Tikkun

POLITICS • SPIRITUALITY • CULTURE

(tē•kün) To mend, repair, and transform the world.

FALL 2012

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE CROSS?

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Gary Dorrien
Henry A. Giroux
Heidi Hadsell
Mimi Kennedy
Stephen H. Phelps
Douglas Rushkoff
Alix Kates Shulman
Jill Stein
Eli Zaretsky

Sabbath Practice as Political Resistance

Trickle-Up Democracy

The Role of the Palestinian Church

Understanding Obama

Why America Needs a Left

Sidra Ezrahi on Death and Loss

Robert N. Bellah on the Evolution of Religious Consciousness

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Cover Image: David Bygott

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Don't miss these lively contributions from James Cone, John Conger, Matthew Fox, Barbara Darling, Mary Darling, Lynice Pinkard, Paul Smith, and others.

Online Exclusives

Tikkun is not just a print magazine—visit our blog at tikkun.org/daily and our web magazine site at tikkun.org.

Visit tikkun.org/beyond2012 for online-only pieces associated with our special section on "America Beyond the 2012 Election." Contributors to the online debate include Sheila Davaney, Charles Derber, Frank Kirkpatrick, Greg Palast, Peter Paris, Don Shriver, Anthony Pinn, E. Marshall Turman, and Sharon Welch.

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VIOLENCE IN SYRIA

Syria's dictatorship has waged a war against what was at first a nonviolent resistance movement. This eventually turned into a civil war between the governing Alawite clan and those whom it has oppressed, tortured, and murdered. Bombed apartment buildings and homes strewn with bullet and mortar holes are evidence that, even for Syria's traumatized children, there's nowhere safe to go.

Top: Robert King/Polaris Middle: Bassem Tellawi/Associated Press Bottom: Creative Commons/Bo Yaser

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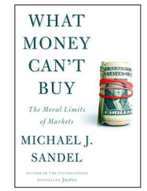
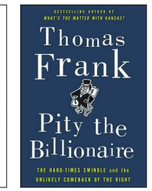


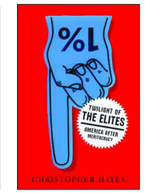
What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets

Michael J. Sandel
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012



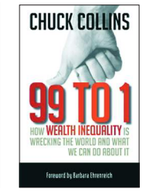
Pity the Billionaire: The Hard-Times Swindle and the Unlikely Comeback of the Right

Thomas Frank
Metropolitan Books, 2012



Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy

Christopher Hayes
Crown, 2012



99 to 1: How Wealth Inequality Is Wrecking the World and What We Can Do About It

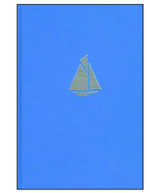
Chuck Collins
Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2012

Turns out there's not much that money can't buy in contemporary America in the era of market triumphalism. Money buys access to the carpool lane while driving solo, the services of a surrogate mother to carry a pregnancy, the right to immigrate to the United States, quicker access to concierge doctors, a kidney when your own fails, a baby from an adoption agency, entrance into many elite colleges, and abundant sex. Moral philosopher Michael J. Sandel describes dozens of situations in which market values are squeezing out moral values in our daily lives. He cautions against the attempt to force citizens to "leave their moral and spiritual convictions behind when they enter the public square," warning that this effort has "drained public discourse of moral and civic energy, and contributed to the technocratic, managerial politics that afflicts many societies today." Written in an easily accessible style, this book is one of the most effective critiques of marketplace capitalism produced in decades.

If you need further evidence of the corruption produced by the capitalist economy, Thomas Frank's *Pity the Billionaire* presents the data for a strong conclusion. "Our leaders have been chasing the free-market dream for thirty-some years now," he writes, "and for every step closer they've brought us, the more inequality has grown." Frank makes clear that Democrats have not been more politically successful largely due to their commitment to the ideology of the capitalist marketplace rather than to serious populism.

Christopher Hayes tells us that to change our society, we need to distinguish between the institutionalists and the insurrectionists. Institutionalists believe that preserving the existing economic, political, and social institutions is the best way to create or maintain the good life (think David Brooks of the *New York Times*). They believe our system is "meritocratic" in the sense that those who rise to wealth and power deserve to be there. Insurrectionists, on the other hand, believe that our institutions are fundamentally broken and seek to rethink our fundamental presuppositions. Hayes sympathizes with the latter group and shows how the elites have failed us. He writes, "Our educational system, the federal government, the national security state, and Wall Street must be confronted and reformed."

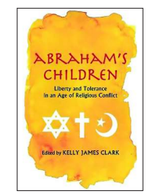
Chuck Collins and the New Economy Working Group show us how to carry out Hayes's vision. After a powerful analysis of how inequality wrecks everything we believe in, Collins goes on to present a series of steps that would definitely "change the playing field." Collins's suggestions are precisely what a serious populist wing of the Democratic Party would be talking about, if such a wing existed. Unfortunately, Collins's group misses the spiritual dimension of human needs and comes off as a bit too technocratic—but that's a story we tell in other ways in *Tikkun*.



Sailing in Kansas: An American Jewish Memoir

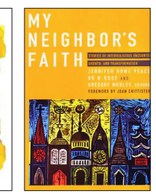
Kathy Green
White Poppy Press, 2012

Kathy Green's memoir takes us to the Jewish experience of Kansas in the 1950s. It also explores how her family of German Jews processed their own memories of the decades leading up to the Holocaust. As a result, this book is both a valuable historical document and an engaging personal story with striking resonance for many Jews who assimilated into American life and participated in the celebration of U.S. fantasies about this nation and the world. The book's recounting of Green's path to a spiritually rich Judaism is one of the many dimensions that make this book an excellent read. Find it at sailinginkansas.com.



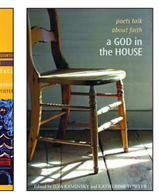
Abraham's Children: Liberty and Tolerance in an Age of Religious Conflict

Edited by Kelly James Clark
Yale University Press, 2012



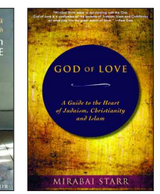
My Neighbor's Faith: Stories of Interreligious Encounter, Growth, and Transformation

Jennifer Howe Peace, Or Rose, and Gregory Mobley
Orbis Books, 2012



A God in the House: Poets Talk About Faith

Edited by Ilya Kaminsky and Katherine Towler
Tupelo Press, 2012

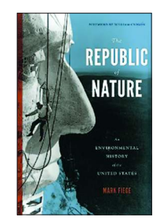


God of Love: A Guide to the Heart of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Mirabai Starr
Monkfish Book Publishing, 2012

One of the most hopeful developments in the contemporary religious world has been the growing recognition that there is a great deal of wisdom in the religious traditions of others. This is not merely the civic "tolerance" that emerged after World War II, but a willingness and even eagerness to learn from each other, as well as a willingness to engage in self-criticism. Each of these books offers such an interreligious opening.

My Neighbor's Faith draws from a wide range of theologians, including Judith Plaskow, Brian McLaren, Ali S. Asani, and Anantanand Rambachan. *A God in the House* does the same for poets, with contributions from Carolyn Forché, Kazim Ali, Alicia Ostriker, and others. *Abraham's Children* goes right into the heart of the Middle East, with contributions from Einat Ramon, Leah Shakdiel, Hedieh Mirahmadi, Rana Husseini, and more. *God of Love*, meanwhile, advises readers on how to open themselves to the wisdom of others. Mirabai Starr calls for "walking the interspiritual path" and argues that "immersion in the well of any single spiritual tradition dissolves the forms that limit the Divine." So much wisdom flows through this book.



The Republic of Nature

Mark Fiege
University of Washington Press, 2012

Mark Fiege's "environmental history of the United States" seeks to show the important role nature has played in shaping what is conventionally understood as human history. He demonstrates how our differing ideas about what is "natural" affect our decisions about the social and political policies that we champion.

Readers Respond

A NOTE ON LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We welcome your responses to our articles. Send letters to the editor to letters@tikkun.org. Please remember, however, not to attribute to *Tikkun* views other than those expressed in our editorials. We email, post, and print many articles with which we have strong disagreements because that is what makes *Tikkun* a location for a true diversity of ideas. *Tikkun* reserves the right to edit your letters to fit available space in the magazine.

ISRAELIS' ATTACK ON REFUGEES

Terror is raging in Tel Aviv. Preschool children are sent home for fear of attacks. People are afraid to walk around their neighborhoods. Health clinics are guarded to protect clients from violent infiltration. Who are the perpetrators? Jews. Their victims? Refugees. These refugees watched their families killed and their villages bombed and escaped to Israel to preserve their own lives.

I don't aim to place all or even most blame on Israel. But the Jewish State cannot turn its back and say, "This is not our problem." We shouldn't even whisper such words given our history of losing millions as other nations turned their backs. Yet 1,000 Jews recently screamed these words as they violently marched through the streets of Tel Aviv. In the Knesset, Jews proclaim these words as they put forth policy to deport refugees to South Sudan—a move authorized by Israel's Attorney General that could send thousands to their deathbeds.

In 1944, David Ben-Gurion asked the international community, "If, instead of Jews, thousands of English, American, or Russian women, children, and aged had been tortured every day, burnt to death, asphyxiated in gas chambers—would you have acted in the same way?" I pose that question back to you.

—Anna Rose Siegel, *Tel Aviv, Israel*

ARABS AND THE HOLOCAUST

In his article, "Setting The Record Straight: The Arabs, Zionism, and the Holocaust," (*Tikkun*, Spring 2012), it is reassuring that professor Ussama Makdisi acknowledges that the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, had a "sordid" relationship with the Nazis. The details, which he doesn't provide, include the Mufti's recruitment of Bosnian Muslims into the SS, his advocacy of Jew-hatred throughout the Arab world with incendiary radio broadcasts from Berlin, and his prominent role in the pro-Nazi coup in Iraq in 1941. Makdisi shies away from fully assessing the weight that this leader bore in the Jewish-Arab conflict over Palestine. Apparently, the book *The Arabs and the Holocaust* by Gilbert Achcar, which he reviews favorably, fails in this regard as well.

I agree that it's too simple to lay all the blame on the Mufti for the periodic post-1917 Palestinian-Arab attacks against their Jewish neighbors, but it would be refreshing and useful for historians to honestly analyze his impact, without getting bogged down in ideological finger-pointing. And yes, some Israeli and pro-Zionist writers—perhaps most shockingly, Benny Morris—do engage in such finger-pointing from their side. Still, if the Mufti were not the most influential leader of Palestinian and perhaps pan-Arab nationalism in the 1930s and '40s, I would like to know who was. Likewise, Makdisi appears to think that the violent turn in the Arab-Jewish conflict came from the Zionist movement. He writes, "There can be no substantial discussion, let alone judgment, of Arab attitudes toward the Holocaust without a frank discussion of Zionism's violence toward Arabs."

Clearly, the alliance of Arab nationalists with the Nazi cause exemplified the principle of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." But can Makdisi deny that the Yishuv—the organized Jewish community in Palestine—had every reason to see Palestinian enmity in the 1930s and '40s as unrelenting in its violence and even genocidal in intent? And if Makdisi and Achcar can contextualize the motivations of the Mufti and his ilk, should they ignore the context of Palestine becoming a refuge for Jews against the ravages of twentieth-century anti-Semitism? Finally, can Makdisi understand that Zionism wasn't simply a settler-colonialist project, as he seems to believe, but the effort of a hounded people to find a safe home? This doesn't justify all that has been done in the name of Zionism, but such an understanding may help forge a fair and workable peace.

—Ralph Seliger, *New York, NY*

JESUS AS A JEW

Daniel Boyarin, in "Jesus, the Kosher Jew" (*Tikkun*, Spring 2012), may be right about Torah's kosher laws in Mark 7, but he is wrong about the central theme of Mark's gospel. Mark's story is not about a "Jewish Christ," but rather is concerned with "the parting of the ways" between Judaism and Christianity. The gospel was written during the Jewish-Roman War (66–73 CE), which destroyed Judaism in Palestine, and explains how this could happen to God's chosen people. Mark's answer: God has rejected the Jews and salvation will now be given to the Gentiles.

In Mark, Jesus teaches before great crowds, and yet not one witness to these amazing performances understands his true identity and mission. He teaches in parables (4:12) so that his listeners won't understand his message, because God does not want Jews to be forgiven and saved. His family members pronounce him crazy (3:21). He performs several miracles in the presence of disciples who are confused about his identity and mission because God has closed their minds (6:52).

No Jew in Mark's story understands who Jesus is. The first to "get it" is the Roman centurion (15:37–39)—a Gentile. This central theme is summarized in the parable of the wicked husbandmen (12:1–12). The Gospel of Mark does not help us understand the historical meaning of the early Jesus movement. It's all about Mark's reinterpretation of that movement for a Gentile audience. To rediscover the Jewish Jesus, one must look to Matthew instead.

—Rick Herrick, *Oak Bluffs, MA*

Tikkun magazine is . . .

. . . a vehicle for spreading a new consciousness. We call it a spiritual progressive worldview. But what is that?

What Do You Mean by "Spiritual"?

You can be spiritual and still be an atheist or agnostic. To be spiritual, you don't have to believe in God or accept New Age versions of spirituality. You don't need to give up science or your critical faculties. We use the word "spiritual" to describe all aspects of reality that cannot be subject to empirical verification or measurement: everything pertaining to ethics, aesthetics, music, art, philosophy, religion, poetry, literature, dance, love, generosity, and joy. We reject the notion that everything worthy of consideration to guide our lives must be measurable.

What's a Spiritual Progressive?

To be a spiritual progressive is to agree that our public institutions, corporations, government policies, laws, education system, health care system, legal system, and even many aspects of our personal lives should be judged "efficient, rational, or productive" to the extent that they maximize love, caring, generosity, and ethical and environmentally sustainable behavior. We call this our New Bottom Line.

Spiritual progressives seek to build "The Caring Society: Caring for Each Other and Caring for the Earth." We seek to encourage people to recognize that their own well-being depends upon the well-being of everyone else and also on the well-being of the planet itself. So we commit to an ethos of generosity, nonviolence, and radical amazement at the grandeur of all that is, and seek to build a global awareness of the unity of all being.

If you are willing to help promote this New Bottom Line for our society, you are a spiritual progressive. And if you are a spiritual progressive, we invite you to join our Network of Spiritual Progressives at spiritualprogressives.org.

Tikkun

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PUBLISHER Duke University Press

905 W. Main St., Suite 18B, Durham, NC, 27701
Visit Duke University Press Journals at dukeupress.edu/journals.

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Tikkun (Vol. 27, No. 4, ISSN 0887-9982) is published quarterly by Duke University Press for the Institute for Labor and Mental Health, 2342 Shattuck Ave., #1200, Berkeley, CA 94704, a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization.

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Tikkun*, 2342 Shattuck Ave., #1200, Berkeley, CA 94704. Periodical postage paid at Berkeley, CA, and additional mailing offices. For individual subscriptions, visit tikkun.org/subscribe. For institutional subscriptions, visit dukeupress.edu/tikkun. Individual subscription prices for 4 issues: U.S. residents, $29.00; all others, $39.00. Institutional subscription prices: print plus electronic, $110.00; electronic only, $85.00; print only, $100.00. Payment in U.S. dollars required. For information on subscriptions to the e-Duke Journals Scholarly Collections through HighWire Press, see dukeupress.edu/library/eDuke. For a list of the sources in which *Tikkun* is indexed, see dukeupress.edu/tikkun.
Printed in USA. Printed on recycled paper.

Compassion for the Victims of Our Global Capitalist System

Too many liberals and progressives blame voter support for reactionary and ultra-conservative politics on the supposed mean-spiritedness, racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, or stupidity of those who vote the other way. By slipping into this easy mindset, we fail to perceive the real yearning so many of us have for a life filled with love, caring, and generosity. This widespread desire to live in a society that promotes social justice, environmental sanity, and global solidarity was momentarily made visible when Obama was (mistakenly, unfortunately) perceived as one of the strongest champions of that yearning to have emerged since the murder of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. pushed it out of U.S. politics. Too often the Left disses our potential supporters for not responding to us, instead of asking how we failed to support that deeper yearning.

Most of the time, such yearning is so quickly dismissed—both by the mainstream and by technocrats in the liberal world—as adolescent, utopian, or unrealistic that few politicians dare to legitimate it. Yet its absence from the public sphere is precisely what leads so many people to not even bother to vote. Many feel that to be taken seriously, they must confine such yearning to their personal and religious lives. Once that yearning does get pushed out of public consciousness, then indeed we all appear to each other to be narrowly concerned with only our own self-interest. And that, in turn, makes us despair of changing the world in the ways that most of us hope for privately.

Given the reality of this cycle of fear and despair, it would be far more accurate to view those who vote for ultra-conservative policies not only as perpetrators of the most sophisticated system of social control ever developed in human history, but also as victims of it. We are all caught up in this global capitalist system together.

Let's start with the 2012 elections. Is there any well-known candidate who is challenging the assumption that there is no alternative to the competitiveness, self-seeking individualism, materialism, and militarism that are the inevitable accompaniments of global capitalism? No. Very few voters know about third parties. The Green Party is only invoked in passing, usually in order to blame it for ruining the 2000 election by taking votes away from Gore and thereby allowing the Supreme Court to install Bush as president. Given the way the media and the mainstream parties ignore the Green Party's ideas, there is almost no way for ordinary citizens to hear anything meaningful about its vision. (Please see the interview with Jill Stein in this issue of *Tikkun* for more on that point.)

President Obama, pictured here in a White House meeting on Afghanistan policy, has adopted strikingly militarist positions. He's escalated the war in Afghanistan, expanded the use of drone strikes to kill U.S. enemies (and civilian bystanders), and supported the notion of an Israeli or American first strike against Iran.

Pete Souza/White House

Progressives' Frustrations with Obama

Why does it seem as if the election might be another neck and neck race? Why wouldn't people feel moved to come out in even greater numbers than they did in 2008 to excitedly back the re-election of President Obama? Obama has had better access to the media and to the public than any other person in the country for four years—so why hasn't he built up more enthusiasm? Well, when you start to ask people, as I have done, the following grievances seem to come up most frequently:

President-elect Obama pauses for one last look in the mirror before taking the oath of office on January 20, 2009. Imagine the possibilities if Obama—and all of us—could take a closer look at how we've internalized the distorted assumptions of the capitalist world.

An Unclear Worldview

Obama has failed to articulate a liberal or progressive worldview and then justify his specific programs in accord with that worldview—thereby challenging the worldview of the Right. Instead, he has often justified his programs with recourse to right-wing ideas about the glories of global capitalism and the importance of America being the world's "number one" competitor (an identity clearly at odds with being a true ally to the peoples of the world).

Catering to Wall Street

Obama made bailing out the banks and investment firms of Wall Street his first priority in dealing with the economic meltdown he inherited from the Bush administration. Progressives hoped that he would create a massive job program like the New Deal's WPA; require banks to reduce their interest rates and renegotiate the terms of previous loans in order to save millions of people from mortgage foreclosures; insist on a "living wage" as the national minimum wage; prosecute the misdeeds of those on Wall Street who had violated existing laws; switch government spending away from the military-industrial complex and toward serving human needs, and allow the Bush tax cuts to expire. Instead, however, he made compromises that have continued to protect the huge incomes of the super-rich while the poorest have continued to suffer.

Abandonment of Single-Payer Health Care

Obama refused to allow his administration to even consider "Medicare for All" (a version of single-payer care) while discussing the potential options for reform. Though he had promised to challenge the high prices of medications, he proceeded to cut a deal with the pharmaceutical industry that prevented the importation of far cheaper prescription drugs from other countries. He legislated a plan that requires tens of millions of people to pay for health insurance but does not include any credible restraints on the rising costs that insurers may inflict on all their new customers. There were some good aspects to his plan, but the flaws generated much popular opposition and made plausible to many the idea that the whole thing would hurt them rather than help them.

Unexpected Militarism

Obama's militarism was reflected in his decision to escalate the war in Afghanistan, in his decision to allow private contractors associated with the U.S. military and intelligence apparatus to continue to operate in Iraq even after the Bush-supported end of the war had been reached, and in his public rejection of a strategy of containment and his support for the legitimacy of a potential Israeli or American "first strike" against Iran. This was all despite the fact that, in 2008, he had portrayed himself as a peace candidate compared to Hilary Clinton and rejected first-strike strategies against Iraq. Obama's militarism has also been reflected in his escalation of the use of drones to kill U.S. enemies and his legitimation of the notion that a president can have a "kill list." This will almost certainly be used by future presidents to expand the range of people targeted for death without trial. Domestically, Obama has failed to fight for civil liberties, particularly the rights of undocumented immigrants and Muslim Americans, and his administration has increased the number of deportations that could have been reduced by presidential order.

Weak Environmental Policy

Obama has failed to push for any serious global or domestic program to save or push back environmental degradation. This global crisis has grown over the last four years. This may be his most serious betrayal of the United States and the people of the world.

Compromises on Israel/Palestine

Obama has capitulated to the most right-wing government Israel has ever had and to its AIPAC supporters. Most significantly, perhaps, he failed to support efforts to pressure Israel to stop the building of settlements until the future of the West Bank has been agreed upon by both Israel and Palestine.

And you can name many other issues, can't you? Some people with whom I spoke also expressed frustration about how Obama repeated the claim (with its implicit anti–peace movement subtext) that many Vets were faced with hostility after the Vietnam War. He could have also praised the courage of those in the movement against the war in Vietnam and of those in subsequent anti-war movements: individuals who had the courage to show that the highest form of patriotism is to oppose policies that undermine core American values of respect for human rights and democracy—a respectable liberal position.

Pete Souza/White House

How Disillusionment Feeds the Right

Most of the people who say they feel betrayed by Obama tell me they're disappointed not because he didn't win every policy battle (except the ones that he had the power to win through his own executive orders) but because he didn't fight either on the political or on the ideas level. They're frustrated that he capitulated so often to the ideological assumptions of the political Right, except in the last few months before the election, when he momentarily discovered that his own base of support needed to be thrown some bones.

Most of the people I know who feel this way seem inclined to support Obama in the elections, but their main reason for doing so is that "Obama is far better than the Republican alternative"—a line unlikely to inspire, even though it might be true. (It's hard to know how different outcomes will shake out; I have heard some argue that the United States would have been better off with a McCain presidency and a Democratic Congress that would have been far more likely to restrain him, particularly in regard to escalating the war in Afghanistan or rejecting militarist solutions.) So even though many of these people would say that the single most hopeful thing that could happen in 2012 is the re-election of President Obama, they still have legitimate anger at Obama for his having acted from the assumption that nothing fundamental could be changed in our economic or political system.

All this has led to a crippling ambivalence among progressives that is shared by a wide swath of Obama's 2012 supporters who don't want a Romney presidency but who can't throw themselves into getting Obama re-elected. If this is true of his supporters, some of these same issues affect how many other Americans feel about him when they face the Romney/Obama choice. (We at *Tikkun*, of course, are prohibited by our 501c3 status from endorsing any candidate or political party.)

My point here is not to affirm any particular criticism but to generate compassion for those Americans who, given the absence of clearly articulated alternatives about the entire economic and political system, end up feeling more attracted to the political Right. Why? Because those who go to the Right are typically those who have been so depressed by living in a society of selfishness and materialism that they have given up on the possibility of ever achieving a world based on justice, peace, caring, and generosity.

After Obama's 2008 victory, hope surged in the country. Americans were proud of themselves, thinking that the country was finally overcoming its long history of racism. Even some McCain supporters—and many who had not bothered to vote—momentarily overcame their normal dismissive attitude toward idealism; they allowed themselves to imagine that a more just, sane, and peaceful America was about to unfold. But allowing oneself to hope also makes one open to the long-instilled inner voice of "realism" that yells, "you are just setting yourself up for disappointment"—a voice that seemed validated when Obama so quickly abandoned his own election-year hopefulness and began to frame his decisions in terms of political realism, often accepting positions he had either explicitly or implicitly rejected during the campaign. Tens of millions of people began to feel that they had made fools of themselves by even momentarily revealing the vulnerable, hopeful part of themselves that yearns for a world of love but has been suppressed by parents, teachers, the army, church leaders, the media, political leaders, and the exhortation to "be realistic." The resulting anger, feelings of humiliation, and spiritual depression manifested not only in many Obama supporters' failure to vote in 2010 but also in how quick many Americans have been to embrace every nutty perception of Obama's identity, calling him a communist and questioning his U.S. citizenship and Christian faith.

I by no means want to obscure the ways in which racism and ultra-nationalism greased the wheels of the anti-Obama backlash. Those forces are a significant part of this story too. But it's a mistake to blame the entire phenomenon on the prejudices of ordinary Americans. Remember that in 2008, Obama was perceived as being more liberal than he can reasonably be perceived as being now. And he was just as much a Black man as he is now. But many people who are angry at him now were willing to give him a chance then because they allowed themselves to open to hope and to the "yes, we can" message.

The Psychodynamics of American Politics

Analyses of the psychodynamics of American politics are usually dismissed by both mainstream and the leftist media as psychobabble or New Age nonsense. They focus all their analytic energy on the materialist idea that "it's the economy, stupid!" And within that paradigm, they debate who is going to make a better contribution to ending the depression of 2008–2012 and beyond. But even in *that* debate, Obama and Romney look very similar. Had Obama, beginning in 2009, talked about "the Republican Depression that is still causing havoc," he might have captured the public's attention. He could have then explained why only a massive spending program comparable to that which ended the Great Depression of 1929–1942 (namely, the spending for World War II), alongside massive regulation of the large corporations, banks, and investment companies, could end the Republican Depression. But instead, Obama embraced many of the key assumptions of the Republicans (or more accurately, Wall Street, as embodied by his Wall Street–friendly economic advisors Summers and Geithner) and was therefore unable to rally Americans around the idea of prioritizing the needs of the middle class and the poor.

Or to frame this point slightly differently, the worst advice that Obama (like Clinton before him) followed was, "show

By casting Obama's health care capitulation to pharmaceutical firms and insurance companies as "socialism," Tea Party activists have moved the discussion far to the right—without a counter-narrative from Obama.

voters that you are not scary, that you are really a moderate." And perhaps that wasn't just outside advice, but rather the inner core of what had made Obama seem so acceptable to the media: his own internalized belief in the racism of America—a belief that the Reverend Wright controversy may have reinforced for him. Perhaps this led him to think—counter to Reverend Wright's approach—that he could only win by selling himself as a very conservative or at least a very, very moderate black man whom no one could cast as aggressive or confrontational. But precisely in thinking that way, he was absorbing what is worst about the Left: its despair about who the American public really is—a despair that is self-fulfilling.

How? Because the more certain you are that the American people are dumb, racist, sexist, homophobic, and xenophobic, the more afraid most people on the Left become about putting forward worldviews, ideas, and programs that could actually restore the hopefulness of people who are drawn in moments of despair by the Right. And without that hopefulness, the Right's programs sound at least as profound as the moderate middle, since the Right is just saying openly what is implicit in the moderate's approach: that ordinary people can't be trusted and that democracy will never work, so we might as well leave our fate in the hands of anyone who manages to succeed in the capitalist marketplace.

America needed a new Roosevelt who could say, "There is nothing to fear but fear itself." In articulating a vision of hope in the midst of an even worse economic situation than we face today, Roosevelt was able to show people that they can trust each other. In creating this positive vision of a caring community, a "we," Roosevelt built support for the New Deal. The truth is that the New Deal, because of its moderation (Roosevelt was, after all, a pro-capitalist seeking to save but not replace the system), did not solve the Great Depression; it was only through spending on Lend-Lease to Britain and then on war preparation that the economy was able to get an infusion of money that the capitalist class would not fight. That infusion was sufficiently big to put people back to work and thus end the economic slump. Yet people stuck with Roosevelt in a way that they are not doing with Obama precisely because Roosevelt understood their need to feel a part of something bigger—a caring community of people who would watch out for each other.

I don't doubt that Obama will belatedly come back to being more visionary and progressive than he has been for the past four years in order to win re-election. And perhaps with the hundreds of millions to be spent in this campaign, he can make people believe that he's a different guy. But it may be too late. When you've sold pablum for so long, it may be hard to sell organic, whole-grain anything!

Rekindling Compassion and Hope

Ironically, the moderates in the Democratic Party always think they are being "realistic" by avoiding anything controversial or anything that speaks to the heart. It is that pseudo-realism that has defeated one Democrat after another. But how about a little compassion for the Left, the Democrats, and even Obama? After all, their failure to articulate a different worldview is itself a product of their fears and their own internalized "surplus powerlessness" (which I've analyzed in my book of that title). The Left is like everyone else, except more so. Progressives, liberals, and pro-capitalist centrists like Obama all have the same dynamics going on inside, and the differences are often a matter of privilege (though not solely economic privilege). With more stability in childhood and family life, more access to love and kindness from others, greater economic security, and greater access to others who are willing to take risks, people become more open to the possibility of a world based on love and generosity.

Those of us who *have* had those kinds of privileged experiences have to reject the notion that this is a reflection of our merit or that we came to higher consciousness solely because we deserve it. Rather, we need to look at ourselves and everyone else as at least in part a product of having grown up in a society whose fundamental structures engender fear, domination, materialism, and selfishness—a society that punishes, marginalizes, and ignores those who believe a different kind of society is possible. In short, compassion for the fearful is necessary if we ever want to help people get beyond their fears.

So, it's also a mistake to blame Obama, though it may be healthy for liberals and progressives to momentarily allow ourselves to feel some anger toward him. Obama is a product of a social system that will remain firmly in place so long as most of us believe it is unchangeable. His moderation disappoints us mostly because we know how badly the part of us that yearns for a different kind of world needs more public affirmation and more support from public figures.

Yet our task is to build our confidence in ourselves, in others, and in the spiritual reality of the universe enough to know that the path of love and generosity will never be defeated. This path is ontologically rooted in the nature of the

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universe, which some of us call God, YHVH, or Allah. The Force of Healing and Transformation that governs the universe is a force that tilts toward justice, love, peace, and environmental sanity—and that Force is the image in which we have been shaped. That Force (or God) is the reality that makes us free and provides the possibility of self-transcendence. We can break the repetition compulsion (the tendency to pass on the fears, pain, and cruelty that we've absorbed from this world) and move toward a new kind of world.

The more our movement can radiate a vision of compassion for everyone, including the 1 percent who are most oppressive to the majority, the more likely we are to become invincible and protected from the claim that we are "elitists." (This is actually a true charge against a Left that doesn't trust the majority; as a result, the rich and powerful have managed to turn this charge of elitism into a powerful weapon against the progressive forces.) Compassion for others ultimately rests on compassion for ourselves, our parents, our children, our friends, and our neighbors. It's quite a task, and yet it's the beginning of both personal and political wisdom.

"Wait," you say. "Aren't you going too far when you express compassion for the oppressors, those who benefit from the existing system and who then empower others to continue oppressing the peoples of the world and many in our own country as well?" So let me be clear about the limits of compassion. We can have compassion for people in every part of the economic and political system in which we live. That doesn't mean giving them a free pass to continue doing what they are doing. Compassion is consistent with a fierce struggle to stop those who oppress and those who enable the oppressors. It may even entail imprisoning people like Kissinger, Bush, Cheney, and the leadership of major banks and oil and gas companies. It may require us to engage in mass actions to stop the war machine and to redistribute wealth and to reduce the extreme income polarities in this society. Yet even those tasks are more likely to be achieved if we first see the humanity and decency in everyone. We must start by dealing with each other as embodiments of the God energy of the universe who, like each of us, has sometimes missed the mark.

