillment of his own childhood, and the dream of a partner who would fathom the scope of his vision, tolerate his darker moods, and amplify his artistic spirit. Had Ives married someone not possessing an artistic sensibility, neither could have survived it. In Harmony's poetry, his musical instincts found an empathetic voice. After only ten months of marriage, the one child they did conceive died before birth. In April 1909, Harmony Twichell Ives entered a hospital in New York City with internal bleeding due to miscarriage and underwent an emergency hysterectomy. They adopted a daughter, Edith, in 1916. Privately, Ives supported Edith's birth family for the rest of his life.

Ives knew that America afforded few opportunities for "professional" composers. He also knew that mastery of technique and hard work required no specific laboratory. By 1915 he had composed most of his major works, including his Symphony #3 ("The Camp Meeting," 1904-1911) for which he received the Pulitzer Prize in 1946, and his Symphony #4, awarded a Grammy for Best Composition by a Contemporary Classical Composer in 1965. Ives's catalog seems less a recognizable linear development than a series of spontaneous utterances,



Charles Edward Ives (1874-1954).

some nearly off-putting in their complexity (and cacophony), others cloyingly simple, but each one genuine, from a sight-readable one-page song to the monumental unfinished *Universe Symphony*. Listening to Ives requires patience and an open mind, and perhaps more than any other composer, a belief in his sincerity, without which, his use of quotation could easily sound like sarcasm or parody (in his *Symphony #2*, for instance, he quotes Brahms, Wagner, church hymns and Negro Spirituals, and his *Variations on America* for organ which he wrote as a teenager seems to do violence to the theme). *The Unanswered Question* (ca. 1906) features layers of seemingly unrelated elements; a string quartet playing serenely in the background, a solo trumpet that poses the melodic ‘question’ the strings refuse to answer, and a group of woodwinds that interrupt with increasingly dissonant hostility. The initial effect is jarring, yet Ives represents the plight of the misunderstood individual in a way reminiscent of the second movement of Beethoven’s 4th Piano Concerto. He pays homage to the New England Transcendentalists in his *Sonata #2 for Piano: Concord Mass., 1840-1860* (1904-1915). Ives quotes the ‘fate motive’ from Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony throughout the four movements entitled “Emerson,” “Hawthorne,” “The Alcotts,” and “Thoreau.” In his *Orchestral Set #1: Three Places in New England*,

Ives recreates the episode from his childhood of opposing bands playing simultaneously in different keys meters, an ultimate tribute to his father.⁵ Nowhere, however, does Ives reveal more of himself than in his songs. He wrote 129 in total, and his self-published *114 Songs* (1922) present a comprehensive summary of his stylistic development, philosophy, and temperament. Protest and parlor songs, ballades and lullabies, hymns and mystical reveries stand side by side, most often singing the original words of Charles and Harmony. The songs provide perhaps the easiest access to Ives’s music, but much like the songs of Gustav Mahler, these do not lack in significance due to their brevity, but rather provide a distillation of his entire vision.⁶

By 1926 at age 52, he had uttered his last original statement. He knew he was finished as a composer. Harmony related, “he came downstairs one day with tears in his eyes and said he couldn’t seem to compose any more—nothing went well, nothing sounded right.”⁷ He had fully realized his isolation. He continued to revise earlier works and support performances of his music, and gradually, the musical establishment came to recognize the importance of his contributions. His work endures, unlike many of his contemporaries, because he allowed the traditional and the innovative, the serious and the frivolous, the cultivated and the vernacular to coexist, in challenging, unlikely, and delightful ways. He spoke with an original voice, both highly imaginative and quintessentially American.

Endnotes:

- ¹ For further reading, consider *After the Revolution: Profiles of Early American Culture*, by Joseph Ellis, and *The Forgotten Founding Father: Noah Webster’s Obsession and the Creation of an American Culture*, by Joshua Kendall.
- ² Webster’s College Dictionary (Random House, 1991)
- ³ Charles Ives, *Essays Before a Sonata, the Majority, and Other Writings* (Norton, 1970), 98.
- ⁴ Charles Ives, *Memos* (Norton, 1972), 131.
- ⁵ James Sinclair, *A Descriptive Catalog of the Music of Charles Ives* (Yale, 1999)
- ⁶ I offer *Songs of Charles Ives* (Centaur Records #2796) for your consideration.
- ⁷ *Memos*, 279. Harmony told the story to scholar and friend John Kirkpatrick.

Images:

Charles and Edith, raisethehammer.org/article/588
 Charles at Hopkins & Charles and Harmony, author
 Ives, charlesives.org/sites/default/files/styles/black_white/public/slide_3.jpg?itok=GGj1XD6f
 Yale, onlineexhibits.library.yale.edu/s/stoeckel/page/ci
 Harmony, http://www.musicweb-international.com/ives/PP_1_09.htm

John Singer Sargent

John Singer Sargent (1856–1925) was an American expatriate artist, considered the “leading portrait painter of his generation” for his evocations of Edwardian-era luxury. He created roughly 900 oil paintings and more than 2,000 watercolors, as well as countless sketches and charcoal drawings. His oeuvre documents worldwide travel, from Venice to the Tyrol, Corfu, the Middle East, Montana, Maine, and Florida.

Born in Florence to American parents, he was trained in Paris before moving to London, living most of his life in Europe. He enjoyed international acclaim as a portrait painter.

Painting: *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (MFA, Boston).





Russell Kirk's Catholic Mind

Mr. and Mrs. Michael Warren Davis

At last, in 1845, John Henry Newman swam the Tiber. It was one of those conversions that, until it happens, seemed inevitable to everyone—except the convert. Newman, who was canonized by Pope Francis in 2019, seemed to set off a chain reaction. In the following century, there was a breathtaking influx of authors, artists, and intellectuals into the Catholic Church throughout the Anglosphere.

Most of these converts were “conservative.” Like Newman, they recognized that Christendom was under siege, both from without and from within. The older Protestant sects, like the Church of England, had no interest in trying to save Western civilization. In fact, many were calling for its death. Ultimately, they were bound to agree with St. John Henry Newman: “There are but two alternatives, the way to Rome, and the way to Atheism.”

Russell Amos Kirk (1918–1994) was probably the last of these great literary converts, though

by no means the least.

Kirk rose to prominence in 1953 with the publication of his magnum opus *The Conservative Mind*. Almost overnight, Kirk became the godfather of the English-speaking Right. It’s a position he retained for the rest of his life. To this day, *The Conservative Mind* is recognized as the most important text in Anglo-American conservatism, except perhaps for Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

One of Kirk’s first disciples was a young man named William F. Buckley, Jr. Shortly after *The Conservative Mind* appeared, Buckley had the idea to found a magazine—one that might serve as a flagship for the nascent conservative movement. Such an enterprise could not be undertaken without Kirk’s support, however. So, the urbane young journalist flew to central Michigan for the blessing of the “Sage of Mecosta.”

Yet, surprisingly, Kirk wouldn’t become a Catholic until 1963, when he was forty-five. Granted, once he’d “poped,” there was no going

back. He was a founding board member of *Una Voce America*, a leading voice of traditionalist Catholicism in the post-conciliar era. After he edited and published his *Portable Conservative Reader* in 1982, he wrote to Buckley saying he was sorry for not including his (Buckley's) 1967 column "The End of the Latin Mass." In it, Buckley gives his very candid opinion of the liturgical "reforms" that flourished after Vatican II: "One's heart is filled with such passions of resentment and odium as only Hilaire Belloc could adequately have voiced. O God O God O God, why hast thou forsaken us?" Those who witnessed these "reforms" will know this wasn't being flippant.

Yet Kirk was received into the Church a year after the Council was convened. What could have led a man of Kirk's caliber to resist the call of Rome until this not-so-opportune moment? The answer may lie in Kirk's strange, fascinating childhood.

If you go back far enough, the Kirk family is of solid, Yankee Puritan stock. His more immediate ancestors were carried away by the various esoterisms that flourished in the 1800s. Most were Spiritualists and Swedenborgians. Kirk himself grew up superstitious, but not religious. As a young man, he adopted Stoicism as his "religion." He served in the Army during World War II; the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius were his constant companion.

As he matured, he became increasingly attracted to the Christian faith. What's more, Kirk—unlike most academics today—never bought into the lie that our Founding Fathers were militant secularists, or that they opposed "organized religion." Perhaps his most important thesis is that the Founding Fathers were not influenced by Enlightenment radicalism, but by the Greco-Roman republicanism. They were renaissance men, not *philosophes*. Yet he also believed that the influence of the Middle Ages on the Founding was even smaller. In his 1991 study *The Roots of the American Order*, Kirk admits:

The majestic Schoolmen of the Continent—Albertus Magnus, Abelard, Hugh of St. Victor, even Aquinas—were little better than names even to the learned in eighteenth-century America. Only when Roman Catholic colleges and universities began to be founded in the United States, chiefly in the late nineteenth century, would the old Schoolmen's intel-

lectual power be recognized in this country. Anglican and Presbyterian and Puritan divines, rather than medieval philosophers, nurtured American faith and reason.

No doubt the absence of a strong Catholic tradition in America made it difficult for Kirk to consider conversion, steeped as he was in the writings of men like Edmund Burke and John Adams.

All the same, several great "Romanists" appear in *The Conservative Mind*. The first is Orestes Brownson (1803–1876). Brownson was a leading member of the Transcendentalist movement and a close friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson's. In other words, he was a quintessential early-American radical. Then he "poped," too.

In his long career as a public intellectual, Brownson slowly grew to feel that America was being driven mad by too much freedom—or, rather, freedom of the wrong sort. His radical friends exalted in the almighty Individual. All influence, be it forceful (like government) or voluntary (like tradition) was to be rejected. In fact, Emerson resigned his ministry because he found the Unitarian Church too reactionary!

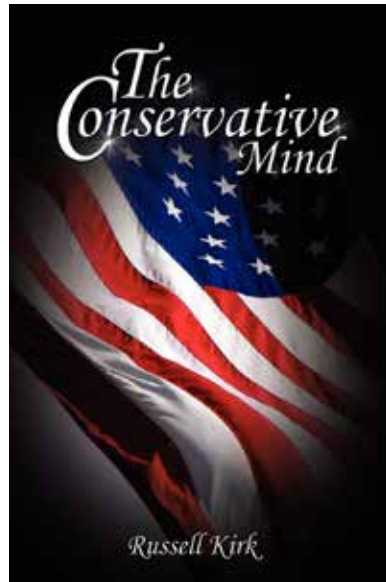
The Transcendentalists' hypocrisy was exposed. Brownson's "path of self-discovery" led to the Church of Rome. Emerson and his followers rejected Brownson, and he rejected them. He realized that, for the Transcendentalists, man was not "free" to seek a teacher, an authority, a community. He wasn't "free" to find safe harbor—only to drift on the high seas, lost and lonely forever.

Yet, for Brownson, Transcendentalism was only the logical conclusion of the Renaissance. . . and the Reformation. . . and the Enlightenment. It was the latest phase in an ongoing trend: a breaking-up, a coming-undone. He lived to see the rise of Karl Marx; in fact, the first writer to rebut the *Communist Manifesto*. And, to Brownson, there was no cure for this growing illness except the Church. "We have heard enough of liberty and the rights of man," Brownson thundered. "It is high time to hear something of the duties of men and the rights of authority."

Brownson appears in *The Conservative Mind* as a relatively minor figure, but his influence on Kirk grew as the years went on. He especially grew to appreciate Brownson's idea that our country needs a "divinely-ordained mission." America needed to be free *to do something* besides pleasuring itself. As Kirk wrote



Russell Kirk enjoying a cigar outside his home in Mecosta, MI.



Kirk's magnum opus, *The Conservative Mind*, 1953.



Orestes Brownson (1803–1876) by G. P. A. Healy.

in a 1991 essay,

Such is the character of true social justice, Brownson tells us: a liberation of every person, under God, to do the best that is in him. Poverty is no evil, in itself; obscurity is no evil; labor is no evil; even physical pain may be no evil, as it was none to the martyrs. This world is a place of trial and struggle, so that we may find our higher nature in our response to challenges.

It is America's mission, Brownson told his age, to offer the world an example of such a state and such a society, at once orderly and free.

The other great Catholic to appear in *The Conservative Mind* is, of course, Cardinal Newman. For Kirk, Newman's key contribution to the conservative tradition is his idea of the *Illative Sense*. According to Newman, the Illative Sense is "the mind that reasons, and that controls its own reasonings." It is a "power of judging and concluding." Or, in Kirk's words, "the Illative Sense is constituted by our impressions that are borne in upon us, from a source deeper than our own conscious and formal reason."

That seems rather complicated, but they're talking about an experience we've all had: often, we do our best thinking when we're not actually "thinking." Over the course of our day—and our lives—we absorb information, sensations, and experiences. Sometimes we wrestle with them; sometimes we talk them over; sometimes

we let them ferment in the back of our minds. But there's this "sense" at work all the time, synthesizing all this data and making sense of it, usually with very little input from our conscious minds.

This was important to Newman (and Kirk) because it smashed the Enlightenment idol of human reason. It shows that there are faculties that men need as much as—perhaps even more than—a sharp mind. Clever arguments aren't enough. According to Newman, one needs a *philosophical habit*, one that gives the Illative Sense time and space to do its work. This habit, he says, is one of "freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom."

In a way, Our Lady is the model of the Illative Sense, the philosophical habit. What did she do after speaking with the Angel Gabriel? Well, she didn't rush out and tell the *Bethlehem Times-Courier*. Every woman in Israel dreamed of bearing the Messiah. That privilege was given to Mary—and yet she didn't say a word, not until her Son began His public ministry. Nor did she leave St. Joseph, knowing she was fated to be something a more than a carpenter's wife. No: according to St. Luke, "Mary kept all of these things, and pondered them in her heart." That's humility. That's wisdom.

This is also why men need authority. Authority is like the Illative Sense of the whole race, by which we calibrate our own minds. It's the clocktower by which we set all of our watches. And, as Newman pointed out, it manifests itself

in many different forms:

Conscience is an authority; the Bible us an authority; such is the Church; such is antiquity; such are the words of the wise, such are hereditary lessons; such are ethical truths; such are historical memories, such are legal saws and maxims; such are proverbs; such are sentiments, presages, and prepossessions.

For Kirk, it was really Newman who discredited the Enlightenment and made the world safe for religion once more. For most of his life, he'd admired traditional Christianity—its philosophers and statesmen, its poetry and music and architecture, etc. Thanks to Newman, it was not only admirable but plausible.

As Kirk's own Illative Sense worked over the next decade, he was drawn more and more to the Catholic Church. As he explained in a letter to William F. Buckley, "I was not 'converted' to the Church, but made my way into it through what Newman calls *illation*—fragments of truth collecting in my mind through personal experience, conversations, knowledge of exemplars, and much reading and meditating."

But perhaps what made Kirk's conversion to Catholicism, besides falling in love with a beautiful young lady of French extraction, was his "supernaturalism." As we said, Kirk grew up with no real religion. Yet the existence of a realm beyond the material was a given. It wasn't a matter of faith; it was an obvious fact. There where ghosts in his childhood home, just as sure as there were tables and chairs.

This supernaturalism was so fundamental to his worldview that it actually got him "unstuck" from his grounding in Burke and Adams. He was instinctively drawn to the Medieval and, so, to Catholicism. As he wrote in his autobiography, *Confessions of a Bohemian Tory*,

Mine was not an Enlightened mind. . . it was a Gothic mind, medieval in its temper and structure. I did not love cold harmony and perfect regularity of organization; what I sought was variety, mystery, the venerable, the awful. . . I would have given any number of neo-classical pediments for one poor battered gargoyle.

It seems only natural that Kirk would try his hand at writing ghost stories, which are widely considered to be the most "conservative" genre of literature. And not only did he try: in

his own lifetime, Kirk's best gothic novel, *Old House of Fear*, outsold all his nonfiction books put together. This, if anything, seems to have drawn Kirk to the Catholic way of seeing things. In the introduction to a collection of his stories called *Watchers at the Straight Gate* (1984) Kirk said,

The tales in this volume have retributive ghosts, malign magicians, blind angels, beneficent phantoms, conjuring witches, demonic possession, creatures of the twilight, divided selves. I present them to you unabashed. They may impart some arcane truths about good and evil: as Chesterton put it, all life is an allegory, and we can understand it only in parable.

In this sense, ghost stories are also an "authority." They impress upon our minds the idea of an order to the universe—one entirely beyond our powers of comprehension. Kirk knew that this order has a name: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, through whom all things were made.

That's why—despite being a bestselling novelist, newspaper columnist, and political philosopher—he did his best to imitate the "hidden life" of St. Joseph. From the time of his graduation from St. Andrews in 1953 to his death in 1994 he lived in his ancestral home, Piety Hill. This magnificent home stands right in the middle of Mecosta, a town of about 400 people in central Michigan founded by Kirk's great grandfather. Kirk turned down countless appointments in academia and government so he could live in his own little Bethlehem.

Kirk died in 1994 and was buried in the cemetery of St. Michael's parish in Mecosta. Next to his grave is a headstone that reads, "Clinton Wallace, Knight of the Road." Wallace was a tramp who befriended Russell and his wife Annette. Whenever he blew into town, he'd stay at Piety Hill, earning his keep by doing odd jobs. One night, Russell found Wallace dead in the snow. They buried him next to Annette's brother in the family plot.

Russell Kirk knew what "love thy neighbor" meant. He knew it better than many men who spent their whole lives going to Mass and reading the Bible. In that sense—as in so many others—Kirk's really was a Catholic mind.

Images:

In front of his house, www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2018/10/29/russell-and-annette/
Russell Kirk, kirkcenter.org
Book cover, www.amazon.com/Conservative-Mind-Burke-Eliot/dp/9659124112



Based at Russell Kirk’s ancestral home of Mecosta, Michigan, the Russell Kirk Center for Cultural Renewal aims to recover, conserve, and enliven those enduring norms and principles that Russell Kirk called the Permanent Things. As Kirk put it:

There are certain permanent things in society: the health of the family, inherited political institutions that insure a measure of order and justice and freedom, a life of diversity and independence, a life marked by widespread possession of private property. These permanent things guarantee against arbitrary interference by the state. These are all aspects of conservative thought, which have developed gradually as the debate since the French Revolution has gone on.

It is the work of the Kirk Center to strengthen the Permanent Things, especially as they relate to America’s tradition of order, justice, and freedom.

It hosts seminars, research, and fellowship opportunities in what is now a unique residential library and conference center. These activities, rooted in one of American conservatism’s historic places, constitute a lively educational community at the core of the Center’s mission. From here, its *Kirk on Campus* initiative supports programs that bring Kirk’s ideas and the tradition he represents to the rising generation at our colleges and universities. Through *The University Bookman* and other resources online, it engages a wide variety of people in its mission of renewing the culture.

Civilization can only thrive, Edmund Burke once wrote, as a partnership of “those living, those who are dead, and those who are yet to be born.” The Kirk Center brings this truth to life. Since its founding in 1995, the Kirk Center has enjoyed a national and international reputation for linking together



generations past and present in an educational journey to discover and nourish the roots of America’s political, economic, and religious order.

Through both its residential and on-campus programs the Kirk Center explores the means by which the patrimony of culture may be preserved and renewed. Civilizational memory and community together can foster the kind of continuity in beliefs, practices, and institutions necessary if a culture is to foster authentic human flourishing.

In these ways the Center continues Russell Kirk’s own efforts to enrich our understanding of the Permanent Things that maintain and nurture America’s civil social order.

For more info, visit the kirkcenter.org.



The Cogitation of Henry Adams

Michael Warren Davis

Henry Brooks Adams (1838–1918) came from good stock. He was the grandson of our sixth president and the great-grandson of our second. His father Charles Francis served as Lincoln’s envoy to the United Kingdom, ensuring the British did not intervene in the Civil War on the side of the Confederacy. Henry himself was a distinguished historian, but is remembered today for his droll autobiography *The Education of Henry Adams*.

Modern Library named his *Education* the best nonfiction book of the 20th century. Albert Jay Nock called Henry the most accomplished member of his dynasty. Russell Kirk said that he “represents the zenith of American civilization.” He was the archetype of the Boston Brahmin, the Eastern Establishment, the WASP aristocrat. He was also a fanatical medievalist.

This is made abundantly clear by his second most famous work, *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres*. The book was inspired by a pilgrimage to France, which he took with his closest friend, the artist John La Farge. Together, they opened a little rift in time. Adams—the quintessential

American, the “child of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries”—came face to face with medieval Europe. And to his amazement, he found new life. “The man who wanders into the twelfth century is lost,” he wrote, “unless he can grow prematurely young.”

By the time he arrived in France, Adams had already begun to grow somewhat disillusioned with the United States. He felt the country wasn’t living up to the promise of its Founding Fathers. He was no democrat; like his great-grandfather, he was deeply suspicious of “the popular will.” But he was too much a product of the Enlightenment to be anything else. He was a republican down to his bones. So, he became a something of a misanthrope.

In the Middle Ages, though, he found something quite different. To him, the Gothic symbolizes the ardor and passion of the Middle Ages. The Neoclassical, meanwhile, represents the narrow rationalism of the Enlightenment. The Gothic sprang up organically from the soil of Christian Europe. The Neoclassical is artificial, affected, self-conscious. So Adams writes that,

In 1058, when the triumphal columns were building, and Taillefer sang to William the Bastard and Harold the Saxon, Roland still prayed his “*mea culpa*” to God the Father and gave not a thought to Alda his betrothed. In the twelfth century Saint Bernard recited “*Ave Stella Maris*” in an ecstasy of miracle before the image of the Virgin, and the armies of France in battle cried, “*Notre-Dame-Saint-Denis-Montjoie*.” What the Roman could not express flowered into the Gothic; what the masculine mind could not idealize in the warrior, it idealized in the woman; no architecture that ever grew on earth, except the Gothic, gave this effect of flinging its passion against the sky.

When men no longer felt the passion, they fell back on themselves, or lower. The architect returned to the round arch, and even further to the flatness of the Greek colonnade; but this was not the fault of the twelfth or thirteenth centuries. What they had to say they said; what they felt they expressed; and if the seventeenth century forgot it, the twentieth in turn has forgotten the seventeenth. History is only a catalogue of the forgotten.

(Readers couldn’t help but notice that the Founding Fathers were fond of neoclassical architecture.)

The medieval Catholic, like the modern American, believed in equality. There’s a crucial difference, however. The Enlightenment sought to make all men equally “high.” The *philosophes* believed human beings were fundamentally good. They sought to unite mankind in the pursuit of a more perfect society. The Middle Ages sought to make all men equally “low.” Before the majesty of Christ, mere rank meant nothing. Bishop or baron, sire or serf—all were subjects of *Christo Rege* and His mother, the Queen of Heaven. Standing at the door of Mont Saint Michel, Adams reflects:

The Empress Mary is receiving you at her portal, and whether you are an impertinent child, or a foolish old peasant-woman, or an insolent prince, or a more insolent tourist, she receives you with the same dignity; in fact, she probably sees very little difference between you. An empress of Russia to-day would probably feel little difference in the relative rank of her subjects, and the Virgin was empress over emperors, patriarchs, and popes.

In the Middle Ages, men were made equal by humility, not in pride.

Adams was also astonished by the incredible

variety in the intellectual life of the Medieval Europe. Back then—to use the author’s striking phrase—“Poetry and metaphysics owned the world.”

He exulted in the *Song of Roland* and the *Lancelot-Grail*. He was carried off by the Latin lyrics of Adam of Saint Victor. (I bet not one in a million Catholics today knows Adam’s work—I didn’t). Above all, he adored Dante. “The whole Trinity, with the Virgin to aid, had not the power to pardon him who should translate Dante and Petrarch,” he quipped. They must be read in their own pure Italian, or else not at all.

He was also a perceptive reader of medieval philosophy. He praised Saint Thomas Aquinas in the strongest possible terms, almost presenting himself as a Thomist:

Saint Thomas is still alive and overshadows as many schools as he ever did; at all events, as many as the Church maintains. He has outlived Descartes and Leibnitz and a dozen other schools of philosophy more or less serious in their day. He has mostly outlived Hume, Voltaire, and the militant sceptics. His method is typical and classic; his sentences, when interpreted by the Church, seem, even to an untrained mind, intelligible and consistent; his Church Intellectual remains practically unchanged, and, like the Cathedral of Beauvais, erect, although the storms of six or seven centuries have prostrated, over and over again, every other social or political or juristic shelter.

Compared with it, all modern systems are complex and chaotic, crowded with self-contradictions, anomalies, impracticable functions and outworn inheritances; but beyond all their practical shortcomings is their fragmentary character. An economic civilization troubles itself about the universe much as a hive of honey-bees troubles about the ocean, only as a region to be avoided. The hive of Saint Thomas sheltered God and man, mind and matter, the universe and the atom, the one and the multiple, within the walls of an harmonious home.

Yet he’s equally enamored of a very different saint: Francis of Assisi. Adams recalls an episode from the life of Saint Francis recorded by his companion Brother Leo. One of the early Minorites asked Francis if he could keep a psalter. According to Leo, Francis said,

“Once you have a psalter, you will want a breviary. And when you have a breviary, you will sit in a high chair like a great prelate, and say to your brother, ‘Bring me my breviary!’”

As he spoke, blessed Francis in great fervour of spirit took up a handful of ashes and placed them on his head, and rubbing his hand around his head as though he was washing it, he exclaimed, “I, a breviary! I, a breviary!” And he repeated this many times, passing his hand over his head. And the friar was amazed and ashamed.

It’s a hilarious mental image, but Francis was deadly serious. As Adams points out, the Poverello had a deep aversion to Scholastic philosophy. He said that the Schoolmen would be condemned on Judgment Day “and, with their dark logic (*opinionibus tenebrosis*) shall be plunged into outer darkness with the spirits of darkness.”

How could the Medieval Church honor two such strikingly different figures? First of all, because they knew that neither was infallible. Francis certainly had a point about the dangers of intellectual pride. And besides, he never knew Thomas. The Angelic Doctor was only a year old when the Little Poor Man died.

More importantly (says Adams), men of the Middle Ages were more tolerant than we are:

A Church which embraced, with equal sympathy, and within a hundred years, the Virgin, Saint Bernard, William of Champeaux and the School of Saint-Victor, Peter the Venerable, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Dominic, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Saint Bonaventure, was more liberal than any modern State can afford to be. Radical contradictions the State may perhaps tolerate, though hardly, but never embrace or profess. Such elasticity long ago vanished from human thought.

Adams was in his glory in the Middle Ages. He relished “its contradictions”—“the strange mixture of passion and caution, the austerity, the self-abandonment, the vehemence, the restraint, the love, the hate, the miracles, and the skepticism.” It broke his heart, reflecting on how much the West had lost.

Worst of all, however, it lost its Lady.

I knew Adams loved the Virgin. I didn’t know quite how much until I read Stephen Schmalhofer’s *Delightful People* (Cluny Media, 2020), one of the best studies of American Catholicism on the market.

Mr. Schmalhofer recalls how, one morning, Adams was walking on the beach with his friend Father Cyril Fey. It was a feast of Our Lady. Father Fey said he would put off saying



Henry Brooks Adams, Harvard graduation photo.

his breviary until they’d had their afternoon drive. Adams wouldn’t hear of it. “Our Blessed Lady will not tolerate that sort of thing,” he thundered. “Today is her feast and she wants her office said on time.” So, he marched the priest up to his room to say his prayers. “She’s my only hope,” he explained to Father Fey.

It’s a pity—a tragedy—that Adams never converted to Catholicism. He never seemed to be able to escape his own seventeenth-century mind. And yet, after he died, his niece Mabel found a poem on his desk. It was called “Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres.”

But when, like me, he too has trod the track
Which leads him up to power above control,
He too will have no choice but wander back
And sink in helpless hopelessness of soul,

Before your majesty of grace and love,
The purity, the beauty and the faith;
The depth of tenderness beneath; above,
The glory of the life and of the death.

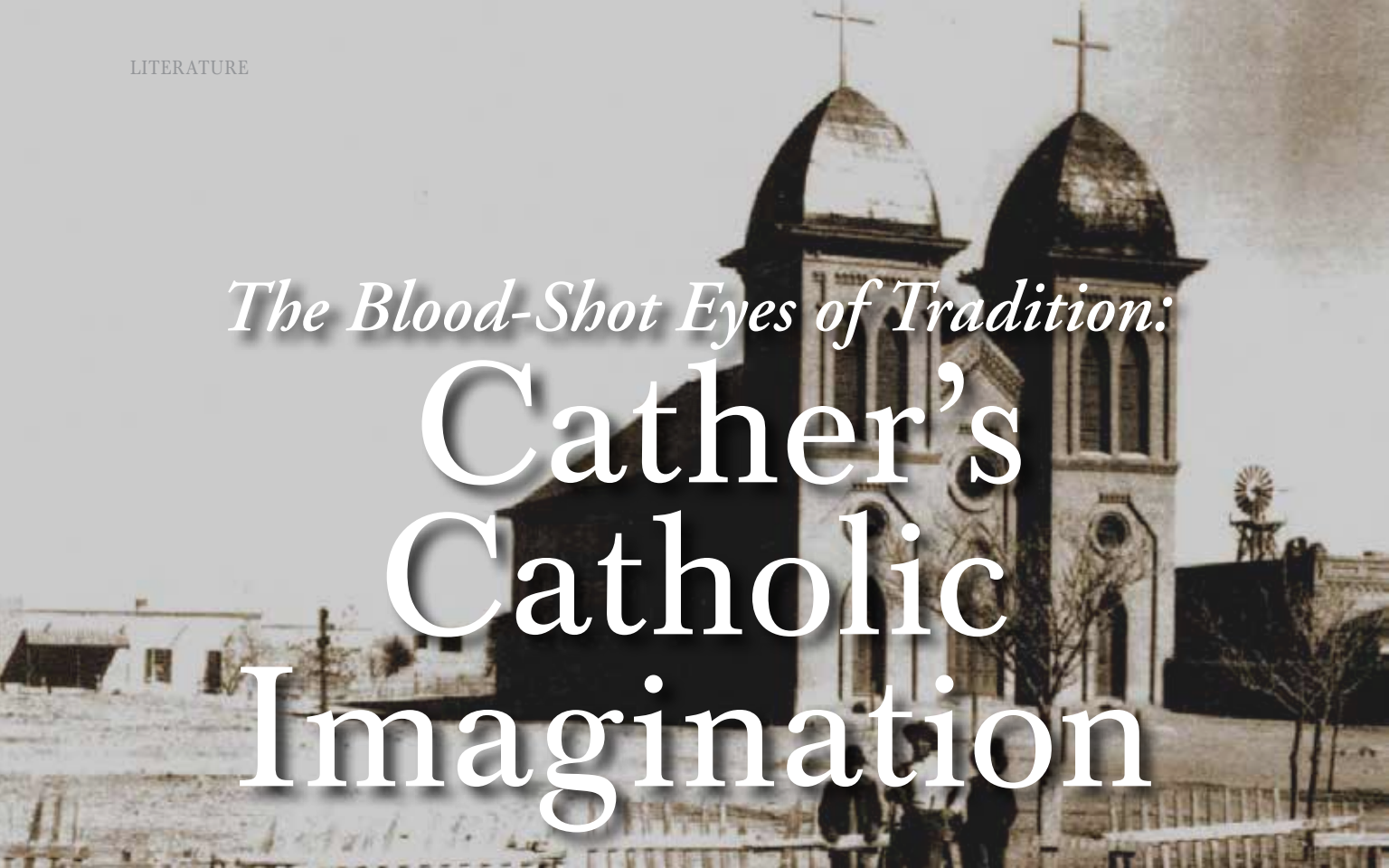
Near the end, Adams makes a promise:

But years, or ages, or eternity,
Will find me still in thought before your throne,
Pondering the mystery of Maternity,
Soul within Soul,—Mother and Child in One!

I hope that’s true.

Requiescat in pace Henry Brooks Adams, a sinner.

Our Lady of Chartres, *ora pro nobis*.



The Blood-Shot Eyes of Tradition:
Cather's
Catholic
Imagination

Jonathan Wanner

For being Episcopalian, Willa Cather has a tendency to write Catholic novels: *My Antonia* (1918) follows Catholic Bohemian pioneers on the Nebraskan frontier; *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) stars Jesuit missionaries in New Mexico; and *Shadows on the Rock* (1931) features Catholic colonists in Quebec. These first two titles are, paradoxically enough, her most enduring and acclaimed books. Perhaps this should not surprise us: Cather was no stranger to Church practices and beliefs. When she was ten, her Virginian family wagoned westward where Nebraska's prairies fertilized her imagination. There, under the Sistine skies of the spring-plowed plains, she found herself among a diverse consort of Catholic friends and neighbors of Scandinavian, German, Bohemian, and French-Canadian descent.¹ These first-hand experiences of a traditional, European faith provided her "a corrective for the received vision of America as merely an extension of Puritan colonies."² Perhaps this is why she described writing *Death Comes for the Archbishop* as "a happy vacation from

life, a return to childhood, to early memories."³

Even later during her Manhattan years, she often heard Mass with the Dominican Friars at St. Vincent Ferrer. When her brother (age 58) died unexpectedly, the chapel became her haven: "The Catholics," she quipped, "seem to be the only people who realize that in this world grief goes on all night, as well as all day, and they have a place for it to hide away and be quiet."⁴ She also had a large cohort of Catholic fans. In response to *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Cather received letters "from great prelates and parish priests from all over the country who had worked with these [Jesuit missionaries] in the west, saying 'You have given us back Father Joseph,' or 'Our Blessed Bishop lives for us again.'"⁵ Cather's editor, Roseboro, noted a particular letter in which a fan boldly declared, "They tell me you are not a Catholic. It is very strange. Pray for me."⁶ Who could blame the sentiment? Cather, after all, so passionately praised the Church, sometimes more vehemently than its members, as when she placed "the

Catholic Rome of the middle ages ... Next in wonder to the Rome of the Empire.”⁷

Even so, Cather’s strange affiliation with Catholicism is difficult to define, and her occasional praise of Papists does not ensure that her imagination, when translated into fiction, is “Catholic.” Nor do her novels, when considered individually, uphold Romishness to the same degree. *My Antonia* may feature Catholic views on prayer, suicide, and purgatory, but the Protestant narrator Jim Burden contrasts these with the beliefs of Lutheran locals. As much as *My Antonia* respects Catholics and wonders at their foreign ways, Burden possesses a cautious air that puts the reader at an arms-length away from experiencing Church traditions as an encounter with *the real*. Any Christian Joe can appreciate the homespun prayers of Cather’s pioneers with their roll-up-your-sleeves ethics and their sacrificial ardor, but it takes a Catholic empathy to see a rosary as an eternal wreath.

Of course, to the extent an author’s imagination is true, good, and beautiful, it is Catholic, and even if an author depicts Church tradition as a museum piece, there is a mysterious truth to a ladybug pinned upon a wall. Yet, for all that, there is a higher knowledge in watching its vermilion dome scurry like a Basilica on the move. Only in the latter case does the creature have a soul. As much as *My Antonia* provides us many sneak peeks at a higher reality, its southwestern counterpart—*Death Comes for the Archbishop*—more willingly depicts the soulful scurrying of Catholic tradition. When we turn its pages, we cannot doubt the tremendousness of Cather’s empathy. The novel is Catholic to the bone: *an especial current of Romish devotions* pulses through its veins. Nor is religion an incidental detail. Devoid of Church traditions, the narrative would altogether lack a plot.

Death Comes recounts the valiant exploits of two French Jesuits, Bishop Latour and Father Vaillant, who evangelize New Mexico after its recent annexation to America. The territory is in dire straits after profligate Spanish priests failed to minister to the locals. The two missionaries successfully cultivate the fertile souls of the Pueblo Indians not by chance, but by passing on long-standing European devotions and traditions: As much as Bishop Latour performs the sacraments, he practices an Ignatian poverty of spirit; amid the absence of Catholic architecture, he constructs a Romanesque cathedral

in Santa Fe; and May is Mary’s month, not only because the missionaries declare it, but because the Angelus is on their tongues and the *Alma Redemptoris Mater* is in their throats.⁸ These traditions even go so far as to sanctify the very soil of New Mexico. Latour’s newly-minted cathedral imbues the landscape around it with sacramental meaning. The desert sunset and red mountain vistas, in the proximity of the church, now recall the blood of Christ (as Latour says, “Sangre de Cristo”)—and with it, the blood of old European Saints. As the Bishop observes, “no matter how scarlet the sunset, those red hills never became vermilion, but a more and more intense rose-carnelian; not the colour of living blood ... but the colour of the dried blood of saints and martyrs preserved in old churches in Rome, which liquifies upon occasion.”⁹ The tradition of Romanesque architecture here is more than a stylistic preference—it is a visible force of Apostolic succession, reeling our souls back in time so that, recollecting the Roman litany of the martyrs, we may see how Christ’s first martyrdom wheels across time in constant repetition.