We can get out of this spiritual and psychological hole. We must do everything we can to make visible the yearning for a different kind of world that exists in almost everyone, no matter how deeply it is hidden. This is the point of insisting on a New Bottom Line of love, caring, generosity, and environmental sanity. This is the point of the Network of Spiritual Progressives' Spiritual Covenant with America, Global Marshall Plan, and Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (all of which you can read about at spiritualprogressives.org). These are all vehicles for exposing our shared yearnings for a different kind of life and public world.

After the election, we will have to rebuild our Network of Spiritual Progressives and, regardless of the outcome, get back to work on affirming the possibilities of transformation that will never be fully extinguished and will remain a beacon of hope for those who allow themselves to see it. For that reason, *Tikkun*/NSP will sponsor several gatherings after the election to discuss what's next. Can you create one such event in your town in the two weeks after the election? If so, start planning now—get a location, approach media and encourage them to cover your gathering, and use this as the occasion to launch a local *Tikkun*/NSP chapter! For guidance and assistance, email assistant.tikkun@gmail.com or call 510-644-1200. ■

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A Red Letter Christian Speaks to the Palestinian Church

BY TONY CAMPOLO

Tony Campolo talks with Archbishop Elias Chacour, a Palestinian Christian leader. The Palestinian church, he writes, has the potential to help heal the deep psychological wounds of Israelis and Palestinians through empathetic listening.

Tim B. Gilman (timmyroland.com)

Politics alone will not solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—a deep, collective, psychological healing must also occur to sustain a lasting peace. I believe Palestinian Christians are uniquely situated to facilitate this healing process.

Like Palestinian Muslims, Palestinian Christians as a group bear the strain of post-traumatic stress associated with the violence of the conflict. They are well positioned to follow the teachings of Henri Nouwen and become "wounded healers," presenting to other Palestinians an empathy that no other group can offer. They know the sufferings of the Palestinian people and their empathy could make the Palestinian Church an ideal psychotherapist.

I deepened my thinking about the Palestinian Church this year as I prepared for a conference at Bethlehem Bible College. The college, which is located between the Bethlehem checkpoint and Manger Square in the West Bank, was founded in 1979 by local Arab Christians and has now brought Evangelicals from around the world together twice—once in 2010 and once in 2012—for conferences on the "Christ at the Checkpoint" theme.

While I formulated the thoughts below to share with a Palestinian Christian audience, I am hopeful that sharing it with a broader audience here in *Tikkun* will inspire people of all faiths and backgrounds to think in new ways about the ways in which they too can serve as wounded healers in their own communities and support healing in other settings, too.

TONY CAMPOLO, PH.D., professor emeritus at Eastern University, founded the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education. Among his books are *The God of Intimacy and Action*, *Red Letter Christians*, and the soon-to-be-released *Red Letter Revolution*.

VOL. 27, NO. 4, FALL 2012 | © 2012 TIKKUN MAGAZINE | DOI: 10.1215/08879982-1729818

My "Red Letter Christian" Perspective

The perspective I bring to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is that of a Red Letter Christian sociologist. "Red Letter Christian" is a label that a group of us progressive Evangelicals adopted for ourselves four years ago while discussing whether it still made sense to identify as Evangelical. Our new label refers to the fact that, in many Bibles, the words of Jesus are highlighted in red letters. By taking this name, we commit ourselves to taking the words of Jesus seriously and doing our best to live them out. That, of course, turns us into *radical* Christians.

Taking the red letters of the Bible seriously means putting religious values into practice. Here, members of Christian Peacemaker Teams deliver aid to a Palestinian village.

Najeh Hashlamoun/Flash90

Our theology was, and continues to be, as Evangelical as ever. We hold to the doctrines spelled out in the Apostle's Creed; we believe that Scripture is divinely inspired and is an infallible guide for faith and practice; and we affirm that salvation comes from having a mystical encounter with the resurrected Jesus in which our lives are pervaded by his spirit, transforming us into new people. We still believe these essential elements of what it means to be an Evangelical, but we have become sadly aware that the label has acquired a great deal of undesirable baggage. To employ the Evangelical label is to be designated as a person who is anti-women, anti-gay, anti-Arab, anti-environmentalism, anti-immigration, and pro-war. Each of us who is a progressive Evangelical is likely to stand back and say, "That's not who I am!"

My colleague at Eastern University, Ron Sider, calls us to consider what those red letters of the Bible teach us by raising outstanding questions such as these: What does it mean to love our enemies? What does it mean to return good for evil? And when Jesus in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12) tells us to be merciful and then goes on to reject the moral principle of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth in favor of overcoming evil with good, does not that preclude capital punishment? How seriously are we to take the words of Jesus, who once told a rich, young ruler that if anyone would be his disciple, that person would have to sell everything he had and give to the poor (Mark 10:17–27)?

One day the father of a young graduate from Eastern University dragged his son into my office. This man shoved his son, who had become committed to living out the red letters of the Bible, into a chair and then shouted at me: "You got him into all of this! He's taking the red letters of the Bible far too seriously. These days he's out on the streets in the slums of Philadelphia, giving away his money to poor people, and spending his time with pimps and whores." The father went on to say: "Don't get me wrong, Campolo. I don't mind being Christian *up to a point*!" Consider how many of us are like that father. Aren't all progressive Christians willing to be followers of Jesus *up to a point*? How willing are we to recognize the truth of the Christian martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who said, "When Jesus calls a man, he bids him come and die"?

A Progressive Christian Lens on Israel/Palestine

Having glimpsed some of the challenges that the hard sayings of Jesus raise for would-be disciples, I want to explore how a Red Letter sociologist might look at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

First let's remember the traumas of the Palestinian people. As Michael Lerner has stated in his new book, *Embracing Israel/Palestine*, the Palestinians were outraged by the realization that representatives of other nations had met in New York without consulting them and decided that land the Palestinians thought was theirs should be taken

from them and given to another people for the creation of a *new* nation. Many Palestinians found it unbelievable that this could happen. They were traumatized.

Then strangers began showing up with pieces of paper that stated that the land and the homes that had been theirs for generations no longer belonged to them. Waving legal documentation, some of these strangers declared that they had purchased the land from absentee landlords whom the Palestinians didn't even know existed. The new occupiers claimed that they were taking the land legally, but deep down, many Palestinians knew that what was being called legal was not moral.

Following the establishment of this new nation in 1948, many Palestinians had to stand by as their homes were demolished. More than 320 of their villages were destroyed, and huge numbers of Palestinian people became refugees.

But even as we hold an awareness of the traumas endured by Palestinians, we must also recognize that the Jewish people, who had established their new nation in the Holy Land, were also traumatized—both by the Holocaust and the persecutions and pogroms that had been going on for hundreds of years. I agree with Lerner's assessment that both Palestinians and Israelis are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Before there can be peace, there must be healing of the hearts and minds of people. There must be a healing of the collective consciousness of each of these groups. It is in this arena that Palestinian Christians have an important role to play.

Listening as Prayer

To serve as an empathetic psychotherapist, the Palestinian church must engage in the kind of intensive listening that is at the root of what Martin Buber referred to as an I-Thou relationship. This requires listening to the narrative of each of these groups without readily jumping in with prescriptions for how healing can occur. It requires a listening wherein what is heard is not only what is being said but also the feelings that come over and around the words that traumatized brothers and sisters are uttering.

I realized our world's need for this kind of listening during the 1970s while on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania. At the time I was teaching Introduction to Sociology to hundreds of students. One day, following a lecture, a student came to my office and asked a rather perfunctory question about the sociological theories of Georg Simmel, a well-known German sociologist. I answered the question in a rather abrupt manner, and then asked, "Is there anything else?" The student sat for a long moment and then he said, "No." He sat for what I thought was an unusually long time during which he said nothing at all. Then he got up and left my office. I didn't think much about what had happened until someone told me the next day that twenty minutes after he had been with me, he went to the top of the apartment building where he lived and jumped to his death. I knew that I had sinned. I had listened only to what he had said, and so much more had been needed from me. I had failed to empathize with him. I had failed to look into his eyes and examine the depths of his being and touch the innermost recesses of his personhood. That is the kind of listening that is the balm of Gilead that can heal the sin-sick soul.

Listening in an empathic manner, which is required in psychotherapy, demands a large amount of spiritual energy. Such energy is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, in whom the fullness of God was revealed, is the ultimate model of such listening. When he looked into people's eyes, the Scriptures say, "He knew what was in men." Having everything that is God in him, Jesus was able to reach into the depths of any person he chose to encounter in a way that would explore and feel everything about that person's psyche and emotions. And, it says in the eighth chapter of Romans, by surrendering to him, "the same Spirit that was in Christ Jesus and raised him from the dead shall be in our mortal bodies."

A Roman Catholic friend introduced me to the writings of St. Ignatius, which taught me a new way of praying. Previously, I had prayed only as most (*continued on page 61*)

Religion and Equality in Human Evolution

BY ROBERT N. BELLAH

Our nearest primate relatives, the chimpanzees, live in hierarchal bands dominated by alpha males. What can explain the comparative egalitarianism of early hunter-gatherer societies?

Joel Orduna Rivera

WHERE DID WE COME FROM? What should we do here? Where are we going? As long as human beings ask these questions, we will need metanarratives—accounts of cosmological and biological evolution that place the human species in the context of what we know about the universe as a whole.

In my book *Religion in Human Evolution* and its sequel, a work-in-progress titled *The Modern Project in the Light of Human Evolution*, I have been exploring a new metanarrative by means of an extended hypothesis about religion and equality in human evolution—a hypothesis that is open to correction at every point and raises far more questions than it can answer.

I have come to view the Marxism of Marx and Engels (not of Lenin, nor certainly of Stalin, nor Mao) as a version of the biblical metanarrative about the history of salvation. Terry Eagleton's *Why Marx Was Right* has further awakened me to the Marxist quality of this biblical metanarrative. (Eagleton is a radical Irish Catholic with a deep conviction of the truth and current relevance of Marx's teaching.)

Marx's version of the biblical history of salvation begins with what he calls "primitive communism," when all things were held in common—a kind of Garden of Eden. Then comes the "fall" into class society that occurred when several forms of the domination of the poor and vulnerable by the rich and powerful succeeded each other—slave society, feudal society, and capitalism. Marx also foresees a version of "that Day" when the Lord will set all things straight, reward the faithful, punish the wicked, and create a reign of peace and justice on earth: socialism and communism.

Eagleton points out that Marx was quite aware of how much he owed to the biblical tradition. Moreover, when Marx's wife wanted to join a women's "secular society," he told her it would do her more good to read the Hebrew prophets.

Hunter-Gatherers' Egalitarianism

The earliest humans, hunter-gatherers, were often remarkably egalitarian. But our history as a species did not begin with this "Eden" (we will see how we need to qualify that analogy in a minute), but with primate ancestors who were anything but egalitarian:

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Where did we come from? What should we do here? Where are we going? As long as humans ask these questions, the author writes, we will need accounts of our cosmological and biological evolution—accounts of how we went from painting cave walls to forming transnational corporations.

our nearest primate relatives, the chimpanzees, live in strongly hierarchal bands dominated by alpha males who attempt to maintain sole sexual access to the females of the group and keep both other males and females in subservience to them.

What accounts for the difference between primate bands and hunter-gatherer egalitarians? The absence of a disposition for dominance? Not likely. In *Hierarchy in the Forest: The Evolution of Egalitarian Behavior*, anthropologist Christopher Boehm argues that we share with chimpanzees and bonobos a tendency toward despotism. Yet nomadic hunter-gatherers have nevertheless been uniformly egalitarian, seemingly for thousands if not millions of years. Boehm explains this seeming contradiction with the claim that hunter-gatherers have "reverse dominance hierarchies": the adult males in the society form a general coalition to prevent any one of their number, alone or with a few allies, from dominating the others. Male egalitarianism is not necessarily extended to females—the degree to which females are subject to male despotism varies, even among hunter-gatherers. But the reverse dominance hierarchy prevents the monopolization of females by dominant males. This makes possible the heterosexual nuclear family as we know it, based on (relatively) stable cross-gender pair bonding and mutual nurturance of children by parents, precisely what is missing in our closest primate relatives.

Egalitarianism is thus itself a form of dominance, the dominance of what Rousseau would have called the general will over the will of each. The hunter-gatherer band is not, then, the family enlarged; rather it is the precondition for the family as we know it.

Boehm identifies "moral community" and "the deliberate use of social sanctioning to enforce political equality among fully adult males" as the two components of egalitarian social control. I would add ritual as the common expression of the moral community without which the process of sanctioning would make no sense. The myths and rituals of hunter-gatherers continually reaffirm a moral order in which no male is allowed to dominate all the other males and the autonomy of women and children is often affirmed as well. This Eden is not as Edenic as the biblical one, in that violence is not missing. Stealing, adultery, and arrogance can get you killed in such societies, but the merciless domination of some over others that is characteristic of all class societies is missing; "reverse hierarchy," the refusal to allow some males to dominate others, is in effect.

Human Hierarchy and the Early State

The development of agriculture provided the ecological backdrop for the transition from hunter-gatherer egalitarianism to the early state. There has to be a surplus worth fighting over to cause some groups to try to dominate others. The beginnings of human hierarchy are subtle: in a number of simple horticultural societies there is hierarchy virtually without domination. Some lineages have more prestige than others, often because they transmit knowledge of myth and ritual that other lineages do not have. They receive respect for their ritual status, but they are not richer than other lineages, and their leaders cannot tell others what to do. Would-be chiefs can seek to lead, but their followers may withdraw support if any given leader is not deemed ethical and generous.

Why was the early state characterized by a return of despotism more ferocious than anything to be seen among the great apes, even though it emerged during a time when egalitarianism was virtually universal among small-scale societies? There is a U-shaped curve of despotism—from the despotic apes to the egalitarian hunter-gatherers to the re-emergence of despotism in complex societies—that needs to be explained.

This U-shaped curve is not quite what it seems. To understand it properly, we need to make a distinction between dominance (or despotism) and hierarchy, terms that get equated with each other in most discussions. I want to use dominance (despotism) to

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describe the straightforward rule of the stronger, and hierarchy to describe status differences that are actually sanctioned by the moral community. In other words, I want to define hierarchy as legitimate authority. Even though dominance and hierarchy always go together, it is important that we separate them analytically. Boehm's term "reverse dominance hierarchy" contains both elements: the moral community justifies the hierarchical element (the group exerting power over the power-hungry upstart), and the ultimate sanction of violence against the upstart has an inescapable element of dominance.

With the development of agriculture, the egalitarianism of early human societies gave way to increasing inequality. This painting by Claude Vignon depicts King Croesus, a fifth-century ruler whose wealth became legendary.

A Case Study: Military Dictatorship in Mangaia

With a population that has never exceeded about 3,000, early Mangaia (one of the Southern Cook Islands) was probably once divided into several small chiefdoms in which chiefs combined religious and secular authority, as in Tikopia or New Zealand. But at some point the chiefs were challenged by warriors, reduced to purely priestly functions, and replaced by a new kind of chief who was in effect a "military dictator." The prize was the small area—2 percent of the island—that could be irrigated. This land was redistributed as spoils of victory, its previous occupants deprived of any hereditary claim to it.

In *On the Road of the Winds: An Archeological History of the Pacific Islands before European Contact*, Patrick V. Kirch writes, "The case of Mangaia is instructive, for . . . it is a sort of microcosm for a Polynesian society in which politics, as well as economics and religion, had come to be thoroughly bound up with warfare."

What the Polynesians called *mana* (spiritual power) was traditionally inherited in chiefly lineages but could also be manifested in others. Success in war was seen as a manifestation of mana and could produce, as it did in Mangaia, a "secular" chief, a successful upstart who nonetheless had a thin veil of religious legitimacy. Lacking, however, what Weber called "hereditary charisma," there was no form of routine succession—every new chief came to office only through military victory.

This political revolution was mirrored by a religious revolution. The god Rongo, who elsewhere in Eastern Polynesia was seen as a peaceable god of agriculture, became a god of war and the high god of the island. In Mangaia, Rongo required human sacrifice at the accession of each new military ruler. According to Kirch, the archeological record suggests that cannibalism was common in late prehistory. "Late precontact Mangaian society became, to a pervasive degree, a society based on terror," he writes. The small size and population of Mangaia prevented the emergence of a complex stratified society, but it serves as an example of some of the possible (though not inevitable) consequences of militarization.

The Rise of Powerful Gods and Kings

Societies based on terror are not very stable; there is a strong drive toward legitimate hierarchy within them as a way of producing some degree of stability and peaceful transfer of power. Human sacrifice is common in the early state—an indication of the element of terror that seems always present. Examples of states that employed this practice include ancient Hawaii, Egypt and Mesopotamia in the early third millennium BCE, and Shang China.

What is interesting about those early states that attained some degree of stability is that terror, while never absent, begins to be at least partially replaced by myths and symbols that draw on our disposition to nurture. Early states tend to focus on individuals, the successful upstarts who lead the warrior groups that can control a large population. And these new ruling individuals whom we can call kings (*continued on page 64*)

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Sabbath Practice as Political Resistance

Building the Religious Counterculture

BY ANA LEVY-LYONS

One thing Abraham Joshua Heschel and Karl Marx had in common, aside from having both been spectacularly bearded Eastern European Jews, is the shared insight that time is the ultimate form of human wealth on this earth. Without time, all other forms of wealth are meaningless. It is this insight about time—patently obvious but frequently forgotten—that makes keeping a Sabbath day both spiritually profound and politically radical. To reclaim time is to be rich. To reclaim a full day every week is to be among the 1 percent. Sabbath practice is also one of the most unambiguously articulated of all the commandments in the Hebrew Bible (even making the top ten!), and yet very few of the "people of the book" actually keep a Sabbath—only traditionally observant Jews, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Mormons (except for Mitt Romney). Perhaps keeping this particular commandment is just too hard.

A family prepares to break challah at a Shabbat dinner. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel described the Jewish Sabbath as a "palace in time" that allows individuals to "lay down the profanity of clattering commerce."

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Surplus Time in a Capitalist Society

While Marx certainly did not intend to write a spiritual text when he wrote *Capital* in 1867, he ended up producing a work that has survived into the new millennium precisely because it speaks such deep spiritual truths about the meaning of human life. Marx's books are still on the shelves at Barnes & Noble because we recognize ourselves and our modern woes in their pages. Like Scripture, they have long outlived the debunking of their factual details. Marx wails a prophetic lament on behalf of his society. He holds up a mirror, showing how human time—human life—is broken down, appropriated, and devoured by the "boundless thirst" of capitalism. He describes the "despotic bell" of the workplace that wrenches people (mere "personifications of labor time") from their homes. In capitalism, free time is a waste or, at best, the necessary evil of preparation for more productivity. Marx describes how technology, rather than freeing us from labor, creates an increasingly frenetic pace of work—the need to milk more and more value from a human hour to "close the pores" of time.

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VOL. 27, NO. 4, FALL 2012 | © 2012 TIKKUN MAGAZINE | DOI: 10.1215/08879982-1729836

Certainly we recognize this phenomenon today: that somehow in our high-tech world, we are all feverishly, dizzyingly busy. Because exactly as Marx described, any surplus time created by labor-saving technology is immediately sucked back into the system to create more value—more money, more goods, more innovation. We, the people, never actually receive the surplus time *as* time. Indeed, although the labor movement has brought us the weekend, we typically spend weekends in a flurry of acquisition, preparation, consumption, and productivity. Stopping is not an option. This is almost as true for the wealthy as for anyone. While the wealthy could technically "choose" to stop working or work less, they generally don't. There's always a mortgage (or a few) to pay and status to maintain, things to buy, and, perhaps most important, a general lack of anything better to do. Once we've been dehumanized long enough by the insatiable engine of secular acquisition and achievement, it's hard to go back.

An inescapable fixture in our society, clocks wrench us from our homes by reminding us of our duty to work. Marx decried the "despotic bell" of the workplace and showed how human time is appropriated by the "boundless thirst" of capitalism.

Embezzling Time

A century later, Heschel picked up where Marx left off, lamenting how our time—our lifeblood—is stolen from us. But Heschel approaches the question from a mystical, religious perspective. In his 1951 book, *The Sabbath*, he writes about the Jewish Sabbath—the mirror image of Marx's dystopia—the twenty-five hours, from sundown Friday until three stars are visible in the sky on Saturday, devoted to prayer, family, community, pleasure, and awe. During this time, we do not work, discuss work, spend money, touch money, travel, strive to self-improve, tackle thorny problems, create things, or destroy things. We do nothing "useful" in the ordinary sense of the word. On this day the pores of time open and the world breathes. Heschel writes in the rabbinic tradition, describing the Sabbath as a gift from God, a "palace in time," a living presence that enters the world bringing a whiff of eternity. He writes in the language of bliss and surrender.

And while Heschel probably did not intend to write a political text any more than Marx intended to write a spiritual one, the contrast between Heschel's description of the Sabbath day and the world of power, control, and commerce could not be more pointed. The social/political battleground is clearly staked out. Heschel writes:

> He who wants to enter the holiness of the day must first lay down the profanity of clattering commerce, of being yoked to toil. He must go away from the screech of dissonant days, from the nervousness and fury of acquisitiveness and the betrayal in embezzling his own life.

Embezzling his own life! What does it mean to embezzle one's own life? The Wikipedia description of embezzlement, which seems as good as any, reads, "Embezzlement is the act of dishonestly withholding assets for the purpose of theft by an individual to whom such assets have been entrusted to be used for other purposes." The asset in question here is time. Heschel is warning that when we remain embroiled in commerce day in and day out, we are withholding, for the purposes of theft, *time* that has been entrusted to us by God to be used for other purposes. Those purposes may include awakening consciousness and deepening relationships, wisdom, and ecstasy. If the idea of time belonging to God is problematic for you, think of it this way instead: Your precious time on this earth belongs to your deepest, truest self—the baby who was you, who precipitated out of the universe with wide eyes and infinite promise. The baby wanted to play all day in life's playground, to be held in loving arms, to nurse, to giggle, to feel soft blankets against her skin, to simply lie on a bed and watch a ceiling fan go round and round. But time—the rightful property of that baby—gets embezzled by your adult self, who spends it all recklessly working, racing, consuming. The baby is robbed of all her wealth.

The Sabbath is a reclaiming of time for God and for our inner baby. It is a reestablishment of a primordial birthright. At its best, the Sabbath allows the spiritual hippie child in us to come out and play. It's a taste of an infinite present. We get to light candles, linger over meals with loved ones, take aimless walks through the town, run yelling on a beach, roll in the grass, read Rumi and Thomas Merton and Torah, sing our hearts out

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Why does the idea of halting all "productive" work, even for a day, terrify so many of us? Are we afraid that, upon returning to our daily lives, we will no longer find the oppressive aspects of our society to be bearable?

on our front stoops, get sticky from eating ripe peaches, dance at worship services, pray, daydream, talk, make love, sleep. Pleasure. Community. Love. We get to luxuriate in life's fountain of blessings.

No Ordinary Vacation

On the surface, this all sounds like innocuous, good, clean fun. A little harmless R&R. It may even sound quaint and archaic, like something from a bygone era that we post-moderns no longer need. And ironically, Marx probably discarded the idea of the Sabbath as just another opiate—a momentary escape and brief therapy from a world where we are constantly exploited. He would say that the Sabbath (and religion in general) is part of capitalism's "corrective" effect, like holidays and weekends—that is, capitalism band-aids the worst parts of the workers' exploitation and compensates them just enough so that their oppression becomes bearable and they don't revolt.

But to equate the Sabbath with an ordinary vacation is to mistake its essence and its revolutionary potential. The goal of a Sabbath practice is not to patch us up and send us back out to the violent secular world, but to represent in the *now* what redemption looks like, what justice looks like, what a compassionate social order looks like. It is to reconstruct the rest of time from the viewpoint of the Sabbath as unjust and untenable. Granted, the Sabbath traditions of some religious communities merely reinscribe the oppressions and exploitations of the secular world—excluding women, for example, from the domestic-duties hiatus that men enjoy. But a truly egalitarian Sabbath that lifts up a holy vision of the world to come performs deeply political work: it builds an "outside" to the current world. The self that emerges from such a Sabbath and reenters the week is a changed self—a newly radicalized self who can no longer tolerate injustice. Oppression does not become more bearable as Marx feared, but rather becomes unbearable. The question becomes this: once they've seen Paris, how you gonna keep 'em down on the farm?

People get this intuitively. Mention the idea of a full Sabbath practice to the average American and the reaction is quite revealing. Typically, it's terror. When we create breathing space in our week, all kinds of unwelcome feelings and thoughts can arise—feelings of despair or dissatisfaction with the world that we would rather leave buried under a mountain of tasks and vapid pleasures. When I told a high-octane lawyer friend of mine that my family keeps Shabbat each week and explained that during this time we don't work or spend money or run errands, he shook his head and said, "Wow. That sounds terrifying."

My friend was undoubtedly imagining all the things he had to get done. It's hard enough, he was probably thinking, to get everything done in seven days. Subtracting a day a week would be catastrophic. The deposition to prepare, the dry cleaning to be dropped off, the research required to buy a mattress, taxes to be filed, a haircut to procure, the show to watch, the hallway lightbulb to be replaced—all these feel immutable to him (as such things do to most of us). The whispered voices of fear are loud in our ears, warning of the social costs we will pay, how our world may spin out of control, the threat of failures. Free time has to squeeze in around these immutable constraints, or so the thinking goes.

So when the Sabbath comes along and insists that in fact *it* is immutable and all else is negotiable, the world is turned upside down. It is the non-negotiability of the Sabbath that gives it its terrifying power. Exceptions are made only for emergencies threatening life or health. Everything else—everything else!—comes to a screeching halt at sundown. The secular understanding of what's "reasonable" and "normal" gets trumped by a commitment to an alternative vision. A check may be left half written, a shopping trip abandoned with an empty cart, the writing of a paper stopped mid-sentence. This is where the personal gets political: the engines of our social and political systems are fueled by the faith that our daily work and consumer practices (*continued on page 66*)

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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE CROSS?

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A NOTE FROM RABBI MICHAEL LERNER

Publishing an article that intensely criticizes an aspect of Christianity was a stretch for us here at *Tikkun*. Although we consider this magazine to be interfaith as well as Jewish—and have many Christian readers and writers—the idea of taking on something as sacred to the Christian world as the cross gave us pause. The last thing we want to do is convey disrespect to the Christian community and its complex internal debates. On the other hand, having already gotten ourselves into a huge amount of trouble by criticizing something sacred to many American Jews—namely Israel and its army—we thought it reasonable to take seriously our interfaith status by allowing a writer to take on a very controversial issue in the Christian world.

We welcome sharp criticisms and alternative readings of the history discussed here. Please remember, however, that our decision to publish the following article—in fact our decision to publish any article in *Tikkun*—is not an endorsement of the position articulated within it. Our positions are stated in our editorials. For me, this debate resonates with the issues I explored in my book *Jewish Renewal*, where I sought to understand elements of Torah that seem to ontologize cruelty into an aspect of God (for example, God's command to sacrifice Isaac). I'd like to invite our readers to consider how the concerns about violence discussed here by Lawrence Swaim, C. Kavin Rowe, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (as well as by Gary Dorrien in his review on page 57) may be applicable to Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, as well.

If you are an NSP member or a subscriber to *Tikkun*, you can read an expanded version of Swaim's piece at tikkun.org/swaim. Also, don't miss out on the rest of the debate, which is available only online! For contributions from James Cone, John Conger, Matthew Fox, Barbara Darling, Mary Darling, Lynice Pinkard, and Paul Smith, visit tikkun.org/crucifixion. We welcome your feedback: letters@tikkun.org.

The Death of Christianity

BY LAWRENCE SWAIM

There is at the heart of Christianity a disturbing doctrine that has the uncanny ability to overwhelm cognition, and—when internalized by the believer—the ability to traumatize. I refer to the belief, held by most Christians, that Jesus Christ, the prophetic figure of Christianity, was crucified to redeem the world, and that this plan originated with God.

This belief, central to most forms of Christianity, both Protestant and Catholic, maintains that God allowed Jesus to be tortured to death in public in order to redeem human beings, so that God might reconcile himself to his own creation.

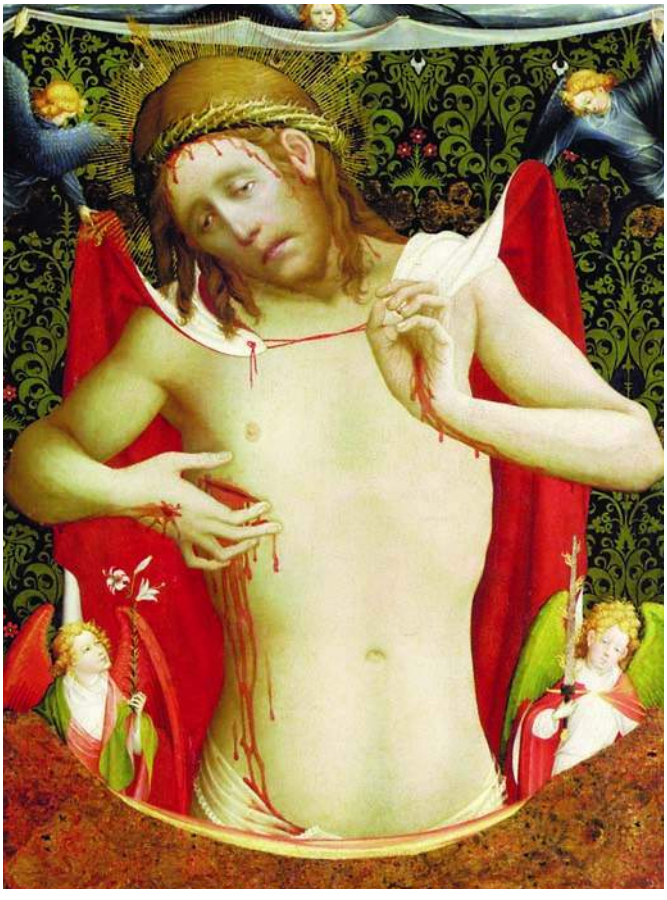
This patriarchal doctrine makes God out to be a vengeful, homicidal deity who can be satisfied only with the death of his son, and portrays the state terrorism of the Roman Empire (the crucifixion) as redemptive. This vision of God is so reprehensible, and sufficiently different from the God of love as taught by Jesus, that it poses an unsolvable and irreducible moral problem.

The extreme sense of paradox created by this doctrine can and does traumatize the believer, especially when disturbing images, narratives, and beliefs concerning the crucifixion are constantly reiterated over a lifetime. This reiteration unconsciously bonds the believer to his Christian faith community, but it does so by causing him to internalize *as redemptive* the aggression implicit in the crucifixion. Because of this, a profound identification with aggression tends to be the fundamental emotional orientation of institutional Christianity.

Can Torture Be Redemptive?

This key belief of Christianity—that God caused Jesus to die on the cross for the sins of the world—is most commonly called substitutionary atonement by Christian theologians. It could be more accurately referred to as *blood redemption* or blood atonement—by dying on the cross, Jesus atones for the sins of humankind and redeems sinners in the process.

LAWRENCE SWAIM is the executive director of the Interfaith Freedom Foundation. His book *The Death of Judeo-Christianity: Religious Aggression and Systemic Evil in the Modern World* will be published by Circle Books. Swaim identifies himself as "a heretical/progressive Christian."