So often the best authors, and Cather among them, inscribe the profoundest realities in cir-



Willa Cather in the Mesa Verde wilds, ca. 1915.

cles because time, when coiled into revolutions, imitates eternity. In our mortal state, time necessarily repeats its elliptical rounds—spring to winter, morning to night, life to death. As monotonous as these cycles may seem, there is communion in the fact that all living men reenact the very circle of life and death that past generations endured, and the fact that we expect the cycle to continue until the end of time links all humans in a single chain: one vaster than we can comprehend. We cannot count every clock-tick of history, yet we feel in our blood that life and death have been swirling round since the days of Eden. Just so, when we gaze at time's immense circularity, we contract all of mankind—every past and future instant—into a single point: the present. Tradition, in this way, is the crossroad between time and the eternal, the screw that threads our beginning to our end.

Of course, circles get a bad rap these days. The quest of our age is not to slay dragons: it is to slay the monotonous cycles of work and the concentric confines of duty. With ease millennials unlatch themselves from hometown and heritage to escape the hamster wheel of adult responsibility. The very idea of committing one's purpose to tradition is, to them, a bore at best, and at worst, a sin—since it means the patriarchy will press on, or that the Jenga blocks of racist institutions will remain intact. The fact is, we have no choice but to live in circular motion. On account of the Fall, evil's ring-like effects necessarily twirl us in a merry-go-round of endless insatiation. The solution is not to escape cyclical living by incessantly “changing it up”: no new location, no new career, no new Amazon package will release you from your mortal coil, from the Ferris Wheel of pleasure and pain. Rather, to end evils' cyclical nature, we must, ironically, chain ourselves to a more eternal circle—Christ's living death and dying life.

The difficulty is that we cannot simply skip from time to eternity: we must join the two

extremes by linking between them rings of Catholic traditions. We forge these rings every time our stomachs become tabernacles. We forge them with our heart's compunction and our lip's Creed. And when our thumbs swivel between *Aves*, we forge them even then, or when we find in the Old Testament ripples of the New. For Cather's Bishop, as well, the very style of the Santa Fe cathedral is a typological ring. One circle will never do—we must *have* many and *be* many—until, by constant regeneration, our time-bound actions become next-to-eternal. How many Masses will have been celebrated throughout all of history? The number, as finite as it is, would make our minds reel into infinity.

Of course, as transfiguring and large-scaled as Catholic traditions are in Cather's novel, the missionaries practice them by paradoxically narrowing their vision: they are utterly French, and their sights are, more often than not, on their motherland. If there is one complaint they have about New Mexico, it

is that the region is not France; Southwestern America, they figure, is uncivilized precisely because it lacks the millennia-long traditions of their homeland. At one point, Bishop Latour and Fr. Vaillant sit down for their Christmas dinner. Instead of a glazed ham like we may expect, they feast on a humble pot of French onion soup. After spooning a mouthful, the Bishop declares that “in all this vast country between the Mississippi and the Pacific Ocean, there is probably not another human being who could make a soup like this.”¹⁰ This is not to say that Fr. Vaillant is a master stock cook. The Bishop, rather, credits the recipe, which “is not the work of one man,” but is “the result of a constantly refined tradition” that stretches back “nearly a thousand years.”¹¹ Here, the soup is not merely a meal. It is a historical identity. To cook its recipe once is to become a culinary superman—to perform the work of a hundred Frenchmen. Nor is it simply French: it is Medieval France, Renaissance France, Enlighten-

While not as vintage as Dante, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* has a top-shelf value. Let us display it on the summit of our bookshelves. Let us humbly confess that the best Catholic American novel of the 20th century was, arguably, written by a Protestant.

ment France, and Victorian France bound in one bowl of broth. In a word, it is a melting pot of historical diversity, if not of nations.

Yet, this Christmas soup is not in France, and the longer the Bishop stays in New Mexico, the more he realizes he is not simply a Frenchman anymore. By his missionary zeal, he has linked ancient European traditions to younger American ones: Our Lady of Guadalupe, the “Sangre de Cristo” sky, and the food of the Pueblo faithful. Just as the Romanesque cathedral progressed from Italy to France and from France to America, its New World iteration reverses the clock, turning time and national identity on its head. The Bishop’s Old World cathedral may have refined his vision of the New World sky, but the New World sky has also refined his vision of Old World cathedrals. He now sees France with the blood-shot eyes of a New Mexican. Amid jutting canyons and rounded archways, one Bishop performs the work of a multitude of saints. He is many men bound in one Catholic broth. So it is. Time welds to time like the interlocking links of the trinity, and the old chain tugs deep within ...

While not as vintage as Dante, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* has a top-shelf value. Let us display it on the summit of our bookshelves. Let us humbly confess that the best Catholic Amer-

ican novel of the 20th century was, arguably, written by a Protestant.

Endnotes:

- 1 Benjamin Ivry, “A Protestant Novelist’s Case for Catholicism,” *Catholic Herald*, October 17, 2019, <https://catholiceraid.co.uk/a-protestant-novelists-case-for-catholicism/>.
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- 4 Stephen Schmalhofer. “The Making of *My Antonia*,” *First Things*, December 17, 2018, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2018/12/the-making-of-my-ntonia>.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Willa Cather. 2018, “#2077: Willa Cather to Roscoe Cather, June 23 [1917],” in *The Complete Letters of Willa Cather*, ed. the Willa Cather Archive team, The Willa Cather Archive, <https://cather.unl.edu/writings/letters/let2077>.
- 8 Willa Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 50, 211.
- 9 Ibid., 278.
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In the wilds, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Willa-Cather-at-Mesa-Verde-ca1915.jpg
Prairie, visitnebraska.com/red-cloud/willa-cather-memorial-prairie



A botanical treasure of 612 acres of native Nebraska prairie, the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie has almost 2 miles of walking and hiking trails open to the public. Located five miles south of Red Cloud on Highway 281 on the Kansas border.



Flannery O'Connor:

Vulnerability and Hope

William Gonch, Ph.D.

Catholics are proud of Flannery O'Connor, but we don't always know what to do with her. She's just too much: too violent, too strange, too bleak. Often, we treat her as a mascot: she proves that Catholics can write great literature, even in the modern era. But when we read her fiction we are left wondering: "Where is redemption in O'Connor? Where is hope?"

If that is you, don't lose heart. Hope is perhaps O'Connor's great contribution to American literature. But she believes that hope is not to be found where we expect it. Hope is a theological virtue, which means that it comes to us through the grace of God. It cannot be seized or willed; it must first be given, and it usually comes through suffering. To see where O'Connor found hope, as well as what she contributes to the American imagination, it is worth first understanding how American literature and culture have imagined its major themes – individualism, society, and freedom.

The dominant strain of the American imagination is Protestant and individualist. Its protagonists reject tradition, history, and society, seeing them as sources of ignorance and oppression. Instead, they find freedom and goodness welling up from their individual consciences. Mark Twain articulates this vision in one of the great novels of American self-reliant individualism, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The protagonist, Huck Finn, is a frontier boy who runs away from his abusive father and the dullness of small-town life and sails down the Mississippi River with his friend Jim, an escaped slave. Huck and Jim enjoy the freedom that they find on the river, living by hunting, fishing, and enjoying untouched nature. When they visit towns on the shore, however, they find a society full of hucksters and con artists. Community and the past are sources of ignorance, superstition, and fraud, from which Huck must free himself; like many great American novels, *Huckleberry Finn* accepts Emerson's state-

ment that “Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members.”

Huck finds superstition and oppression in society; he finds truth by reaching deep within himself. He has been taught that slavery is right and that he is committing theft by helping Jim to escape, but his heart tells him that his friend deserves his loyalty. In the end, he trusts his conscience over his upbringing and helps set Jim free. Morality, then, depends on Huck’s inner goodness: Huck rejects what he has been taught by his elders and discovers the moral truth that he knows in his heart. After freeing Jim, Huck sets out for the frontier so that he can live by his own values rather than those of society. The book ends with his resolution to “light out of for the Territory ahead of the rest” so that he can stay one step the friendly relatives who want to “sivilize” him. On the frontier, away from society, he is free to live the life that he chooses.

In the 19th century, Americans saw the frontier as a place where we could escape the strictures of society and define our own lives. Later, new spaces of freedom replaced the frontier: cities, the suburbs, and the virtual world of the internet. To this day, stories of freedom and self-determination retain immense power in American culture. They show up in our popular culture, our politics, and our everyday conversations. When someone speaks of finding “my truth,” he is channeling Emerson, Twain, Whitman, and other great 19th Century American writers. When we speak of America as a place where you can become anything you want, we are tapping into the same strain of self-determination. Liberals and conservatives both draw on Twain’s vision of an innate desire for self-determination. George W. Bush expressed one version of this vision when he declared that “the desire for freedom resides in every human heart.” Transgender ideology depends on the conviction that I, only I, can decide my identity. And our popular culture teaches us to find truth by searching within ourselves: if you want to blow up the Death Star, you first need to “trust your feelings.”

O’Connor’s protagonists, too, seek, to define their own lives. In most of her stories they fail horribly. But through those failures she charts the limits of American self-definition—and the hope, love, and Grace that lie on the far side.

Her stories make human failure, embodiment, and interdependence—the very things that the mainstream American imagination flees—into the ground for hope.

O’Connor’s story, “Good Country People,” features just such an Emersonian protagonist. The story introduces Hulga Hopewell, a young woman with a Ph.D. in philosophy and a conviction that life is meaningless. Because she has a bad heart and an artificial leg (the legacy of a childhood accident), Hulga lives on a farm with her conventional, middle-class mother. Hulga’s mother worries that her daughter cannot enjoy an ordinary life: “It tore her heart to



“On the Raft.” *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Mark Twain, 1885.

think instead of the poor stout girl in her thirties who had never danced a step or had any normal good times.” But Hulga has no desire for an ordinary life: she thinks that she achieves her highest freedom and dignity by recognizing life’s meaninglessness and refusing to accept conventional illusions. She has even tried literally to define herself: her mother named her “Joy,” but she changed her name to Hulga, the ugliest name she could imagine. Hulga’s name symbolizes her entire character: because beauty is conventional and false, she will embrace ugliness to be true to herself.

One day, a young man named Manley Pointer comes to the door to sell Bibles. He oozes evangelical sincerity and good-neighborliness; everyone except Hulga describes him as “good country people.” He charms Hulga’s mother so thoroughly that Hulga sees him as a challenge: she decides to prove the emptiness of his faith by seducing him. In a satirical sequence that only O’Connor could have written, Hulga musters all the charms available to a reclusive academic and finally brings Pointer up to the family hayloft. Pointer wants her to say that she loves him; she tries to resist, telling him that she has too much self-respect to indulge in illusions like love. But eventually, she gives in. He tells her to prove her love. “How?” she asks, and he says something that shocks her to her core: “Show me where your wooden leg joins on.”

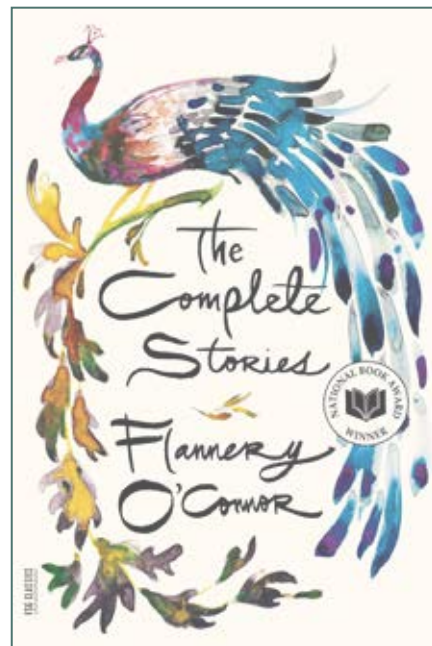
Hulga’s wooden leg, he says, is “what makes you different. You ain’t like anybody else.” Here, her game falters. She is no longer playing with him; she realizes that “with an instinct that came from beyond wisdom” he has “touched the truth about her.” He has understood that her leg has made her different from everyone else. Her mother was right that she has been excluded from normal society and that she would always be dependent on others. Her conviction that the world is meaningless, and that she sees through it, made her special and made her restrictions less restricting. As Pointer sees this, she begins to fall in love with him.

O’Connor throws us one more big twist, but I’ll let you read the story to find out what it is. Nevertheless, I have said enough to describe the story’s core thematic movement. This story is a metaphysical seduction. There is no sex, but Manley Pointer steals Hulga’s innocence in a much deeper way: he steals her illusions about herself. He shows her that her freedom, self-definition, and insight, are all forms of self-defense. The story cruelly sweeps aside Hulga’s illusions—but are we sorry that she has lost her innocence? Her desire to define her own life had isolated her from her mother, from the people around her, and having a place in the world. Bereft, she is now open to the possibility of love.

Like Hulga Hopewell, many O’Connor protagonists see their dreams of autonomy turn out to be illusions. But what makes O’Connor



Illustration of “Good Country People” by Afu Chan.



different from tragic American writers like Melville or Fitzgerald is that the destruction of those illusions paves the way for a hint of Grace. Grace in O'Connor is violent and grotesque because God tries to save characters from a damnation that looks—to them—like independence and self-definition. In O'Connor stories, Grace can appear as a burning farm or a run-in with a circus freak. In her most famous story, "A Good Man is Hard to Find," an old woman is shot to death by a madman. But before she dies, she is able to make a single act of love—the first truly free act that she makes in her life—which prompts her killer to give her an immortal eulogy: "She would of been a good woman...if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life." Death frees the old woman from the trap that she had made of her own life and makes it possible for her to go to her Father.

Likewise, O'Connor frees American fiction from the trap it imposed on itself by Americans' desire for self-determination. In her stories, the freedoms that American culture most cherishes—intellectual independence, commercial accomplishment, rugged self-reliance—turn out to be illusions. Her protagonists are more vulnerable, fragile, and dependent than they thought. But in reckoning with their vulnerability they are thrown open to the grace of God.

O'Connor knew what she wrote about. She was born in Georgia in 1925; in her early twenties she left her home to study fiction, then moved to New York City to write. She had obvious talent, caught the attention of prominent intellectuals, and was launched on a promising career. Then, when she was twenty-seven, she was diagnosed with lupus, an autoimmune disorder that had killed her father and was still little understood. The disease would kill her at age 39; while she lived, she was often in excruciating pain. She could walk only with crutches, and she was forced to move back home to her family farm in rural Georgia so that her mother could care for her. The autobiographical overtones of "Good Country People" are obvious: O'Connor, like Hulga, was an intellectual who glimpsed the world of learning and culture when she was young and then had it taken from her. Her body confined her, and her pain reminded her every day that she would die. But her return to Georgia produced an imaginative revolution and stories that have no parallel in American literature.

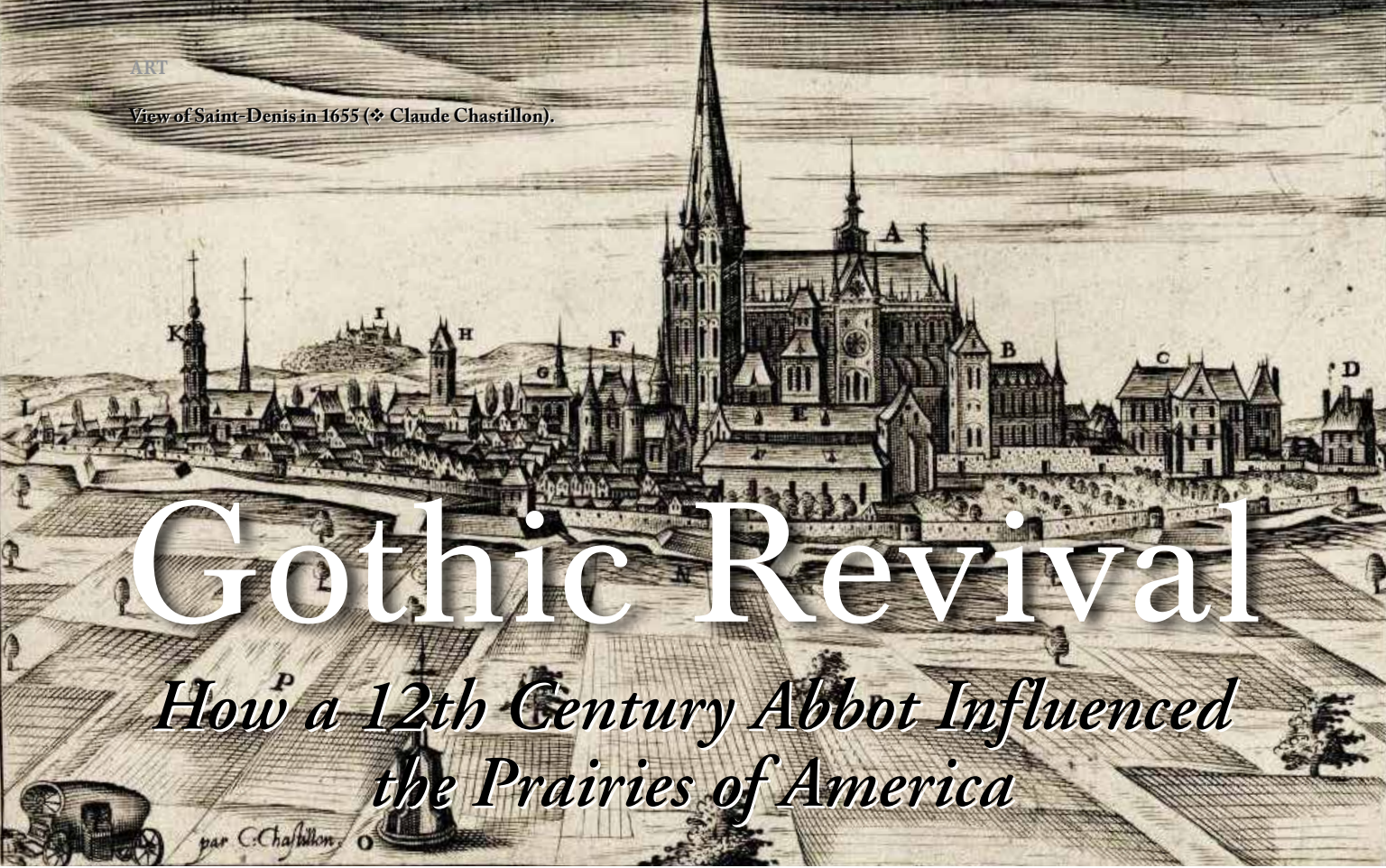


Flannery O'Connor, 1962.