How does repeated exposure to gory crucifixion imagery affect our psyches? Do images like this fifteenth-century painting by Meister Francke send the message that violence can be redemptive?

Some Christians will object at the outset by saying that it was humanity, and not God, that crucified Jesus Christ. Indeed it was, but every Christian theology of which I am aware maintains that it was God that infused the crucifixion with its power to redeem. Human beings may have crucified Jesus, but it was God who gave that crucifixion its redemptive power, thus ensuring eternal life for the believer.

In other words, God colluded with the procurator of the Roman Empire, a specialist in imperial cruelty, to arrive at redemption for you and me. God, in this scenario, is little more than a cosmic thug whose specialty is ritualized human sacrifice and whose preferred method of redemption is public torture of dissenters. If you do not "accept" this distasteful belief (that is, if you refuse to internalize it as part of a conversion experience) because you do not accept that torture

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can be redemptive, you yourself will go to hell and be tortured for all eternity. (Interestingly, this was also the implied social contract involved in the use of the Inquisition as an instrument of social repression.)

Whatever else it may do, the doctrine of blood atonement *does* send a message that violence can be redemptive. This message came to be, over a period of time, the very heart and soul of Christianity. I am not talking about Jesus's life, the Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, or the parables. I am talking about the idea that God made a human sacrifice out of Jesus as a scapegoat for the sins of humanity. This belief in blood redemption is, I submit, perhaps the most violent idea ever devised by the human mind, with the single exception of eternal torment for temporal sins. And this belief in Jesus's blood atonement, far from being some unexamined bit of theology in the dank margins of religious exotica, is the foundational theological concept of almost *all* institutional Protestant and Catholic Christianity. Jesus's violent death on the cross (the central dynamic of salvation) is constantly referred to by Christians as being of supreme importance, from the primitive church through the Middle Ages right up to, and very much including, today's conservative Catholics and Protestant evangelicals—in other words, the majority of American Christians.

Please note, also, that this belief in substitutionary atonement is also a central belief in the liberal mainstream Protestant denominations (Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, and Lutherans). Liberal Christians see the Garden of Eden story as an allegory for the growth of evil in human consciousness. They tend also to see Judgment Day—correctly, I think—as a remnant of the apocalyptical thinking of Jesus's time. But even the most liberal Christians, usually so adept at discerning the metaphorical nature of religious language, generally do not denounce the idea that the execution of Jesus by the Roman Empire two thousand years ago was God's way of redeeming humankind. They, too, have generally internalized this central idea to such an extent that they can no longer see it for what it is: an attempt to redeem the psychic effects of aggression by accommodating, idealizing, and internalizing it—standard mechanisms of trauma bonding.

This particular form of trauma bonding has resulted in a generalized Christian obsession with crucifixion and the cross. Generally blood redemption is associated with the worst and most obscurantist aspects of Christianity, at least partly because the emphasis on Jesus's death can be used to downplay and repress the importance of Jesus's life and teachings. But the primitive nature of the doctrine of blood redemption is especially conducive to—and tends to encourage—social practices of extreme brutality. It shouldn't surprise anyone that a religion that embraces the doctrine of blood atonement should once have believed that Jews killed Christians in order to put their blood in matzah. In fact Christianity's most violent and pathological obsessions (loathing of women, war in the name of Jesus, and flagrant anti-Semitism, to name just three) waxed and waned in roughly the same proportion as the Christian obsession with Jesus's death on the cross and the accompanying belief in blood redemption.

This obsession continues today in the recurring emphasis on Jesus's blood in evangelical sermons, hymns, and literature. And it continues in the liturgical churches' Eucharist, which culminates in the symbolic drinking of Jesus's blood and eating of his flesh. The anti-Semitism is still often there, too, although in a disguised form. The current Pope has again made possible the reading of prayers for the conversion of Jews during Easter Week, a clear reference to the idea of inherited Jewish guilt for Jesus's death. In many conservative evangelical churches, people long for the End Time (or End of Days), which means the end of the world. Many of them believe the End Time will result in the forced conversion of the Jews. For those Jews who *don't* convert to Christianity at the End Time—well, the final solution for *them* will be genocide. God, the same psychopathic God who needed a human sacrifice to be reconciled to the world that he created, will murder all the Jews who refuse to convert to Christianity, thereby finishing the job that Hitler started at Auschwitz.

Blood Atonement and AM Radio

Blood redemption, the central doctrine of Christianity, is the train wreck of Western civilization. You want to stop looking at Jesus up there on the cross, but you can't, because images and reminders of Jesus's death are everywhere. And even when there are no images, there is every imaginable kind of music about it, from Bach to bluegrass. It is the pain and horror and *blood* of the crucifixion that evangelicals, in particular, are obsessed with—that is their preoccupation, and that is what they think about and preach about. Nothing, you see, is quite as dramatic as murder—which is why cop shows on TV are so popular; and there is no murder with as much over-the-top, pulse-pounding excitement as the murder of God, especially when the listener can be denounced as an accomplice.

If you drive through huge sections of the Midwest and the South, you'll often find that there is nothing on the radio but right-wing Christian radio stations. Even the AM stations that aren't technically evangelical carry evangelical preaching, full of constant references to the blood and gore of the crucifixion. These fundamentalist sermons, declarations of faith, and gospel-quoting sessions all come to the same conclusion: Jesus suffered on the cross for *you*, for *your* sins, because you are a sinner for whom Jesus had to suffer interminably and shed his blood.

This evangelical preaching overlaps naturally with AM hate radio, in which talk show "hosts" imitate Rush Limbaugh and rant against any trace of liberalism or critical thought. The underlying emotional dynamic of AM hate radio is pure

Even as progressive Christians root powerful messages of compassion and social justice in the crucifixion story, some right-wing groups use it to anchor messages of hate, particularly toward Jews, whom they blame for the death of Jesus. Here, children from the Kansas-based Westboro Baptist Church picket a Los Angeles synagogue in June 2009.

aggression. Hate radio is redolent with resentment toward people who are perceived as having more education, more money, more cultural literacy, more intelligence, or more pleasure than oneself. It is also shot through with hostility against people who belong to different races and religions. Many listeners to AM hate radio feel offended by the Civil Rights Movement and emasculated by the women's movement. These are overwhelmingly, in other words, angry white men whose skin color and gender no longer guarantee them a modicum of deference. Hate Radio is aimed at angry white guys who are sinking every day into deeper economic, emotional, and spiritual blight—men who are desperate to find scapegoats who can't retaliate.

Christian evangelicalism and AM hate radio go together very well; they represent two connected phenomena that have been interacting for well over sixteen hundred years. The first is the belief in the crucifixion of Jesus as the basis for human redemption, an idea central to most Christian teachings. The second is the worship of aggression in the form of state power. The two validate and drive each other forward and have done so since the time of Constantine in the early fourth century; and for this reason they are intertwined in Western society. Blood atonement and the worship of state aggression don't appeal to those who already have power, but to people who feel powerless, clueless, and without a coherent strategy for their lives.

In the Christian evangelical and fundamentalist movements, it is blood atonement that redeems. In AM hate radio, the redemption comes from hating—and fantasies about hurting—human beings who are different and who probably cannot retaliate. Either way, it is always about redemption through aggression, experienced through a constant stream of violent words and images. Politically, it always expresses itself as support for war, torture, and repression.

I know there are progressive Christian evangelicals, and there are also a few progressive AM talk shows. But in the majority of Christian radio programs, the unconscious message, on the level of the emotions, is identification with aggression, identification with the ecstasy of victimhood, and redemption through violence.

This obsession that Jesus had to die on the cross for your sins and that only by accepting this can you avoid damnation, didn't start yesterday. It didn't start with Billy Sunday or with Billy Graham, or even with the great Puritan preachers like Jonathan Edwards. It started in 381 CE when the belief in blood redemption was institutionalized at the Council of Constantinople, and in the twelfth century, when that belief was extended to confer salvation on crusaders who killed Muslims or who were killed by them. All the violence—all the killing of Jews, Muslims, women, and heretics—can be traced back to the belief that Jesus suffered publicly on the cross for the sins of the world and, in so doing, redeemed the world. That established Christianity as an *exclusive* religion: only those who believe in blood atonement, who believe that Jesus died on the cross for their sins, can spend eternity in the New Earth. The rest of us must be punished—that is the basic message. But it did not start out that way.

The Radical Teachings of Jesus

Nobody knows exactly why he did so, but at the age of thirty, a man named Jesus from the small, slightly disreputable town of Nazareth, in Galilee, began to roam across the country speaking to large crowds, talking to them about a new kind of relationship with God. In gospel accounts we discover that this prophet or teacher believed that the end of the world was near and sought to prepare his followers for it. The best preparation was to create a new relationship with God, Jesus believed, and he explained how that could be done, using the vernacular Aramaic language of his time and employing earthy, hard-hitting parables and metaphors that the people of his time understood.

He encouraged his followers not just to follow the law, but also to internalize it, because only then could it change behavior. To accomplish that, Jesus taught them to pray to God for help, using a new prayer that Jesus taught as part of his spiritual discipline. If they prayed with all their heart, God would change their personalities in such a way that people would feel the same kind of love that people feel for their children, parents, siblings, and best friends. As their relationship to God changed, so would their relationships with one another. You had to ask for help from God, and your

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ability to receive God's love would change how you see the world and bond you to other people who were going through the same process. Jesus believed in charity toward all people, a determination not to judge others, and an ever-present willingness to humbly ask God for guidance.

Supposedly this would create a new "kingdom" of believers, psychologically bonded together by this new personal relationship with God and animated by God's law embedded in their personalities. That was the process. But Jesus was also concerned about aggression and had some startlingly new ideas about how to deal with it. One idea was so counter-intuitive and so radical that it probably struck some listeners as a form of insanity: Jesus said people should pray for their enemies and even love them. Not kill them, not retaliate against them, but pray for them and love them. Of course, you had to pray to God a great deal to get into that kind of mental and emotional state, but Jesus said it was possible. This was something people hadn't heard before.

Many of Jesus's teachings were inspired adaptations of Pharisaical and other concepts current in Judaism, but Jesus was selective about the themes he pursued and he expressed them in charismatic and exciting ways. Although Jesus was close to the Pharisees in both theology and temperament, he was different in one important way: Jesus apparently believed that Jewish law couldn't become a part of one's personality until it was internalized and that the Pharisees wouldn't, or couldn't, internalize the emotional implications of their own law. To Jesus, this meant that the Pharisees weren't practicing what they preached. The Pharisees were mainly interested in measuring social behavior against the law, whereas Jesus, although a shrewd observer of behavior, was concerned about the way people experienced God psychologically.

Jesus was a powerful speaker, skilled at reducing profound ideas to jokes, stories, and parables, and was apparently one of those rare people for whom others feel an almost immediate attraction. He was, in other words, the consummate itinerant preacher, and one with a natural sense of comic timing. He was extremely quick on his feet, regularly turning the tables on those who tried to entrap him with trick questions. In the course of his ministry, Jesus challenged many prevailing cultural belief systems of his time, especially attitudes toward women—in fact he constantly deferred to women in ways his followers found sacrilegious. Jesus sought a spiritual revolution and made it clear that he wasn't preaching violent revolution like the Zealots. (After all, Jesus believed that God was coming soon to set up a kingdom of the righteous, so a human rebellion wasn't necessary.)

Although Jesus judged religion by its effect on behavior, he was unique in his emphasis on the interior rather than the public dimension of religion. This fascination with a personal relationship with God, when combined with the insistence on praying for one's enemies, was, in a sense, a way of pleading with God to change humanity from the inside out. It was certainly a new way of dealing with human evil. Of course, Hillel and other great rabbis of that time were working along similar lines. But in Jesus's case, the moral precepts he taught were intended not just for achieving a good life or a just society, but also as preparation for the imminent end of the world. Perhaps partly because of this, his sermons had a searing psychological intensity that made Jesus special, especially to the poor, the rejected, and the socially marginalized.

For most Jews of Jesus's time, righteousness tended to come from the laws Yahweh had created, just as later in rabbinical Judaism it would come from debating the various interpretations of those laws. For Jesus, righteousness could paradoxically arise from forgiving the obnoxious or homicidal behavior of others. Much of the drama of the New Testament arises from the irony—and pathos—of the difference between what Jesus was saying and what his disciples wanted to hear. It was a time of religious enthusiasm, during which Jerusalem and its environs were thronged with would-be messiahs, secret Zealots, apocalyptic preachers, shamans, and itinerant wonder-working magi of every description.

But for Jesus, righteousness was a state in which laws were followed out of love rather than duty, and arose from a person's relationship to God. Jesus insisted that the right relationship with God came not from the endless parsing of law against public behavior, but from a private, inner attitude based on the willingness to humble oneself. When Jesus taught people to pray for a new kingdom ("thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"), the words refer not to a worldly kingdom, but to a spiritual one, in which he and his followers would strive not for power, but to change the *nature* of power. They would accomplish this through radical love and forgiveness, which Jesus believed was God's will, and which he thought God could, if asked, help people to achieve.

The New Testament brims with parables of generosity and kindness. Lawrence Swaim calls on fellow Christians to ground their faith in stories about Jesus's life rather than his death. In this painting by Jacopo Bassano, Jesus brings forth a miraculous catch for fishermen in the Sea of Galilee.

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Traumatized Disciples Behold a Resurrection

Very early on, Jesus's disciples formed an idea that Jesus was a Messiah, and quite naturally expected him to overthrow the Romans, because that's what a Messiah was supposed to do—the Messiah was supposed to rescue the Hebrew-speaking people from their oppressors. They fully expected that Jesus would use his special powers to get rid of the cruel Roman procurator Pontius Pilate, along with his disrespectful and sadistic troops.

But when Jesus was arrested and hauled in front of Pilate, he was scorned by the Pharisees, scourged by the Roman soldiers, and crucified by the imperial state. The messianic dreams of his disciples were smashed. Their teacher, their rabbi, their Messiah, their Jesus of Nazareth—the charismatic, tireless leader whom they had accompanied in their itinerant wanderings throughout the country—was tortured in public by crucifixion, which was the special punishment reserved for the worst enemies of the state and the most despicable criminals. Throughout this time Jesus lifted not a finger to save himself. There was nothing even remotely messianic about his last hours. Why didn't Jesus use his spiritual powers to stop the Roman soldiers in their tracks? After all, he'd already used those powers to heal the sick, to raise the dead, and to turn water into wine. But when crunch time came, he did nothing, meekly allowing himself to be tortured to death before his followers' eyes.

For Jesus's disciples, it was a devastating experience that overturned everything they knew about the messianic vocation. The synoptic gospels make it unmistakably clear that Jesus's disciples had discerned an opportunity to improve themselves personally by getting in on the ground floor of the new kingdom they thought Jesus was about to build. Jesus's disciples were psychologically crushed. They went from being confreres of a Messiah to being hunted criminals. Thus it should be no surprise that after his death his disciples began suddenly to see him in various places, under unusual and mysterious circumstances—after all, Jesus was a man with so much personal charisma that many of them had dropped everything (that is, they had actually walked off their jobs) to follow him. They loved him as they had loved no one else. So his frightened and dispersed disciples began to see him after he was dead.

The hysterical character of these encounters is easily discerned from scriptural accounts. The disciples walk for many miles on a road with a stranger, and even eat supper with him, without realizing until later that he is Jesus. Of course, it makes no logical sense that the disciples could have walked or eaten with Jesus, a man with whom they'd spent so much time, without recognizing him immediately; but this should not be seen as literal truth but as a psychological phenomenon

Jesus heals a paralyzed man at the Pool of Bethesda in this painting by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo. Images of such marvels abound, but artists struggle to illustrate what was perhaps Jesus's most miraculous act—his success at spreading radical new ideas about the importance of loving everyone, even one's enemies.

with great metaphoric value. Among other things, it meant that Jesus *could be anybody,* that kindness to strangers was actually kindness to Jesus, that feeding any hungry person was feeding Jesus. The disciples' sightings of Jesus after his death amounted to a *psychological* defeat of death.

As for the historical Jesus, the story of Jesus's body being interred in a cemetery is surely an invention, because the Romans would never have allowed one of their condemned prisoners to be so honored. Most likely his remains were eaten by the packs of wild dogs that roamed Jerusalem, as New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan has suggested. The real Jesus disappeared from history after his death, along with his earthly remains. But his disciples saw him, or apparitions they thought were him, repeatedly and, in so doing, were comforted in their loss. But in being so comforted, they turned the trauma on its head. Jesus hadn't been killed by the Romans after all. Jesus had risen! The Romans had been defeated! If Jesus returned to life after being dead for three days, that would enable the early Jesus movement to erase the stigma of the crucifixion by representing Jesus as so powerful that he could outsmart the Romans at their own game. Even the Roman Empire, with all its might, could not kill Jesus, because he had risen victorious from the grave!

It was a giddy, life-affirming victory, but the belief in Jesus's resurrection already contained a negative tendency. It took people one small step away from Jesus's message, putting the emphasis on Jesus's supernatural powers rather than on the radical nature of his teachings. But it was not yet a big step, because the early church had no reason to suppress or dissimulate Jesus's radical teachings. The revolutionary nature of Jesus's ideas was not yet threatening, because the Jesus movement had no political clout. They were merely

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Emperor Constantine, depicted here in an Italian fresco, enabled a more violent form of Christianity to emerge by declaring it the official religion of the Roman Empire.

another group of semi-indigent religious fanatics in Jerusalem, one of many such messianic groups, and probably one of the least attractive. It was easy for them to talk about loving their enemies, because they did not yet have the power to retaliate against them.

Constantine and the Rise of Imperial Christianity

Another big paradigm shift in Christianity occurred in 312 CE, and it, too, was traumatic. An ambitious Roman general named Constantine gave nominal fealty to the traditional gods of the Romans; but he also wanted a more dynamic state religion that could operate as an adhesive to bind together his disintegrating empire, which had become spatially sprawling and ethnically diverse. Christianity as it stood couldn't do that, because of the many variations of Christian belief—unless someone imposed a single brand of Christianity on the young church. For that to work, one brand of Christianity would have to become the state religion and the others would have to be banned. Christianity would not necessarily replace the older gods, but if it became a state religion, it would be given a state ascendancy over the older pagan beliefs that would increase with time.

This revolution in the fortunes of humanity occurred—or was set in motion—by the events of a single day in 312 CE. Constantine, who had ruled the Roman Empire's western dominions with a combination of brutality and strategic acuity, was preparing to go into battle against Maxentius, a rival Roman general. The evening before the battle, as he lingered at Milvian Bridge near the River Tiber outside Rome, Constantine saw a cross in the sky above the words *In Hoc Signo Vinces* ("In This Sign, Conquer"), which he decided was a sign from the Christian God. That night he had a similar dream. His interpretation, not surprisingly, was that the Christian God approved of him, personally, and also of his imperial ambitions. According to his own later accounts (and those of his hagiographer), he used this inspirational vision—and the cross as a lucky talisman—to rally his troops, who soundly defeated Maxentius. He probably would have won this battle anyway, but the wily Constantine had good reason for wanting the support of Christians: they had grown quite numerous in Rome.

The words *In Hoc Signo* later became a popular motto of the church, the letters IHS even appearing on communion wafers in the liturgical churches. (They were said to represent the first three Greek letters of Jesus's name, but the other connotation—of defeating an enemy in battle—was widely understood to be the real meaning.)

From then on, Roman emperors would increasingly wage war or conduct affairs of state in the name of the Christian God because they saw themselves as acting out God's will on earth. Christianity would no longer be led by idealistic, scruffy, schismatic types living on the fringes of society. It had become the official religion of the Roman Empire. Overnight, Christianity transformed from a movement of the lower classes into a defender of privilege and government repression. The bloodier the violence committed in the name of Christianity, the more violent its imperial theology would become. Author James Carroll explores this topic in *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews*, writing, "When the power of the empire became joined to the ideology of the Church, the empire was immediately recast and reenergized, and the Church became an entity so different from what had preceded it as to be almost unrecognizable."

Empire and church interacted upon each other, but clearly it was the church that changed most. Consider, for example, that up to this time Christians had often been pacifists. When Christians had been persecuted, they tended to accept it without complaining, since by suffering martyrdom they were able to die in the same manner as Jesus. And no single brand of Christianity had been suppressed by any other, because no single group had been powerful enough to do so. Now, however, ascendant members of the church hierarchy saw the opportunity to consolidate their theological power in the same way that Constantine sought to consolidate his temporal power.

The church would use its new political clout to impose theological uniformity upon the loose amalgamation of hundreds of different sects, traditions, and beliefs that constituted Christianity. Soon the cross was to be found on the shields of the Roman legions, whose members considered it good luck. The belief in blood redemption, which had been steadily growing within the church hierarchy, fit well with the brutality of imperial rule.

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Crucifixion-Inspired Anti-Semitism

Carroll shows how anti-Semitism waxed and waned in general conformity with other excesses, almost invariably tending to be associated with Christians' growing obsession with the crucifixion of Jesus. This anti-Semitism was also associated with the promotion by church hard-liners of the doctrine of blood redemption. The cross was becoming a central preoccupation of the church, and since "the Jews" were popularly thought to have been responsible for Jesus's death, they began to be seen increasingly as embodying the evil that Jesus supposedly died to redeem. And the Jews' evil was seen as particularly heinous, because they had rejected Jesus's gift of redemption.

The doctrine of blood redemption would also, in an indirect and unconscious way, predispose Christians to anti-Semitism. If violence could redeem, and one person could suffer for all humanity's sins, why couldn't a single group of people be made into a scapegoat for the sins of the world? The idea of the scapegoat, an animal that embodied the sins of the tribe, had of course preceded Christianity, but it now took on an unexpected and diabolical human dimension.

The magical thinking involved in this aspect of emergent Christian theology would, on an unconscious level, prefigure the Augustinian idea that the Jews must suffer to demonstrate God's disapproval of their unwillingness to become Christians. If Jesus could embody all the sins of the world when he was crucified and redeem the world through his suffering, why could not a single people—the Jews—similarly embody all the evil in the world and experience redemption through *their* suffering? In fact it was argued that suffering could redeem them, because it would motivate them to "accept" Jesus—and his crucifixion as redemptive—by converting to Christianity.

Progressive theologians who seek to recuperate the symbol of the cross contend with the historical baggage produced by images such as this manuscript illumination from Saint-Jean d'Acre, in which a crusader brandishes a cross-emblazoned shield.

Creative Commons/Saint-Jean d'Acre

Could Christianity Survive Without the Cross?

Taking the cross out of Christianity might, after all these centuries of identification with the crucifixion, be giving up the glue that has held it together—a negative kind of glue, to be sure, but nonetheless an emotional orientation capable of creating a powerful bond for people who are habituated to it. Without the trauma bond of an inexplicable and brutal God who sacrifices his son, the church would almost surely lose its mass base. It would become a radically smaller and less moneyed religion and would probably result in a new church that, instead of offering redemption that ensures eternal life, would be aimed at changing personality and behavior right here on earth. That is hard work—even when you ask God every day to help you. Most people who turn to Christianity are not looking for that kind of hard work, but for forgiveness that will allow them to go on with their lives without making any big changes. So such a new church would be able to attract only a tiny fraction of the people it attracted before, because the trauma bond of the crucifixion would be removed.

Institutionally, Christianity is re-trenching. The dream of Vatican II has given way to a much more authoritarian Roman Catholicism; liberal Protestantism cannot define evil, much less tell people how to deal with it. The Christian evangelicals and fundamentalists, having failed to achieve their political goals in the Religious Right, know that something is wrong, and seek frantically—good capitalists that they are—to rebrand and to reissue a new and improved version of their faith, in the hopes of making it more palatable to the average religious consumer. But they are missing the point. If blood redemption is not challenged, nothing will change. Interestingly, blood redemption *is* being challenged, most often by Christian feminists. But they are in a very small minority.

People in the pews can feel in their own lives the toxic aggression at the heart of modern Christianity, and they know in their gut that something is wrong. What happens to those who lose their faith when they lose the cross? At least blood redemption acknowledges the existence of evil—without it there will be a temptation either to give in to evil or to fashionably deny its existence. What will Christians do, once they have lost the gut-wrenching metaphor of Christ's

Could Christianity survive without the cross? Lawrence Swaim calls on Christians to embrace a new central symbol such as a parent nurturing a child. In this painting, *Epiphany*, artist Janet McKenzie reimagines the story of the Magi.

Janet McKenzie

crucifixion as the central act of human history? How will they be able to imagine their own salvation, once they can no longer believe in human sacrifice? How will they imagine morality once the drama of deicide no longer provides the dark matter around which everything else revolves?

One thing is sure—Christianity without blood redemption cannot be worse than Christianity with it. Each believer must now decide what to do—to go forward in the quest for a new kind of Christianity or to declare Christianity null and void. Some will take the traditional path of least resistance, practicing Christianity only occasionally and ignoring it the rest of the time, settling for cultural religion. If for no other reason than its proclivity for creating and supporting systemic evil, Christianity cannot go on as it is. A few, a brave few, will attempt to devise a new faith based on Jesus's life, rather than his death, but whether anyone will pay any attention to them is anybody's guess.

Christendom's Living Heart

The cross upon which Jesus was crucified is at the center of the debate not because it is the central icon of Christendom, but because for so many Christians it *is* Christianity, outweighing everything else. The cross pulses in the living heart of Christendom's dream of the City of God, not to mention the American vision of a City on a Hill. But within that living heart reside also the tragic figures of the Christian prince and the Christian warrior—and the brutal religious wars and the vicious anti-Semitism of which they were a part. Within that heart lies also the Inquisition, a fear of women's power, a hatred of the human body, nightmarish stereotypes of murderous Muslims, and the idea that heretical intellectuals must be hunted down and burned in public. All of these things are animated by a belief in redemptive violence, ensconced most purely in the doctrine of blood redemption. For this reason, it is time we retire the cross and put it back in the world of imagination and narrative art, back in the troubled and traumatized collective unconscious of humankind whence it came. It has had its sixteen hundred years of social and cultural ascendancy. It's time to let it go.

Should Christianity die? Yes, if it cannot take the cross from the center of its theology, its culture, and its preoccupations, it should die. It would be worth it if such a death could stop one homophobic assault, one Islamophobic foreign policy, one religious war. Most Christians know instinctively that something has been lost, something that was there before the theologians got to it, before the crusades, before the pogroms, before the centuries of religious war, before the witch-burning and Luther's hatred of Jews and intellectuals, before Auschwitz. Most Christians know that Christianity has, by its own standards, failed. Because of that, even many Christians would be willing to see Christianity die—though I think they would also like to meet, for one moment, the Jesus who walked in Galilee. But they will never meet him if Jesus's death continues to be more important to Christianity than his life.

If the cross were removed from Christendom, what would be left? Would there be a big hole in the center of Western culture? With what symbol would people replace it? Perhaps the Book of Life that every person must write, or the Tree of Life that grows in every Promised Land. Perhaps a new Holy Grail, filled with kindness rather than the strong drink of the hero. Or perhaps the tattered coat of Joseph, on each patch a dream, for such public dreams are the luminescent motley of the prophet, the poet, and the fool. But these are symbols most people do not know—so we must find a better and more universal symbol to go where the cross was before.

I think I know what that symbol could be.

It could be a picture of a woman holding a child. Behind her, a spouse or parent, perhaps, or a lover or grandparent or friend, perhaps even Jesus himself, standing there—imagining together, imagining with her, the sacred dream of a safe place for a child. That would be a symbol I would want to internalize. That could be a symbol for life on this earth. ■

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The Hope of the Cross

BY C. KAVIN ROWE

Ignorance of major world religions comes in many forms today, but Lawrence Swaim's particular version is still stunning. It is almost as if Swaim skimmed pop or even comic books on Christian theology and early church history and fashioned a reckless rant from their raw materials. Of the many historically and argumentatively strange things in his essay, his call for Christians to get rid of the symbol of the cross is the most bizarre. Getting rid of the cross is tantamount to getting rid of Jesus—which is to say, of Christianity itself. Many self-proclaimed progressives may want Christianity to go away, but realists know that this will not happen anytime soon. So, for the time being, let at least this much be understood: If Christianity is here at all, it will have to do with Jesus of Nazareth. And if it has to do with Jesus of Nazareth, it will have to do with the symbol of the cross.

Serious historians dispute many things about Jesus's life, but the one thing they all acknowledge is that he was killed on a Roman cross. Even the ancient Roman historian Tacitus knew this. The founder of the abominable Christians, said Tacitus, "suffered the extreme penalty . . . under one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate." As Tacitus knows, the cross of Jesus is a historical fact. Banishing it from our understanding of Christianity falsifies the truth of history and thereby ruptures the continuity with Jesus of Nazareth as he really lived and died. Jesus without a cross is, quite frankly, someone else. No more could we speak truly of Abraham Lincoln or his legacy without mentioning his assassination. On this point, the past is not so pliable as our contemporary sensibilities may wish: no cross, no Jesus. To talk meaningfully about Jesus at all is to speak clearly of his earthly end—execution on the cross.

In Christian understanding, however, this does not mean that God sadistically punished Jesus. In fact, a major burden of the New Testament and later Christian thought is to say something quite the opposite. The point the early Christians made is precisely that God does *not* punish someone else for humanity's crimes, but that he takes such judgment upon himself. The New Testament speaks of Jesus's legal innocence together with his refusal to deal violently with those who come to kill him, as well as his self-determination to follow through with his mission even unto his unjust death. Later Christian thinkers developed the implications of this language with the doctrines of the Trinity (that the one God exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and the Incarnation (that God the Son became flesh in the person of Jesus).

In fact, these doctrines can be read as the culmination of Christian reflection on the cross. Taken together, they affirm

For many theologians, the cross is a symbol not of blood redemption, but of hope even amid suffering. C. Kavin Rowe warns that excising the symbol of the cross would decimate the "specifically Christian impetus to work with and for those who are being bruised and crushed."

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that Christians see on the cross not only the innocent Jesus but also God. In the enfleshed person of God the Son—Jesus of Nazareth—God refuses to deal with violence by violence and instead exposes himself to the gravest violence and injustice humans can perpetrate. In so doing, God absorbs human pain and waywardness into his own divine life for the purpose of healing. The cross, that is, is God's own ingestion of the world's refuse. Far from disclosing a strange, violent God, the cross of Jesus actually discloses God's humility and desire to repair the world at his own expense.

Finally—and here we come more directly to the issues that concern readers of *Tikkun*—the cross is not simply a symbol of defeat. It is, rather, simultaneously the image of suffering and of hope, the symbol within the Christian drama of the essential unity of complete devastation with the hope for newness and repair. When on the cross Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" he is not uttering a general cry of abandonment. Rather, he cries out to God in the language of the Psalms (22:1). Jesus was a pious Jew; the Psalms are his natural language of lament. It is therefore all the more striking to realize that his cry of dereliction invokes, in good Jewish fashion, not only the beginning of Psalm 22, but the entire psalm itself. What begins in the psalm as a cry of lamentation makes its way to this in verses 23–28:

> You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help. Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you will I fulfill my vows. The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the Lord will praise him—may your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.

Those Jews and Christians who remember the Psalms will thus hear in Jesus's cry not only suffering but also hope. In the very center of the crucifixion's real horror, there is the hope for justice, vindication, and the worship of God—the poor will eat and be satisfied, and those who seek the Lord will praise him. In Christian logic this hope points forward to the resurrection of Jesus—God's own and final vindication of the innocent crucified one. In the New Testament and in Christian reasoning more broadly, therefore, to see the pain of the crucifixion is not to see a wildly vindictive God. It is instead already to see the hope of vindication that God himself fulfills in the resurrection.

To lose the tension that the crucifixion maintains between unjust suffering and the hope for victory over injustice and pain is to rob Christians of their deepest reason for believing that the God of Israel identifies with those who are afflicted, who are humiliated by injustice, and who nevertheless long in hope for vindication. It is, further, to remove the hope of resurrection—or victory—from the center of suffering. In short, excising the symbol of the cross decimates the specifically Christian impetus to work with and for those who are being bruised and crushed.

It is therefore all the sadder to see the obvious: throughout history, Christians have betrayed the meaning of their symbol in ways both large and small. Cross-bearing crusaders, Martin Luther's twisted tractates against Jews, the persecuting and anti-Jewish "German Christian" church, "prosperity Gospel" American preachers, and many, many others flagrantly flout the meaning of the cross. In less obvious but still profoundly damaging ways, the symbol of the cross is flatly contradicted by Christians who exhibit passive indifference to the plight of the poor, who fail to show mercy to the afflicted, and who ignore the sick. To all this, the cross speaks a plain word of contradiction—*No!* And of all this, and of much else, Christians need to repent.

Still, the proper understanding of the cross as God's own peaceful acceptance of our violence and his willingness to submit to our injustice makes it historically and philosophically absurd to root Christian sin genetically in the symbol of the cross. Surely Christians, no less than anyone else, can act poorly and commit atrocities well enough without having to learn evil from their symbol. If anything, the pervasive use of the cross should serve as a constant reminder to Christians of the way their God dealt with the human problem by absorbing it, and our resultant need to take up the cause of the battered and bruised with the hope of resurrection.

And, indeed, it is in fact undeniable that a great many politically charged works of charity and justice have been done out of the understanding that the cross signifies Jesus's ultimate identification with those on the underside, as well as God's final commitment to the work of justice and vindication. Mother Teresa, to take a striking example well known to all, displayed the lived potency of the symbol of the cross: we see in the cross of Jesus the suffering of the utterly downtrodden, and therefore care for them as we would for the wounded Jesus himself. We can tirelessly do this, she knew, not because of a utopian fantasy about human goodness or a naïve confidence in the malleability of the world's systems but because of hope in the God who gives life—even where such hope takes shape in the midst of being crucified.

For this reason if for no other, those who care about the work of justice and of repair—and about hope in the midst of such hard work—have a major stake in helping Christians to understand the depth and political potential of their central symbol. The cross names the fact that patterns of repair (resurrection) must begin by acknowledging the damage wrought by injustice, suffering, and death (crucifixion). It also names the fact that those who have been damaged can experience justice, healing, and renewed life. ■

The Cross as a Central Christian Symbol of Injustice

BY ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA

In "The Death of Christianity," Lawrence Swaim argues that the doctrine of substitutionary atonement "makes God out to be a vengeful, homicidal deity who can be satisfied only with the death of his son." He eloquently elaborates how the doctrine of blood atonement is a product of Roman imperial power, injustice, and terrorism, and presents the cross as a sign of conquest that has shaped Christian identity and ecclesiastical might throughout the centuries. Urging us to embrace a *counterstory* of Jesus's life, Swaim goes on to suggest that we replace the symbol of the cross with the image of "a woman holding a child." Since the cross sends a message that violence can be redemptive, he argues, Christians must jettison the doctrine, story, and symbol of the cross.

I do not think that we should drop the symbol of the cross, either from the story of Jesus or as a central Christian symbol. We need the symbol of the cross as a public sign of imperial injustice and murder, a symbol that challenges state and ecclesiastical powers, and empowers victims. Hence, it is necessary to retell the story of Jesus in terms of justice and not just in terms of internalized love.

Feminist Debates on the Cross

What is not obvious at first glance is that Swaim's argument adopts the critical debate on the the*logy of the cross that has taken place in feminist the*logy and studies in religion. (Please note that my use of an asterisk in "the*ology" is not a typo but rather a way to speak about G*d in neither masculine [*theology*] nor feminine [*thealogy*] gender terms.) To my knowledge, Mary Daly was the first feminist the*logian to point out the significance of the discourse on sin, cross, and salvation in *Beyond God the Father*:

> The qualities that Christianity idealizes, especially for women, are also those of the victim: sacrificial love, passive acceptance of suffering, humility, meekness, etc. Since these are the qualities idealized in Jesus "who died for our sins," his functioning as a model reinforces the scapegoat syndrome for women.

Mary Daly and subsequent feminist theologians have raised questions about whether the cross glorifies suffering. But the answer, the author writes, is not to drop the symbol, but to reframe it as a symbol of contemporary injustice. In this painting, *Women Offered #5*, Janet McKenzie draws on crucifixion imagery to evoke the suffering of women in the face of oppression.

Subsequent feminist christological discussions have underscored the problematic character of Christian beliefs in the cross and redemption. One example of this feminist the*logical discussion is *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*. In the introduction to this book, Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker argue that Christianity has been a primary force in shaping our acceptance of abuse. They write:

> The central image of Christ on the cross as the savior of the world, communicates the message that suffering is redemptive. . . . The child who suffers without even raising a voice is loaded with the hope of the world.

After reviewing the classical doctrines of atonement and discussing modern the*logies of suffering and the cross, they conclude:

> Christianity is an abusive theology that glorifies suffering. Is it any wonder that there is so much abuse in modern society when the predominant image or theology of the culture is of "divine child abuse"—God the father, demanding and carrying out the suffering and death of his own son. . . . This bloodthirsty God is the God of the patriarchy who at the moment controls the whole Judeo-Christian tradition.

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Janet McKenzie

Members of Occupy Catholics call on Roman Catholic bishops to oppose federal budget cuts. Their fifty-foot banner asks, "Were You There When They Crucified the Poor?"

Loren Hart/Occupy Catholics

I agree with both this critique and with Swaim's rejection of the doctrine of blood atonement, as well as his thorough elaboration of imperial Christian power and violence in the name of the cross throughout the centuries. However, I do not think that we should drop the symbol of the cross because it is a constant reminder of imperial injustice.

A Public Sign of Injustice

The recent case of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida, underscores why we need public signs challenging imperial injustice and murder such as the cross. In April 2012 the news broke that, after weeks of public protest, Martin's killer was arrested. This was achieved because the injustice of Martin's death was kept alive in public consciousness as a sign of unjust law and rampant police racism that targets young black men. While the cross, i.e., the unjust execution of Jesus, was not publicly invoked as an interpretive frame, its spirit of intolerable injustice was present.

Catholics United for the Common Good articulated this critical public function of the cross this year during a demonstration on Good Friday with a fifty-foot banner that asked, "Were You There When They Crucified the Poor?" In addition to standing in protest before St. Patrick's Cathedral, the demonstrators submitted 6,400 signatures calling on the Roman Catholic bishops to defend the poor from budget cuts pushed for by House Budget Committee chairman Paul Ryan, a Roman Catholic.

In order to keep the cross as the symbol of injustice before our eyes, we have to continue to ask, were you there when they crucified poor welfare mothers or women who insisted on their right to make their own reproductive decisions, or when they crucified young black men? In order to be able to understand the symbol of the cross as a sign of injustice, we need to tell its *story* differently. We need to abandon the story-frame of blood atonement and tell the Jesus story in terms of struggles for justice. We must not cut the cross and resurrection out of the Jesus *story* but tell this story differently. We can do so if we read the New Testament not through the lenses of blood atonement the*logy but rather in light of the resurrection.

Interpreting the Execution of Jesus

Critical biblical scholarship has unearthed a host of different interpretations of Jesus's death and resurrection that may or may not have a claim to being "historical." While scholars disagree in their historical evaluation of individual texts about Jesus's death, they almost universally agree that these texts have been generated by historical events. These "facts" consist in that Jesus suffered the excruciating death of crucifixion and that he was proclaimed by his followers as having been raised from the dead.

The actual form of Jesus's execution is not controverted. We know that the Roman imperial police did not hesitate to use crucifixion as a mode of execution, especially against seditious provincials and rebellious slaves. According to all four gospels, Jesus was charged with a political crime. The Roman governor Pontius Pilate had affixed a placard to Jesus's cross proclaiming the crime for which he was killed. He gave as the reason for Jesus's execution that he was the "king of the Jews." Some scholars doubt that this official interpretation of Jesus's execution is historical. Yet it would be difficult to argue for its later invention, since the statement serves neither Jewish nor Christian political-religious interests. To the contrary, it caused great difficulties for both. In any case, Pilate's public identification of Jesus as "king of the Jews" constitutes a very early explanation as to why Jesus was crucified. However, the gospels have the tendency to shift attention from this political reason for Jesus's death to a religious-ethnic one. Such a shift takes away the responsibility for Jesus's execution from the Roman government and places it increasingly on the Jewish leadership and people.

The execution of Jesus raised a difficult the*logical problem for his followers as to whether he and his message were wrong. It also engendered the need for a political apologetics capable of showing that the early Christians were not seditious enemies of the Roman order. Such a political apologetics shifted theological attention away not only from the political character of the death of Jesus to a religious symbolic interpretation of the cross, but also away from the culpability of the Roman imperial administration to that of the Jewish leadership and people. Since this shift had already been accomplished at the time when our canonical gospels were written, it is important to trace the pre-gospel interpretation of the execution of Jesus.

One of the first interpretations given to the execution of Jesus is the confessional formula "G*d raised him from the dead," or "he was raised" (passive voice). This formula seems to be structurally patterned after the central Israelite

confession "God brought Israel out of Egypt." It asserts that G*d's saving activity is manifested in the vindication of Jesus, who is now the Resurrected One. While the blood atonement interpretation sees Jesus's death as the perfect sacrifice for appeasing G*d, the vindication by G*d interpretation sees his execution as unjust and his being raised as the exoneration of the just one. Such language of vindication is found in both apocalyptic and Hellenistic wisdom literature. For instance, Wisdom of Solomon 2:13–20 asserts that the righteous one will be numbered among the children of G*d and not be put to shame. The righteous one will be saved by G*d and exalted to glory as a witness to G*d's help for those who are truly just. To stress that "G*d raised Jesus" expresses the conviction that Jesus's message and person were vindicated despite all evidence to the contrary.

Various other meaning-making attempts in the face of the unjust execution of Jesus, including that he died for our sins, can be explicated if one explores not only Pauline texts but also christological titles, almost all of which were ascribed to Jesus after his death and resurrection. By giving dignity and value to the one who in his execution became a dehumanized non-person, these titles seek to exonerate Jesus. One could also find increased instances of such "naming" and meaning-making rhetorical gestures by looking closely at how the oldest narrative traditions characterize Jesus. These early Christian attempts at making meaning in the face of the devastating execution of Jesus should not be conceptualized in terms of the history of ideas, but as critical arguments that begin with the very real experience of Jesus's unjust dehumanization and crucifixion as a political criminal.

In short, the cross and its early New Testament interpretations begin with the historical fact of unjust oppression, the experience of struggle for a different world, and the encounter of the victimization and death of the dehumanized person. They seek to make meaning in the context and situation of unjust suffering. In doing so, they claim the historical agency of those disenfranchised to define and change death-dealing situations of dehumanization because execution is not the last word.

A Symbol of Hope

Resurrection is a symbolic act, yet it offers real justification for Jesus and all those "little ones" or "nobodies" who struggle for survival, human dignity, and liberation from oppression. Faith in resurrection and hope in the overcoming of brutal suffering and execution celebrates the living. It does so with ever new names and images that reconstitute the human dignity, agency, and memory of those who were killed.

All gospels mention Mary of Magdala as the primary witness to the resurrection, and they refer to other women as well. Moreover, these women are not only said to be the first proclaimers of Jesus's resurrection, but they are also characterized as the primary witnesses to his execution and burial.

"The texts of the empty tomb tradition take injustice, suffering, and death seriously but do not see them as having the last word," the author writes. In this painting, *Empty-Tomb* by He Qi, women gather around Jesus's empty grave.

He Qi

Yet, no human being is reported to have witnessed the resurrection event itself!

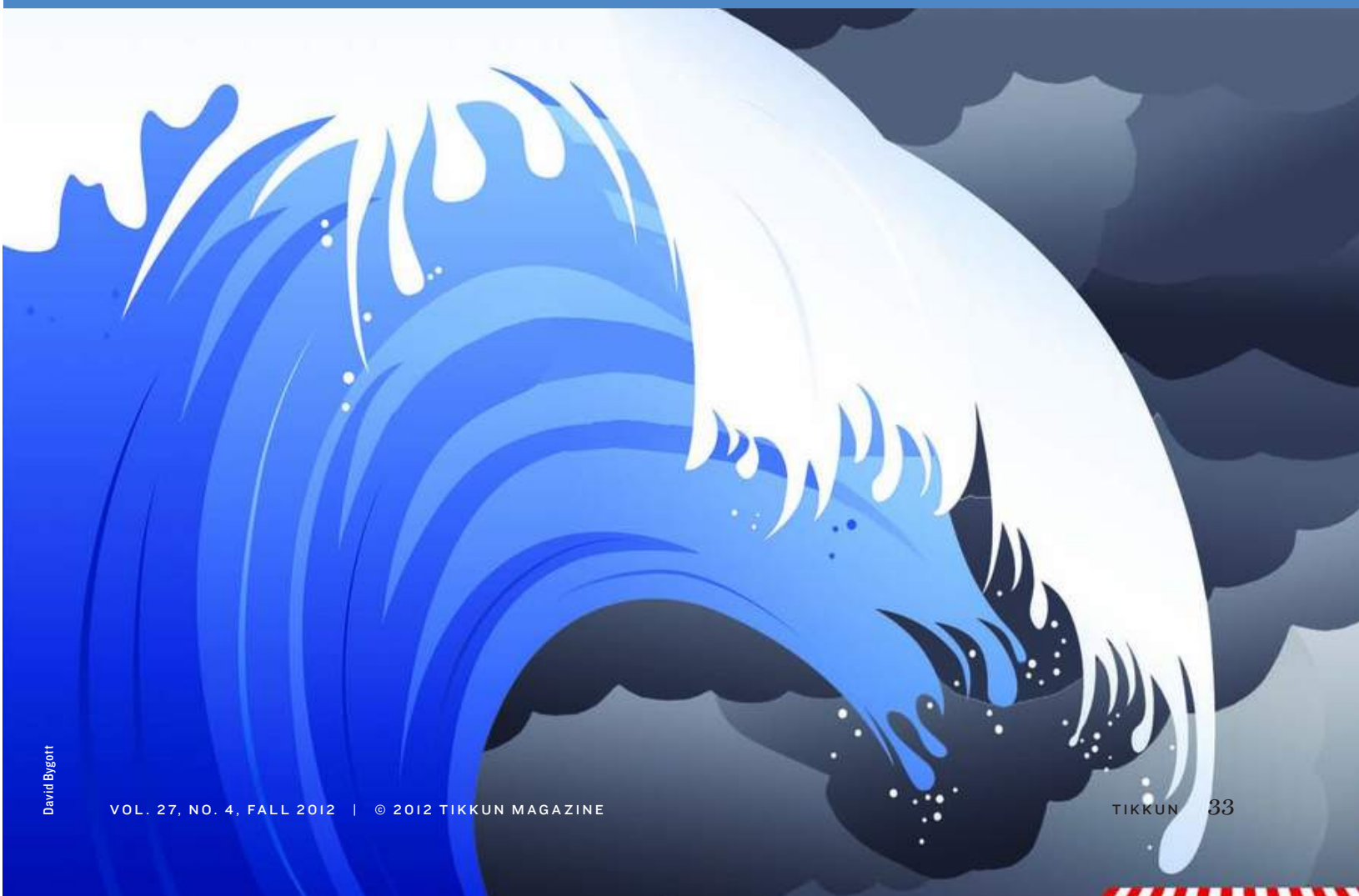
The Easter message is given to Mary of Magdala and to the other women who have come to the grave site. The kerygmatic formula proclaimed in Mark 16:6 and stylized in Matthew 28:5–6 mentions the death of Jesus not in general terms but specifically as a crucifixion. The resurrection stories state, "he is not here," i.e., in the place where Jesus was buried, and the proclamation "he was raised" is the proof for it. The Easter message is an announcement requiring action rather than a statement of confession. It is future-oriented rather than backward-looking: the women "seek" Jesus among the dead but are told that the tomb is empty. The empty tomb proclamation locates the Resurrected One not in heaven but on earth, in Galilee. The imagination space of the empty tomb engenders the proclamation of Jesus as the unjustly killed one who has been vindicated.

Positioning contemporary feminist discourses about the the*logy of the cross within the rhetorical space of the empty tomb as an ambiguous, open space allows one to reclaim this space of resurrection for women's meaning-making practices in the face of dehumanization and oppression. Religious discourses can take these spaces of brutal victimization seriously and at the same time claim the victims' agency in either collaborating with or transforming such spaces of death.

The texts of the empty tomb tradition take injustice, suffering, and death seriously but do not see them as having the last word. Since G*d was absent in the execution of the Just One, the women's presence under the cross is a witness to this absence. The tomb is the brutal, final reality of the cross that eclipses G*d and negates all possibilities for the future. But the "tomb is empty!" The empty tomb does not signify absence but presence: it announces the Resurrected One's presence on the road ahead, in a particular place of struggle such as Galilee or Sanford, Florida. The Resurrected One is present in the "little ones," in the survival struggles of those who are impoverished, hungry, imprisoned, tortured, and killed in the wretched of the earth. Their claims to justice remain visible and audible in the symbol of the cross. We cannot afford to relinquish this Christian symbol of brutal injustice: the cross continues to challenge us to protest the imperial powers of victimization and injustice that shape both our society and our religions. ■

AMERICA BEYOND THE 2012 ELECTION

Amid the blitz of campaign commercials, presidential debates, and political punditry, it can be hard to imagine life beyond the upcoming election. But a narrow focus on electoral politics can distract us from impending global crises that transcend national politics—crises such as climate change, economic collapse, the ever-growing power of transnational corporations, and the escalation of attacks on social welfare in the name of "austerity." In this special section we present a lively debate on how much energy to invest in electoral politics, how to make sense of Obama's first term, and why America desperately needs a Left, no matter who wins in November. The positions articulated in this section are not meant to represent *Tikkun*'s position; indeed, as a 501c3 nonprofit, we are prohibited from endorsing political parties or candidates, so we never engage in partisan campaigning. Instead we offer wide-ranging analyses of contemporary politics from a spiritual and progressive perspective. As always, we have put some of our best pieces in the print magazine and some on our web magazine site. Don't miss lively contributions from Sheila Davaney, Charles Derber, Frank Kirkpatrick, Greg Palast, Peter Paris, Don Shriver, Anthony Pinn, E. Marshall Turman, and Sharon Welch. To read those online-only pieces, visit tikkun.org/beyond2012.



David Bygott

Why America Needs a Left

ELI ZARETSKY

THE UNITED STATES TODAY should be engaged in a great debate, not so much over who the next president will be, or over the role of government in economic life, but over the very identity and future orientation of the country itself. On the one hand, powerful right-wing voices argue that America is an essentially conservative country. On the other hand, other voices, led by the president, argue that "there's not a liberal America and a conservative America—there is the United States of America!" implying that we are an essentially centrist country. Strikingly marginal to the election—though clearly present on TV (Bill Maher and Rachel Maddow), in poll numbers, and in opinion surveys—is an American Left, proudly self-identified as such.

The relative marginalization of the Left in American politics is not new. From the beginning of the republic, many of America's thinkers and political leaders have argued that the country neither has nor needs a significant Left. In the 1950s, the so-called liberal consensus school—including Richard Hofstadter and Louis Hartz—argued that the country has always enjoyed agreement on such matters as private property, individualism, popular sovereignty, and natural rights. Others claimed that America did not have a leftist working class or peasantry as other nations had, a claim often termed American exceptionalism. Still others claimed that the country didn't need a Left because it already believed in, or had even achieved, such goals as democracy and equality—goals that other nations were still striving to achieve. This view has been associated with cold-war liberalism and neoconservatism. Thus when Barack Obama described the conflict between Left and Right as a "psychodrama of the Baby Boom generation—a tale rooted in old grudges and revenge plots hatched on a handful of college campuses long ago," he was in the mainstream of American political thought.

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The U.S. fight against slavery generated the first powerful constitution of an American Left. This painting, *The Anti-Slavery Society Convention* by Benjamin Robert Haydon, depicts Thomas Clarkson addressing American and English abolitionists in 1840.

The Left's Role in Times of Crisis

In spite of these claims, the country has typically had a powerful, independent Left. The indispensable role of the Left has come during periods of long-term crisis, by which I mean turning points in the country's history. The country has had three such crises in its history: the slavery crisis culminating in the Civil War, the crisis precipitated by the rise of large-scale corporate capitalism, culminating in the New Deal, and the present crisis (the crisis of "affluence" and global power, which began in the 1960s). Each crisis generated a Left—first the abolitionists, then the socialists, and finally the New Left—and together, these Lefts constitute a tradition.

Each Left arose through challenging the liberal conception of equality—the formal or procedural equality of all citizens before the law. In place of that understanding, each Left sought to install a substantive idea of equality as a continuing project. In the abolitionists' case, the issue was racial equality, specifically as a prerequisite for the republican form of government. In the socialists and communists' case, the issue was social equality, specifically the insistence that democracy required secure guarantees of such basic necessities as health care, housing, and jobs. In the case of the New Left, the issue was participatory parity in every sphere of society, including social movements themselves. Central to our history, then, is a struggle between liberalism and the Left over the meaning of equality.

To clarify, when I talk about "liberalism" here, I am referring to the liberal-consensus position vis-à-vis equal rights.

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The United States was founded on liberal principles of equal rights, and these have been shared by both the Republican and Democratic parties, and by their predecessors. Nonetheless the principle of equal rights is itself ambiguous. As a result, a Left has needed to challenge the mainstream conception of equal rights—a conception focused on formal or procedural equality before the law.

The Right, by contrast, is a reaction to the Left. When we get a Right that has genuine intellectual force and charisma, as we got in the United States after the quasi-defeat of the New Left, it necessarily dressed itself up in the leftist vernacular of protest, discontent, minority voice, and exclusion. Any attempt to exclude the Left, and to form a coalition between liberals and the Right, cannot resolve the country's crisis, as we shall see. Only a revitalized Left, which further deepens America's egalitarian commitments, can move in that direction.

The crisis precipitated by the rise of large-scale corporate capitalism culminated in another resurgence of the Left in the 1930s. Murals created under the New Deal's Public Works Art Program articulate that era's vision of social equality anchored in union organizing.

Defining the Left

To make this argument, I first need to clarify two concepts: the Left and crisis. What is the Left? Derived from the spatial situation of the body in nature, in every society, the Right symbolizes dominance, authority, and God; the Left symbolizes rebellion, danger, discontent, perversion, and the plebeian status. In this sense—the sense of rebellion—the existence of a Left is a universal characteristic of all societies. Nonetheless, in traditional societies rebellion took the form of "anger at the failure of authority to live up to its obligations, to keep its word and faith with the subjects." Traditional protest, then, accepts the existence of hierarchy but attempts to make it conform to an idealized pattern. The modern idea of a Left, by contrast, questions whether we need particular forms of hierarchy or authority, such as kings, or capitalists, or "experts," at all. It doesn't seek to return to an idealized past, but rather to move toward an ultimately realizable future.

When we think of the Left in the modern sense, we tend to think of the French Revolution. As most historians know, the term "left" emerged with the creation of the National Assembly in France during the 1789 revolution. Over time, those who sat on the left (the Jacobins) came to represent the egalitarian social revolution, while those who sat on the right (the Gironde) stood for the liberal political revolution. As Napoleon's conquests spread revolutionary ideals throughout Europe, the left/right distinction began to order parliamentary democracies. As J.A. Laponce has described in *Left and Right: The Topography of Political Perceptions*, being visual and spatial, the dichotomy was "immediately understandable and easily translatable across cultures."

France had a parliamentary system with left, right, and center parties. The United States by contrast developed a nonideological two-party system. As a result, the term "left" was not widely used in a political sense in the United States until after the Bolshevik Revolution. In fact, the first American book that I have been able to locate that uses the term in its title in the political sense, David Saposs's *Left-Wing Unionism*, only appeared in 1926. This did not mean, however, that America lacked a Left before the Bolshevik Revolution. On the contrary, there existed powerful U.S. counterparts to Europe's advocates of self-government, socialism, and communism. These included the radical wing of the abolitionists, as well as many other nineteenth century reformers, labor organizers, communalists, pacifists, and the so-called "lyrical Left" of John Reed and Randolph Bourne.

It is partly because the Social Democratic and Communist versions of the Left were relatively weak in the United States that a reexamination of the American Left has so much to offer. The place of Communism within the history of the Left was deeply ambiguous. The reason was the Communist break with liberalism. Marx argued that the democratic revolutions were bourgeois revolutions and thus should be followed by socialist revolutions. Whereas the historic idea of the Left presupposed a center and a Right, Marxism (and especially Leninism) wanted the Left to occupy the total political space. Thus, Marxism conflated the Left with social revolution, whereas in many societies, such as our own, the Left presupposes liberal and democratic institutions and is committed to preserving, albeit deepening them. The inextricability of American radicalism and liberal and republican traditions can be seen if we consider the English Civil Wars. As Christopher Hill wrote:

> There were . . . two revolutions in mid-seventeenth-century England. The one which succeeded established the sacred rights of property, gave political power to the propertied, and removed all impediments to the triumph of the ideology of the

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men of property—the protestant ethic. There was, however, another revolution which never happened, though from time to time it threatened. This might have established communal property, a far wider democracy in political and legal institutions, might have disestablished the state church and rejected the protestant ethic.

Thus while liberals like John Locke were attacking extremist, utopian sects, a nagging, radical tradition was born, concerned with enclosures, political democracy, women's subordination, and the demand for "true and pure undefiled religion"—i.e., freedom of conscience.

Defining Crisis

Marx is the only thinker who has provided a clear and lucid theory of capitalism, a social system organized through the division between capital and labor, and utterly distinct from a market or exchange society, as described, for example, in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Such a theory lies behind the second term I promised to clarify, crisis. The American Left inherited the idea of a crisis from Marx, not just the kind of "economic crisis" that characterized the Great Depression and that afflicts the country today, but also broader crises reflecting Marx's influence on modern historiography, such as "the crisis of the middle ages." I believe we need a concept of this sort to understand America.

The Greek word *krisis* derives from the word *krino*, which means to pick out, to choose, to decide, to judge. A crisis is not simply an economic breakdown or a war, from which one needs to recover. Rather, it is a turning point during which a society makes fundamental decisions about its future. There is a narrative structure to a crisis, as in the Greek tragedies. The heart of a crisis lies not in its objective character but rather in the subjective self-awareness of the one who undergoes it, in our case the American people. It is during periods of crisis that the Left becomes indispensable to the nation, so indispensable that our previous crises were never resolved without the Left's active participation.

To understand the relation between the Left and crises, we must distinguish crises from both "normal" periods and emergencies. During normal or everyday periods, the country *does* appear to have a consensus on such ideas as individualism, pluralism, and private property. During short-term emergencies, like the Alien and Sedition Acts, the Red Scare, or the McCarthy period, the country reveals a surprisingly strong communal, religious, and ethno-national core; it comes together as a whole people, but in a panicky way, joining to expel the "alien element." In crises, by contrast, Americans strive to form a new or revised agreement, an agreement on values, and not a mere deal or compromise. While the Left is present during normal periods, and can be very important in resisting group pressures during states of exception, its special value lies in periods of crisis. During

The third great resurgence of the American Left took place in the 1960s, with the emergence of the civil rights, feminist, and anti-war movements. Here, a demonstrator offers a flower to a military police officer in 1967.

such periods the nation has to look inward and summon up its unconscious and inherited powers. When it does, it needs the deep conception of equality to which the Left adheres.

Crises have a dual character. On the one hand they invariably have a structural dimension. They occur because of epochal transformations in the deep structure of American capitalism. Still, such crises are not merely "economic" crises, resolvable by allowing the value of goods and services to decline sufficiently—in other words, by inflicting sufficient pain. Rather, they are momentous shifts in which the nation's assumptions, values, and direction are rethought. Thus, they have an identity dimension as well.

Egalitarianism and the Shaping of Collective Memory

The United States has undergone three crises of this sort. Importantly, the American Revolution, which established independence, was not one of them. Rather, the three crises I have in mind constitute a kind of counter-narrative to the one that begins with Independence.

They were, first, the slavery crisis, which came to a head in the struggle to abolish slavery and the Civil War; second, the crisis surrounding the rise of large-scale corporate capitalism, which came to a head in the struggles of the 1930s and the creation of the so-called general welfare state; and third, the crisis opened up by the neo-liberal revolution in the 1970s, but with roots in the preceding decade. Each crisis was associated with a particular stage in the history of capitalism: primitive accumulation in the form of slavery and "Indian removal," large-scale corporate accumulation in the case of the New Deal, and finance-led globalization in the case of the New Left.

American history, too, must be understood to have a two-fold character. On the one hand, it has to be understood in terms of a unilinear unfolding beginning with independence. On the other hand, it has to be (*continued on page 67*)

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Obama in Question

A Progressive Critique and Defense

BY GARY DORRIEN

Many progressives are upset about how President Obama has coddled Wall Street. Yet he has also signed the biggest antipoverty bill in forty years and attained health coverage for millions of uninsured people. How is he doing on his promise to deliver the "change we need"?

FOUR YEARS AGO we seemed to take a shortcut to some kind of national redemption. The same nation that enslaved African Americans until 1865 and imposed a vicious century-long regime of segregation and everyday abuse upon them elected an African American to its presidency. The same nation that elected twelve slave masters to its presidency elected a president whose wife was a descendant of American slaves. The same nation that never would have elected a veteran of the Civil Rights Movement to national office fulfilled some of the movement's most idealistic hymnody. The same nation that made "USA" synonymous with imperial smashing in Iraq and torturing prisoners at Guantánamo made a bid to dramatically change its international image.

We elected an inspiring, eloquent, dignified, reflective type who understood very well that his candidacy offered, and rested upon, a series of shortcuts. Politics is always about power and is only sometimes about social justice. It has a relation to redemption—the healing of life and the world *(tikkun)*—only through its connection to social justice. The Obama movement of 2008, although long on redemptive aspects for a political campaign, wrought nothing like redemption for centuries of U.S. American slavery and apartheid, and it did not change the fact that African Americans are subjected to unemployment, imprisonment, and bad schools at higher rates than other groups. Even as ordinary politics, the Obama campaign was a shortcut. Otherwise Obama would not have been compelled to play down the memories, ideals, and struggles that tied his campaign to the Civil Rights Movement. And otherwise it would not have mattered so much that Obama's many political talents include his Oprah-scale capacity for making white Americans feel good about themselves and their nation.

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Obama was only the third African American to serve in the U.S. Senate since Reconstruction, and he had been there for only three years when he ran for president. He skyrocketed to national prominence, and then the presidency, on the strength of his once-in-a-generation talent, intelligence, and self-confidence. In the Senate he pleaded with supporters to give him time to accomplish something before they talked up a run for the White House; Michelle Obama was adamant on this theme.

All was to no avail. The vast crowds of mostly white liberals and moderates who packed into Obama's speaking engagements could not wait for him to run on his record. Since Obama had planned all along to run for president as soon as possible anyway, he had only to change his mind about when it was timely to do so. One shortcut led to another.