O'Connor's faith, and her experience with lupus, taught her that human freedom, community, and dependence are interconnected. Our bodies make us dependent. We begin as children, dependent on our parents; if we live long enough to grow old, each of us comes to depend on our children and communities. Between childhood and old age, we can sometimes pretend to be independent, but it is always an illusion. Illness, violence, accident, or want, can remind us that we need the love and mercy of other people. O'Connor's illness spared her the illusion of self-determination. But—and here is the key Catholic insight—it is good that we should be prevented from pure independence. Independence isolates us, and it is not good that man should be alone. O'Connor's faith made it possible for her to see the American desire to live life on one's own terms as form of isolation, and to see suffering and family ties as sources of genuine freedom. It is a strange working of grace, and it took a genius and a woman of faith to see it.

Images:

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Gothic Revival

How a 12th Century Abbot Influenced the Prairies of America

Andrew Latham

Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis was no stranger to influence and power. From unknown origins, he rose to become not only a confidant to two kings of France in the 12th century, but with the construction of the Basilica Cathedral of Saint-Denis, also started arguably the most important architectural shift of the second millennium—the Gothic style. This pedigree notwithstanding, he could have never dreamed that his vision, after falling out of style, would again take root in a yet-unknown world, some 700 years after his death.

Ecclesiastical architecture is in constant tension between new and old. Today, many Catholics rebel against any whiff of innovation in sacred design, but for centuries, innovation and experimentation was the norm, indeed, celebrated. But as with all things, design is cyclical. When one style gets pushed to its maximum, another trend takes hold, and often, this trend

will leapfrog backwards, taking cues from a previous generation's expertise.

In painting and sculpture, we see this most clearly with the Renaissance, when artists made a conscious effort to look back to Ancient Rome and Greece and reflect in their compositions those humanist, pagan roots. Architecture took a bit more time to reach back to Classicism, but it exploded on the American scene with the Neoclassical forms seen in the Lincoln Monument, White House—essentially most of the buildings surrounding the National Mall and many federal and state buildings built throughout the nation in the 19th century.

Meanwhile, Protestants, chief among them the Anglicans, after several generations of usurping Catholic churches, needed to build new churches. So where should they get their inspiration, if not Neoclassical? A Catholic would say the answer is obvious—go back to the magnificent Renaissance and Baroque cathedrals and basilicas of Rome, Spain, and

Florence. But for the Anglicans, this was more distasteful than pagan connotations—after all, fundraising through indulgences for the greatest Baroque church in the world, St. Peter’s, was one of the causes of the Protestant revolt.

No, “that papist excess” had no place in Protestant architecture. But Gothic architecture—now, this was “pure” and worthy of their places of worship. And so they built, in Gothic Revival.

Gothic Revival also took on political connotations; with the “rational” and “radical” Neoclassical style being seen by many as associated with republicanism and liberalism (as evidenced by its use in the United States and to a lesser extent in Republican France), the more spiritual and traditional Gothic Revival became associated with monarchism and conservatism, which was reflected by the choice of styles for the rebuilt government centers of the Palace of Westminster in London and Parliament Hill in Ottawa. In *Contrasts: or, a Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages, and similar Buildings of the Present Day* (1836), the architect of Westminster, A.W.N. Pugin expressed his admiration not only for medieval art but for the whole medieval ethos, suggesting that Gothic architecture was the product of a purer society.

This movement swept across the pond, with scores of Protestant churches breaking ground in the mid-1800’s, most notably Trinity Church in New York City and the Cathedral Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in Washington, D.C.

But Catholics on the American continent had no intent on allowing Protestants a monopoly on this exciting new revival, and set to work themselves.

Notre-Dame Basilica in Montreal is perhaps the finest Gothic Revival Catholic church on the continent, and certainly in Canada. The interior of the church is amongst the most dramatic in the world. The vaults are colored deep blue and decorated with golden stars, and the rest of the sanctuary is decorated in blues, azures, reds, purples, silver, and gold. It is filled with hundreds of intricate wooden carvings, and remains the greatest of the grand Catholic churches of French-speaking Canada.

In New York, the great St. Patrick’s Cathedral, completed in 1878, stands as a monument to both the American Catholic explosion in the late 19th century as well as the Catholic history of Europe. In fact, it would be difficult at first glance to be able to discern notable distinctions between St. Patrick’s and the grand *Flamboyant* cathedrals of France in the late Gothic period. Walking into Saint Patrick’s Cathedral and the medieval cathedrals of Europe, one would find a similar atmosphere of beauty and peace. A sentence from Cardinal’s Spellman’s sermon on the occasion of the consecration of the High Altar in May 1942 states it well—*At its portals, the world seems left behind and every advancing step brings heaven nearer and deepens the soul’s union with Divinity.*

But it wasn’t just great cathedrals which bring to light the Catholic Gothic Revival movement



Westminster Palace, London (✧ Wikipedia Commons, Diliff).

of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The small town where I grew up, Saint Marys, Kansas, boasted two churches built with Gothic Revival influences—the original Immaculata Church (with its daughter, the “New Immaculata” nearly a year away from completion) as well as the current diocesan church in town, Immaculate Conception Church. Just 14 miles away, in tiny Flush, Kansas, a farming community pooled their resources to build a small, but magnificent Gothic Revival church out of the native limestone wrested from their fields.

Especially in the heartland of America where workable stone was plentiful, the Gothic Revival movement flourished, with thousands of these miniature descendants of Europe’s grand Cathedrals bursting at the scenes with the ranchers and railmen who were taming the prairies and feeding the nation. Today, art historians have labeled these as “Prairie Gothic” or “Pioneer Gothic,” with influence spreading into other secular buildings as well—think of the house in the background of Grant Wood’s aptly named, “American Gothic.”

One can’t help but imagine what Abbot Suger would think if he could have visited these Prai-

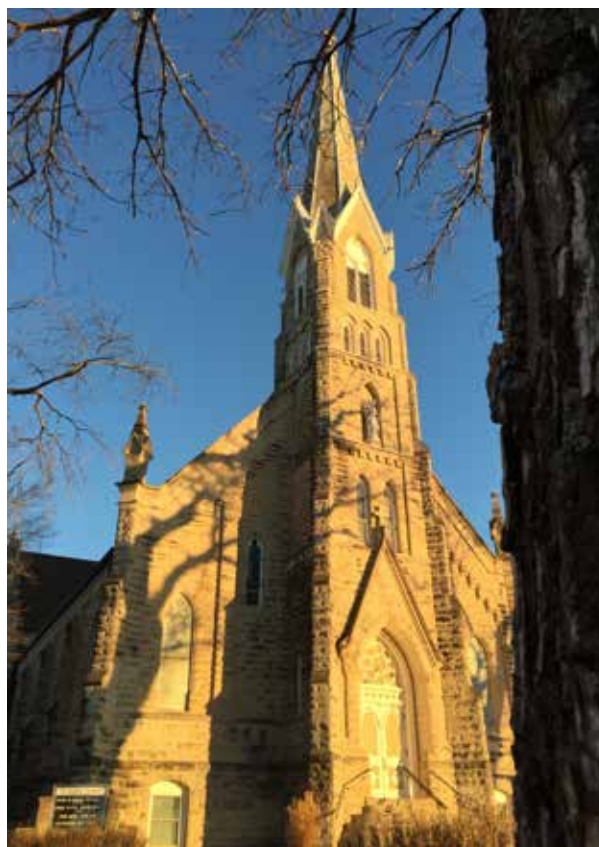
rie Gothic churches in the Heartland of America, especially in their heyday of early 20th century. Aristocratic though he was, he would be at home among these sunburnt, tough people, mirroring in their own way the gargantuan task of Medieval Europe—lifting stone from the earth, erecting these stone temples to the Almighty. Certainly, he would be edified that this strange new nation and its people were carrying on the tradition of raising churches by hand with the same care he did almost eight centuries before.



Parliament Hill, Ottawa, Canada (❖ Greymouser).



Immaculate Conception Church, Saint Marys, KS (Facebook).



Saint Joseph's Church, Flush, KS (Author).



Cathedral Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, Washington, DC (❖ Siubo11A).



Trinity Church, NYC (❖ Donna Cheung).



Notre Dame Interior, Montreal (Author).



St. Patrick's Cathedral, NYC (❖ Jean-Christophe Benoit).



Immaculata Church, Saint Marys (KS State Historical Society).





The American Gothic House (also Dibble House) in Eldon, Iowa, designed in the Carpenter Gothic style with a distinctive upper window. Grant Wood, who observed the house only twice in his lifetime, made only an initial sketch of the house—he completed *American Gothic* at his studio in Cedar Rapids.

American Gothic is a 1930 painting by Grant Wood in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. Wood was inspired to paint what is now known as the American Gothic House along with “the kind of people he fancied should live in that house.” It depicts a farmer standing beside his daughter—often mistakenly assumed to be his wife. The painting’s name is a word play on the house’s architectural style, Carpenter Gothic.

The figures were modeled by Wood’s sister Nan Wood Graham and their dentist Dr. Byron McKeeby. The woman is dressed in a colonial print apron evoking 20th-century rural Amer-

icana while the man is adorned in overalls covered by a suit jacket and carries a pitchfork. The plants on the porch of the house are mother-in-law’s tongue and beefsteak begonia, which also appear in Wood’s 1929 portrait of his mother, *Woman with Plants*.

American Gothic is one of the most familiar images of 20th-century American art and has been widely parodied in American popular culture. From 2016 to 2017, the painting was displayed in Paris at the Musée de l’Orangerie and in London at the Royal Academy of Arts in its first showings outside the United States.

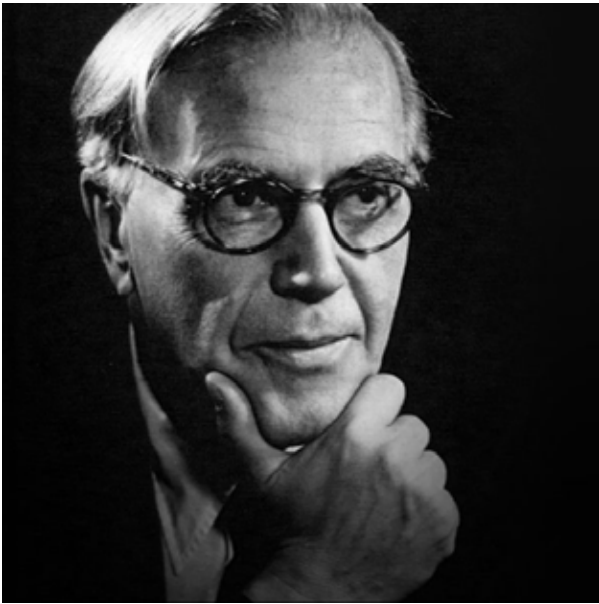
Catholicism, the American Imagination, *and the Pluralist Beast*

John Rao, D.Phil., Oxon.

Some years ago I was travelling with my wife and three children in an isolated region of Germany packed with visitors for a once-in-a-decade festival. After having hunted unsuccessfully for lodging until quite late at night we finally came upon a lovely little village isolated deep in a forest in the mountains. I charged into its one guesthouse, the Hotel Beethoven, with my desperate request for accommodation at whatever cost, to which the immensely fat German innkeeper at the reception desk responded: “I am so drunk from so much beer that I do not have the faintest idea how even to begin to shape an answer to your query.” I have to confess that, *mutatis mutandis*, my first reaction to a call from *The Angelus* to write on Catholics and the national imagination reduced me to a position similar to that of my inebriated German host. I was tempted to reply, incredulously, that my brain had been so pickled by a life spent in the alternate universe created by American pluralist society that I could not imagine how Catholics

might relate to its lunatic vision of creativity in any way whatsoever. Like Ezra Pound, asked what he thought about being released from the nuthouse to which the government had temporarily committed him, it seemed to me that “I was, after all, in America; and all of America is a mental institution.” A Catholic dialogue with the *American Imagination*? Forget about it.

But my corpulent Teutonic innkeeper did in fact find us a room, and further reflection made it clear to me that a brushoff of the *Angelus* would be a copout both insulting to Catholicism as well as to my fellow citizens. It would make America and Americans as such seem to be the problem and not the evil pluralist monster on whose back they had been forced to ride. It would thereby insinuate that the Faith could not push a “raw” nation and its inhabitants—as *natural* as any others it had dealt with in the past—off the *unnatural* beast propelling them to their perdition, so as to effect their redemption, and that of their creativity along with it. More-



Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889–1977), German Catholic philosopher and religious writer.

over, this copout would have neglected the reality of some very serious proofs of imaginative national genius, such as a literature on a level with that produced by the French, the Russians, and the British.

In other words, there are “Seeds of the Logos” in the United States just as elsewhere, which Catholicism can and must appreciate and nurture for a joint assault against the befuddling poisons ceaselessly fed to both of them through their common and all too deadly, pluralist American environment. What the Seeds of the Logos need to fight pluralist stunting of natural imaginative growth is physical exercise; guidance in how to twirl about in a “dance of life” rather than to fall flat on their face in the *danse macabre* shaped by those in charge of the pluralist “make believe ballroom.”

Dietrich von Hildebrand was my chief instructor in the choreography of the “dance of life,” teaching me its steps beginning by noting those taken by the man facing the back of Plato’s cave in *The Republic*. Questioning whether the shadows that he saw could honestly explain themselves on their own terms, that curious soul was awakened to the need for more enlightenment in order to understand their true character and message. This caused him to break free of the chains limiting his ability to “wonder,” leading him ever upward, towards the sunlight at the opening of the cave, where he learned of the flesh and blood beings casting the shadows

that he had taken for the substance of reality. In his excitement at his discovery, he returned to awaken his former fellow-prisoners of the darkness, only to be greeted with their unwillingness to hear the truth and their fatal hostility.

Explanation of such a tragedy obviously required knowledge of further steps for someone wishing to dance the dance of life successfully. This, as von Hildebrand argued, meant more “light” that could only be given through a still more sublime awakening to “every best gift, and every perfect gift,” which “is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change, nor shadow of alteration” (James 1: 17). Through God’s Revelation, Old and New, that further light lacking to the Greeks concerning the essential truths regarding a good Creation, the reality of free will, the shock of Original Sin, and the need for Redemption through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and membership in His Mystical Body was made available to them—not just to their intellectual elite, but to the population as a whole.

Through that supreme and final light, the believer’s imagination is stirred to a *wondrous* acceptance of a natural word external to himself in all of its exciting fullness, a deep *sorrow* over its tragic Fall, and a heartfelt *joy* and *hope* over the possibilities of its correction and transformation through the embrace of the reality of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. He also becomes aware of his enlistment in an army *struggling* mightily against enemies, demonic and human, external and internal. *Awakened* to all the steps needed for dancing the dance of life, he realizes that *performing* them properly will entail a life-long battle, with his potential pitfalls legion, his successes all the more glorious, his failures all the more terrible. What creative spirit’s imagination would not be electrified due to contact with such awe-inspiring themes?

Sadly, the unnatural pluralist beast providing the energy driving the American Regime works vigorously in the opposite direction. Rather than *awakening* the individual’s active imagination, it does all that it can to *put it to sleep*. Rather than encouraging the productive, corrective, transforming dance of life that ought to be the birthright of all free men and women, it forcibly shoves the human person into a debilitating *danse macabre*; a dull-witted, endless, meaningless, misanthropic marathon

draining mind, spirit, and body of everything that he might make of himself.

Let us put this stultifying Regime type of dance instruction in high relief by first returning to the Greco-Catholic ballroom. From its aesthetics-driven outset, the whole purpose of the Greek approach to life was not to engage in a diverting little parlor sport, but actually to get somewhere; in Homeric language, “to seize possession of the Beautiful.” Plato and the other Socratics demonstrated that this could not come about without the aid of a philosophy-driven “seizing” of the True and the Good as well. Then, the Catholic Faith gave the final “light” to the souls climbing upwards, out of the cave, enabling the originally purely aesthetic and philosophic minded hunters to make their claim upon possession of the Beautiful eternally solid though union of their bodies and souls with the loving, Triune God.

In contrast, the Pluralist Regime’s psychosis-inducing instruction in the *danse macabre* is centered upon an obliteration of the connection of the *hunt* for the True, the Good, and the Beautiful from any possibility of actually *obtaining* them. For the Regime tells its subjects that they can, indeed, all hunt *internally* to their hearts’ content—thinking and believing whatever they want—but that they can never *externally* do what they may well conclude that they absolutely must do to reach the goal that they have come to embrace. They are expressly prohibited from connecting thoughts, beliefs, and actions in the world around them. Why? Because to do so might offend those with divergent thoughts and beliefs, thereby leading to the single unforgiveable sin against the Spirit of the Pluralist Beast: *divisiveness*.

Paralyzing fear of divisiveness is bad enough for the mental health of any individual, given that this now does in fact reduce the play of everyone’s imagination to the level of a parlor sport within whatever particular “clubhouse” he might be operating, creating a mindboggling, frustrating, psychological nightmare. His imagination allowed to go nowhere or to produce anything having a social impact is consigned to impotence.

Nevertheless, the damage done by this reductionism to the Greco-Catholic believer in the Mystical Body of Christ that houses him, is correspondingly worse still. His already full individual awakening to the wonder, the

tragic sorrow, the hope, the joy, and dramatic struggle of existence is now shut hermetically sealed from the outside world. An enormous stone slab is placed between him and the rest of Creation, preventing his evangelization of those still fixated on the dark shadows of the back wall of the cave, his shaping of the environment in which he lives in a way that he knows will aid him to “seize eternal possession of the Beautiful” if used properly, and his efficacious defense against enemies working to corrupt them to block his hunt for the fulfillment that is his birthright.

In speaking of such enemies, we end up hitting upon the central *fraud* perpetrated by the already *psychotic* Pluralist Regime. This fraud, also deadly to the human imagination, ensures the violation of the liberty—however one may define that slippery term—of almost all those riding on the back of the monster.

Forging the pathway to that injustice was, ironically enough, the labor of the naturalist individualism of the Pluralist Beast and its claim that this atomism would guarantee the perfection of everyone’s personal creative potential and freedom. But what that naturalist individualism actually made certain was that the very concept of the hunt for the True, the Good, and the Beautiful was entirely abandoned by those agreeing to its self-destructive *modus operandi*. A hunt leading *upwards* and outside of himself was replaced by the individual’s *downward* and purely internal focus upon satisfying his own limited, unexamined, ultimately irrational, and sinful “needs.” And this entailed an arrogant neglect of all the natural and supernatural, rational and faith-provided, voluntary and authoritative guides to correction and real perfection; the contemptuous dismissal of all of the medicines that might “awaken” him from his dull-witted, sinful, dogmatic slumber.

The almost millennium-long history of the development of the naturalist individualism upon which the Pluralist Beast feeds, involving Manichean, Nominalist, Protestant, Mechanist, Atomist, and ultimately Nihilist forebears, is obviously too long for us to discuss here. But what has it meant for its victims’ “imagination” and “creativity”? By turning them solely inward to work with the material offered purely by sinful souls doomed to wallow in and develop their hopeless imperfections, they shrivel and die a pathetic death.



Louis Veillot (1813-1883), French Catholic journalist, polemicist, letter writer, and author.

Louis Veillot, the nineteenth century French Catholic critic, has much to tell us in this regard, starting from the fact that “the reduction of the truth has diminished intelligence, hearts, and even the instinct of life” (L. Veillot, *Mélanges*, Paris, 1933, XI, 337). A world submitting to its self-imposed limitations, transmitted in a “dishonored jargon which would draw forth cries of indignation from the most careless writer of one hundred years ago” (I, 327), he continues, “sets sail on a sea of platitudes. . .where it will grow immensely bored” (XIII, 448). Men taught to believe that their sensual vices are “the summit of virtue” become “barbarians of civilization” (XII, 401), incapable of even sinning greatly, since “everything is lacking to the poverty of our times, including the brilliance and often even the substance of the vices it would like to have” (IV, 2-3; XII, 426-420).

No more men anywhere! The production of man has ceased. . . There are some men of more or less complete honesty, but lacking talent; some very incomplete men of talent lacking all honesty; no attachment to any truth, but the most senseless attachment to the most mad errors; no more good sense, except in damning uselessly the impotent and evil works one persists in pursuing; no more pride in the face of anything base, yet puerile and dangerous and even cowardly arrogance in face of all that which one must fear. . . (XII, 360-361).

Horrified by the fact that the great Chicago Fire seemed to be viewed in the United States as an opportunity for further economic growth rather than a tragedy, Veillot felt that America offered the Christian West as a whole a warning of what was to come. A full Pluralist Regime, composed of individual sensualists, would be inhabited by “men without history, without cradles and without tombs; adventurers of both sexes who are not even barbarians.” The citizens of its cities would be “gathered together solely to make one another mutually sweat gold,” and produce nothing of imaginative value whatsoever (XI, 333).

This people does not cry for its dead. It only knows how to cry for money. Fire can grip its cities, but it devours in them neither a monument nor an art object, nor a memory, and the money melted is not money lost at all. One draws it from the ruins; it is often even good business. (XI, 34).

One can look at North America and the direction in which it is headed: its rapid progress, owed to the most brutalizing work, has fascinated Europe: but already the true results of this exclusively material progress appear. Barbarism, wicked behavior, bankruptcy, systematic destruction of the natives, imbecilic slavery of the victors, devoted to the most harsh and nauseating life under the yoke of their own machines. America might sink completely into the ocean and the human race would not have lost anything. Not a saint, not an artist, not a thinker—at least if one does not also call thought that aptitude for twisting iron to open pathways to packages (XII, 359-360).

Yes, the reduction of the imagination to cheap, material vulgarity would be the main *widespread consequence* of naturalist individualism. But the *fraud* that would be perpetrated by the fully developed Pluralist Beast lies elsewhere. This is to be found in the fact that while, for fear of “divisiveness” the average American, Catholic and non-Catholic, does indeed keep whatever thoughts and beliefs he still retains to himself, the thorough-going immorality engendered by the system as such ensures that the most willful egotists, indifferent to any “divisive” barrier between thought and action, win control over the external social order, happily bending the “liberty” of everyone else to their desires. And they are utterly contemptuous and incapable of “imagining” the True, the Good,



Knight, Death and the Devil by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528).

and the Beautiful, or the wonder, sorrow, joy, and hope that acceptance of God's Creation, Redemption, correction of sins, and transformation in Christ provide. To paraphrase Chateaubriand, referring to the union of Talleyrand, the corrupted man of mind and spirit, and Fouché, the outright bandit, the fully developed Pluralist Regime guarantees us the spectacle of Vice and Crime walking arm in arm and building a "culture" that pleases only them.

No, there can be no commerce between the "awakened" Catholic mind and spirit on the one hand, and the "sleeping" American Pluralist vicious-and-criminal "imagination" on the other. But, once again, that must never be said to be true with respect to America and Americans as such. Just as Catholicism corrected and transformed the warlike spirit of the Germans and Vikings, leading to the ideal of the crusading knight and the literature of the *chansons de geste*, it can and must do the same with the imaginative spirit of Americans like Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allen Poe, the Southern Agrarians, Paul Elmer More, Irving Babbitt, H.L. Mencken, and many, many, others, all of whom, in different ways, were at

least partially "awakened" to aspects not just of natural or supernatural Truth, but also the crippling problems of a society subjected to the will of the Pluralist Beast and its vicious and criminal minions.

How can the necessary correction and transformation be accomplished? It can only progress through the difficult work of evangelization and constant struggle. For the representatives of the truly imaginative and creative American spirit, the national Seeds of the Logos, feel themselves, as T.S. Eliot noted, to be "outsiders," often thinking that for survival's sake they need to "go into exile," either to Europe or to New York City or to the precincts of some university, whether Ivy League or parochial, the latter preferably southern in location. We Catholics, who are perhaps even more "in this environment, but not of it," must keep their accomplishments alive and expand upon them, joining them together with all of the cultural achievements that our Classical and Catholic past have produced before them.

Albrecht Dürer has an engraving of a Christian knight wending his way through a wild forest. He is a portrait of manliness, dominating a horse that is ennobled by its rider's control. Demons and threats of all kinds appear in the wilderness to deflect him from his path, all to no avail. The Heavenly City lies in the background, and the Christian warrior intends to use his strength to carve his way to it. The same kind of engraving, *mutatis mutandis*, could have been made to indicate the active, affirmative strength of the Christian teacher, statesman, king, or poet. These are the kind of men that God wants and the Pluralist Beast seeks to destroy. It is with the single-minded courage of Dürer's knight that American Catholic patriots must separate out the chaff from the wheat of the national imagination and move forward with the Seeds of the Logos to the transformation of all things American in Christ.



Two of America's Best

Bridget Bryan

As Americans, we love to watch the underdog raise himself up by his bootstraps and flourish: here are two American saints born into wealth who enabled this idea in paradoxical ways that only believers of the invisible world can understand. The heroines in our media and entertainment have always reached for more; these two heroines have done just that—and lived happily ever after.

(So many saintly men and women *made* America. The author hopes that the reader will understand that the heroines shared here are not so much a sign of preference, but rather a sign of great constraint. The venerated related here are those that bring a unique story and considerations to this day and age.)

St. Elizabeth Anne Seton: Wife, Mother, Foundress Immolated by Frequent Holocausts

An accomplished equestrian, writer of poetry, mother and wife,¹ Elizabeth Ann Bailey Seton was born into the highest levels of colonial New York society. Her formation from her Episcopalian well-connected family made Elizabeth Ann an extremely well-rounded valiant woman. But when her spouse died, a business friend and a trip abroad changed her life. That life change would shape America in the 19th century.

Elizabeth was born in New York City on August 28, 1774, in the era of the American Revolution. Her age witnessed the redcoats leaving and the Stars and Stripes newly flying amid fifes and drums. Loss marked life from an early age: she lost her mother and little sister at age three, but her father's spiritual life gave the family much stability. A college professor of renown at Columbia University, he was also deeply religious. From him, Elizabeth learned to love the scriptures, especially the psalms, examined her conscience daily, and developed a deep love for humanitarian work. Her father

would later remarry a lady whose family was connected to the Roosevelts. The deep affection within the family, combined with her strong father, kept Elizabeth anchored in the midst of her wealthy upbringing within the first families of America.

On January 25, 1794, Elizabeth married William Magee Seton, whom she loved dearly. A happy marriage led to a strong bond between her and her sister-in-law, Rebecca Seton. In her Elizabeth found the “friend of her soul,” and as they went about on missions of mercy they were called the “Protestant Sisters of Charity.”²

Waves of deep sorrow soon enveloped those sweet times. William developed tuberculosis while sorting out his father’s financial affairs, experiencing his sudden death and orphaned siblings. Elizabeth’s own dear father passed away. Stretched too thin, William’s own health wore down and doctors recommended a trip to Europe. In 1803, while dear Rebecca kept the Seton’s four younger children, William, Elizabeth, and their eldest daughter journeyed across the Atlantic to Tuscany, where the Filicchi, business friends, lived. William’s spirits waned, however, and despite Elizabeth’s heroic efforts to rally and encourage him, he passed away in Pisa within weeks of arriving in Italy. The Filicchi took Elizabeth and her daughter under their wing, befriending them during their time of grief. Old friends of late William, they offered the Catholic Faith as a consolation to the grieving widow’s heart.

During the time with this Catholic family “and in the churches of Italy Mrs. Seton first began to see the beauty of the Catholic Faith.” The convent life especially attracted her.³ Accompanied by Mr. Antonio Filicchi, they returned in June 1804, to the fatherless family. Sorrowfully, Rebecca died a month later. This time of great suffering for Elizabeth and her children coupled with her time in Europe caused a “great spiritual perplexity.” She prayed constantly for light: “If I am right Thy grace impart still in the right to stay. If I am wrong Oh, teach my heart to find the better way.”⁴

Elizabeth’s protestant spiritual leader tried to dissuade her from entertaining ideas of converting to Catholicism, while Filicchi presented the claims of the Faith. He also arranged a correspondence between Elizabeth and both Bishop Cheverus, the first Bishop of Boston, a survivor of the horrors of the French Revolution, and



Elizabeth Ann Seton at time of her wedding.
(www.pillaratholic.com/p/the-hamilton-saint-elizabeth-seton?s=r)



Elizabeth at the bedside of her ill oldest daughter Anna Maria.
Drawing by S. Ruth Jonas, SC.

(www.srcharitycinti.org/2021/01/06/celebrating-elizabeth-seton-elizabeth-the-mother/)



The minor basilica and shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, Emmitsburg, MD.

([Acroterion, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Seton_shrine_basilica_Emmsburg_MD1.jpg](https://acroterion.commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Seton_shrine_basilica_Emmsburg_MD1.jpg))

Bishop Carroll, the first Catholic Bishop of the United State of America. Filicchi's true friendship and the religious correspondence clarified Elizabeth's perplexities. She was baptized into the Catholic Church on Ash Wednesday, March 15, 1805, and received her first Holy Communion on March 25.

Elizabeth and her children hailed from prominent first families in the New York area, (she even knew Alexander Hamilton,⁵ one of the Founding Fathers of the United States). Yet in spite of these connections, Elizabeth's conversion cut her off from any financial or social advantages since English-turned-American Colonial United States was deeply anti-Catholic. In addition to the heartbreak of the death of her dearest friends, husband William and sister-in-law Rebecca, Elizabeth's own family tried to enact state legislation to drive her from New York because she sparked the conversion of her younger sister-in-law Cecilia Seton.

To make ends meet for her children, Elizabeth had started a school, but false rumors about her work circulated and resulted in its closure. Everywhere she turned seemed to be a closed door, with the exception of Filicchi sending her sons to college. At the suggestion of Bishop Dubourg (the same who asked Mother Barat's Sisters to come to the Great Plains and St. Louis), Elizabeth founded a school for girls in Emmitsburg, Maryland, near Baltimore. Her sons went to college nearby, and her girls were able to go through the education she was making possible for other Catholic girls. For herself, the spiritual life that she longed for was more easily accessible.

She was drawn to religious life. Dedicated to the education of young souls, starting with her own children, Elizabeth soon began dressing in simple black clothes like some of the nuns she had seen in Italy. Others began joining her work. Her two sisters-in-law, Cecilia and Harriet Seton joined; soon the school was not only full of pupils but postulants seeking formation from their schoolmistress. In 1809 Mrs. Seton took her vows privately before both Archbishop Carroll and her daughter Anna. This began a new religious order: "Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's, the first community for religious women established in the United States."⁶ Modeled after the rules of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, it was approved by Archbishop Carroll in January 1812.

She was first a mother though, and her own warm words, backed up by her superior, sound even a little indulgent:

"[T]he dear ones have their first claim which must ever remain inviolate. Consequently, if at any period, the duties I am engaged in should interfere with those I owe to them, I have solemnly engaged with our good Bishop John Carroll, as well as my own conscience, to give the darlings their right, and to prefer their advantage in everything."⁷

The growth of order began with two "holocausts," that of her dear sisters-in-law: Harriet died in late 1809 and Cecilia in 1810.

Against her will, and despite the fact that she still had to care for her children, Elizabeth Anne Seton was elected as superior. The community grew, and further holocausts were asked. Mother Seton's elder daughter Anne, a postulant, grew sick and after three months died, receiving her final vows on her death bed in 1812. Elizabeth conveyed her grief in these words:

"For three months after Nina [Anna] was taken, I was so often expecting to lose my senses and my head was so disordered that unless for the daily duties always before me I did not know much of what I did or what I left undone."⁸

In 1813 Mother Seton and 17 other women made their vows and received the Sulpicians as the fathers of their communities. As their school for the well-to-do girls flourished, their work for the poor and orphans also prospered. The Sisters of Charity spread to Philadelphia. The order came full circle in New York and from then on spread, via near 10 mph bumpy horse-drawn carriage rides, to more than 30 dioceses across the country. By founding these schools Mother Seton was a pioneer of Catholic education in America.⁹

In the midst of her travel and formation work, Mother Seton was busy with her creative intellect. She found time to translate spiritual books from French. She wrote copiously in diaries and correspondence which reveal that during much of her religious life she was afflicted with a desolation of soul.¹⁰ Yet all accounts show that she accepted this purification and chose the road of the "cheerful man."

One more holocaust, her youngest, Rebecca, would be asked of her before she herself died. “For nine weeks, Elizabeth held Rebecca day and night, ‘even eating my meal with one hand often behind her pillow while she rested on my knees—her pains could find no relief or solace but in her own poor Mother so happy to bear them with her.’”¹¹ After much long-suffering, her youngest daughter Rebecca died of tuberculosis.¹²

Elizabeth was elected, against her will, for two more terms as mother superior. Then, afflicted with pulmonary affection, she died on January 4, 1821. She was survived by a daughter who would later become a remarkable religious, and two sons, one of whom would become a fine husband and father impactful children.¹³ Mother Seton became the first American-born citizen to be beatified (1963) and then canonized (1975).

From a wealthy socialite to nearly a beggar, she suffered heartbreak after heartbreak as she strove to care for her soul and the spiritual and temporal welfare of her children. Through this suffering, Elizabeth, in her docility to the will of God, achieved a type of immortality as a mother and an educator. Author Carrie Gress writes “Mother Seton never lost sight of her role as a true mother to all who came to her in need.”¹⁴ In the spirit of a mother, as an educator, Elizabeth planted the seeds of Catholic education in the United States, and founded the first congregation for women in the United State. Now “her legacy now includes religious congregations in the United States and Canada, whose members work on the unmet needs of people living in poverty in North America and beyond.”¹⁵ Elizabeth Ann Seton left all worldly possessions in converting to Catholicism, and yet she helped enable “a whole new world” in hearts and souls.

St. Katharine Drexel: Millionaire Servant to African Americans and Native Americans

St. Katharine Drexel was an heiress of great fortune, an American princess (complete with a stepmother), who learned at a young age how to show compassion and use her wealth as a tool. She gave it all up to pursue a new ideal and let her love encircle the African Americans and Native Americans in spite of degrading segregation and Protestant white supremacy.



St. Katharine Drexel, photograph, ca. 1910-1920.
(commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Katharine_Drexel.jpg)



Katherine Drexel out with donkeys and men.
(blogs.shu.edu/crra/2013/07/17/saint-katharine-drexel-1858-1955-of-the-sisters-of-the-blessed-sacrament-for-indians-and-colored-people-s-b-s-with-charlie-mitchell-navajo-and-franciscans-while-visiting-st-isabels-mi/)



Katherine Drexel with children.
(stmaryltdtown.org/apostolate/saint-katharine-drexel-society/)

Katharine's life was similar to Elizabeth Anne Seton's. Both grew up in wealthy families. Both lost their mothers. Both witnessed their fathers spending time in prayer, and their parents giving aid to others. Whereas Elizabeth was born into Protestantism, the Drexel family was one of the pillars of Catholicism in Philadelphia.

Katharine was the second child, born on November 26, 1858 to a wealthy Philadelphia family, Francis Drexel and Hannah Langstroth. Katharine's mother died 5 weeks after her birth. She and her older sister lived with family while her father grieved. He later remarried in 1860 to Emma Bouvier, who became a loving mother to the two girls and their new little sister. Together the family of five had a tight-knit but fruitful life. Francis looked at his money as a way of helping the common good and he quietly did much in Philadelphia to that end. Emma showed her daughters how to do the same, making visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and opening their house up regularly to aid the poor and needy. Katharine had the best of everything, including a religious education, travel, and a grand debut into society.