Obama is a figure of protean irony and complexity. He wrote a lengthy autobiography in his early thirties, yet he is short and guarded about what makes him tick. He is decidedly introverted, yet in public settings he has an extroverted charm that is not forced or phony. He is audacious about himself and his career, with enormous ambitions for his presidency, yet he governs with deep caution, even timidity, even as he pushes for huge, risky, historic things. He is disciplined to the point of having disciplined even his feelings. He is almost eerily self-possessed, more comfortable in his skin than any American political leader since Ronald Reagan, who, like Obama, was sometimes described as an actor portraying a politician.

Reagan was more complicated than he seemed. Obama, by contrast, is obviously complicated, which unnerves many Americans. Yet Obama's blend of informality, centered ease, reasonableness, and personal guardedness epitomizes the

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style of sociability that is prized by American professional and business culture. Obama developed his affable cool in Indonesia and Hawaii—places where being affably cool helped him get along, negotiating his outsider status.

Obama's First Year in Office

Obama had barely been elected president when he had to start governing, and he was in full governing mode before he was inaugurated, pushing a huge stimulus bill that he wanted to sign on his first day in office. A month after he was inaugurated, he signed seven landmark bills at once—the largest tax cut for the middle class since the Reagan administration, the biggest infrastructure bill since the Eisenhower administration, the biggest education bill since the Johnson administration, the biggest antipoverty and job training bill since the Johnson administration, the biggest clean energy bill ever, and huge investments in housing and scientific research.

But he wrapped these things together as one bill to ensure that everything passed. He played down the fact that the stimulus contained the best antipoverty bill in forty years because drawing attention to it would have jeopardized it. He settled for a smaller stimulus than was needed, without fighting about it publicly—a sign of things to come. Then he pulled off a colossal antipoverty reform by attaining health coverage for 34 million uninsured people; he rarely mentions this achievement today, because it has become politically toxic.

Obama defied his entire senior staff by rolling the dice on national health insurance, an issue with forbidding politics and a record of seven presidential failures. I believe that he made a serious mistake by going for health reform when he did, and I'm convinced that he went about it in the wrong way. He excluded single-payer care as something not worth discussing, and he bailed out on the public option without risking a single speech or fight for it. But for all that he got wrong in this area, Obama abolished the worst abuses of the health insurance companies. It says something important about him as a moral being that he risked his presidency to gain health coverage for tens of millions of poor and vulnerable people.

Attacks from the Right

It did not take long to see what Obama's special problems are. More than one-fourth of the American population claims to believe that Obama is an illegitimate president, a radical Socialist, anti-American, and/or sympathetic with Islamic radicalism. In some polling, up to one-third of Americans have contended that Obama wants to impose Sharia law throughout the world, and over half have tagged him as a radical Socialist.

Obama's election set off a howling alarm of anxiety and fear for Americans who could not see him as an American leader. Within weeks of Obama's election, "I want my country back" became a staple of Republican rallies featuring an image of America's first black president.

Normal political trading stopped with the coming of Obama, notwithstanding his pleas for civility and political cooperation, and notwithstanding that the nation was in the midst of an economic crash when his presidency began. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell was adamant that Republican cooperation with Obama would not be tolerated; his top priority was to take down Obama.

The stimulus bill was the first test of that resolution. The United States had lost nearly 3 million jobs the previous year. We had lost 741,000 jobs in the month that Obama was inaugurated. Nearly every economist said we needed a stimulus to save the nation from reliving 1933. But the stimulus bill got zero Republican votes in the House and three expensive Republican votes in the Senate. Somehow, it was horribly wrong to save the nation from free-falling into a depression. On the basis of that absurd argument, the Tea Party exploded into being and won a huge political windfall, which has made the Republican Party more extreme than ever.

The Tea Party, the most powerful movement in American politics today, is overwhelmingly white, middle-class, and either middle-aged or elderly. It thrives on a deeply felt dichotomy between the deserving and the undeserving. At the grassroots level, much of the Tea Party is not hostile to Social Security or Medicare, unlike the professional ideologues that are exploiting it. Tea Party Republicans are quite certain that they deserve their own Social Security and Medicare. But they are outraged that "undeserving" people get taxpayer-funded benefits from the government, and they are willing to swallow a Wall Street Republican presidential candidate if that is what it takes to get rid of Obama. The right-wing, anti-Obama literature charges incessantly that white liberals coddled an undeserving Obama into and through Harvard Law School, financed his political career, and fawned over him all the way to the White House, where he allegedly betrays America's national interests and slathers the undeserving with Obamacare and food stamps.

Disappointment on the Left

Meanwhile Obama has serious problems with his progressive base. Every week on the lecture trail, and nearly every day on radio shows, I meet progressives who are finished with Obama. Many have signed petitions saying they will not work for him or even vote for him. They feel betrayed, or disillusioned, or both. Often they assume that I agree, since I have sharply criticized Obama's policies from the outset of his presidency and I have been deeply involved in Occupy Wall Street.

But I do not feel betrayed or disillusioned, because I never considered Obama to be a progressive movement leader. He could not have been elected president had he been one, and he is not a substitute for the vital progressive movement that we lack. Obama has governed in the centrist, sometimes

Where does Obama stand on military policy? While he escalated the war in Afghanistan, he also withdrew American troops from Iraq and ended the Pentagon's "don't ask, don't tell" mistreatment of gays and lesbians. Here, U.S. and Afghan forces assemble in Ghazni Province following a military operation.

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liberal-leaning fashion that he described while running for the White House. It is imperative that progressives acknowledge his considerable achievements, not repeat the mistakes of 2000, and recognize that electing a more compelling human being to the presidency is not possible in this country.

Obama is a centrist politician with liberal leanings on some issues, exactly as he described in *The Audacity of Hope* (2006). He did not have a single risky position in his 2008 campaign portfolio. He did not promise to scale back America's military empire, or to get out of Afghanistan, or to break up the megabanks. His campaign supported a public option in health care, but very quietly, and he talked about persuading Democrats and Republicans to work together, not about fighting for social justice causes. But too many progressives and others projected their fantasies onto him, imagining that they were electing Martin Luther King Jr., which set them up for a mighty disillusionment.

America and the world would be much better off today had there been a Gore administration. As president, Gore would not have invaded Iraq, launched a perpetual global war, showered the rich with tax cuts, doubled the federal debt, or let the oil companies devise America's energy policies. The left-liberals who sat out the 2000 election or who supported Ralph Nader in Florida had ample cause to be frustrated with Bill Clinton's legacy and put off by Gore's candidacy. But the differences between the Gore administration that should have been and the Bush administration that occurred were enormous, vastly outstripping the reasons that some progressives gave for allowing Bush to win the White House.

To be sure, Obama has made brutal concessions that he never promised, mostly in hostage situations. Some are too brutal to be cleaned up even by the hostage explanation. He cut Medicaid to get a budget deal, which is morally indefensible, carrying on the Beltway tradition of bashing poor people first. He offered to increase the entry age for Medicare, which is the opposite of what America needs to do in health care. He extended and heightened some of Bush's worst policies in the national security area. He cut an atrocious deal in the debt ceiling fiasco as though he lacked the Fourteenth Amendment or any other leverage, giving Republicans (on House Speaker John Boehner's estimate) 98 percent of what they wanted.

Obama as a Conciliation-Minded Centrist

On no major issue did Obama plant a flag and fight for something worth risking a legislative defeat. Repeatedly he surrendered in the third quarter, or punted on third down, or whatever sports metaphor one prefers for this objection. Conciliation was not merely his default mode. It was his chief operating mode.

Obama is predisposed to the role of mediating reconciler who leads the country beyond its divisions. He got to be president by persuading independents that a likable type like himself could inspire cooperation across party lines to solve the nation's problems. He wanted to be the Reagan of his party, a forward-looking optimist who changed the course of history. He wanted to do it by winning independents and Republicans to his idea of good government, just as Reagan won over independents and Blue Dog Democrats. Getting people to like him had always worked for Obama, as had his trope about America not being divided between blue states and red states.

But Republicans opted for obstruction and took back the House of Representatives. Then they took the nation hostage over the debt ceiling, and Obama, belatedly, rethought what his presidency needs to be about. Any progressive case for Obama has to bank on his commitment to limit the damage from his own concessions and to redeem the promise of his presidency.

This promise is still in play; Obama is singularly gifted and he has historic accomplishments to his credit to build upon. He stabilized an economy that was spiraling into a deflationary abyss. His stimulus bill made social investments that will pay off for decades, and it expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit, which has saved millions from falling into poverty. Obama rescued the automobile industry and the economies related to it. He pushed for a no-exemptions version of the Volcker Rule and eventually signed a halfway decent financial reform bill against an overwhelmingly better-funded opposition. He abolished the United States' use of torture and the CIA's secret prisons. He made a historic outreach to the Muslim world. He forced the insurance companies to stop excluding people with preexisting conditions and to stop dropping people when they got sick. He withdrew American troops from Iraq exactly as he promised. He made two excellent

Tea Party supporters, shown here at a Michele Bachmann rally, emerged as a formidable force during Obama's first term. The Tea Party's influence, the author argues, has made the Republican party more extreme than ever, creating difficulties for Obama.

appointments to the Supreme Court. He ended the Pentagon's "don't ask, don't tell" mistreatment of gays and lesbians in the military. He terminated the Justice Department's legal defense of the Defense of Marriage Act. He blocked Republicans from eliminating federal funding for Planned Parenthood. He suspended deportation proceedings against illegal immigrants lacking a criminal record. He has supported family unity in immigration policy, interpreting "family" to include the partners of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. He has endorsed marriage for gays and lesbians. And he has represented the United States with consummate dignity.

Obama is a pragmatic, liberal-leaning centrist who prizes collaboration and accommodation. He's a big-thinking ambitious type who wants to leave the largest possible legacy while governing cautiously and taking a few risks. He advocates and exemplifies the communitarian approach of pulling people together to advance the common good. Obama likely hopes that he will inherit a less obstructionist opposition if he wins a second term. He will be a lame duck, the Tea Party will fade, and more Republicans will accept him as a legitimate president. Perhaps something closer to normal politics will resume.

But the big issues that loom ahead have to be fought over: breaking up the megabanks, scaling back the global military empire, lifting the cap on the Social Security tax, adding tax brackets at the upper end, abolishing fee-for-service medicine, and building a clean-energy economy. Since the debt ceiling debacle, Obama has belatedly committed his presidency to social investment. But actually doing it will require more fighting than he waged on anything in his first term.

American Aspirations

For two centuries, Americans have debated two fundamentally different visions of what *kind* of country the United States should aspire to be. The first is the vision of a society that provides unrestricted liberty to acquire wealth. The second is the vision of a realized democracy in which rights over society's major institutions are established. In the first view, the right to property is lifted above the right to self-government, and the good society minimizes the equalizing role of government. In the second view, self-government is considered superior to property, and the good society places democratic checks on social, political, and economic power. In the first vision, one tries to attain enough success to stand apart from others, not have to worry about them, and perhaps look down on them. In the second vision, a good society reduces the punishments of failure and the rewards of success.

Both of these visions are ideal types, deeply rooted in U.S. history. Both have limited and conditioned each other in the U.S. experience. But in every generation one of them gains predominance over the other, shaping the terms of debate and possibility, telling the decisive story of its time.

Today the Republican Right is preaching a very aggressive version of anti-government ideology. The story of our time, in this view, is that a great people is being throttled by a voracious federal government. Americans are overtaxed; government is always the problem; somehow the federal government caused the financial crash; we have a debt crisis because we have too much government; and cutting taxes again is always in order.

But the real story of our time is that the common good has been hammered for thirty years. Wages have been flat for thirty-five years and inequality has worsened dramatically. We need economic democracy more than ever, for when the sum of individual goods is organized only by capitalism, it produces a common bad that destroys personal goods along with society.

Why We Need Economic Democracy

In conclusion, I'll make four points about our need for economic democracy. First, Americans are not overtaxed. This year the total tax burden reached its lowest point since 1958. In 1999 Americans spent 28 percent of their income on federal, state, and local taxes, which was the usual amount going back to the early 1970s. Today that figure is 23 percent. As a percentage of GDP, American taxation is at its lowest level since 1950, 14.8 percent.

Second, this is how we got in debt. If the United States had stuck with the Clinton tax rates, our national debt today would be minimal or nonexistent. Our nation's debt exploded because during the Bush years we cut the marginal rate and capital gains taxes without paying for either, we established a drug benefit that we didn't pay for, and we fought two wars

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When Obama signed the health care reform bill in March 2010, he was widely praised for attaining health coverage for 34 million uninsured people. The issue has now become politically toxic.

Pete Souza/White House

that we didn't pay for. These expenditures doubled the nation's debt in seven years, and the record keeps mounting, accounting for three-fourths of the new debt that has accumulated during Obama's presidency. Most of the remaining new debt is cleanup for the financial crash.

Today the wealthiest Americans pay income taxes at Mitt Romney's rate, 14 percent. Investment managers earning billions per year are allowed to classify their income as carried interest, which is taxed at the same rate as capital gains, 15 percent. Constantly we are told that the investor class would lose its zeal for making money if it had to pay taxes on its actual income or if the capital gains rate were raised. But there is no evidence for this claim. No investor passes on a promising investment because of the tax rate on a potential gain.

A tax system that serves the common good would have additional brackets for the highest incomes, as the United States once did. It would have a bracket for those who earn $1 million, a bracket for those who earn $10 million, a bracket for those who earn $100 million, and so on. It would lift the cap on the regressive Social Security tax, taxing salaries above $110,000 per year. It is absurd that someone making $1 million per year pays no more into Social Security than someone making $109,000.

Third, a federal budget is a moral document. If we scaled back America's global military empire and reinstated a progressive tax system, we could eliminate the entire federal debt by 2021 without cutting Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, education, or research. A morally decent tax and budget plan would tax capital gains as ordinary income. It would cap the benefit on itemized deductions at 28 percent. It would tax U.S. foreign income as it is earned. It would eliminate the subsidies for oil, gas, and coal companies. It would place a tax on credit default swaps and futures and charge a leverage tax on the megabanks.

These are not radical proposals. The United States would still be well below European levels of taxation. All of it together only mildly restores the principle that people should pay taxes on the basis of their ability to do so.

Lastly, tax rates are not the most important factor con tributing to economic growth. Creating a healthy and productive workforce is far more important than the fluctuations in tax rates that we debate in election years. Educating the workforce for twenty-first-century jobs and investing in research and technology are more important. Developing a strong infrastructure and saving for investment are at least as important as tax rates.

Today the economy is sluggish because of weak consumer demand caused by stagnant wages, job uncertainty, and the ongoing ravages of the mortgage disaster. Mitt Romney's answer is a staggering 20 percent tax cut, which would explode the national debt, so he embraces the Ryan plan, which savages Medicaid and Medicare. Obama, by contrast, is talking about tax fairness and creating an infrastructure bank.

That is the beginning of a real answer, though merely a beginning. We need to renew the country by making massive investments in a clean-energy economy. Labor costs, equipment costs, and the cost of capital will never be lower than they are today. The United States has under-invested in infrastructure, education, and technology for decades. A national infrastructure bank, once created, would get serious money plowed into infrastructure rebuilding on an ongoing basis.

If we can spend trillions of taxpayer dollars bailing out banks and eating the toxic debts of AIG and Citigroup, we ought to be able to create good public banks at the state and federal levels to do good things. Public banks could finance start-ups in green technology that are currently languishing and provide financing for cooperatives that traditional banks spurn. They can be financed by an economic stimulus package approved by Congress, or by claiming the good assets of banks seized by the government, or both.

Obama still has an essentially progressive vision of the presidency he wants to have. There is still time to redeem the 2008 election promise, which was and is, to put an end to the Reagan era. To fulfill that promise, Obama has to overcome his own cautious, accommodating temperament, and progressives have to believe it is still possible for him to do so. ■

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The Need for Progressive Realism

BY HEIDI HADSELL

Yes, Obama was moderate, and still the lofty sounding rhetoric made us feel that change really was possible. Hope was in the air. With time, we didn't so much argue about the policies of his administration, many of which seemed fair and forward-looking. Rather, we took issue with the unwillingness to fight, the folding of the hand before the cards were played, the untoward interest in compromise with those who sought his political demise, and the combination of heady discourse with reliance on advisers peddling conventional economic wisdom geared toward the rich.

Often, one side argued that the pressures and powers must be so rough—particularly the pressure to compromise with the demands of corporate capitalism and other entrenched interests—that the best one can do is what Obama was doing: articulate and appeal to the ideals that make us feel good about our moral selves yet minimize the deep structural economic divisions that shape American politics and American society. The other side took the position that the hesitancy, the frequent unwillingness to fight, was mostly a result of Obama's temperament and character, and probably also life experiences, rather than the pervasive power and influence of private interests. In other words, our discussions often turn on the question of whether Obama would do more if he could, or whether Obama's eagerness to compromise leads him away from a coherent analysis of the realities of American society, and thus blinds him to what could and really needs to be done.

In his article for *Tikkun* and at more length in his book *The Obama Question*, Gary Dorrien characterizes Obama as a "communitarian, mostly of a progressive-leaning type"—that is, one who sees American domestic life from a worldview focused on the common good and thus seeks commonalities, compromise, measured deliberation on common goals, and shared solutions in spite of real differences, even in a polarized political and economic climate. Here, Dorrien brings an important new explanatory element into this ongoing argument. Obama acts as he does because he sees the domestic world as he does, and he seeks to create common space for moral and political discourse. Even while Dorrien appreciates elements of Obama's worldview, he sees its limitations, insisting that the "big issues that loom ahead will have to be fought over" and that "the party of the common good must struggle with conviction for a just society."

Obama, shown here shaking hands with House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio), has approached his presidency with an orientation toward compromise. "Conciliation was not merely his default mode," Gary Dorrien writes. "It was his chief operating mode."

Pete Souza/White House

Dorrien's characterization of Obama's domestic vision as one often focused on the search for an illusive common good helps shed light on another question about Obama: why his domestic approach seems so different from his international approach. Internationally his thought is characterized by a clear and often nuanced understanding of the changing role and place of the United States in the international arena. This shift in American self-perception, which begins to view the United States as one international actor among many with both competing and complementary interests, has been generally well received internationally and has been greeted with relief by many inside the United States. At the same time, Obama's actions internationally are often characterized by decisiveness and even aggressiveness in what he

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views as serving American interests (whether one agrees with him or not is another question).

This too, Dorrien's analysis suggests, can be understood at least partially as a matter of worldview: internationally, Obama is very much a political realist (with a fondness for American exceptionalism). Dorrien observes that in Obama's thought, "as in Niebuhr's, liberal internationalism and realism fold together since working together is what actually works to secure American interests."

Given the multitude and depth of the challenges this country faces today, and the political and economic polarization in the United States today, the worldview best suited for clear-eyed leadership seems to be that of a realist. Nationally, as in the international arena, there are areas of complementary interests across our political and economic divides, but there are also large and deep and unavoidable areas of clearly competing interests. Significant political battles need to be fought; otherwise, it is impossible to secure in the long run basic elements of what can serve a future common good. This includes laws that promote some rough economic equity, environmental responsibility, health care, and steps toward dismantling the American economic and military empire.

For Obama the realist (an Obama who is willing to fight in domestic politics and policy) to fully emerge, the progressive wing of the American electorate will have to push him there. The impetus to confront what Dorrien calls the "unsustainable demands of corporate capitalism" must come from those who do the electing. This means people—religious and secular—who are willing to do the groundwork, the coalition building, and the organization of real politics in a sustained way. The 99 percent movements, which have effectively raised national awareness about economic realities and divisions, waking up many of us who share their concerns, are showing signs of shaking off their hibernation. Are these movements composed of individuals, groups, and coalitions that can think and act out of a coherent discourse? Do they have the organizational staying power to endure? Will they be able to make a significant political impact on American politics in general and on Obama in particular? ■

What Comes Next for Spiritual Progressives?

BY STEPHEN H. PHELPS

America's political dysfunction is a symptom of a a national identity crisis. Americans are drawn incompatible views of human purpose. I appreciate how Gary Dorrien (writing in both this issue of *Tikkun* and in *The Obama Question*) frames the broken mirror of national identity in two panes. In one is yearning for unrestricted liberty to acquire wealth; in the other is yearning for self-government—that is, a desire for rightful power to apply core values in the creation of public policies and practices, including those that pertain to wealth. Not only do large blocs form around these two yearnings, but many individuals seem internally split by the competing desires. They want leadership, but no clarity comes from political or religious leaders. If this crisis goes unsettled for much longer, the system will founder. That fact should cheer no one, for in the present state of affairs, tyranny, not revolution and reconstruction, will follow.

While these split yearnings have certainly vied with each other throughout America's history, they are not *see* and *saw*, paired off like talk show foes. To the contrary, an absolute hierarchy of values rules here, for the crisis is not essentially political, but spiritual: the crisis goes to the core question of humanity's purpose.

A spiritual perspective holds that human consciousness is capable of connecting material reality with nonmaterial reality. A spiritual perspective brings a moral imperative to bear: since high and low can touch, they must be allowed to touch as often as possible. Both those who reject this distinction of spiritual and material reality and those who put material values first (regardless of what they say of God and truth) hold what I would describe as unspiritual worldviews. In a spiritual worldview, a person becomes truly human to the degree that she learns how all things can and must be connected to values beyond themselves. Scriptures throughout the world share one mind on this matter: things below must serve the things above. It is absurd when men who claim Jesus as their pioneer also set the acquisition of wealth at the pinnacle of their principles. These men are basically unspiritual, their policies are necessarily inhumane. They have lost touch with the possibility that the integrity of laws and leadership can make space for people to develop both inward and outward expressions of self-government.

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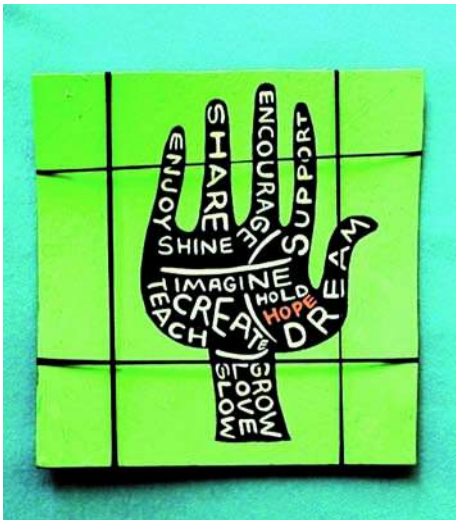

Clearly no creature survives without the desire to get and keep its stuff. This is kindergarten teaching. So is the observation that when this desire goes unrestrained, it deranges our conscience and distorts our social relations as it draws votes and money like moths to the flame of politics. It blinds us to our total situation. But such is our crisis: kindergartners have more clarity about the relationship of greed and fear to growth, love, and development than they will have when they become adults. As U.S. demographics move inexorably away from a white majority to a nonwhite majority, legislatures and corporations obsess over the possibility of keeping *all* of our stuff. This obsession is actually motivated by a racialized fear over the coming loss of power, but so lost are the sheep without a shepherd that in the tumult of distractions and desires, it becomes difficult to feel their basic yearning for their own humanity through increased self-government.

A spiritual awareness sees perfectly well that things and bodies matter and need appropriate attention. But the eye of spirit understands that the true and human value of any thing can only be set in the nonmaterial viewfinder. As to keeping stuff or letting it go, therefore, the mature want to discern which will serve the greater end. A spiritually qualified person knows that letting go is sometimes the best course for herself *because* it is best for all, and that letting go is ultimately life's only course. This acceptance of mortality is apparent in the spiritually mature insofar as they exhibit less fear and a greater ability to share power, to let others in, and, at the right time, to let go of stuff. Only this kind of freedom has ever marked the path of possible peaceful futures. The political consequences are immense.

And here is the glad surprise: as a racehorse yearns to run, humans yearn to move toward their higher nature. Deep down, we know our purpose. We want to touch deep values. We love to feel compassion. Stories of integrity, equality, courage, and shared sacrifice stir us. Since most Americans identify as Christians, these yearnings are often felt through the symbol of Jesus. One need not accept Jesus to understand that spiritual progressives must take Christian Americans at their word, as people alert to the relationship of higher and lower. This does not mean using religious symbols in the public square. It means understanding that politics are fundamentally played on the field between fear and love, between holding and letting go—and that humans want to respond to their highest ideals.

But we are all also afraid—to die, to lose, to give up. If left leaderless through loss and grief, a human being contracts in fear and does not learn his or her own capacity for growth. The hardened heart shows up as reactionary, self-protective politics. When spiritual progressives see and accept this natural tension in all social relations, we are able to conceive and interpret any effective policy in terms of the desire for growth and development, both inward and outward. We know that all of us are always tapping the ground in front of us to learn whether it is safe to take the next step. We must not lose sight of the fact that inner self-government (the highest expression of personal freedom) and political self-government grow together—or fail together.

Paying taxes is the only public act in which all people in a nation are potentially united according to the will of the self-governed. Every good act that will bind us together (*e pluribus unum*)—from providing for health care or education to rebuilding infrastructure—will come through budgets and taxes that set our intention to grow together, inwardly and outwardly. Barack Obama's writings show that he has spiritual awareness and the capacity to affirm human purpose. As president, however, his thought shows up only slightly left of center on the continuum of power politics. Dorrien is right that in its current crisis, America cannot elect a "more compelling human being" than Obama. It is time that we spiritual progressives organize with like-minded movements to connect the higher and the lower in politics at every level. ■

Denise Carbonell

Trickle-Up Democracy

BY DOUGLAS RUSHKOFF

I KNOW WE'RE NOT SUPPOSED to say such things, but I have lost faith in national politics. Yes, I'll vote in the coming elections and do my part to get the less sold-out, less anti-communitarian candidate in office. But I no longer look to the top tier of centralized government to solve our problems or help us grope toward conclusions together.

For me, big government has become as abstract as the corporations that made it possible. The more I study the emergence of corporate capitalism, the more I see central government as the other side of the same coin: a booming peer-to-peer society was intentionally dismantled during the Renaissance in order to reassert the authority of the aristocracy. This was achieved by giving "chartered monopolies" the exclusive authority to do business in their industries (cronyism) and by giving central banks the exclusive authority to issue currency. All work, trade, lending, and borrowing now had to go through the central authorities. This abstracted what we think of as commerce.

We don't buy from our neighbors anymore. We buy from the firms our neighbors may work for. We don't create value; we serve as employees. We have no relationships with our producers. We engage instead with the brands concocted to shield us from the labor embedded in what we buy. We live in a society where laborers are disconnected from their competencies; consumers are disconnected from producers; and consumers are alienated from one another.

We are taught to look up, rather than toward one another, for solutions. Our best presidents, true believers in the corporate-government partnership, try to kick-start our economy by giving banks money in the hope that they will lend money to corporations, which will in turn open factories in depressed regions so that people can get jobs. This only creates more dependence on institutions whose true purpose is to extract value.

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In an age of bank bailouts and corporate-sponsored candidacies, community farming and local politics can offer a reprieve from disillusionment. "I want a state legislator who will help my Community Supported Agriculture group get its land approved for something other than corn," the author writes.

What a national leader might do instead, of course, is simply encourage the people on the local level to develop their own economies, beginning with "favor banks" (online networks through which people can "bank" services they do for one member of a community in order to receive services from another), local currencies, and community agriculture. Just like what is going on in Greece, where people's limited access to the euro and the greater economy has forced them to look to one another as resources for goods and services.

The focus on national politics gives people the false impression that a new national leader is going to somehow get us the things we need, when the tools and rules he has at his disposal are intrinsically biased against that ever happening. National politics—from corporate-sponsored candidacies and bank bailouts to spectator democracy and the branding of issues—doesn't simply occur on an abstract scale that has nothing to do with us; this activity itself reinforces the conditions and beliefs that perpetuate its dominance.

So I have taken my eyes off the prize, and my focus off the national political stage. I am looking instead at very local politics, and the trickle-up effect of people engaging on the ground with the issues that matter to them on a daily basis. I want a state legislator who will help my Community Supported Agriculture group get its land approved for something other than corn, or who will change the regulations on biodiesel alternatives to oil.

But most of all, I want to help develop conversations about what we can actually do for one another, instead of who is supposed to represent us in the abstracted, stalled, and dehumanizing landscape of national politics. ■

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Be a Progressive Democrat!

BY MIMI KENNEDY

U.S. voter turnout rarely surpasses 60 percent, even in presidential elections. Nonpartisan get-out-the-vote promotions like this one, which features both Obama and Romney, remind us of the importance of asserting ourselves at the ballot box.

Creative Commons/Todd Benson

ELECTION YEAR IS DIFFERENT from all other years. Awash in propaganda from global profiteers, we'll be sold magical individuals who'll promise to restore our national identity and save our souls.

The media will invite progressives into the fray. They'll goad us, for ratings' sake: Do you love Obama? Hate him? Are your politics pure?

Keep your head together. Keep organizing to send people to the ballot box, and watch the voter rolls, absentee procedures, and election-night count. It's our basic progressive value: Hear all voices! The GOP acts to suppress them.

Presidential elections decide war and peace. Few say it, but we must face it. The executive branch plans wars and asks Congress to vote when legislators are too cowed to say no. Millions in the streets can't stop them then. Stop them now at the ballot box.

In 2000, the GOP stopped the Florida balance-of-power vote count, and the Supreme Court declared the winner—who then launched two pre-planned wars, one of them built on lies. The offensives in Iraq and Afghanistan were sustained by the 2004 fraudulent election and became the two longest wars in U.S. history. They sank the world economy, delayed work on climate change, and revived racism and hate speech in our country while quashing dissent. Right-wing loyalists and true believers, rewarded for their compliance, packed our courts, government agencies, media, corporate boards, and foundations. This will take time to undo. Those who hate Obama await their old masters' return, and they love it when progressives say they hate Obama, too.

The GOP hopes to bat progressives away at the ballot box, saying we're too "outside" for the support of "the American people" (as if we weren't American people, too). Provocateurs may mar our actions, and skewed polls and even manipulated election results may confuse and dishearten us. Cleave to the truth. Our coalition—which includes labor unions, civil rights groups, immigrants, peace advocates, and environmental activists—is actually a majority. Remember the GOP officials in state primaries who robbed and lied to their own to establish preferred top-down outcomes? Will they be shy when the balance of power is at stake? Watch! Verify!

Election year is different from all other years. If you dislike Democrats, be a *progressive* Democrat. The GOP won't embrace you. And what an opportunity for progressives this year: Republicans abandoned their core moral issue—"respect for life"—when they rejected birth control. Birth control *prevents* abortion. This revealed their hypocrisy. Don't let them say they're saving babies this year. Their agenda is anti-woman, anti-immigrant, anti-gay, pro-gun, pro-war, and pro–death penalty. Progressives have the high moral ground. We respect life—all life on earth.

Resist the entertainment fray. This is dead serious. War has stifled the progressive agenda for a century. Defeat it now at the ballot box. In the streets, our coalition can demonstrate for a progressive second term—not in fruitless attempt to prevent another war from Romney's neo-con advisers. Be of stout heart! ■

MIMI KENNEDY is an actress (*Midnight in Paris*, *In the Loop*, *Dharma & Greg*), activist, and founding national advisory chair of Progressive Democrats of America.

Democratizing the Economy for a New Progressive Era

BY GAR ALPEROVITZ

Come what may in November's presidential election, progressive prospects at the national level are far from encouraging. Truth be told, we live in an era of deepening stagnation and political stalemate. While the short-term consequences of who occupies the Oval Office are important, in the long term, the logic of the system as now structured is producing inexorable results: deepening inequality, proliferating ecological crises, and increasing pain for the majority. With the labor movement—the traditional countervailing power that drives progressive politics—at its historic nadir, we cannot expect the kind of systemic transformation we need to come from Washington.