"But when she nursed her stepmother through a three-year terminal illness, she saw that all the Drexel money could not buy safety from pain or death, and her life took a profound turn."¹⁶ Katharine wondered if Christ was calling her to the religious life. After her stepmother's death, Katharine wrote to her old parish priest and spiritual director, Bishop O'Connor about it. "He advised her to "Think, pray and wait."¹⁷

In 1885 her father suddenly died. The sisters inherited the family fortune, each of them coming into \$7 million dollars. During this time, on "a trip to the Western part of the United States, Katharine, as a young woman, saw the plight and destitution of the native Indian-Americans."¹⁸ In Protestant America, any person of color was commonly treated as inferior to the white man, regardless of metaphysical equality. To deny the metaphysical equality of another human is to break up the bonds of a loving society geared towards the common good. "This experience aroused her desire to do something specific to help alleviate their condition"¹⁹ and those of the African Americans as well.

In 1887 (St. Thérèse of Liseux would have been a young child in France at this time), her

two sisters and she went to Rome on pilgrimage. There, Katharine and her sisters had a private audience with Pope Leo XIII. Katharine, kneeling at his feet, pleaded for a missionary priest to be sent to the Indians of the United States. The Pope responded: "Why not, my child, yourself become a missionary?" Later, Katharine told her sisters "she did not know what the Pope meant and she was very frightened and sick."²⁰ What the pope was proposing was very different from the contemplative life she had begun to imagine.

During this period of discernment, Katharine began to give, as a layperson, in the area that pained her heart. With her sisters, she visited remote reservations with Msgr. Joseph Stephan, Director of the Catholic Bureau of Indian Missions and Bishop O'Connor. She "began building schools on the reservations, providing food, clothing and financial support." Aware also of the suffering of the black people, she began to extend the same love to them.²¹ Bishop O'Connor finally agreed Katharine had a religious vocation, and almost commanded her to found a new order serving the Indians and Colored People. She was appalled at the thought. She did not think herself virtuous enough.

Her correspondence with Bishop O'Connor shows the struggle: "I know the privations, the trials, the temptations, and I ask myself, could I go through all these things in a manner suitable for edifying the religious of my order?" she asked. He replied, "I was never so sure of any vocation, not even my own, as I am of yours. If you do not establish the order in question, you will allow to pass an opportunity of doing immense service to the Church which may not occur again." Towards the end of his letter, her director writes, "Even as a foundress, you will have your faults, but God not you will do the work. He often makes use of very weak instruments. The question is not will you be all you should be, but does God will you to be his instrument."²²

To aid in discernment, Katharine made a retreat which ended on the feast of St. Joseph. On March 19, 1889, she wrote: "It was only this morning that I could promise Our Lord to please Him by entering fully into your plan of founding an order. As long as I look on self, I cannot. Our Lord gives and will give me the grace always to look at Him."²³ To Bishop

O'Connor she wrote, "The feast of Saint Joseph brought me the grace to give the remainder of my life to the Indians and the Colored."²⁴

On February 12, 1891, Katharine began a novitiate with the Sisters of Mercy in Pittsburgh, with the understanding that in two years she would found her own order, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People. She would, she vowed, "be the mother and servant of these races."²⁵ Two years later, she received the religious habit and the name of Sister Mary Katharine. Others joined her; the motherhouse was established at St. Elizabeth's Convent, Cornwell's Height, Bensalem, Pennsylvania. Here St. Frances Cabrini would discuss with her friend, Sr. Mary Katharine, the need for her to travel to Rome in order to get her Order's Rule approved.²⁶

Sr. Katharine's first two schools were in Virginia, one for black girls, and the other for black boys. Both were vocational schools to enable the children to become financially independent by the time they graduated. A school for Pueblo Children in New Mexico was next on the list followed by Xavier College (later Xavier University) in Louisiana in 1915. This Catholic University was the first and only all-black college and a pioneer first in co-education. The focus of this college was to train lay teachers to staff schools for black children in Louisiana.

Some met her work with hate. One of many warnings from the KKK threatened to harm those carrying out her mission:

"We want an end to services here," read the sign nailed on a Catholic Church in Beaumont, Texas, in 1922 "We will not stand by while white priests consort with n— wenches in the face of our families. Suppress it in one week or flogging with tar and feathers will follow."²⁷

In this era, which witnessed the Great War, Prohibition, the Great Depression, and is era that some of our grandparents can still recall, not all agreed with or understood Katharine's work. These women in habits withstood the fearful, angry pressure of the American "caste system." Outside of the South, Segregationists harassed her work, burning a school in Pennsylvania.²⁸

Prudence was needed. Mother Katharine, seeing the dominating habit of segregation, made the decision not to admit black women to her convents "in part because laws in some



(www.svdpskdrexel.org/ineed-help.html)

Southern states would force them to house black and white nuns in segregated convents, and in part to avoid drawing worthy candidates away from two all-black religious orders already established."²⁹

For the daughter of a millionaire, she was an example of minimalism and fortitude. She traveled by train, tirelessly. Though her personal income through her father's trust was \$1000 a day, she lived most simply. She possessed the same pair of shoes for ten years and used items, such as pencils, down the erasers.

Mother Katharine remained vigilant yet realistic and detached. She was against segregation and yet accepted that things would probably not change within her time: she focused on the good she and her order could do instead of being derailed by perfection. Every request for money, she personally read, "often writing her decision on a note on the letter of inquiry."³⁰ Squabbles over details of management with the local priests and bishops were avoided because she kept to the order's apostolate. By 1942 she had established a system of 40 mission centers and 23 rural schools in 13 states.

Sr. Katharine lived through three of America's greatest wars: the Civil War, WWI, and WWII. She lived through times of great change: from horse and buggy and kerosene lamps to cars, planes, electricity, telephones, and television.

In 1935 Sister suffered a severe heart attack. She survived it, yet it forced her to slow down and become a powerful tool of prayer. The next 20 years became a passive time for her, dedicated to prayer at St. Elizabeth's Convent. "Quiet, intense prayer from a small room overlooking

the sanctuary” filled her days. “Small notebooks and slips of paper record her various prayers, ceaseless aspirations, and meditations.”³¹

She died there peacefully on March 3, 1955, at the age of 96. “At the time of her death, 501 members of her order were teaching in 63 schools and missions in 21 states.”³² Sr. Katharine outlived her two sisters, and per their father’s will, the remaining fortune was then distributed to the charities he had listed in the will. Sister Katharine’s cause for canonization was taken up less than 10 years after her death, and she was canonized on October 1, 2000, as the second American-born saint. “Today, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament remains a religious order devoted to the education and care of Native Americans and African Americans.”³³

A parting word

St. Elizabeth Anne Seton and St. Katerina Drexel followed their hearts for the sake of the Greatest Good. Each bequeathed to their children a legacy of love and eternal glory. These heroic women did more than dream of a better world, a world without end: they believed in it, hoped in it, and gave it to others. Each lay down her life in the pursuit of making that world possible for others.

About the Author: Bridget Bryan has been writing and drawing since she was ten years old. Upon her bachelor’s in Catholic General Education, SMC, she taught for 10 years within SSPX schools and traveled the world in the summertime. Bridget currently works as a freelance artist and also for the LIVE-ACTION, a pro-life organization. You can follow her work at bridgetbryan.com where she’s excited to share this year’s project: The Camino de Immaculata: a travelogue capturing the physical progress of the New Immaculata and the highlights of a pilgrim along the way.

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Katy Carl Reviews Nick Ripatrazone's
Longing for an
Absent God

Katy Carl

Humans are storytelling creatures, blessed and cursed with the drive to narrate. We are also, even when immersed in a culture's fashionable admiration for skepticism, believing creatures. Our brains have a need to make sense of experience, a need that is not subject to critical judgment about the feasibility of the endeavor. Even the embrace of skepticism can be a reflexive bid in the direction of sense-making—sometimes a desperate bid, lunged at in self-defense against the felt incomprehensibility of experience as received: *Ah! See, life is supposed to be bewildering and destabilizing! I am right after all!*

The human mind, to retain its health, must manufacture what appears to it to be a coherent and logical worldview. Offered one we find compelling, we are likely to accept it. Lacking that, we tend to build our temples in whatever plot of dust we find convenient. This way of being in the world—obscured by sin and struggle, often circuitous, yet also full of hope and

desire for the Divine—makes for a rich history of literature, in which authentic belief and what Henry James called “the sense of felt life” can merge to compelling effect.

In choosing the contemporary era and the Catholic Church as places to pick up his study of literature and belief, Nick Ripatrazone in his recent book, *Longing for an Absent God: Faith and Doubt in Great American Fiction*, stands in a rocky, yet ultimately fruitful, patch of ground. The rockiness is well understood: Following the Second Vatican Council, seismic changes in liturgy and in the presentation of doctrine—alongside other, more widespread shifts in culture—led many to wonder if the Catholic Church truly *did* any longer present a coherent, compelling, and logical worldview. The fruitfulness, therefore, may come as a surprise, especially as academic and popular fashions in literature throughout the 1980s and 90s appeared to be all in favor of irreverence or at least of irreverence's venerate. For writers of serious religious faith, and espe-

cially for Catholics, whose integrated vision is hard to bracket or background in the context of artistic perception, this phenomenon led to a certain invisibility, a disappearance. This phenomenon has been noted in Paul Elie's 2012 essay "Has Fiction Lost Its Faith?" and expanded upon by L.A.-based Catholic critic and poet Dana Gioia in *The Catholic Writer Today*. Among practicing Catholic believers, Gioia in 2013 identified an "intellectual retreat and creative inertia" that led to Catholics having "almost no positive presence in the American fine arts." Though the big picture has changed in the intervening decade, Gioia's claim retains merit: By the time many writers of the millennial generation were entering MFA programs and beginning their first serious works, the mainstream atmosphere in publishing was such that novelist Jonathan Franzen could set down in all seriousness the phrase "Fiction is my only religion"—and the words could have the ring of praise.

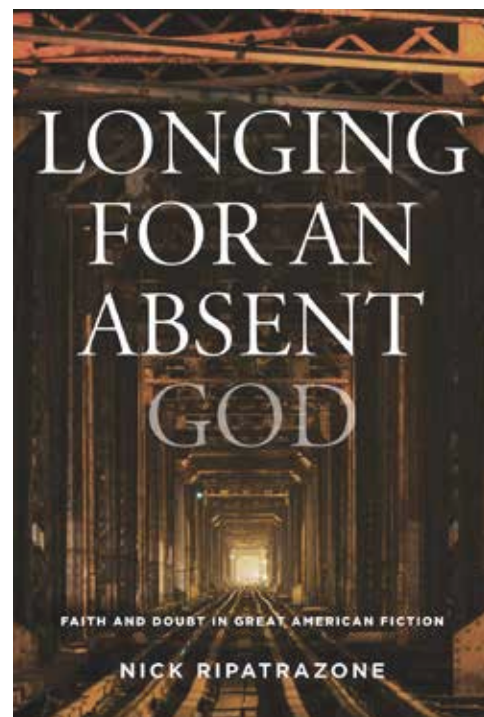
In this vein, it's worth asking whether all fiction, memoir, poetry—all imaginative literature that engages in meaning-making, that creates within itself an intelligible order presented for the reader's comprehension—can be said to be, to the extent it brings close attention to what is deeply human, "religious." Such writing considers our life here significant enough to be worth observing, recording, and communicating, and presents this work as the proper business of the human. But this business as practiced in a pluralist milieu frequently takes for itself, and leaves for its readers, a broad latitude in assigning meaning both to the text and to the realities it describes. Much fiction today remains committed to an agnostic position about whether the supernatural exists or, if it does, makes any difference to the material reality we encounter every day.

This widespread practical agnosticism, this choice to prescind from the transcendent and to focus only on the tangible and sensible, has led in many quarters to what Gioia finds a "cultural and social paradox that diminishes the vitality and diversity of the American arts." In the public square, believers cannot rely on commonly held perceptions when laboring to render their most central experience, that of lived faith, credibly in art. Many believing artists feel pressure either to deny or to minimize belief's effects on them. But this pressure in turn may tend to diminish the power of their art, to

obscure the importance of their struggles with faith and doubt, or both.

In search of "positive presences" that persist despite this pressure, Ripatrazone in *Longing for an Absent God* lifts up fiction that bears the influence of Catholic teaching and as such achieves or invites reverence toward the human encounter with mystery and transcendence. *Longing for an Absent God* both expands on and distills the insights of Ripatrazone's previous work in *The Fine Delight: Postconciliar Catholic Literature* (2013). An admirable piece of scholarship, that earlier book broadly taxonomizes several varieties of religious experience found among Catholics after the Second Vatican Council, and the types of writing those experiences tended to produce. *The Fine Delight* generates expansive and worthwhile reading lists, not only of novelists and short-story writers but of essayists, poets, and multipotent and less easily categorized writers like Andre Dubus and Brian Doyle. By contrast, the more popularly accessible *Longing* performs several deep dives into the work of fictionists who are both currently admired in the literary mainstream and notably shaped by a present or one-time Catholic faith or educational influence, including revered authors Don DeLillo, Cormac McCarthy, Thomas Pynchon, Toni Morrison, and Louise Erdrich.

One important category for Ripatrazone is that of the Catholic "jester": an artist who, not



<https://www.amazon.com/s?k=longing+absent+god>

yet or no longer formally Catholic, has been influenced by Catholic teaching or belief without embracing it and yet also without being able to fully leave its content and themes alone either. In fiction, we might take as a corner case David Foster Wallace, whose on-again, off-again relationship with the Church as an adult catechumen lent a religious coloration to his career-long obsessions with attention and human effort. Wallace's well-known pronouncement in a 2005 Kenyon College commencement address is downright homiletic: "Everybody worships. All we get to choose is what." More often, rather than being a deliverer of fervorinos, the jester acts as a satirist, using absurdity as a cover behind which to ambush the reader with deep realism: "The ultimate trick of the literary jester is surprise," as Ripatrazone defines it; "we expect comedy, which makes sincerity easy to miss." The jester reveals and resists the distortions and grotesqueries perpetrated by shallow, disingenuous, or self-deceived believers, while continuing to value something deeply real reflected in authentic experiences of faith.

Another great virtue of *Longing for an Absent God* is its idiosyncratic, perhaps unique, close reading of Black novelist and believer Toni Morrison. Ripatrazone makes a strong case that Morrison's career, an exemplar of literary excellence, may help to clarify the phenomenon of the "invisible Catholic" in the literary world post-Vatican II. Morrison is hardly a hidden figure in contemporary literature—instead she is justly one of America's most revered novelists. Yet her relation to the Church remains either broadly unknown or underexplored, though it is comparable in some ways to Graham Greene's—her faith may as well have been invisible to many of her most devoted readers, despite the clear marks it left on her work and particularly on her portrayals of suffering. As an example, Ripatrazone likens the "tree" of whip marks on former slave Sethe's back in Morrison's *Beloved* to the Cross of Christ. Ripatrazone notes how Our Lord's Cross is often metonymically described as a tree in traditional devotional poetry and hymnody, particularly in the devotional symbols embraced by Black Catholics, whose experience of slavery and the history of racism in America creates a direct association between Christ's suffering and that borne by their ancestors. Furthermore Morrison's literary Christ-figures, Ripatrazone adds,

tend overwhelmingly to be Black women, a phenomenon not often noted in academic scholarship on Morrison's work. The eyes of devotion enable Ripatrazone to see what remains invisible to many of Morrison's readers in the literary mainstream.

Ripatrazone also attends to what Dana Gioia identifies as a split between "practicing" and "lapsed" Catholic writers—those who retain the wholeness of belief and those who, lacking it, still hold to a "sacramental" or "incarnational" vision of reality. Ripatrazone describes "contemporary Catholic practice and cultural representation" as "fragmented, with the lines between sincerity and parody often blurred." At the same time, he contends that writers whose relation to the Church is ambiguous or broken still bring important aspects of the Catholic worldview and experience to their work. The pace and structure of their language and syntax, the very furniture and fenestration of their minds, has been carved and colored by their contact with authentic Faith. Their work may not reflect the plenitude of the devout believer's vision, but, as Ripatrazone suggests, even the traces of liturgy and litany carry a power and a resonance that can make occasion for grace.

The underexplored presence of so many writers who stand, in various ways, at once in and out of the shadow of the Church also raises a question whether the narrative of drought and decline among believing writers isn't subject to revision. Even in the decades Gioia identifies as marked by relative literary invisibility for Catholics in America, the Catholic novelistic tradition experienced a new flourishing worldwide. Ripatrazone spends significant time discussing the notable fiction of Andre Dubus, Alice McDermott, and Ron Hansen, all of whom fall into the category Gioia labels the "practicing Catholic" writer. Many of these writers' major works have centered as well on practicing (though often, also, confused or struggling) Catholic characters. Further exponents of the tradition include not only the American authors in whom Ripatrazone specializes but also a notable "variety and diversity" of global writers, too numerous to engage here, yet whose contribution merits mention.

In describing the paths that our narrative and devotional endeavors can wend through the world, Catholic essayist Heather King uses the analogy of the city planning term "desire lines,"

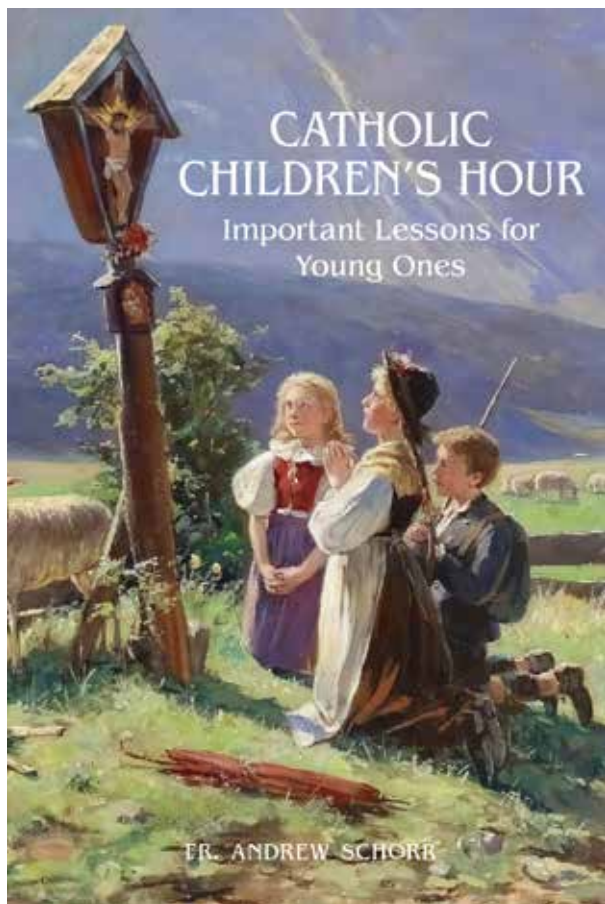
or worn paths that show the routes walkers take to arrive where they want to go. In *Longing for an Absent God* Ripatrazzone, too, seems to be seeking out a Catholic “desire line” in late-twentieth-century literature. While mapping out paths for engagement with complex permutations of comedy, tragedy, satire, and polemic, Ripatrazzone never forgets that the *Deus absconditus* feared or missed by many of the writers he covers was never really “absent,” merely hidden. In this, the book itself is an expression of a certain sort of desire line: If for many literary readers and writers—whose pursuit is at once solitary and communal—the need to find companionship on the page is immense, then the path Ripatrazzone has walked in this book will save tomorrow’s novelists and believers a great many steps in expanding and developing their

literary taste, while simultaneously fulfilling and challenging their perceptions. Its publication confirms a sense that others have walked this path before us: an affirmation that feels like a gift.

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Today's ceremony might be simple, but our hearts should all be in celebration. The feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which is certainly one of the most beautiful feasts of Mary, and which is for us faithful who are still on the way to Heaven an occasion of great hope and great support.

If we look for the lesson that the Church gives us in her liturgy today, we will find it in the Collect. We are going to sing presently in prayer the wish that the Church asks for us: That we may always keep the gaze of our bodies, of our souls, of our hearts always directed towards celestial things. The prayer and the Church add: That we may one day be partakers of the glory of Mary.

What more can the Church desire for us? What better advice can she give us? To have our eyes, that is to say above all, to have our whole heart oriented towards the things of Heaven. And if it is something that is difficult for us, since we are afflicted by the consequences of original sin and our soul is somehow blinded by material things, by sensitive things that form a screen between us and Heaven, whereas they should be, on the contrary, a means for us to rise towards Heaven. Well, if there is one thing, one thought that helps us to look towards Heaven, it is to think of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary.

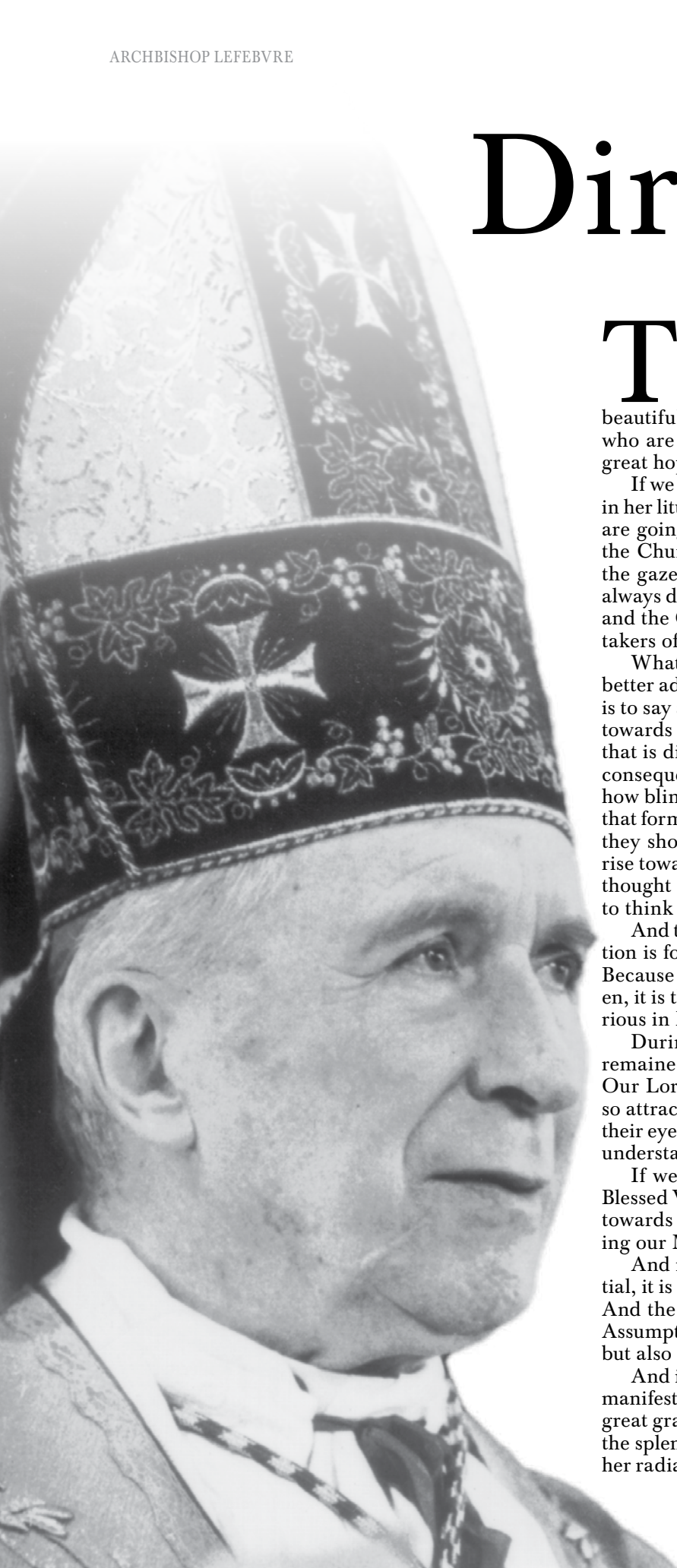
And this is precisely why this feast of the Assumption is for us filled with hope, joy, encouragement. Because if there is a subject that elevates us to Heaven, it is the thought of Mary triumphant, Mary glorious in Heaven, Queen of Heaven.

During the Ascension, it is said that the apostles remained with their eyes turned towards Heaven. Our Lord had already disappeared, but they were so attracted by this vision which they had seen that their eyes remained fixed towards Heaven. And how understandable that is!

If we too had attended the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, our eyes would have remained fixed towards Heaven, with the hope one day of following our Mother.

And if one can say that a creature is truly celestial, it is of the most holy Virgin that one can say it. And the Good Lord has given proof of this by her Assumption. She is now radiant not only in her soul, but also in her body.

And it is a fact that each time the Blessed Virgin manifested herself here on earth, those who had this great grace of seeing her were in admiration before the splendor of the Blessed Virgin, before her light, her radiance, her celestial state. And these children



Sermon, Feast of the Assumption, August 15, 1990

Hearts to Mary

Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre

were so captivated by this vision that their senses were no longer operating.

It is said that Bernadette being in this state of ecstasy before the Blessed Virgin Mary, a candle flame being placed on her hand, she did not even feel it, she was so attracted by the beauty, grandeur, by the sublimity of the vision and presence of the Most Holy Virgin Mary.

Indeed, the Virgin Mary had extraordinary privileges. She can well say in her *Magnificat*: The Almighty has done great things in me. It is indeed hard to imagine that a creature can carry God, the Creator of Heaven and earth, within its bosom, as the Most Blessed Virgin Mary carried Him.

God remained God. Nothing has changed in God. Nothing was changed in the Holy Trinity. God is immutable. And yet HE wanted to dwell in the womb of the Virgin Mary for nine months. What graces for this creature chosen in a very special way, to be the Mother of Jesus Christ, the Mother of our Savior. Mary is truly heavenly.

And moreover, this feast of the Assumption shows that among the faithful and in the Church in general, the crowds rush to follow the Virgin Mary. Crowds of faithful gather on the occasion of this feast everywhere, either by making processions in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, or by going on pilgrimages.

And the feast of the Assumption does not date from the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, *i.e.*, November 1, 1950, when Pope Pius XII proclaimed the Assumption a dogma, a truth that we must believe in order to be truly Catholic. No, the feast of the Assumption dates from the time of the apostles. We celebrated the Virgin Mary—and the best proof is what is inscribed in our cathedrals, in our churches, the prayers themselves speak of the Assumption, of the Blessed Virgin.

The paintings, such as the famous painting of Murillo in the museum of Madrid [c. 1678], are proof of this. For many years, the Blessed Virgin Mary has been celebrated on the feast of the Assumption and in particular when in 1638, King Louis XIII consecrated France to the Blessed Virgin Mary, on Assumption Day.

These are all manifestations which show the attachment of the faithful, of the Church to the Virgin Mary in her Assumption, and particularly obviously to the conclusion of this entire history of the Assumption of Our Lady, which is the proclamation of the dogma by Pope Pius XII in Rome, where I had the good fortune to find myself that day.

So, what should be the conclusion for us of these considerations on the feast of the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary?

Well, we must do everything in order not to prevent our hearts from being oriented towards Heaven, towards the Virgin Mary. We should be able to ask ourselves when we are at home, in our daily life, in our customary activity, that we can think that if the Virgin Mary were there, would she be in agreement with us, with what we do, with what we think, with what we watch, with what we love. We must live with the Most Blessed Virgin Mary and thus we will truly live from Heaven.

It is good to reflect and do something like a little examination of conscience and say to yourself: What would the Virgin Mary think if she were now present with me, for what I do, for what I say, for what I think, for what I love.

So consider allowing the Most Blessed Virgin Mary to be always with you, wherever you are. Wherever we are, may we live with our Mother. That she doesn't have to leave us, because she can't stay in our company, because she doesn't want to accept what we do or what we like.

This, I think, is the resolution we must take if we want to live with the Virgin Mary. And consequently to realize this wish that the Church manifested in her prayer: That we always keep our eyes turned towards Heaven.

What will the Virgin Mary teach us? She will teach us to be holy, as she was holy, to be pure, as she was pure; to love God as she loved Him. And above all to love His Son Jesus Christ. And to teach us that there is no other God but Our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom dwell the Father and the Holy Ghost.

This is above all the great lesson given to us by the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. And this lesson is very important today, because Our Lord is set aside. Our Lord is made equal to all religions. The Most Holy Virgin Mary cannot bear this. It's impossible! For her, there is only Our Lord Jesus Christ, her divine Son who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, who is the way to Heaven. There is no other. She came to give Him to the world. She was chosen to give Him to the world, this path, this way.

So let us ask the Virgin Mary to stay, that she take us by the hand, that she lead us, that she really be our Mother during this earthly life so that one day, as the prayer says, we may also share her glory in Heaven.



Fr. Juan Carlos Iscara, SSPX

How should we fulfill the precept of attending Mass?

The third commandment of the law of God requires that we “keep holy the Sabbath day” (Ex 20:8), and in the Old Testament God Himself had more exactly defined how to fulfill this obligation. In the New Law, the Church has determined that the divine precept is to be fulfilled by the attendance to Mass on Sundays and holy days. This is an obligation—under pain of mortal sin—for each and every Catholic aged seven and older, who has the habitual use of reason.

To fulfill the ecclesiastical precept of attending Mass the first condition is the physical presence there where the Mass is celebrated, in such a manner that the actions of the priest may be followed. It is not required, however,

to be inside the church, not even to see or hear the priest. It is enough to be part of those who hear the Mass (e.g., from the sacristy, or a side chapel, or behind a column, or in just outside if the church is crowded) and can follow it in some way, by the sound of the bell or the gestures of the other attendees. Thus, even outside the church building one can still assist at Mass for as long as one stays united with the group of faithful inside.

For lack of this physical presence, one who hears Mass on radio or television, or follows its online streaming, or who remains so far from the group of the attendees that he cannot be considered as being part of them does not fulfill the precept.

This presence must be **continual during the whole Mass**. The Mass must be whole and entire, that is, one must be physically present from beginning to end, from the first sign

of the cross until the Last Gospel inclusively. If anyone voluntarily, on purpose or by culpable negligence, omits any notable part of it commits a sin.

In order to determine which part is considered notable, and therefore the gravity of the sin, it is necessary to take into account the dignity of the parts missed and the duration of the absence.

The essence of the Sacrifice consists in the double consecration, completed by the priest's Communion, whereby the victim is consumed. Therefore, whoever arrives after the twofold Consecration or departs before the celebrant's Communion has definitively missed the Mass and must attend another Mass to fulfill the precept. If he fails to do so, he commits a grave sin.

On the other hand, it is a venial sin to culpably miss out on a non-essential part of the Mass (for example, from the beginning until the beginning of the Offertory, or all that follows after Communion, or from the preface until the consecration or from the consecration to the Pater Noster). He who arrives late at Mass is obliged to supply the part that he omitted, unless it is materially or morally impossible (for example, because it is the last Mass or he must be absent by force).

The fulfillment of the precept also requires the **religious, devout attention** of the mind. Attention is the application of the mind to what is being done. It may be internal or external, depending on whether the mind is fixed or applied to the action being performed or avoids any external action that may hinder internal attention.

To validly hear the Mass at least real external attention is required. Thus, for lack of it, he does not hear Mass who during it reads a book entirely profane, or talks at length with the neighbor, or looks carefully at the images or architecture of the temple, or is fast asleep.

A certain interior attention, or presence of mind, is required so that this is truly a human act, and not just a simple physical presence. The interior attention can be: a) material, that is, to the words and actions of the priest; b) literal, that is, to the meaning of those same words and actions, and c) spiritual or mystical, doing acts of love of God or reciting pious prayers (v.gr., the rosary). Any of them is enough to fulfill the precept piously.

Moral theologians have discussed the question of whether the one who is confessing fulfills the precept. Some have said no, because confession requires all the attention of the penitent, even the external attention. Others have said yes, as long as one intends to hear Mass and attend to it as much as possible. In practice this second opinion can be followed, especially if it would be burdensome for the penitent to wait for the end of the Mass or there would be a danger of not being able to receive Communion, etc., since, undoubtedly, the mind of the Church is to facilitate the frequency of sacraments for the faithful, and it is not entirely impossible to pay some confused attention to the Holy Mass even during confession. It would be appropriate, however, to interrupt the confession during the consecration of the two species, remaining at that time collected and attentive.

Among the social virtues related to justice, St. Thomas lists “affability.” What is it, as a virtue?

Affability is friendliness, the virtue that impels us to put in our words and external actions what can contribute to make friendly and pleasant the relations with our neighbors. It is an eminently social virtue, morally necessary for human coexistence, and one of the most delicate and unmistakable signs of an authentic Christian spirit.

Its manifestations are multiple, all exciting the sympathy and affection of those around us – kindness, simple and natural praise, indulgence, gratitude manifested with enthusiasm, politeness in words and manners, etc.

Nonetheless, as it is a moral virtue, affability must always be maintained in a just mean, since it can be sinned against by excess (flattery) and by defect (quarreling, spirit of contradiction).

Flattery is the sin of the one who tries to please someone in a disorderly or excessive way to obtain from him some advantage of his own. Deep down, it always implies hypocrisy and selfishness. As Saint Thomas says: *“Friendship before said, or affability, even if it has as its own purpose to please those around it, however it should not fear, if necessary, displeasing to get a good or to avoid an evil. Indeed, if one wants to converse with*

another with the intention of pleasing him always and never contradicting him, he excels in his affability and therefore sins excessively. If he does this out of sheer joviality, he may be called kind according to Aristotle; but, if he does so seeking his own benefit or interest, he incurs the sin of flattery. However, the name of flattery is commonly extended to all those who inordinately seek to please others with words or deeds in the ordinary dealings” (II-II,115,1).

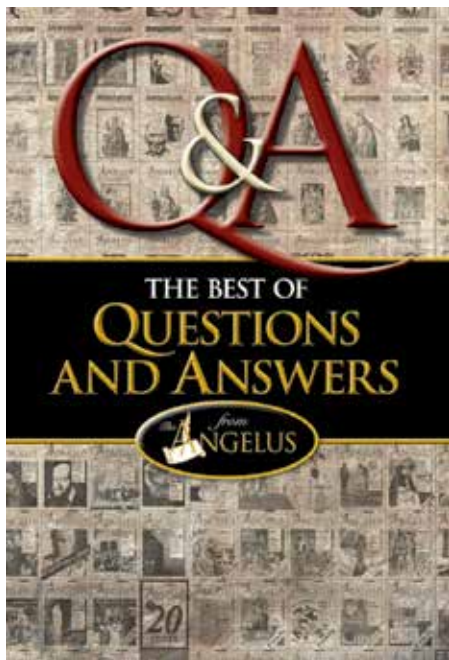
Answering the objection that praising or wanting to please everyone is not a sin, since Saint Paul says of himself that “I try to please everyone in everything” (I Cor. 10,33), the Angelic Doctor writes that to praise another can be good or bad action, as certain requirements are observed or neglected. In fact, if praise is intended, observing the right circumstances, to satisfy one and to encourage him in his work or to encourage him in the pursuit of his good works, it is the fruit of the above virtue of affability. Instead, it is flattery when praise falls on something that should not be praised, either because it is a bad or sinful thing, or because the foundation for such praise is not clear, or when it is to be feared that praise is for the other motive of vainglory. It is also good to want to please men in order to encourage charity and encourage others to progress in virtue. On the

contrary, it is a sin to want to please them for reasons of vainglory, or of personal interest, or in bad things.

Quarreling, or the spirit of contradiction, is a sin that is opposed by defect to affability, and consists in frequently and systematically opposing the opinion of others with the intention of contradicting them or, at least, of not pleasing them.

If the contradiction to the words of the neighbor proceeds from a lack of love for him, it directly opposes charity; if it is done with anger, it is contrary to meekness, and if it is intended to grieve the neighbor or not to please him, constitutes properly the sin of litigation (or spirit of contradiction), which is directly opposed to affability.

In itself, quarreling is a more serious sin than flattery, because it is more radically opposed to affability, which in itself tends to please rather than to grieve. However, we must take into account the external motives that impel us to commit these sins. And, according to them, sometimes flattery is more serious, when it tries, for example, to obtain by deception an honor or an unjust profit. Others, on the other hand, are more serious litigation; for example, when the truth is challenged or the contrary is despised or ridiculed (II-II,116,2).