Nevertheless, our present deadlock and decay open up possibilities for longer-term systemic change in surprising directions. Emerging beneath the media's electoral radar at the neighborhood, city, and state levels all across the country is what many have called "the new economy"—thousands of experiments that democratize ownership, stabilize communities, and build a more sustainable future. These developments address immediate needs while also pointing the

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After many demonstrations like this one, Vermont's government passed a statewide single-payer health care initiative in May 2011. State and municipal reforms can pave the way for more systemic transformation at the national level.

Creative Commons/National Economic and Social Rights Initiative

way toward a more sweeping, possible longer-term systemic transformation. And at this moment—the *prehistory* of the next progressive era—this may well be the most important arena in which to organize.

What can be done, and what kind of victories can we win, if we shift our focus in this way? Cities are a powerful place where we can push for transformative steps toward a new economy. In Cleveland, Ohio, residents of some of the city's most devastated low-income neighborhoods of color have developed a network of green worker cooperatives. Other cities are beginning to launch similar initiatives—in most cases, not because of any deep ideological commitment to a progressive agenda, but simply because the old solutions are no longer working. Still other cities are experimenting with city ownership of sustainable energy. The citizens of Boulder, Colorado, for example, voted in a referendum to end the city's relationship with a private energy supplier and build a municipally owned clean energy utility in its place.

At the state level, many interesting developments are taking place: Sixteen states (most famously Vermont) have passed—or are exploring the creation of—a single-payer system or a public option in health care. Seventeen states have introduced legislation that would charter a publicly owned, nonprofit state bank, on the model of the successful Bank of North Dakota. Eleven states have passed bills—and four more are considering legislation—enabling businesses to become incorporated as "benefit corporations" or "B Corps," which are then required to live up to certain social or environmental commitments. This makes it legally possible for publicly traded companies to pursue social or environmental goals in addition to profit, balancing their obligation to their shareholders with an obligation to benefit society at large. (As of June 2012, seven states have passed B-Corp legislation.)

None of this is incompatible with a defense of traditional liberal strategies of regulation and reform at the national level. However, as such methods prove less and less effective, there is every reason to join the slow, steady, state-by-state and city-by-city struggle for a new, more just, more equitable, and more sustainable economic system that we can embrace in our communities and at the polls.

Whatever happens in November, if we're serious about changing the system, a bottom-up strategy for the long haul is of vital importance. And just possibly—as we saw in the long lead-up to the New Deal—a local, solutions-driven politics may provide the models and necessary groundwork for more comprehensive change at the national level when the next great moment of progressive change occurs. ■

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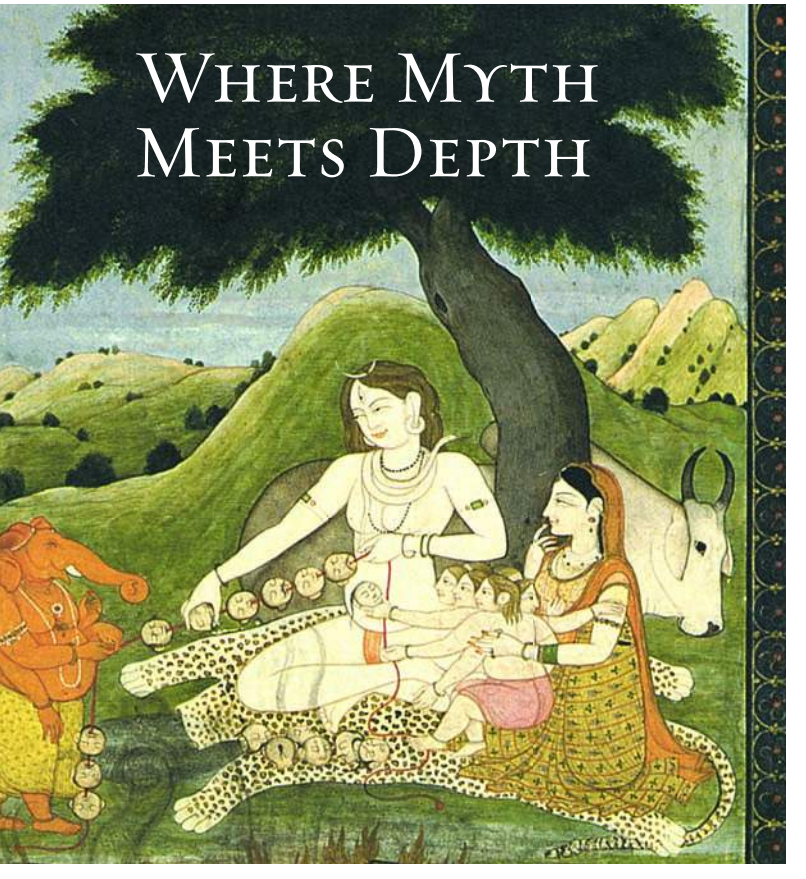

Reclaiming the Radical Imagination

Reform Beyond Electoral Politics

BY HENRY A. GIROUX

THE UPCOMING ELECTION of 2012 presents a challenge to progressives whose voices have been excluded from both the mainstream media and the corridors of political power. Under such circumstances, politics dissolves into pathology as those who are able to dominate politics and policy-making do so largely because of their disproportionate control of the nation's income and wealth and the benefits they gain from the systemic reproduction of an iniquitous social order. In other words, electoral politics is rigged and any notion of liberal politics that is willing to invest in such ritualistic pageantry adds to the current dysfunctional nature of our social order while reinforcing a profound failure of political imagination. The issue is no longer how to work within the current electoral system but how to dismantle it and construct a new political landscape that is capable of making a claim on equity, justice, and democracy for all of its inhabitants. Obama's once inspiring call for hope has degenerated into a flight from responsibility while legitimating a range of foreign and domestic policies that have shredded civil liberties, expanded the permanent warfare state, and increased the domestic reach of the punitive surveillance state.

It is time for progressives and others to shift the critique of Obama away from an exclusive focus on the policies and practices of his administration and instead develop a new language for politics—one with a longer historical purview and a deeper understanding of the ominous forces that now threaten any credible notion of the United States as an aspiring democracy. The key here is to refuse to enter into the current political discourse of compromise and accommodation in order to get beyond a politics of protests. Rather than fight for Obama's re-election, it might be more worthwhile to fight for the formative cultures and public spheres that make a real democracy possible—to think beyond the discourse of compromise and conduct struggles on the mutually informed terrains of civic literacy, education, and power.

To foster a radical imagination, we need new spaces for consciousness-raising and debate. How might our society transform if we created free education spaces in our churches, synagogues, mosques, parks, and schools?

Under such circumstances, progressives can focus their energies on working with the Occupy movement and other social movements to develop a new language of radical reform and create new public spheres to make possible the modes of critical thought and engaged agency that are the very foundations of a truly participatory democracy. Such a project must work to develop vigorous educational programs, modes of public pedagogy, and communities that promote a culture of deliberation, public debate, and critical exchange across a wide variety of cultural and institutional sites. And it must focus on the end goal of generating those formative cultures that are preconditions for political engagement and vital for energizing democratic movements for social change—movements willing to think beyond the limits of a savage global capitalism.

Central to such a project is the development of a new radical imagination in the service of a broad-based social movement that can move beyond the legacy of a fractured left/progressive culture and politics in order to address the totality of society's problems. This means finding a common ground in which challenging diverse forms of oppression,

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The Occupy movement has offered a fertile arena for the development of a new language of radical reform.

exploitation, and exclusion can become part of a broader effort to create a radical democracy. Language is crucial here, particularly language that addresses what it means to sustain a broad range of commitments to others and to build more inclusive notions of community. Appeals to class warfare and economic injustices are important but do not go far enough. There is a need to invent modes of pedagogy that connect learning to social change and create modes of critical agency in which people assume responsibility for each other. This is not merely about skill sharing or democratizing pedagogy and politics; it is about generating a new vision of democracy in which people can recognize themselves, a vision that connects with and speaks to the American public's desires, dreams, and hopes. Questions of what it means to be a critical and engaged member of society (and their link to how people understand themselves, their relations to others, and their relation to the world) are at the heart of a politics wedded to the primacy of the radical imagination. In part, this means, as media scholar Nick Couldry has argued, reclaiming a discourse of ethics and morality, elaborating a new model of democratic politics, and developing fresh analytical concepts for understanding and engaging the concept of the social. The social has to be reconfigured so as to eliminate a market-driven project that individualizes responsibility while also eliminating claims made in the name of democracy. Reclaiming a democratic notion of the subject goes hand-in-hand with reinventing a new understanding of social conditions, civic responsibility, and critical citizenship.

Matters of subjectivity and pedagogy are central to a new understanding of politics and demand that issues of identity, desire, and agency be situated in an energized struggle to reclaim the promise of a substantive global democracy. In this instance, progressives need to create public spheres using new technologies and other tools as part of a larger project in which the radical imagination is tied to the understanding that educated societies are healthy, equitable, and more democratic (an idea that Erica Shaker of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has explored more fully). The radical imagination rejects the notion that a corporate-dominated market society represents the essence of democracy. In doing so, it connects economics to social costs and measures the political and spiritual life of a nation by the degree to which it offers collective security, justice, equality, and hope to existing and future generations. We need a new conversation and a new political project about democracy, equality, and the redistribution of wealth and power. And we need to explore how such a discourse can offer the conditions for critical visions, modes of governance, and policy making.

Ideologically, this means that progressives must develop new ways to challenge the corporate values that now shape American policies. It is especially crucial to provide alternative values that challenge market-driven ideologies that equate freedom with radical individualism, self-interest, hyper-competitiveness, privatization, and deregulation, while undermining democratic social bonds, the public good, and the welfare state. Such actions can be further addressed by recruiting young people, teachers, labor activists, religious leaders, and other engaged citizens to become public intellectuals who are willing to use their skills and knowledge to make visible how power works and to address important social and political issues.

Regarding policy, progressives can explore a variety of options to build coalitions with labor unions, the Green Party, public servants, and educators in order to develop a broad-based alternative party. Such a party could then push reforms pertaining to paid family and medical leave, a new Equal Rights Amendment for women, literacy programs, a guaranteed income, ecological reform, free child care, new finance laws for funding public education, the cancellation of higher education debt obligations for middle- and working-class students, health care programs, and a massive jobs program in conjunction with a Marshall-like plan to end poverty and inequality in the United States. All of these policies are designed to address important social issues and build coalitions.

Finally, progressives need to take on the role of educational activists. One option would be to create micro-spheres of public education that further modes of critical learning and civic agency and thus enable young people and others to learn how to govern rather than be governed. This could be accomplished through a network of free educational spaces developed in churches, synagogues, temples, and public schools, as well as in religious organizations affiliated with higher educational institutions. These new educational spaces would be not unlike those institutions developed by socialists and labor unions in the thirties and forties and civil rights activists in the fifties and sixties. At a time when critical thought has been flattened, it becomes imperative to develop a discourse of critique and possibility—one that recognizes that without an informed citizenry, a collective struggle, and viable social movements, the dynamics of democratization will slip out of our reach. ■

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Why Progressives Should Follow Feminism's Lead in 2012

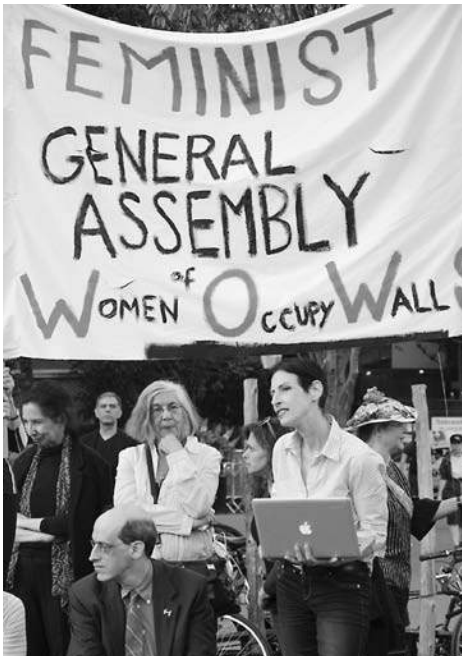
BY ALIX KATES SHULMAN

Some progressives, disappointed in Obama's performance, are expressing apathy about the 2012 election. Feminists, however, facing an escalating "war on women" and recognizing the enormous political stakes, have been organizing with renewed energy. The "gender gap" that emerged from 1970s feminism has made women's votes such an important force that politicians who attack women's rights in order to rouse their base are at peril of rousing the ire of an expanding female voting bloc. It's time for progressives of every gender identity to join this bloc and follow our lead.

An overwhelming majority of female voters favor contraception and abortion—those most basic of women's rights. Many are so outraged by current attempts to limit reproductive freedom that they are organizing new boycotts, petition drives, debates, and mass demonstrations on behalf of gender justice. Women know that winning this election is essential because one party supports abortion and one opposes it, and because the Supreme Court balance—holding the fate of Roe vs. Wade—will be determined this year for a generation.

Recent events that have so provoked women focus on reproductive issues, particularly right-wing attempts to defund Planned Parenthood and to remove free birth control from comprehensive health care under the Affordable Care Act. These maneuvers generated so much organized resistance that they have mostly failed. In addition, Romney's proposals to increase military spending and balance the budget would drastically reduce social programs for mothers and children, the elderly, and the poor—all groups with female majorities. Even nuns are assailed as the Vatican formally reprimands the largest group of U.S. nuns for promoting "radical feminist themes" and focusing on poverty and economic justice while remaining "silent" about abortion and same-sex marriage.

These attacks are inciting a raucous feminist renewal, even within the Occupy movement. In New York's Occupy movement, at first feminism had so little voice and some women felt so unsafe at Zuccotti Park that in protest they formed the women's caucus, Women Occupying Wall Street (WOW), which quickly took hold in other cities too. The founding statement of Occupy Austin, Texas, which explicitly rejected taking a position on such "divisive" issues as abortion, has provoked feminist outrage. Some women activists report that before WOW they were wary of the F-word, but they are now proud to organize explicitly as feminists. In New York City alone, important new feminist working groups have emerged from Occupy: one mounted the First Feminist General Assembly, which took place on May 17, attracted 300 people who agreed to assemble monthly, and has been taken up in other cities; an Occupy group called Feminist Resistance held an initial large public forum; and feminists have organized a series of fall courses on feminism in OccU, Occupy's Free University. What's more, these groups are doing outreach to every existing feminist organization they can locate of whatever wave and to people of every gender identity. As an organizing model for progressives for 2012, this may be it.



Outraged by the escalating "war on women," feminists nationwide are organizing new boycotts, petition drives, debates, and demonstrations. Here, feminists hold a general assembly at Occupy Wall Street in New York.

Erik McGregor

These are dangerous times and this election matters. A Romney victory would be a disaster for everyone, but particularly for women. In solidarity with feminists, all progressives, including those hesitant to engage in electoral politics, owe it to their sisters not only to vote but to become actively engaged. ■

ALIX KATES SHULMAN's two latest books are *Ménage* (a novel) and *A Marriage Agreement and Other Essays: Four Decades of Feminist Writing*. Her website is alixkshulman.com.

Third-Party Politics

A Conversation Between Green Party Candidate Jill Stein and Michael Lerner

Jill Stein is not your typical presidential candidate. She started out as a doctor but says she became an environmental activist upon learning that "even mother's milk and the fetal environment had become polluted."

Office of Jill Stein

MICHAEL LERNER: So you're running for president. Could you tell me a little bit about who you are and how you came to run on the Green Party platform?

JILL STEIN: It's a wonderful place to begin. I'm a mother and a doctor—a general internist. When people ask what kind of medicine I'm practicing, I now say political medicine because it's the mother of all illnesses. We've got to fix this one in order to fix all the other things that ail us!

I became alarmed about twenty years ago about the new epidemics of chronic disease— skyrocketing rates of asthma, learning disabilities, autism, cancer, obesity, diabetes, etc.—that appeared in our communities, especially among kids. I became passionately interested in the links between our health and our communities—that is, in the environment broadly defined: our air, water, food, chemicals, transportation, and pollution, as well as our social environment and poverty. All of this impacts our health. I started working with communities to fix the causes of these sicknesses. I tried to close down polluting incinerators, clean up coal plants, and get toxic pesticides off the shelf, and instead create jobs in recycling, conservation, and community organic farms. So that's how I became an activist for communities, for public health, and for the environment.

I was first approached by the Green Party and recruited to run for office in 2002, when I ran against Mitt Romney for governor of Massachusetts. I was not a political person and had not previously been a member of a political party. I entered that campaign in desperation and came out of it with inspiration, having seen how eager the public was for solutions that were truly "of, by, and for the people" and that were not co-opted by corporate money. It was very exciting to see that there was this wealth of public will and community spirit, a world apart from the political establishment. In the absence of a political party that unites us, ordinary citizens are rendered powerless in a game of divide and conquer. It was a wake-up moment for me to realize that the whole point of a political party is to bring advocacy groups together so we can actually form a critical mass and make real progress.

I was active at the state and local levels because the grassroots is where people's politics must start. But last year, when the president put Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security on the chopping block as part of the solution to the debt-ceiling crisis—a concocted crisis to start with—I suddenly saw reason for national as well as local advocacy. It gave me great appreciation for the national structure of the Green Party as the only national force that allows us to challenge the determination of both Republicans and Democrats to destroy our

JILL STEIN is a mother, physician, pioneering environmental-health advocate, and Harvard graduate. After watching corporate-sponsored policies repeatedly harm children's health, she helped win publicly financed elections in Massachusetts. Watching the Democratic legislature repeal this public financing convinced her to join the Green Party.

essential social infrastructure in order to preserve tax breaks for the wealthy, wars for oil and bloated military budgets, and Wall Street bailouts. I set out to help the Green Party find someone who would be willing to run for president. In the process, I was strongly urged to run by the very people I had sought to recruit, so I stepped up to the plate.

The fear-mongering over the past decade—the idea that we have to vote our fears and not our values—has scared many progressives into political silence. But the reality is that silence has not been an effective political strategy! And the politics of fear has brought us everything that we were afraid of: the massive Wall Street bailouts, the expanding wars, the off-shoring of jobs, obstruction of unions and workers' rights, declining wages, attacks on civil liberties and immigrant rights, skyrocketing student debt, the unmitigated foreclosure crisis, meltdown of the climate, etc. My campaign is addressing the politics of fear up front, because people are clamoring for the solutions that only our campaign is providing. People want jobs, health care and education as human rights, housing, a stable environment, a climate future. They want what the Green agenda offers, but they've been manipulated into the politics of fear. We're clarifying that the answer to the politics of fear is the politics of courage.

Is It Risky for Progressives to Vote Green?

LERNER: I'm delighted to learn that this is what you are hearing as you go around the country. Yet I also hear different voices that repeat what you call the politics of fear. Many people believe that George W. Bush would not have been president if Ralph Nader had not run in Florida. I was one of Nader's supporters. I was in the Green Party at that time and left afterwards, but I was one of those who urged him to withdraw from those states where there actually was a chance that the Green Party vote would tip the balance (e.g., Florida). The hostility that subsequently developed against the Green Party (or any third-party effort) at this point, is based on the belief that, had Nader not run, Bush would not have been close enough in Florida, the Supreme Court would not have been called on to intervene, and Gore would have won. This supposition claims that if Gore had become the next president, he would not have created a war in Iraq or enabled the level of repressive legislation that followed September 11. And we would have taken some serious steps to reduce the carbon emissions that are causing global warming.

The fear that many social change activists express today is similar—that, although Romney appears to be the most moderate of the Republican candidates, he is nevertheless surrounded by a structure of extreme Republican political fundamentalist thought that could easily lead us into a full-scale war with Iran, into worse destruction of the environment, and into an escalation of the already repressive legislation that has passed under Obama, like the authorization for imprisoning people on the basis of suspicion of being sympathetic to terrorism—the NDAA, the National Defense Authorization Act.

STEIN: Yes, Obama actually codified the abuses of Bush and went even further—criminalizing protest (H.R. 347), establishing indefinite detention of U.S. citizens without charge or trial and use of the military against citizens on U.S. soil, and authorizing assassinations of U.S. citizens. And so much more. So Democrats are doing terrible things too! That's exactly the point.

LERNER: Yes, very bad things! But the anger comes from the perception that, as bad as the Democrats are, the Republicans would be considerably worse. They would potentially have the opportunity to appoint yet another right-wing ideologue to the Supreme Court. Given that scenario, people feel very upset about the possibility that a third-party candidacy could gain mass support (even at the level of Nader) and consequently throw the election to Romney. This is why they fear a revival of the Green Party and your candidacy.

Stein sees sustainable solutions such as wind energy as inextricably linked to other progressive policy goals. "We need a politics of integrity that allows us to come together around a shared agenda for people, peace, and the planet," she says.

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STEIN: Thank you for raising that. So let me address each of those issues. First of all, many of the votes that Nader won were from people who would not have voted at all had Nader not been a candidate. And the number of Democrats who crossed over to vote Republican in Florida was greater than the entire number of people voting for Nader. And finally, Gore did win the election, and it was the Supreme Court that called off the vote count in Florida, hence making Bush the winner. So scapegoating Nader for Gore's loss of the presidency is wrong.

In any event, Nader 2000 can't be blamed for what is happening now—under the leadership of a Democrat who also had both houses of Congress for two years. The Obama administration and its failures, like the Bush administration and its failures, were both products of many decades of growing economic, political, and corporate power that concentrated in the hands of a small elite. Look at what Obama has delivered: millions of people who cannot find jobs, declining wages, expansion of "free trade" agreements that send jobs overseas and undermine the bargaining power of workers, the growing obscene gap between rich and poor, expanding militarism, and growing defense budgets. Look at the massive Wall Street bailouts—which grew from $800 billion under Bush to $16 trillion under Obama. Obama has deported more immigrants in four years than Bush did in eight. This is happening because the voice of political opposition has been silenced. This is why the Greens—as the only voice of national electoral opposition—desperately need to be heard.

Third Parties and Social Movements

STEIN: It's not easy to get corporations out of running our lives, the politics of our country, and the planet—this is a very hard fight. For the past two centuries, it's always been social movements out in the street allied with independent political parties that have changed history. The abolitionists had the Abolition Party, the women's suffrage movement had the National Women's Party, the union movement had the support of the labor, socialist, and progressive parties. In the words of Frederick Douglass, power concedes nothing without a demand—never has, never will. The role of independent (i.e. "third") political parties is to articulate the vision, the agenda, and the demands of the social movement, and drive the real solutions into the political dialogue, where they cannot be stopped. This movement is alive and well in the streets. We deserve a voice in this election, and a choice at the polls in November.

LERNER: It's the fear of pushing things further to the right that is precisely what makes people worry about a third-party presidential presence that could help elect a more extreme right-winger.

STEIN: Silence is exactly what the political establishment wants, so it can continue moving the agenda to the right. Silence guarantees that will continue to happen. If there is no public-interest, non-corporate voice in the elections, there is nothing to stop the discourse from continuing to surge further to the right.

LERNER: That's why I wrote an op-ed in the *Washington Post* in December of 2010 calling for a progressive candidate to run against Obama in the Democratic primaries. That would have given us the chance to push progressive analyses and programs into the public dialogue. But no nationally known progressive figure responded to that call, or to subsequent attempts by a group of us who urged possible candidates to run in the Democratic primaries. Most progressives had simply given up on the national level and said their energies should be focused on changing Congress in a progressive direction. But I've seen little energy of that sort in challenging Democrats who are closet Republicans, whereas the Tea Party did a very effective job of challenging many Republicans whom they viewed as closet Democrats!

STEIN: It speaks volumes that no Democrat was willing to take up your suggestion. People know better than to keep fighting on such a tilted playing field, where the system is corrupt and will invariably sabotage dissidents from within.

By the way, as a citizen of Massachusetts, I lived under Governor Romney. He was virtually indistinguishable from Deval Patrick, the Democratic governor that followed Romney. As an "Etch A Sketch" politician, Romney's positions have generally been molded by his electorate, so we're likely to see him moderate after the Republican convention.

If Obama were a Republican, masses of people would have been out there demonstrating against him and trying to get Congress to stop him from expanding war, giving the store away to Wall Street, off-shoring our jobs, doing nothing about the home foreclosures, and condemning a generation of college students to being indentured servants with oppressive student loans and low wage jobs—if any—with which to repay them. If the election of Romney will revitalize real people-powered opposition, it's not so clear that a Republican facing a storm of opposition will actually be more harmful than a corporate-sponsored Democratic president presiding over a silenced, demoralized electorate.

LERNER: And the Supreme Court? His right-wing appointees might be shaping the courts for decades to come.

STEIN: The Supreme Court has mostly been on the wrong side throughout its history. So if you think the Supreme Court is going to save us, don't hold your breath. We need a strong social movement that has an electoral voice. What has changed the Supreme Court in the past has been strong social movements in the streets. The Supreme Court is not the place to look for the engine of social and political change that we need.

In a *Washington Post* poll earlier this year, half of the people polled said America needs a (*continued on page 70*)

Culture

BOOKS

In Death's Dominion

Shadows in Winter: A Memoir of Love and Loss
by Eitan Fishbane, with a foreword by Leon R. Kass
Syracuse University Press, 2011

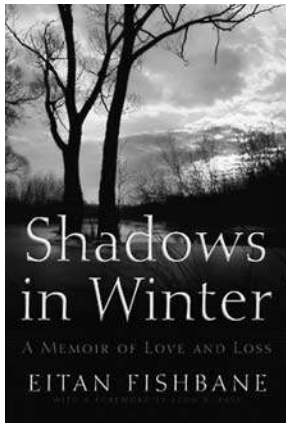
REVIEW BY SIDRA DEKOVEN EZRAHI

I AM WRITING THIS by the bedside of my ninety-eight-year old mother, watching the life forces slowly ebb. It is a strange privilege, the fear of the inevitable and the sorrow of anticipated loss mingled with gratitude for so many years of presence and a minimum of pain in this twilight time. On the table beside the hospital bed on which Mom lies, rests Eitan Fishbane's *Shadows in Winter: a Memoir of Love and Loss*. Eitan is my nephew and Mom's grandson. In 2007, his wife, Leah, was two months pregnant when she died suddenly at the age of thirty-two of an undetected brain tumor, leaving her husband and a four-year-old daughter. I am sojourning in death's dominion, witnessing the gently accompanied decline into that good night of a woman crowned with decades of full living—a long (yes! happy) marriage and all the pleasures and pains of nurturing three generations of family, of reaping some professional achievement (rather unusual for immigrant women of her generation), of cultivating the smooth surfaces while struggling with the gritty layers—while I leaf gingerly through a journal of the precipitous descent of a woman who died on the cusp of life's promise.

Leah Fishbane: the sprite of our family, the radiant presence who greeted you at the doorway—her own, her in-laws'—as if your entry into that portal was the most important event in her day. Yes, the dead are eulogized; their flaws tend to fall away with their mortal coil, and their memory always shines. But Leah *was* a blessing . . . and who will know it, besides her close family members and friends? She hardly had a chance to cut into the world, with as narrow or wide a swath as a few more decades of living would have permitted.

Who, then, besides that circle of family and friends, will read the memoir written by her grief-stricken husband in the months following her death? Why didn't this young widower heed the advice of a prominent Israeli writer who had himself recently suffered the loss of a dear one—to leave the manuscript in the drawer for awhile so that his own life could proceed into its next inevitable phases? Indeed, five years have passed since this memoir was written in the heat of raw grief and disbelief, and time has done its work: Eitan's life proceeded apace, and along with his and Leah's daughter, Aderet, who is now nine years old, his family includes a new wife and baby.

What, then, does this slim book add to the shelf of grief literature? *Shadows in Winter* was written when a spate of memoirs of loss, most prominently Joan Didion's *Year of Magical Thinking,* were saturating the talk



shows and stacking up on the nightstands of conscientious readers. What, besides pathos, could Eitan Fishbane, a scholar of Jewish thought at the Jewish Theological Seminary, add to the sensitive howlings of professional writers who, even in their darkest moments, know how to craft a sentence and avoid maudlin cliché?

The first thing to say is that Eitan is a gifted writer. He not only avoids sentimentality in a genre that practically begs for it, but he also brings a relentless honesty and a poetic ear to every emotion-laden moment, elevating the emotion itself while eliminating what is predictable and prefabricated.

The Rituals of Mourning and the Rhetoric of Comfort

Writing this memoir was the second of three pillars on which Eitan rested during the months following his wife's death; the first was the presence of his young daughter, Aderet, whose

neediness was nonnegotiable and whose love and shared loss were both crucible and comfort. The third pillar was the unobtrusively reliable presence of friends, a community bound by the *mores* of Jewish compassion, as well as their own personal wisdom and generosity—endless offerings of soup and Shabbat dinners, but also the unexpected: a party next door to the house of mourning for Aderet, whose fourth birthday fell three days after her mother's death; a box of presents for the upcoming birthdays of Aderet's nursery school cohort. And the most cherished gift of all: the ability of true friends to sit quietly and share in the pain. "The one who suffers does not seek a quick fix for the torment," Eitan writes. "Instead, the griever needs someone to *hold* his pain: to take in some measure of it, to listen, to embrace."

The Jewish rituals of mourning, the traditional "structures of time" were, eventually, received by the young widower "as a buffer against the tidal waves of crushing solitude." But he did not avail himself of the most obvious crutch for any observant Jew, especially one versed in the texts and practices of Jewish orthodoxy or mysticism: the platitudes of faith. On the first page is a quote from *Lamentations:* "'Lonely sits the city / once great with people! She that was great among nations / Is become a widow. / Bitterly she weeps in the night, / Her cheeks wet with tears.'" This is followed by: "People are still roundabout me, but I am alone. Alone." The contrast between the biblical passage, intoned perennially on *tisha b'av* by collective mourners for a place and time remote from their own experience, and the existential reality of one human being whose life has collapsed overnight couldn't be more stark. Eitan doesn't elaborate, but the biblical image only underscores his loneliness. The English translation elides the subtle rhetorical move in the Hebrew text: the city is not a widow but has become *as* a widow (hayta *ke*-almana). The entire text of *Lamentations* can be read as an interrogation of rhetorical forms in times of crisis. In a way, that is what Eitan has done in this memoir. Quietly but persistently, he looks over the landscape of rhetorical, ritual, and theological comforts and lets them go, one by one.

He tells us that he kept his eyes averted throughout the *shivah*, repeating almost mechanically the story of Leah's crushing headaches in the eighth week of pregnancy, the stages of her precipitous decline in the ICU, the heroic medical measures that failed, and the final hours of letting go of hope—and of Leah herself. In the days and weeks that follow, sometimes it helps to recite the *kaddish* in the presence of the daily quorum. But "We stand there with the other mourners, all of them from another generation. Even amid community, our experience is solitary. *Whose wife dies at thirty-two? Who loses a mother at age four? We stand within a vast abyss—our screams go unanswered*."

But they do not remain as unarticulated screams. Eitan quietly deconstructs and reconstructs the rhetoric of comfort to make it fit his own pierced soul and piercing mind:

> Do the words [of the *kaddish*] really mean anything to me? Is this the God of *my* faith, or is it merely a relic of an older, outmoded theology—one that we hold on to with the desperate clutch of childhood simplicity?
>
> "Abba, you know what? I think Imma and God are playing checkers together! And when God is gonna make it rain, Imma can say: No God. I don't want it to rain on my Aderet and my Eitee! And you know what? God listens to her, and it doesn't rain."