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Meditations on St. John's Gospel

Chapter Thirteen

Pater Inutilis

In chapters 13–17, St. John will give us many sublime teachings of Jesus to His apostles at the Last Supper—a part of those, as promised by Our Lord on this very occasion: “the Holy Ghost. . . will bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you” (14:26). The language introducing Christ’s farewell words are quite solemn: “Jesus, knowing that his hour was come, that he should pass out of this world to the Father. . . knowing that the Father had given him all things into his hands, and that he came from God and goeth to God. . .” (vs 1 & 3). He is about to leave them (vs 33 & 36), which does not mean that He does not love them. On the contrary, “having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (vs 1) to the end of His life, and to the limits of love (15:13). This whole discourse will show us that.

There are some who are troubled somewhat by the first words “Before the festival day of the Pasch” (vs 1), and especially those subsequent,¹ which show, according to the fourth gospel, that Jesus died on the day before the Passover. The Last Supper would not therefore have been the Passover meal. (This is the reason for the Eastern Rites using leavened bread for

the Eucharist.) But it was, as is seen very clearly from the Synoptics.² Jesus, and some of the Jews, therefore, celebrated the Passover the day before most of Jerusalem did. That is a fact we get from the gospels. We do not know exactly why; hence a number of theories.³ But it is sure that He supped on the Thursday, died on the Friday, and rose on the Sunday.

At this Supper, we see Jesus “troubled in spirit” (vs 21), as He already had been, at the prospect of His passion (12:27). His passion has begun; He is wounded in heart; the cause right now is the thought and presence of one of His intimates who is about to betray Him, under the inspiration of the devil (vs 2). Our Lord knows this (vs 11) and that it is ordained of God (vs 18). But He cannot keep it to Himself, “and He testified and said: Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you shall betray me” (vs 21). The outpouring of a suffering heart, and at the same time, a further appeal, after washing his feet, to the traitor. “Friend” Jesus will call him to the end (Mt. 26:50). Now all the apostles are troubled (vs 22), except the one who should have been. Our Lord will be giving them a new commandment of love (vs 34) for which He has already prepared them more immediately by His example,

washing their feet (vs 14 & 15), and now showing consideration to Judas. He will not point him out to all, but disclose the traitor quietly to the “disciple whom Jesus loved” “leaning on Jesus’ bosom” (vs 23) who asks Him, and in the hearing of the one next to Him to whom He passed dipped bread (vs 26). Judas will not let his heart be softened, and so “Satan entered into him” and Jesus dismisses him: “That which thou dost, do quickly” (vs 27). [Most likely, it is not a question of corporal possession, but being firmly resolved to go ahead with the treachery. “The wicked man, when he is come to the depth of sins, contemneth” (Prov. 18:3).] Judas has been a burden for His heart for some time now [“Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” (6:71) He gave voice to a year ago], but has been treated by Our Lord just the same as all the others. They don’t suspect him, even after the denouncing of a traitor in their midst and this dismissal, but ascribe worthy motives for his going (vs 29). Jesus must be for us a model in our fraternal charity: “I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also” (vs 15).

St. John does not speak of the institution of the Holy Eucharist—the Synoptics and St. Paul (I Cor. 11:23ff) already had. Most commentators put it here, just after Judas’ departure and before Jesus’ more tender love. “Little children” (vs 33) He calls them (for the only time in the gospels). [Some say Luke’s “the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table” (Lk. 22:21), after the consecration, is not just the substantial equivalent of Our Lord’s quoting the psalmist (Ps. 40:10), which He does (vs 18) and could apply, Judas being present or not, but that it is a statement and in its chronologically right place. The Fathers, in their commentaries, are divided on the question of Judas’ presence.]

Be that as it may, with the traitor having gone, Jesus becomes more effusive. “Now is the Son of man glorified. . . Little children. . .” (vs 31–34). “A new commandment I give unto you: that you love one another as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (vs 34). What is “new” in this commandment is the pattern of Christ’s love: so sublime as to be a goal ever to be aimed at. Cf. I Jn. 3:16; 4:9f. The new commandment will recur constantly in the writings of the disciple whom Jesus loved.⁴ It is also new because of Christ’s teaching that we are all one, thanks to His life animating each mem-

ber (14:23; 15:1-7; 17:21-23), a teaching St. Paul develops at length with his “Body of Christ.” This mutual love, moreover, must be what characterizes the Christian: “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another” (vs 35).

Just before giving His new commandment, Jesus had told them that He was going and they couldn’t follow Him (vs 33)—though it would be for the moment (vs 36). St. Peter, through his love for the Master, is held back by that word. Where is He going? Why can’t I follow? (vs 36f). Peter’s love is not pure and it somewhat blinds him. Just as once Christ had told them that He must suffer and Peter had said “No!” (Mt. 16:21f), so tonight Jesus wants to wash his feet and he says “Never” (vs 8). And now, Jesus says that they could not follow, and Peter remonstrates. If he must be washed to have part with Our Lord, then his hands and head too (vs 9); if he must follow Him to death, he’ll do it. “I will lay down my life for thee” (vs 37). Peter doesn’t know himself, just how weak he is; and he has not yet learnt that “we are serving God only when we are serving Him as He wants to be served.” We are “to go at God’s pace.” He will learn the hard way: “the cock shall not crow, tilt thou deny me thrice” (vs 38). Peter is infirm, but, as for Lazarus, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it” (11:4).

Endnotes:

- ¹ On the day of the Passion, the priests refuse to enter the Praetorium, which would render them defiled and unable to eat the pasch (18:28); when Jesus was crucified “it was the pascheve (preparation) of the pasch” (19:14 & 31); the day after the crucifixion was a Sabbath exceptionally solemn i.e. the Passover (19:31).
- ² It was the first day of Unleavened Bread (Azymes) that His disciples go to prepare the Passover meal (Mt. 26:17; Mk. 14:12; Lk. 22:7). Our Lord’s request to the Cenacle’s master is that He have the Passover there (Mt. 26:18; Mk. 14:14; Lk. 22:11). The apostles do prepare the Passover meal (Mt. 26:19; Mk. 14:16; Lk. 22:13). Hence Jesus’ word: “With desire have I desired to eat this pasch with you before I suffer” (Lk. 22:15).
- ³ Was there some difference of opinion about the day of the full moon? A difference between Galilean pilgrims in this, and inhabitants of Jerusalem? Or between Pharisees, who were the dominant religious force, and Sadducees, the priests regulating the calendar? Or. . . ?
- ⁴ 15:12; I Jn. 2:7-10; 3:11; 3:23; II Jn. 5. Well known is St. Jerome’s anecdote of the aged John: carried to the pulpit, he always said the same thing, “Love one another.” They, tiring, asked why always this word. “It is the precept of the Lord, and if it is observed, it is enough.”

Image: *The Last Supper* by Lorenzo Monaco, c. 1390.

(DSVTP1176, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Last_Supper_by_Lorenzo_Monaco.jpg)



Who Then Can Be Saved?

Pauper Peregrinus

To go to heaven, we need the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. To get on well with our neighbour, on the other hand, lesser qualities will do: friendliness, sympathy, basic honesty and decency. But since we see our neighbour, and we don't see heaven, people easily imagine that these lesser qualities are "what really counts." From there it's a small step to supposing that everyone who is not an obvious scoundrel will probably get to heaven in the end.

That kind of thinking is death to evangelization. If our non-Catholic, and even our non-Christian neighbor is probably alright as he is, who will go the trouble of trying to bring him into the Church? Might it not even be kinder to leave him alone, since if he becomes Catholic, he'll discover that he has all sorts of obligations to believe and do and not do things, none of which he knew about before? Surely, it would be cruel to enlighten him!

Of course, such thinking is nonsensical. Truth sets us free: error imprisons us. The gospel is not a burden which we should want to spare our neighbors; it is the grace of God, and life eternal. And Jesus Christ is not one way among others, not even a "privileged way," as a certain American bishop recently said: He is the way to the Father, and we cannot walk that way unless we know Him.

Unfortunately, "indifferentism," despite having been condemned in round terms by various 19th century popes, seeped into the Catholic Church in the 20th, and made itself intellectually respectable. One of those who reacted most strongly against it was the Jesuit priest, Fr Leonard Feeney (1897-1978). The outline of his story is quite well known: insisting on the literal truth of the axiom, "Outside the Church there is no salvation," he became a successful chaplain to students at Harvard University. Protestant parents were annoyed to find their children going over to Rome. Cardinal Cushing, archbishop

of Boston, was induced to feel that Fr Feeney and his followers were expressing themselves too strongly, and he solicited a letter from the Holy Office to that effect.

The letter duly arrived, dated August 8th, 1949. It expressed surprise at Father Feeney's teachings, and said that in certain circumstances, a person could be sufficiently joined to the Catholic Church by an "implicit desire" of belonging to it. Father Feeney himself was summoned to Rome: before going he asked, reasonably enough, whether he was being called to trial and if so, for what offence. Eventually, in 1953, he received his answer: a decree of excommunication. It was issued not for a fault against the faith, but for refusing the summons to Rome. Frank Sheed, a friend of the excommunicated priest and the founder of Sheed & Ward publishers, would later comment: "Fr Feeney was silenced but not answered."

This rather tragic tale turned into farce in November of 1972. A bishop, acting as envoy of the Holy See, came to see the priest, now an old and infirm man, to seek a reconciliation. Someone suggested that Fr Feeney and his community chant the Athanasian Creed. This, of

course, is the creed that begins: "Whosoever wishes to be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith." When they had finished the chant, he was told that he was now once more reconciled with the Church. He died on 30th January, 1977.

It is hard not to feel a good deal of sympathy for Leonard Feeney. No Protestant or other non-Catholic was ever converted by being told that he might very well be in invincible ignorance. It is the business of priests to tell men the whole of the divine message, which includes the duty to believe this message and to enter the Catholic Church if they want to save their souls. "We renounce the hidden things of dishonesty," said St. Paul, "not adulterating the word of God."

There are, though, three distinct questions that should not be confused, though they often are, even by some theologians. (1) Is anyone saved without baptism by water? (2) Is anyone saved without being a Catholic or at least without the explicit intention of becoming one? (3) Is anyone saved without explicit belief in Christ? In what follows, I shall consider the questions in themselves, leaving the precise positions of



Njinga, later queen of Ndongo and Matamba, is baptized in Luanda.

Father Feeney to his biographers.

(1) If we leave aside the special case of martyrdom, which the Fathers of the Church extol for its power to blot out sin, we can say that there is some evidence for belief in “baptism of desire” in the early Church, but that no one considered this a point of faith. The two Fathers most often quoted in this connexion are St. Augustine and St. Ambrose. The emperor Valentinian II, who had bravely resisted the demands of pagan senators to restore their religion, had wanted to be baptized a Catholic but died by violence while still a catechumen. St. Ambrose said of him in a funeral oration that he had been washed by his desire, as the martyrs are by their blood. Yet elsewhere, the same saint lays down, at least as a general rule, that though catechumens may already believe in the power of the Cross, their sins are not forgiven without the washing in water.

St. Augustine, in a work on baptism, says that after careful consideration, it seems to him that faith and conversion of heart may supply the want of baptism if some sudden crisis makes it impossible to celebrate the sacrament before death. Yet elsewhere, like St. Ambrose, he lays down the general rule that however much a catechumen may have advanced, he cannot be freed from the load of his sins without baptism. He did not retract either opinion at the end of his life, in the book that he wrote to correct errors that had slipped into his voluminous writings.

This nuanced position came to be generally accepted in the West. St. Bernard, in the 12th century, is surprised when he hears of people absolutely denying the possibility of salvation for catechumens, and St. Thomas Aquinas followed him. Yet this “baptism of desire” is apparently not mentioned by the Eastern fathers, and its existence has not been defined by the Church. Catholics are free to believe if they will that God will ensure that all those predestined to life will be washed in baptism before they die; though they should not insist on this as if it were part of the faith.

(2) All these saints, however, were speaking about Catholic catechumens. Can we find anything in their writings to suggest that baptized people in non-Catholic bodies might be saved? Barely. St. Augustine does remark in passing that we should think very differently of those brought up in such bodies than of those who have left the Church to join or found them.

But how should we think of them? If people born into these groups are validly baptized and taught rightly about the Trinity and Incarnation, and especially if they have the sacraments of penance and Holy Eucharist to help them keep the commandments, we cannot rule out the possibility that some at least are in a state of grace, and hence that their souls, though not their bodies, are already within the Church. They would be like irregular soldiers, fighting on the right side, unaware of their proper commanders.

Yet any such people, having the Holy Ghost, will respond well, sooner or later, to the preaching of the Church, of whom He is the soul. All the more reason for the Church’s pastors to invite them home! It is impossible to approve of the modern custom of Catholic priests and bishops preaching to groups of non-Catholics, and failing to issue this invitation.

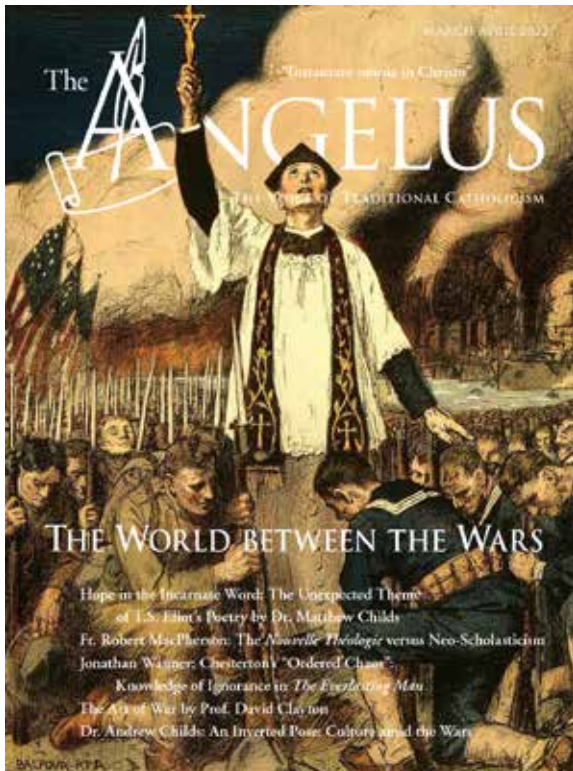
(3) When, though, it comes to those who do not know Christ, we cannot have even this guarded and uncertain hope. He who has the Son, has life. He who has not the Son, has not life. We cannot become friends of God except by accepting His offer of forgiveness. Before Good Friday, mankind was invited to accept a redemption that would come one day. Since Good Friday, mankind is invited to accept the redemption that has already come: but no one can do this unless he has been told about the Redeemer. How shall they believe him of whom they have not heard, asks St. Paul. Even Pope John Paul II, despite those misguided gatherings in Assisi, declared in his official teaching: “The distinction between theological faith and the sort of believing found in the other religions must be firmly held” (*Dominus Iesus*, 17). And as the Council of Trent taught, echoing St. Paul, theological faith is necessary for man to be justified and made pleasing to God.

Outside the Church there is no salvation. Theologians may offer a precision here or there about these glorious words. But preachers, like Noah, should just invite men to enter before it is too late.

Image: “The Good Thief,” in *Crucifixion* by I. Moskos (1711).

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THE LAST WORD

Fr. David Sherry
District Superior of Canada

Dear Reader,

“The Americans,” wrote a certain rotund English writer, “have established a Thanksgiving Day to celebrate the fact that the Pilgrim Fathers reached America. The English might very well establish another Thanksgiving Day to celebrate the happy fact that the Pilgrim Fathers left England.” Perhaps the English were glad to see the Puritans go because they were killjoys, I would have been glad to see the Puritans go because they were even less Catholic than the Anglicans.

People often make the claim that it doesn't really matter what religion you follow as there is much goodness to be found in differing sects. “Look, see how honest those Methodists are,” or “If only our girls dressed as modestly as the Mennonites!” or “Ah! The beauty of the Anglican liturgy!” This is to be expected. Heresy is not an apostasy from *all* truth and all goodness, but rather the elevating of a partial truth to the detriment of all others. The heretic—the Puritan in this case—says “God is all powerful.” This is true. Then comes his error. He elevates that truth above everything and concludes “Therefore, there is no free will outside of God.” This inexorably leads to “God is the cause of evil” or, as Philipp Melanchthon had it, “God is no less the cause of the treason of Judas than He is

of the vocation of Paul.” This widening error's practical conclusion was well understood by the author of this witty limerick.

At Geneva when Calvin had quitted
A young man said “Now I have hit it
Since I cannot do right
I must think out tonight
What sin to commit and commit it.”

For error to be believed, it has to be attached to truth; and for evil to be attractive it must needs be attached to good. And good there is: the Methodist is honest, and the Mennonite is modest and the Anglican liturgy? . . . well, compare it with your Roman missal and see where the good came from.

Many Catholics pray that their country returns to the Faith; the American or English Canadian can scarcely do that as his country never has been Catholic. The greatest thing he can pray for is a first and fervent conversion of his country to the true Faith of Christ and that His Church take our nations in Her maternal embrace. Now that would be cause for a Thanksgiving Day.

Fr. David Sherry

The Society of Saint Pius X is an international priestly society of almost 700 priests. Its main purpose is the formation and support of priests.

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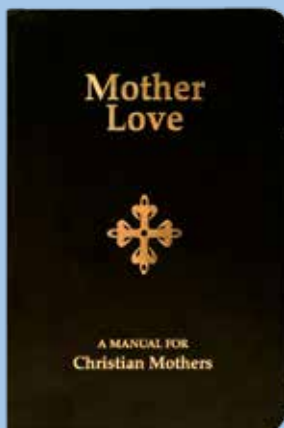
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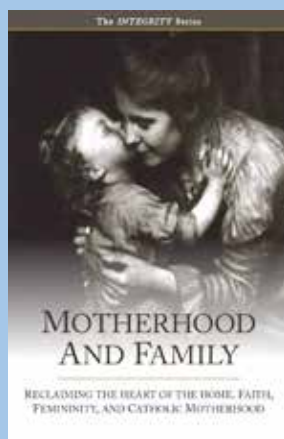
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