Isn't it, after all, Aderet's four-year-old certainty ("*you know what*?") that gives expression to the "desperate clutch of childhood simplicity"? By inserting her voice in the strategic places where his own knowing mind would refuse this comfort, Eitan manages to both hold onto it and to transcend it. He is able to indulge in magical thinking through the games that Aderet devises, the pictures she draws, the messages to send to Imma's "bed in heaven" and her dreams of rescue: Imma was falling off a cliff, but "I flew like Tinkerbell, and I caught her and she was in my arms."

From childhood simplicity through the unarticulated scream to the interrogated rhetoric of comfort, we reach beyond providential theology. The *kaddish* is eternal and unchanging:

> *May God's great name be blessed for ever and ever. . . . May great peace and life from the heaven be drawn down onto us and onto all of Israel, and let us say: Amen. He who makes peace in the heavens, He will bring peace upon us . . .*
>
> *Blessing. Peace. Life.* The refrain of my outward grief, my communal grief—words spoken for generations and generations . . . ring hollow. What peace? And where am I to find blessing and life in all of this? The liturgy refers to God as the compassionate One, but I see no compassion and no mercy. I want to rewrite the language of the prayers: He who curses. He who makes war. He who doles out death with a merciless hand. This is the refrain of my inward grief, my private world. And yet the problem of injustice was never my theological problem. I could never believe in that kind of God anyway: not the God of Justice who controls and destines everything; the God who is portrayed as the grand puppeteer of the universe . . . ultimate arbiter of cosmic justice, nor as the one who takes the most precious of young souls to heaven. . . . For me, God was always more of an animating life force in the world: the breath that lies at the center of things; the pulse and lifeblood of the Great All of being . . . the great oneness of reality [while] we are but the many faces of that larger radiance.

The young man's reentry into life with its "many faces," its wonder and its promise, is marked cautiously at the end

of this memoir, with the reawakening of something like gratitude: the drive from Teaneck to New York City, ending his six-month retreat, takes place as the leaves of summer are beginning to turn. Miraculously, he can *see*

> the transcendent air of fall . . . awake and brilliant. . . . As I come off the bridge and turn onto the West Side Highway, the Hudson River is revealed as an incandescent reflection; vivid and radiant on this September morning, it is a reminder to me that the sun will continue to rise, that the river will be there to receive it.
>
> And so I take in this brief eruption of the sublime. I have returned to teaching, and it is good: back into the life I have made, the life that Leah helped me build. One step, and then another.
>
> Inaudible, I speak a prayer: a prayer that knows this pain will become more bearable with time; that just as I have crossed this first seemingly infinite horizon, so too there will be more to come—each day a threshold, each day another healing salve for a soul on its way back to the world of the living.

To return to my initial question: who is this book intended for? The first addressee is Leah herself, and the husband's last words addressed to her ("'Lealie,' I whisper in her ear. 'I love you . . . I'm not ready to lose you'") make us want to turn away and tiptoe quietly out of this intimate space. This memoir is also meant for Aderet's older self, to inscribe memories that would otherwise fade ("I will remember for you," he writes with the dedication). Finally, privacy yields to a more public invitation to those in the first stages of grieving, whom Eitan addresses even as he acknowledges that he himself is already in another place: "I hope most of all that my words reach those of you who are carrying the heavy weight of mourning; that my own retelling may allow you to know that you are not alone in this unbearable pain; that although each of us travels a road that is unique in its suffering and memory, there is a community of friends and strangers who share an experience that cannot be known from the outside—only embraced in empathy." But *Shadows in Winter* is more than that. It is an artifact of love, as real and as desperate as that evinced by centuries of writers for young love lost.

Artifacts of a Life

Beyond the value to Eitan himself, to Aderet, and to Leah's family and friends, even beyond the value to all those secret sharers of grief spread over the globe, it has value *as a monument to a specific life*. In this book one can hear Leah's voice, as ventriloquized through her husband: her voice in life and her dying voice. Leah's professional voice can also be encountered in the volume dedicated to her memory, which Eitan coedited with Professor Jonathan Sarna, who was Leah's dissertation advisor. *Jewish Renaissance and Revival in America* (Brandeis University Press, 2011) includes several essays by prominent professors of American Jewish history as well as two chapters of Leah's unfinished dissertation about a group of young Jewish thinkers in late nineteenth-century America who would go on to found some of the major institutions of Jewish culture and education in the twentieth century.

Her voice might indeed have matured into that of a serious scholar of the American Jewish experience; then again, it might have taken a turn into the field that ignited her imagination and passion: food, in all its dimensions—from the vegetables and fruit at the market through illustrated cookbooks to the art of production and culinary creation. Leah, in the New England Bookfair, would begin in the history section, her husband tells us, "but then make her way with far more delight to the array of cookbooks on sale: her real place of pleasure . . . And for all the elaborate cookbooks that filled our kitchen, she never really followed a recipe."

> Leah's playground would be Williams-Sonoma or Sur la Table: the gourmet kitchen stores where she could run her hands along the various fancy implements like a kid in a toy store. And there she would dreamily contemplate the kitchen we would have one day when money wasn't so tight. But for now we would be content with the glazed ceramic mugs, those that still greet me when I come to take my morning coffee.

A good part of this memoir focuses on the textures, colors, flavors, and aromas of the physical world that Leah and Eitan explored as a young couple and later as a family: salmon and risotto in the wood-paneled fish restaurant in Gloucester; French onion soup at Caffit in Jerusalem; the "scent of blackberry—*or was it peach?*—tea" at the Urth Café in Los Angeles. And then there were Leah's creations for the Sabbath table in Boston, in Los Angeles, and finally in Teaneck: "chicken with sautéed mushrooms and tomatoes, broccoli florets crisply seared in that rich extra virgin olive oil she loved to use . . . Chilled water on the table."

Or was it peach? It is not only the life that Eitan succeeds in recording but also his own powers of observation that are astounding. His memory and his imagination recreate the material spaces of his life with Leah—places like her parents' house on the lake in Pennsylvania. "Sold years ago, it's now taken on the layers of someone else's experience: but I wonder if places can store up scattered fragments of time. . . . Are there traces of us, of the soft edges of our summer hours—and will they remain somehow on the wood of that deck, looking out on the water?" Like that "glazed ceramic mug that still greets me when I come to take my morning coffee," with its "steam rising like the vapor of life," it is the ekphrastic word on the page that is the most indelible trace of all that has been.

What can finally be said is that, wherever her professional journey would ultimately have taken her, Leah's domestic life was full of the pleasures of this world, and life outside that sphere was clearly subordinate, as anachronistic as that may sound to our ears. She poured herself so fully into partnering Eitan and mothering Aderet that it seems in retrospect as if somehow she knew she would have only a few years to perform a lifetime of nurturing. And perhaps most important for the survivors—for all survivors—it is a life that was accompanied and witnessed. *Attention must be paid*.

As I prepare to take my leave of my mother and Eitan's "Nanny" in these dark days of early spring, I also part, once again, from Leah Levitz Fishbane, confident that the artifacts of her life—her daughter, her unfinished projects, her voice, and her very essence—are preserved in the words of her young bridegroom. ■

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DOI 10.1215/08879982-1729962

Black Liberation Theology and the Lynching of Jesus

The Cross and the Lynching Tree
by James H. Cone
Orbis Books, 2011

REVIEW BY GARY DORRIEN

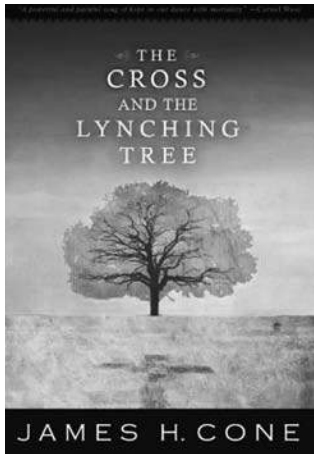
IT TOOK JAMES H. CONE four weeks to write his first book, *Black Theology and Black Power,* a work surging with revolutionary expectation. It took him six years to write his latest work, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree,* a book of haunting sorrow and beauty.

Staring at the pictures of tortured black victims was too much to bear on a weekly basis. Writing about them was slow and tortuous. On numerous occasions he had to push the manuscript away. I learned to stop asking him if he was making progress on the book; he could tell me only so many times that he was proceeding "like a turtle." But it helped that Cone is a Christian theologian who had never quite gotten clear on what he wanted to say about the cross of Jesus. The cross helped him grapple with the lynching tree, and the lynching tree helped him grapple with the cross.

Cone's joyful ebullience, playfulness, and tender heart don't often register on his written pages the way they do in person. But joyfulness distinctly pokes through in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree,* despite the book's gut-wrenching subject matter. This book is a magnificent capstone to Cone's forty-three years of theological leadership. It teaches that the lynching tree is a metaphor for the crucifixion of black American Christ figures. And it points the way to the redeeming presence of God and to Martin Luther King Jr.'s hopes for a beloved community.

A Theologian of the Black Power Movement

The Cross and the Lynching Tree builds on decades of Black Power theology. To appreciate the significance of this latest book, it's helpful to look back through the years of its author's powerful contributions. In 1967 Cone was a young theologian at Adrian College, ninety minutes from Detroit, when Detroit and Newark erupted in summer riots. Cone had spent the climactic years of the Civil Rights Movement in a seminary library, earning a doctorate. He lamented that his teachers fixated on European theologians, but he wanted the degree and an academic career, so he mimicked his teachers, writing a dissertation on Karl Barth's theological anthropology. Then he taught theology at two colleges, feeling increasingly alienated from his field, while the Black Power



movement arose. Cone prized the writings of James Baldwin, Richard Wright, and LeRoi Jones (later known as Amiri Baraka), which blazed with anti-racist rebellion, but he was stuck with white theologians who epitomized the culture of whiteness and who rarely uttered more than a few words against racial prejudice.

Cone decided that he was in the wrong field. He could not spend his life teaching theologies that dismissed slavery and white supremacism as topics not germane to theology. But then Detroit and Newark exploded, and Cone decided that he lacked time for the doctorate in black literature that he had been considering. He would have to make do with the education that he possessed, to say something

on behalf of the struggle of oppressed American blacks for freedom.

Cone found his voice upon hearing white theologians and pastors admonish blacks to follow Jesus instead of resorting to violence. He later recalled: "I was so furious that I could hardly contain my rage. The very sight of white people made me want to vomit. 'Who are they,' I said, 'to tell us blacks about Christian ethics?'" How did whites muster the gall to lecture oppressed blacks about love and nonviolence? How could whites be so surprised by the anger of American blacks? "My rage was intensified because most whites seemed not to recognize the contradictions that were so obvious to black people," he added.

That was the wellspring of emotion and conviction that produced Cone's electrifying first book, *Black Theology and Black Power,* which was published a year after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated and three months before Cone moved to Union Theological Seminary, in 1969. He later recalled, "I had so much anger pent up in me I had to let it out or be destroyed by it." King's murder was merely the last straw after the killing of Malcolm X and many Black Power militants.

In Cone's telling, his anger stretched back to the slave ships and the auction block, but more pressing were his personal encounters with race hatred in Arkansas, Illinois, and Michigan. He vowed to make no compromise with the evils of white racists: "Racism is a deadly disease that must be resisted by any means necessary. Never again would I ever expect white racists to do right in relation to the black community."

Black Power theology was an announcement that self-respecting blacks would no longer depend on the good will of white liberals. Malcolm X's phrase "by any means necessary" was fundamental to Cone's project: "Complete emancipation of black people from white oppression by whatever means black people deem necessary." Black Power, Cone explained, used boycotts when necessary, demonstrations when necessary, and violence when necessary. Cone lumped white liberals "in the same category with the George Wallaces," which made them howl with wounded moral pride. Cone told liberals to deal with it. All white Americans were responsible for the oppression of black Americans, and the last thing that black people needed was to be assimilated into white culture.

Liberation from Satanic Whiteness

Cone stressed that Black Power theology was against integration—especially the humiliating assumption that white institutions were superior. White liberals, to the extent that they acknowledged white racism, sought to cure their culture of it by integrating blacks into it. They claimed to believe that race should not matter; the Christian liberals added that Jesus was above race. Cone replied that race mattered everywhere in real-world America, assimilation was deadly for blacks, and thus, in the American context, Christ was black. The humiliating phase of linking arms with white liberals was over. The black struggle for liberation would get nowhere if blacks got tied up with the anxieties and superiority complexes of white liberals.

Cone acknowledged that there was a place in the justice struggle for white radicals—the John Browns who burned with hatred of white racism. They didn't get in the way of black liberation or presume to tell black radicals what to do, and they risked their lives for freedom. But a theology of Black Power had to repudiate the white liberal quest of innocence and its bogus solidarity with black freedom.

Cone's first book contained the liberationist principle of responding to a world that defined the oppressed as nonpersons. However, neither personhood nor the word liberation was a key concept for him as yet. Then he wrote his epochal work, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970), which launched the North American liberation theology movement. At the time Cone was unaware of similar stirrings in Latin America and South Africa, but he defined "blackness" as a symbol of oppression extending beyond the North American context. The object of black theology, he declared, was "liberation from whiteness." Black theology was "theology of and for the black community, seeking to interpret the religious dimensions of the forces of liberation in that community."

Cone stressed that whites were "in no position whatever" to make judgments about the truth claims or legitimacy of black theology. The point of black theology was to "analyze the satanic nature of whiteness" and to offer a liberating alternative to it. No white theologian had ever taken white America's oppression of blacks as a point of departure for theology. Even white theologians who wrote about racial injustice failed to attack white racism in its totality. Thus, white theology was not Christian theology at all, but its enemy.

Black theology did not claim a universal starting point or aim. In Cone's rendering, Black theology was intrinsically communal, refusing to be separated from the black community of faith; it identified liberating activity with divine action; and it rejected abstract principles of right and wrong, operating by a single, partial, and contextual principle: liberation. The test of truth in black theology was whether a statement or action served the end of black liberation.

In a paradigmatic liberationist move, Cone lifted up the scriptural themes of exodus from slavery and liberation from oppression, stressing that God is a partisan, liberating power. The God of the Bible calls blacks to liberation, not redemptive suffering: "Blacks are not elected to be Yahweh's suffering people. Rather, we

are elected because we are oppressed against our will and God's, and God has decided to make our liberation God's own undertaking." God is black because liberation is the very essence of the divine nature.

This liberationist starting point distinguished Cone from his teachers and the field of theology. He put it sharply: "White religionists are not capable of perceiving the blackness of God, because their satanic whiteness is a denial of the very essence of divinity." For blacks, evil was anything that arrested or negated liberation; salvation was liberation. For whites, evil was normal life, benefiting from the privileges of whiteness; salvation was the abolition of whiteness. White theologians, preferring their privileges, pleaded that color should not matter. Cone replied, "This only reveals how deeply racism is embedded in the thought forms of their culture."

Many reviewers complained that Cone's books were emotional, intellectually thin, obsessed with race, infatuated with violence, and dependent on the accusative mode. Often they claimed that Cone's appeal to epistemic privilege made him impervious to criticism or falsification. But liberation theology was too profound in its critique and constructive import to be blown away by ridicule. Why did racial justice disappear from the agenda of white American theology after slavery was abolished? How was one to account for the stupendous silence of white American theologians through decades of segregation and racist lynching? If liberal theology flowed out of the Enlightenment, and the Enlightenment rationalized racism and the slave trade throughout the eighteenth century, what did that say about liberal theology? What would it mean if theology interpreted history from the standpoints of oppressed and excluded peoples?

Cone was the apostle of the revolutionary turn in American theology that privileged liberationist questions. Black theology, in his rendering, was about liberating oppressed people from dependency and oppression by privileging their struggles, contexts, and spiritual experiences. It found in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures a radical witness to a partisan, black, liberating God of the oppressed.

All of Cone's authored works since 1970—*The Spirituals and the Blues* (1972), *God of the Oppressed* (1975), *My Soul Looks Back* (1982), *For My People* (1984), *Speaking the Truth* (1986), *Martin & Malcolm & America* (1991), and *Risks of Faith* (1999)—explored the liberationist departure in Christian theology. Always he pressed hard on one question, which led to a second: (1) How was it possible for a religion based on the witness of Jesus and the prophets to be so deeply implicated in the oppression of black people? and (2) How could theologians not regard this as a central issue for theology?

In recent years he has pleaded with black theologians not to exaggerate their fluid postmodern identities in a supposedly post-racial society. In 1998 he told a gathering of black theologians: "We have opposed racism much too gently. We have permitted white theological silence in exchange for the rewards of being accepted by the white theological establishment. This is a terrible price to pay for the few crumbs that drop from the white master's table."

Yet for all of Cone's insistence on confronting painful truths and evils, he had some major unfinished business to confront after forty years of writing black liberation theology. He had repressed the terror of lynching that he felt as a child, the importance of lynching for his own subject, and the meaning of the lynching tree for his theology of the cross.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

Growing up in Bearden, Arkansas, where he attended Macedonia A.M.E. Church, Cone heard a great deal about the cross of Jesus. There were more hymns, gospel songs, spirituals, prayers, testimonies, and sermons about the cross than about anything else. They conveyed that Jesus was a friend of oppressed people and knew about their suffering. Jesus achieved salvation for "the least of these" through his solidarity with them, even unto death. Black Christians, like Jesus, did not deserve to suffer. But keeping faith in Jesus was the one thing blacks possessed that white people could not control or take from them. For black Christians, Cone stresses, merely knowing that Jesus suffered as they did gave them faith that God was with them, even if they ended up, like Jesus, tortured to death on a tree: "The more black people struggled against white supremacy, the more they found in the cross the spiritual power to resist the violence they so often suffered."

The crucifixion of Jesus placed God among a persecuted, beaten, tortured, and crucified people. White communities lynched blacks in nearly every state of the United States. Cone notes that lynching was a media spectacle in the 1890s and the early twentieth century, as prominent newspapers announced the place, date, and time of the next festivity. Lynching was "a ritual celebration of white supremacy," suitable for family gatherings, attracting up to 20,000 celebrants. American blacks, like Jesus, were stripped, paraded, mocked, whipped, spat upon, and "tortured for hours in the presence of jeering crowds for popular entertainment." Revelers posed for pictures with the burned and dismembered black victims—pictures that were then turned into postcards that hawkers sold to members of the crowd.

Just as Jesus was a victim of mob hysteria and imperial violence, American blacks were victims of mob hysteria and white supremacy. Cone stresses that the cross and the lynching tree struck terror in the heart of the subject community. Terrorism was the point in both cases—terrorizing to enforce obedience and conformity.

Can Suffering Be Redemptive?

Cone acknowledges that it took him many years to appreciate Martin Luther King's theology of redemptive suffering, partly because he loathed the common misunderstandings of it. King's idea of redemptive suffering had nothing to do with legitimizing suffering or sanctifying it. King tried to end racist harm in the United States, and he sacrificed his life so that others would not suffer.

Many womanist and feminist theologians have dissented on this subject. Womanist theologians Delores Williams and Emilie Townes, and feminist theologians Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker, have sharply criticized the emphasis on the suffering of Jesus in most forms of Western and Eastern Christianity. This is not merely a protest against the ransom theory (which makes Satan the problem) or the various satisfaction theories (in which Jesus rescued sinners from a wrathful God by suffering in their place). The womanist and feminist critiques focus much of their critical fire on moral influence theory, in which Jesus offered an exemplary religious ideal through his willingness to die for others. Moral influence theory pervades a great deal of liberal theology: it plays a role in Eastern Orthodox theologies of deification and it is also featured in traditional black church preaching.

Some womanist and feminist theologians reject all atonement theorizing and all theologies that emphasize the cross of Jesus. Some reject atonement theory but not an emphasis on the cross. Others contend for a form of atonement theory that adjudicates womanist and feminist criticism. For all theologians in the first camp, and most in the others, atonement theology as a whole is problematic for perpetuating patriarchy, magical thinking, a vengeful deity, and/or an ethic of martyrdom. If Jesus exemplifies a religious ideal by suffering for others, the gospel becomes a message of self-sacrifice and moral perfectionism. To the extent that this message retains any concept of a substitutionary or surrogate sacrifice, the problem worsens.

Cone summarizes this topic very briefly, taking no interest in interrogating or interpreting the various doctrines of atonement. Atonement theory and liberation theology are incompatible, he judges; thus, it is pointless to belabor the finer points of atonement theology. All atonement doctrines turn the gospel of Jesus into a rational concept that is explained by a theory of salvation. Even moral influence theory perpetuates the logic of surrogacy, at least implicitly. Cone allows that too much black church preaching has taken this tack.

But black Christians were not wrong to fixate on the cross of Jesus, he argues. Having struggled with this issue for many years, Cone sides with womanist theologians Shawn Copeland and JoAnne Terrell, who insist that the cross is central to the gospel faith and Christian community, especially African American Christianity. Copeland admonishes that the spirituals did not emphasize the cross because American blacks were masochists who enjoyed suffering. They sang of Jesus because he endured what they suffered. The cross enthroned "the One who went all the way with them and for them."

Cone puts it equally vividly: "The cross is the burden we must bear in order to attain freedom. . . . One has to have a powerful religious imagination to see redemption in the cross, to discover life in death and hope in tragedy."

Billie Holiday's sublime and horrific song "Strange Fruit" conveyed what white ministers should have said—that the lynching tree *was* the cross in the United States of America. But only a handful said anything like that in public space—notably Quincy Ewing (an Episcopal priest) and E. T. Wellford (author of *The Lynching of Jesus*). Moreover, Cone observes, secular black writers like Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes were stronger critics of lynching than were black theologians, who rarely discussed it.

For U.S. Americans, Cone rightly argues, to speak of the cross without relating it to the lynching tree is evasive and unreal. It is to reduce the cross to an abstract sentiment, a contemplative piety. But the lynching tree without the cross is "simply an abomination." The lynching tree without the cross has nothing to do with redemption, nor with anything not repugnant. Only those who stand in solidarity with the oppressed can embrace the cross of Jesus. God's loving solidarity, Cone urges, can transform even the hideous ugliness of imperial crucifixion and American lynching into occasions of beauty—"into God's liberating presence." ■

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DOI 10.1215/08879982-1729971

CAMPOLO *(continued from page 12)*

Protestants pray. I would simply tell God what I wanted God to deliver. It was almost as though I was reading off a list of nonnegotiable demands to the Almighty.

These days, when I wake up in the morning, I center down on Jesus. It takes me about fifteen to twenty minutes to become completely still. I have to push out of my conscious mind what C.S. Lewis called "the animals"—the hundred-and-one worries and plans that come rushing into my mind the minute I wake up. I have to push back these animals and create what the Celtic mystics called the "thin place." I have to transport myself emotionally and spiritually to a condition of inner stillness. It is in that stillness that I

focus on and surrender to the Spirit of Christ. In the Baptist church of my childhood, we used to sing: "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace." That's what I'm talking about.

During a television interview, Mother Teresa was asked, "When you pray, what do you say to God?" She answered, "I don't say anything; I listen." Then the interviewer asked, "All right! When you pray, what does God say to you?" Mother Teresa replied, "God doesn't say anything; God listens. And if you don't understand that, I can't explain it to you."

I do understand that. I understand that there is a kind of praying in which the person says nothing and hears nothing but, in quietude and in stillness, centers down on Jesus and waits patiently for the Spirit to flow into and envelop him or her. It is through this infilling of the Holy Spirit that Palestinian Christians can have the power to empathetically relate to others.

Building Empathy and Trust in Israel/Palestine

Being Spirit-filled is a prerequisite if Palestinian Christians are going to carry out the high and holy task of being God's therapy instrument for those who are suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Those ready to take on this task might start by empathizing with Palestinian Muslims. Empathizing with them should be relatively easy since the ordeals they have suffered over the past half-century have also marked Palestinian Christians' lives. While it will be harder for Palestinian Christians to empathize with their Israeli neighbors, it is also a task that Jesus commands. He clearly stated, "If you only love those who love you, and if you only empathize with those who are like you, what reward from God do you think you deserve?"

In the Palestinian Christian context, following this command means feeling the fears and the anxieties that your Israeli neighbors endure day-in and day-out. It means feeling the weight of having been persecuted through many ages by neighbors who seemed trustworthy. It means empathizing with both the anger and fear that was generated by the Holocaust, and empathizing with Israelis' anxieties about the Arab Spring.

The Jewish people certainly have cause to question whether Christians can be trusted to stand up for them in times of trouble, given the Pope's concordat with Hitler during World War II and the complicity of other Christian groups in anti-Semitism and the Holocaust.

Even the Evangelicals who form the base of support for Christian Zionism in the United States can make the Jews nervous. They know that even though powerful Evangelical leaders such as John Hagee and Pat Robertson advocate strong support for the State of Israel, these Evangelicals still believe that unless Jews accept Jesus as their messiah and savior, they will burn in Hell forever.

In *Escape from Freedom*, psychoanalyst Erich Fromm pointed out that the Holocaust was partly the result of theologies propagated by Evangelical Christians. The theologies of John Calvin and Martin Luther, for example, had conditioned German Christians to divide the human race into two groups: "the elect" and "the totally depraved." Members of the elect were seen as the only members of society chosen by God for eternal salvation. Fromm made it clear that once a group of people has been defined as totally depraved, mistreating them and even killing them becomes much easier.

The challenge for Palestinian Christians and other Christians around the world is to overcome this dichotomy and sense the image of God in every person, regardless of their personality or ethnic identity. Until you can look into the eyes of those who might otherwise be defined as "enemies" and feel Jesus staring back at you, you will not be Christian in any sense that really matters. When you are looking into the eyes of your Jewish neighbors, you must always be able to sense a sacred presence there and hear Jesus saying, "Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me."

Jesus made it clear that making amends with your "enemy" is like making amends with God and that it is impossible to be right with God unless you are right with those who otherwise might be defined as your enemies. Evangelicals have long ignored this necessity. If you want to love God with your whole heart, mind, soul, and strength, as the red letters of the Bible tell us to do, then you've got to love your neighbor as you love yourself.

I have a Franciscan friend who tells me that God comes to us sacramentally through the poor and the oppressed. In a real sense, that's what I believe has to happen if we are to overcome the animosity that exists between Christians and Muslims, on the one hand, and Christians and Jews, on the other. We must learn to recognize "the holy" in the other.

Lessons from Northern Ireland

I saw the kind of reconciling relationships that I am talking about during a visit to Northern Ireland. Prior to the peace talks that led to the Good Friday Agreement, which brought some degree of reconciliation in Northern Ireland, I was asked to speak at a peace rally in the town of Portadown. That particular town is where, once a year, the conflict between Protestants and Catholics reaches its highest level. On that day, Protestants march through the Catholic neighborhoods, mocking their Catholic neighbors and calling them all kinds of insulting names. Each group says its rights are being violated when objections to the annual march take place. The Protestants say they have a right to march where they want to march and a right to publicly demon-

strate their feelings. The Catholics say they have a right to be left alone and to be free from the darts and arrows that are tossed their way by the verbiage of their Protestant enemies.

When I arrived at the town hall in Portadown, there were both Protestants and Catholics present. They were sitting on chairs facing into the center of the room, the Catholics on one side and the Protestants on the other. When I saw that arrangement, I thought, "We're not off to a very good peace rally, given the separation of these two groups." I was wrong.

The program started off with a Protestant man standing up and confessing, "I always hated Catholics." Then he went on to talk about some of the terrible things he had done to them. When he finished, he looked across the room and asked the Catholics, "Will you, in the name of Jesus, forgive me?"

The Catholic group said, in unison, "In the name of Christ, we forgive you!" Then a Catholic man stood up and said almost the identical thing. He, too, confessed that he had harbored hatred against Protestants and had done some things that would have to be considered criminal. Again the question was asked, "Will you forgive me?" This time the Protestants responded with, "In the name of Christ, we forgive you."

It went back and forth like that until, at the end, a man with no legs, sitting in his wheelchair, said: "I always hated Protestants, but one day when I got into my car and turned on the ignition, a bomb went off and blew off both my legs—and then I hated Protestants with a red-hot passion. But my priest prayed with me and asked me to surrender my life to Christ. I did and because I have Christ in my life, I have forgiven the man who did this to me."

On the other side of the room, a Protestant man stood up and said, "He did forgive me. You should know that I'm the one who set off the bomb." It was then that the man in the wheelchair said: "He hasn't told you that I have no children. And when my wife died nine months ago, he invited me to live with him, and we, to this day, are living together as brothers in Christ."

Reconciliation comes only when there has been confession. There needs to be confession in this Israeli-Palestinian crisis, just as there was confession in that town hall in Portadown.

When I was in Israel/Palestine this spring, I had a meeting with the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, Shlomo Amar. At the end of our discussion, he offered a proposal: he asked that the leaders of the Bethlehem Bible College, along with other Evangelical Palestinians, meet for regular discussions with a group of rabbis. He made it clear that such conversations should not be marked with accusations and criticisms, with each side finding fault with the other. What needs to happen is that both Palestinians and Israelis should sit silently and listen to each other's narratives. Both groups need to listen to the perspectives, feelings, hurts, and perceived injustices as articulated by those on the other side.

Healing through Celebration

I hope that the time will come when Israeli, Palestinian, and American young people can come together to sing and dance. Good therapy always involves people coming together to enjoy one another.

When Jesus described the Kingdom of God, he likened the Kingdom unto "a wedding feast." A wedding feast was the ultimate party in the ancient Hebraic world. Jesus compares the conditions that will exist in the Kingdom to that kind of partying.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus came to the town where Zacchaeus lived, the crowds lined the streets. Zacchaeus, who was short in stature, couldn't see over the crowd to get a glimpse of Jesus, so he climbed up into a sycamore tree. When at last the Savior came walking by, he looked up in the tree and he shouted: "Zacchaeus, come down! I'm going to your house today. We're going to have a party!"

It was the same thing with the story of the prodigal son. The boy took half of his father's money and ran off to an evil city where he wasted his father's money in riotous living. He was so poor that he did something that no decent Jewish man would ever think of doing—he took a job feeding pigs. And when he saw the slop that the pigs were eating, he said to himself: "I don't have to do this. I can go home to my father and ask my father for a job on the farm. His employees on that farm live better than I am living right now." The scriptures say that when the son was a long way off, his father saw him, ran out and threw his arms around him, and welcomed him home. His father put a ring on his finger and a robe on his back, and then called together all of his servants so they might celebrate together. Reconciliation took place in the context of a party.

I hope for the day when young Palestinian Christians can go to those young soldiers with machine guns whom I saw at the checkpoints and say: "Hey, is it possible for us to get together and have a party tonight? Is there some way we can spend some time with each other in celebration?" I don't know whether that is possible, but if it is, I hope that young Christian Palestinians will help make it happen.

Cultivating a Prophetic Imagination

To be a therapist who does God's work, you have to be not only empathetic and reconciling but also prophetic. In his book, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Walter Brueggemann says a main characteristic of a prophet is that a prophet weeps. The prophet weeps for what his or her own people have done wrong and for what is happening to the prophet's own people. Palestinian Christians have to weep over what has happened to their own neighbors. The conflict over the last several decades has given rise to hatred. In schools throughout the West Bank and Gaza,

children are often taught to hate the Jews, to the point where some of them think about becoming suicide bombers. Some in Israel have similarly spread hatred, including racist rabbis who have preached that Arabs are inferior people and have even suggested that killing Arab civilians is religiously justified.

The Christian therapist knows that hatred is a cancerous emotion that destroys those who hate and does little, if anything, to help remedy the wrongs that have been done. Palestinian Christian therapists must stand over and against the resentment that the Bible calls "the root of bitterness" and, most of all, must weep over how violence against Israelis and Palestinians has taken innocent lives.

I am not suggesting for one moment that this resentment and animosity is not justified; I am only saying that hatred and resentment is corrosive when it exists in our hearts and minds, and Palestinian Christians must find ways to stand up for justice, to have their voices heard, and to do so without violence and hatred. Whenever the hatred generated by the oppression that Palestinians have endured at the hands of Israelis becomes a front-page news story, this diminishes the moral authority of Palestinians and lends support to the erroneous belief that all Palestinians are terrorists.

To be prophetic, it is also important for Palestinian Christians to come up with alternative visions of the future. The main alternative vision I have heard articulated among Palestinians is of a one-state solution—a state in which Jews and Palestinians would live together under one government. It would be ideal if Jews and Arabs could be good neighbors and establish a unified government that would mete out justice without prejudice to all of its citizens. In reality, though, the most workable vision of the future that I have heard entails a two-state solution.

A third alternative is a two-state condominial solution, which has been described as a kind of marriage of the one-state and two-state solutions. Russell Nieli and some of his colleagues in the political science department at Princeton University have been formulating this proposal, which Nieli described in detail in the July/August 2009 issue of *Tikkun*. This vision entails a two-state solution with both states having their capitals in Jerusalem. All people of Arab descent would be citizens of the Palestinian State and all people of Jewish descent would belong to the Israeli State, regardless of where they lived. But importantly, both Arabs and Jews would be allowed to live anywhere they liked within the entire region. Arab people would be allowed to return to land that is presently within the borders of Israel.

The United States, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, along with contributions from other nations, would have to provide funding so that the returned Palestinians could buy land, and perhaps even buy back the homes that they left in what is now Israel when they became refugees. The Israelis would not have to be afraid that returning Arabs might become citizens and then vote the State of Israel out of existence because the Arabs would be voting in the Palestinian election, not the Israeli election. Jewish settlers could stay put, but they would have to acknowledge that they are living on Palestinian land, are subject to Palestinian law, and must depend on Palestinian police to protect them.

This plan is much more complex than what I am presenting here, but I believe it must be given careful consideration because it is one of the few new ideas that have come along. Prophets must present a workable solution to this problem that parties on both sides will view as workable. I discussed this plan with the head of the Israeli Consulate in the city of Philadelphia. I also presented it to the policy director in the Foreign Affairs office of the Israeli government in Jerusalem. I even ran it by Bill Clinton, who said he saw much value in it.

I know I am an outsider, prescribing a stranger's vision as to what should be done, but I believe that these sorts of ideas are what would result from a reading of the red letters of the Bible. I believe that those red letters call Palestinian Christians to be therapists who seek to allay the fears and anxieties of both the Jews and their fellow Palestinians. I pray for the day when Palestinians who are Christian and Muslim can join together with both secular and religious Jews to affirm each other as part of the family of God, acknowledging that *all* the people at such a gathering are fellow descendents of Abraham. ■

BELLAH *(continued from page 15)*

are also often identified with gods. In hunter-gatherer societies, there are no gods, there are only powerful beings (often viewed as ancestors) that may be dangerous or benevolent; their power is always limited and they aren't very different from humans. Gods in the sense of powerful beings who require worship and sacrifice arise only with kingship, and often kings are thought to be gods, or sons of a god, or divinely chosen. Kings tend to present their own image, as well as that of the god they embody or serve, as not only powerful but also caring.

The god and/or king can be said to be a father. The image of the king as a "good shepherd" is found in several early states, notably in both Mesopotamia and Egypt. In early states, what has been called a secondary formation—a group of relatives and close followers of the king—exists in an exalted status above ordinary people. In the simple chiefdoms of ancient Polynesia, the chiefs are simply the heads of lineages that contain all the people, but in an early state like Hawaii, only the ruling

group has lineages, and commoners are forbidden to remember their predecessors beyond one generation. Whereas the aristocrats, the quasi-divine members of the ruling lineages, spend their time feasting, dancing, writing love poetry, hunting, and sometimes waging war, commoners live a life of toil and are subject to arbitrary taxation or even the confiscation of their land. There is a third class below commoners: a pool of enslaved outcastes from which victims are drawn for the human sacrifices required by the rituals of the ruling group.

Even in what I have called archaic states, the somewhat stabilized societies that have grown out of early states, in which the "gentle violence" of all subsequent class societies has partially replaced the reign of terror, we can begin to find popular protest. We have poetry from ancient Egypt, especially in intermediate periods in which order has broken down, that asks: Where is the king? Where are the gods? Why are we hungry? Why are we being killed by barbarians? Generalized questioning of class society does not yet exist, but it is clear that these poets are not convinced of the legitimacy of an authority that seems anything but nurturing.

Organized Protest in the Axial Age

In the Axial Age of the first millennium BCE, when states have grown larger, urbanization has increased, and iron weapons have made endemic warfare more horrifying than before, we find the beginnings of organized protest. Confucian scholars condemn rulers who dine on delicacies while the peasants starve. They argue that true rule is based on moral conduct, on the example of ethical rulers, and not on violence and punishment. The Buddha argues that those who rule by force will be condemned to eons of suffering due to the bad karma created by their violence, and that only non-violence will lead to a good rebirth and eventually to nirvana. Everywhere in the Axial Age, those sensitive to the evils of class society become, like the Buddhist monks, renouncers, seeking outside the existing society a way of life based on compassion and benevolence. The great Israelite prophets are in their own way renouncers, refusing to collaborate with those in power, but they are also powerful denouncers, threatening those in power with the consequences of their actions. Amos, in the eighth century BCE, for example, describes the Lord's punishment of "they that trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, / and turn aside the way of the afflicted" (2:6–7).

In the last catastrophic days before the destruction of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians, Hosea (13:9–11) calls the kingship itself into question:

> I will destroy you, O Israel;
> who can help you?
> Where now is your king to save you?
> where are all your princes to
> defend you—
> Those of whom you said,
> "Give me a king and princes"?
> I have given you kings in my anger,
> and I have taken them away in
> my wrath.

The prophets, the earliest proponents of the Yahweh-alone position, claimed that they were more truly "called" by Yahweh than were the kings. And from them, over time and with the assistance of priests and scribes, there developed a vision of an ideal society in which kings would spend their lives in the study of the law and would not aggrandize themselves with luxury and display; a society of justice and peace would replace the violent and exploitative society they were denouncing. Axial societies like that of the prophets developed images of a genuinely good society—images that were utopian under existing social and economic conditions.

Imagining an End to Class Inequality

In Axial societies, especially when conditions got really bad, visions arose of a just society coming down from heaven and replacing all the corruptions of the world. In Second Isaiah (65:17–19, 21–22, 25), probably coming from the period of the Babylonian captivity, we have a powerful version of that vision, which would reverberate for centuries:

> For behold, I create new heavens and a
> new earth;
> and the former things shall not be
> remembered
> or come into mind . . .
> no more shall be heard in it the sound
> of weeping
> and the cry of distress.
> They shall build houses and inhabit
> them;
> they shall plant vineyards and
> eat their fruit.
> They shall not build and another
> inhabit;
> they shall not plant and another
> eat;
> for like the days of a tree shall the days
> of my people be,
> and my chosen shall long enjoy the work
> of their hands.
> The wolf and the lamb shall feed
> together,
> the lion shall eat straw like
> the ox;
> and dust shall be the serpent's
> food.
> They shall not hurt or destroy in all my
> holy mountain,
> says the Lord.

What we see here is a world of absolute nonviolence and social justice: the rich and powerful will not take away the houses or the harvests of the poor, and ordinary people shall long enjoy the work of their hands. Above all it is a world of rejoicing where the sound of weeping and the cry of distress will no longer be heard. The legitimation crisis of the Axial Age is solved, even if only at the end of times.

This long tradition of criticism and protest has continued into the modern era. Political movements such as Marxism are clearly indebted to the religious traditions that I have discussed, even

as they critique the degree to which religious institutions have aided the oppression of ordinary people by the rich and powerful. The Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with all its complexities and distortions, has in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries helped to stimulate anti-colonial rebellions and the establishment of new states. Marxism, explicitly anti-religious yet often generating a kind of religious devotion, produced in the democratic socialist societies of Northwest Europe some of the most equitable societies the world has ever seen, yet in Russia and China these movements produced just the kind of oppression and exploitation they were originally dedicated to opposing. Fascistic antirevolutionary movements have created some of the greatest evils in the history of mankind. And even democratic America, although it has realized millennial hopes at least for some, has a list of crimes too long and too horrible to begin to recite.

Prospects for Equality Today

With all the great achievements and the great crimes of modernity, it is hard to say where we stand today. We have the capacity to create a world of peace and justice but also a greater capacity to destroy ourselves than ever before. Among the great ideals of the Enlightenment, supported by many religious as well as secular groups (though always opposed by religious and secular coalitions), were individual rights, the rule of law, democratic government, and equality. Nowhere in the world are any of these ideals completely institutionalized, though some are more secure than others. Perhaps the most fragile ideal, the one in greatest danger today, is equality.

Marx foresaw the triumph of socialism in the most advanced and prosperous capitalist countries, where the exploited workers would realize they were in a majority. He believed the socialist revolution did not have to be violent but could come about through democratic change, as democratic socialism has done in a number of countries. What Marx did not imagine and would even have necessarily condemned is that socialism would triumph in agrarian settings, such as early twentieth-century Russia and China, where the prosperity and innovation of industrial capitalism were missing. He could have foretold that despotism would be the result.

Today in the United States, the ideal of equality has almost vanished, and those who espouse it—religious or secular—are denounced as "socialist." Today, when almost all the wealth created by increased productivity goes to the top 1 percent and much of our population (not to mention the inhabitants of the countries where our corporations have moved their factories) lives in poverty, we are very far from realizing the egalitarianism that capitalism has made possible. Reckless selfishness at the top is also threatening our natural environment. We have reached the point where, by human productivity and ingenuity, a genuinely just and peaceful world is possible, but we can see that the same human capacity can lead to the opposite result. As Terry Eagleton has written:

> In the long apocalyptic tradition of cosmic portents, fiery signs in the skies, and impending planetary doom, it was never envisaged that we might prove capable of bringing all this about by ourselves, without the slightest help from a wrathful deity. Who needs an angry God to burn up the planet when as mature, self-sufficient human beings we are perfectly capable of doing the job ourselves?

Moses presented the children of Israel, and through them, the world, with the choice between life and death. Never before have human beings had the capacity to make this choice themselves—the choice between a just and peaceful world and the destruction of our species and our environment. Over 2,000 years ago, the great seers and prophets of the world's religions foresaw this choice. The hour of decision is surely here. Can the religious traditions that have sprung from those sources influence the choice human beings will make? ■

LEVY-LYONS *(continued from page 18)*

are immutable, inevitable, and somehow natural. By injecting doubt into that faith, Sabbath practice disrupts the dominant logic of American culture. Each person who keeps a Sabbath plays a part in exposing the underlying ideology of the status quo—the religion of materialism, self advancement, and the pursuit of individual happiness. For, in Heschel's words, "a thought has blown the marketplace away."

As sweet and gentle as the Sabbath may be, its arrival collides violently with the secular world. It forces us to choose every week: will I surrender to a deeper principle of joy and meaning or will I embezzle time from God? It forces us to confront the fundamental question: to what or to whom do I ultimately belong? To my possessions? To my boss? To my insecurities fueled by the media? To my fears about the future? To my boundless thirst for *more*? To whom or to what?

Week in and week out through my own Sabbath practice, I ask myself this question. And I find that as I am more and more able to answer, "I belong to God" or "to my deepest self" or "to community" or "to the earth" or "to liberation," I grow in spiritual strength. The tension between the call of work and the call of the Sabbath becomes merely weight added to my spiritual barbells—another opportunity to destabilize my ordinary world and lift up my deepest truths. This is why Sabbath observance is a spiritual practice: it takes discipline, ironically, to enter into an undis-

ciplined, formless time. It takes discipline to reimagine our world. It takes courage to assert and reassert our freedom. It takes a true leap of faith.

It is no coincidence that the Sabbath was invented/received by a people who understood themselves to have once been slaves. The genius of their insight was that sometimes the most politically radical use of time is not to use it efficiently, but rather to squander it. To spend it lavishly. To while it away—as if the present moment were an eternity, as if the present moment were all that existed, as if we had all the time in the world. This insight became enshrined in Torah, and henceforth the Israelites made perennial commitments to a liberating Power even greater than the Pharaoh. Imagine if we made commitments to a liberating Power greater than the Pharaohs of our day. Imagine if we reaffirmed those commitments every week with a community dedicated to reclaiming the wealth of time and the promise of justice for ourselves and for all the creatures of the earth. Imagine if we whiled away twenty-five hours a week just lounging together on life's playground. ■

ZARETSKY *(continued from page 36)*

understood as a series of successive crises. The actual founding of the United States, I argue, lies in its commitment to equality and justice, not simply to independence. Thus, each crisis sought to *refound* the country, or transform its identity in light of a telos of equality. In each case the Left supplied an indispensable idea, namely a conception of equality that spoke to the country's identity. The reason the Left's contribution was so important was that the meaning of the reforms that resolved each of our three great crises was ambiguous.

Consider the abolition of slavery. The new sense of self-worth experienced by formerly enslaved workers in relation to their free labor could disguise exploitation, as it did in the new factories, or it could become a spur to redeeming the "equality [of] people of subordinate status," as David Brion Davis has argued in *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*. The abolitionists, the first American Left, forced the latter meaning, to the extent that it has been forced. Similarly, the powerful mechanisms of the New Deal state could have been used either to help rescue Wall Street or to advance the condition of industrial workers, immigrants and southern blacks. To the extent that the New Deal did the latter, it was due to the efforts of the socialists, understood broadly to include a great range of American reform, including the communists. Finally, the Sixties could have produced a meritocratic, consumption-oriented, two-tier rentier society or a worldwide democratic transformation centered on an expanded ideal of equality. The New Left sought to establish the second outcome; if it failed, the long-term meaning of the episode remains to be seen. What the Left did, then, was to give an *egalitarian meaning* to each of our epochal transformations—to articulate racial equality as the meaning of the Civil War, social equality as the meaning of the New Deal, and participatory democracy as the meaning of the Sixties.

In doing so, the Left sought to place the ideal of equality at the center of the country's collective memory. In recent years we have been reminded of how important collective memory is by the Tea Party movement, which insists on the founding fathers' sacred writ. The Left, by contrast, argues that the nation's identity is an ongoing project, constantly being redefined, but in the direction of greater equality: what Richard Rorty called "achieving our country." Thus a crucial moment for the first American Left occurred when Lincoln insisted that the Declaration of Independence's proclamation of the equality of "all men" was not placed there to effect the separation from Great Britain but rather "for future use," by which Lincoln meant the emancipation of the slaves.

Likewise, Eleanor Roosevelt understood the nation's identity as an ongoing project when she arranged for Marian Anderson, denied access to the Daughters of the American Revolution Hall, to sing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. The Lincoln Memorial, she grasped, had been put there for "future use." In his speech to the 1963 "March for Jobs and Freedom," Martin Luther King observed that "all men—yes, black men as well as white men" had been given a "promissory note" in the form of the Declaration of Independence, and that the note had come due. In each case, the Left connected the present to a telos of equality, seeking to refound the country on an egalitarian basis. Far from being irrelevant, then, the Left has been central to the country's effort to establish a coherent history based on its deepest resources. What my recent book, *Why America Needs a Left,* does is work this out for the three cases.

The Abolition of Slavery

The abolitionists were the first American Left. Born with the two-party system, they were responsible for such innovations as ongoing systematic agitation, demonstration, leafleting, nonviolent direct action, and the presence of women and blacks in public life. As American historians all know, many early nineteenth-century Americans wanted to abolish slavery, but most were content to return slaves to Africa or to limit the area in which slavery could be practiced, thus encouraging its long-term decline.

By contrast, the abolitionists—many of whom were "free Negroes"—linked the end of slavery to integrating schools and churches and accepting interracial marriages. Without the abolitionists, slavery would have been abolished, but then we wouldn't have had the attempt—however flawed—to refound the country on the basis of racial equality. The original impetus for the Left, it is worth

adding, was the problem of chattel slavery, and not as Marx argued, the problem of industry and the working class. Thus violence, social reproduction, and even sexism were issues from the first; they were *re*discovered, not simply discovered, in the 1970s. This arguably was the case everywhere in the world, not just in the United States. This is another example of how we need to emancipate the idea of a Left from Marx.

The New Deal

The crisis associated with the rise of large-scale corporate capitalism centered on both structural and identity issues, just as the abolition crisis had centered on both the structural issue of slavery expansion and an identity crisis centered on racial equality. Not only technological and economic, the second crisis arose from the perception that the rise of large corporations or "trusts" had created a new system of quasi-feudal estates. The crisis of the 1930s required, as Franklin Roosevelt put it in his Commonwealth speech, "a reappraisal of values"—in other words, a new direction for the society. The goal was not "recovery," but rather a refounding in the same sense that the Gettysburg address had been a refounding.

At the heart of the refounding lay a new role for the state, the culmination of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century labor, Populist, and progressive struggles. In my argument, the key idea behind the New Deal was the idea of "planning," which the economist Lionel Robbins called "the panacea of the age." But the second Left took shape as a *critique* of planning, insisting that only an organized working class—including but not restricted to industrial unions—could have the heft to bend market forces to meet popular needs. Without the Left, the New Deal state might well have assumed a more nationalistic, intolerant, racist, anti-Semitic, and, in a word, fascistic character.

As it was, the New Deal was inflected with the values and meanings created by a broad-based series of social democratic and anti-capitalist movements, including those among industrial workers, African Americans, undocumented immigrants, and women. The New Deal in general, and Franklin Roosevelt in particular, are often credited with "saving" liberal democracy, meaning that when other nations turned to fascist and communist solutions, the United States held fast to its founding ideals. This is true, but it is not the whole truth. Liberalism survived the Great Depression only by appropriating principles of social equality, such as health care and jobs as rights. The contemporary American use of the word "liberal" reflects this shift. Thus just as the abolitionists helped put racial equality at the center of our history, so the Popular Front leftists (i.e, the "old Left") put social equality there.

The Emergence of the New Left

The Popular Front essentially brought the idea of the Left to America, but as a historical idea. Its members tied the idea to the abolitionists as well as to Puritan reformers, feminists, Christian socialists, and even to the Spartacist Rebellion of ancient Rome. As a result, when the third American turning point began in the Sixties—a turning point we have still not resolved—the student movements could call themselves a "New Left."

By the New Left I mean the activists of the 1960s who intervened in the three great mass movements of the time (the civil rights, anti-war, and feminist movements) and, in intervening, tried to draw out the continuity between the three movements. In calling itself "new," the New Left sought to distinguish itself from the old Left. The difference lay in the different stages of capitalism from which the two lefts arose. From the old Left point of view, the emancipation of man from nature depended on building up collective institutions, such as trade unions, and on gaining influence and ultimately control over the state.

The New Left is difficult to comprehend, in part because it is still new, and its historiography is just beginning. How, for example, are we to define the New Left, given that it was composed of many diverse movements, including the radical wings of the civil rights and Vietnam War movements, new and unexpected forms of social protest (such as those concerned with ecology, second-wave feminism, and gay liberation), and new sites of struggle, such as schools, prisons, and hospitals? In what sense did the New Left confront a crisis comparable to the crises of slavery and industrial capitalism? Finally, what is the legacy of the New Left, especially given the political and even intellectual predominance of the Right since the 1960s?

The New Left arose not from the accumulation of labor, but from the *release* of (first-world) labor from direct engagement in material production, in other words, from the scientific, technological, and educational revolution that has produced the wealth of our time. Beginning after World War II, capital organized itself globally, so that the nation state, including the United States, underwrote a system of global finance and sought foreign markets. On the one hand, labor became increasingly productive, which was experienced in the 1960s under such rubrics as "affluence," automation, and "the triple revolution," and in the emphasis on students in general. On the other hand, capital became increasingly mobile as new forms of "cheap labor" developed globally. The changed geography of production was experienced in the 1970s as deindustrialization, in the 1980s and 1990s as the global spread of finance and services, and today as an unemployment crisis based on global overcapacity and fiscal austerity imposed by banks. The disaggregation of market forces that has characterized capitalism since World War II ultimately generated what Daniel Rodgers has called "the age of fracture." The result was a massive social and cultural revolution.

There would have been such a revolution had there never been a Left. One did not need a Left to see that the 1960s

marked the first full-scale emergence of mass consumer culture, with its uninhibited vibrancy and sex appeal, its reliance on youth and on racial and sexual subcultures, its unprecedented international exchanges in design, music, and film, its rights revolution and postmodern philosophy, and the massive entry of women into the labor force. One did not need a Left to see that Cold War liberalism had produced a "democratic faith lacking in deeper emotional resources," as Doug Rossinow has described in *The Politics of Authenticity*. One did not need a Left to see that this lack might encourage a religious awakening, shown not only in the importance of religion to the Civil Rights Movement, but also in Zen, Indian music, meditation, and the Christian search for existential authenticity. Without the New Left one might still have had the Beatles, the Grateful Dead, *Hair*, Pop Art, Jimi Hendrix, John F. Kennedy, Marshall McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, Mary Quant, color TV, jet travel, transistors, and the pill.

One did need a Left, however, to break through the iron vise of Cold War thinking; to expose the alliance between Democratic Party liberals and Mississippi segregationists; to grasp the corporate and military control of the universities; to face the shocking sycophancy of American intellectuals in the face of power; to acknowledge the almost incalculable extent to which the government lies to its people, especially concerning war; to grasp the continuity between racism, colonialism, and the war in Vietnam; to see that schools, prisons, and doctors' offices were sites of power; to develop critical subfields in every academic discipline; to see sexism as a deep structure of human history, not simply a form of discrimination; and to build ties of solidarity with the poor, LGBT people, women, and racial minorities. It was the New Left that ensured that the 1960s was not only a period of cultural transformation. The New Left gave the cultural transformation its political meaning: a radical deepening in the promise of equality, in terms of new subjects, such as gays, and new sites, such as the family.

The New Left constitutes the third great benchmark in American history but differs from the previous two in that it did not provoke a successful transformation of liberalism. On the contrary, beginning in the 1970s, the Left began to lose its central place in American politics, at least ostensibly. The reasons for this are complex—they include globalization, the decline of industry, and the new priority given to ideas of identity—but the loss did not occur overnight. The country hovered between left and right for most of the 1970s and, contrary to appearances, never decisively shifted to the right. There was never what political scientists call a "critical election," establishing a mandate for Reagan or Bush comparable to the elections of Lincoln in 1860 or Roosevelt in 1932. The reason the Right is unable to establish a coherent majority is that the Right is a reaction, a corrective, to the great epochs of reform; it is not a progressive force. After the 1970s, the Right adopted a leftist vernacular of protest, discontent, anti-elitism, and exclusion, mimicking but not assuming the Left's historic role.

Lessons for the Occupy Movement

What the country needs now, however, is not a *faux* protest movement, but a revitalized, independent Left—the only force that can advance the core, egalitarian project of the nation. What drives American history forward are not horse swaps, grand bargains, and "pragmatic" compromises between centrist liberals and centrist rightists, but rather a struggle between the center and the Left over the meaning of equality.

The implications for understanding America today are clear. Obama's first term disappointed not only because his pursuit of a center-right dialogue was stillborn and vacuous, but also because it wound up empowering the Right. The immediate and welcoming response to Occupy Wall Street demonstrated how much Americans have missed the presence of a leftist voice; it was as if we had been waiting for someone to raise the question of equality again. What is needed now is that the spirit of Occupy Wall Street speak not only to our moment of national crisis, but that it also inspire a permanent radical presence in American life, one that builds on the egalitarian tradition that is at the core of our identity.

With that aim in mind, I would propose two immediate steps for Occupy Wall Street and its supporters. In both proposals, I build on the idea that we need to continue to occupy not just physical spaces like parks and public areas, but political and cultural spaces as well. First, we need to participate regularly in the Democratic Party, not as passive voters, but as activists who demand ninety-nine at-large seats chosen from our ranks in order to represent the 99 percent of the American people who will be otherwise unrepresented. The Credentials Committees at the local, state, and the national levels have the right to grant unpledged at-large seats. It was the New Left that reformed the party in 1972, and we need to take advantage of that reform. We need to be in the convention halls to participate in writing Democratic Party platforms, not just its planks on banking regulation, mortgages, and student loans, but also on the withdrawal of American military forces from abroad, on the abolition of the continued violations of our precious traditions of civil liberties, on global warming, torture, and immigrant rights. We also need to nominate our own candidates within the Democratic Party—not corporate liberals who mouth Occupy Wall Street slogans, but individuals who represent the point of view of the demonstrators, even when it is opposed—as it generally will be—by the Democratic Party officialdom, from the president on down.

Our participation in the Democratic Party needs to be modeled after the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's participation in the 1964 Democratic

Party Convention. At that time, the unrepresented African Americans of Mississippi came to the Atlantic City Convention, demanding that they be seated. Even if not to the same extent, today's 99 percent will not be represented in the Democratic Party unless it is physically present and agitating on its own behalf.

My second proposal is similarly based on recovering the lost heritage of the American Left, especially the New Left: this is the revival of the teach-in. The teach-ins of the 1960s were not restricted to ending the war in Vietnam, nor were they exclusive to the universities. Rather, they were successful efforts to establish an alternative discourse—a counter-public sphere—to the official one, which was so suffused with sycophancy, special pleading, spin, distortion, and outright dishonesty as to make genuine, deeply felt discussion of the alternatives facing the nation impossible. Crucial to the teach-ins of the 1960s was the successful discrediting of supposedly expert opinion, such as the foreign policy "specialists" who brokered the war.

Similarly, we need long, widely ranging discussions—engaged in by ordinary people, not dominated by elites—of U.S. history; of capitalism and its inherent problems; of what new techno-ecological systems look like in the wake of the failure of the older model of socialism; and of the effects of the present-day crisis on literature, music, and the arts. Above all, we need to reduce the role of economics in our present debates. Economics is a highly specialized micro-discipline with the shallowest perspective on the social relations, political organization, and values around which our teach-ins need to revolve.

Carving out a space for ourselves within the Democratic Party without losing our independence, and establishing a space for ourselves within the universities, but also reaching out to the neighborhoods, are the next logical steps for those of us who have been occupying parks and other public spaces. A third step has already been occurring: the creation of caucuses within the union movement.

In taking these steps we are tapping the roots of American identity. We are looking to a different past than that of the Tea Party, with its radical anti-government ideology. And we are refusing to hand over the country to the banks and insurance companies as the Clinton-Obama Democrats have done. Rather we are taking up the mantle of the great traditions of radical, uncompromising abolitionism, cooperatives, democratic unions, and socialist experiments. We are tapping the wisdom of the New Left, with its still pressing ideal of participatory democracy and its transformative role in the civil rights, anti-war, feminist, and gay liberation movements. Unless we return to this legacy and bring it to bear today, the country will recover its economy but not its moral grounding and place in the world. ■

STEIN *(continued from page 54)*

third party and they would seriously consider voting for it. The big problem is reaching people to let them know they do have a choice offering the solutions they are calling for. Communications in the United States are under corporate lockdown, and anyone who poses a serious threat to that system is generally ignored or smeared. Luckily, through the Internet, we now have the means to circumvent the corporate media—as the people of Tunisia and Egypt did recently in their democracy revolutions. The American people used this in stopping the SOPA bill.

There are vast constituencies out there who could carry this message of empowerment and courage far and wide through social media. Students are responding to our message as fast as they hear about it. The peace community is outraged that President Obama committed us to another ten years in Afghanistan, while expanding drone wars and military bases around the globe. There are twelve million additional homeowners at risk of losing their homes, and 50 million people without health care whose health and financial security will not be delivered by Obamacare. I spoke recently at a 20,000-person rally of the cannabis and medical marijuana community—which is under attack from Obama. It's not a stretch to see how we could get to 15 percent in public opinion polls, the criterion for admission into televised presidential debates. Should that happen, there is a very real possibility of reaching tens of millions of people with a message with which they already strongly agree.

A Constitutional Amendment to Fight Corporate Power

LERNER: We think that the way to capture this readiness is to focus on the Network of Spiritual Progressives' two major campaigns: the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (ESRA) and the Global Marshall Plan (GMP). The ESRA (presented in detail at tikkun.org/ESRA) would overturn Citizens United and declare that money is not protected speech and that corporations are not entitled to the same rights as human beings. It would ban the use of private or corporate monies in elections, require major media to give free and equal time to all political candidates, and force corporations with incomes over $100 million per year to get a new corporate charter every five years by proving their social responsibility to a jury of ordinary citizens. The GMP (outlined in full at tikkun.org/GMP) calls for the dedication of between 1 percent and 2 percent of industrialized countries' Gross Domestic Product each year for the next twenty years to once and for all eliminate (not just ameliorate) global poverty, homelessness, hunger, inadequate education,

and inadequate health care, and repair the global environment. It would support the development of locally sustainable regional economies and agricultural communities and seek to achieve homeland security not through a strategy of domination (be that military, economic, political, or cultural domination) but through a strategy of generosity.

STEIN: The principles of these campaigns are very similar to what we talk about in the Green New Deal, which is a legislative approach to doing much the same thing.

LERNER: Given the Supreme Court's extremist majority, any legislation that seeks to limit the elites of money or corporate power will simply be overturned and declared unconstitutional, which is why the only plausible path is a constitutional amendment.

STEIN: That may well be correct. We already support a constitutional amendment to recognize that money is not protected speech and that corporations are not entitled to the rights of people.

LERNER: But that would only bring us back to 2010, before the Supreme Court's decision of Citizens United. Why make the time-consuming and financially draining effort to get a constitutional amendment passed if the outcome will only bring us back to a status quo ante dominated by corporate elites? The rest of the ESRA would actually create democratic power over the economy.

STEIN: Yes. You could argue it strategically both ways. I leave the strategies to the strategists. I see my role as supporting the principles here, and I do support them, and it would be wonderful to see these two programs move forward!

LERNER: So why not incorporate them into what you talk about during your campaign and into the program of the Green Party?

STEIN: We can do that!

Anti-Spiritual Attitudes on the Left

LERNER: You may face more opposition than you think in the Greens. I left the Green party ten years ago and registered as a Democrat because, after I presented these ideas as a plenary speaker at the national convention of the Greens, I found they were dismissed and even put down as spiritual and religious, even though there is nothing intrinsic to these concepts that requires a belief in God or a commitment to any religion.

As I've discussed at more length in my books *Surplus Powerlessness*, *The Politics of Meaning*, *Spirit Matters*, and *The Left Hand of God*, the research we did for many years about the psychodynamics of American society revealed that a significant number of working people were defaulting to the Right because the Left did not understand or acknowledge the spiritual crisis in American society—a crisis rooted in the dynamics of the capitalist work world and brought home into personal and family life, where it undermines loving relationships and causes instability. Many of the thousands of working-class Americans we interviewed said the anti-religious and anti-spiritual consciousness that they perceived in the Left made them feel unwelcome and disrespected. They agreed with much of the Left platform, but wanted something more: They wanted to be respected for who they are. They wanted work that had some higher meaning besides making money to pay their bills. They wanted a meaning to their lives that transcended the individualism and selfishness of the capitalist marketplace.

I talked about all this at the Green Party's national convention, and afterward, I felt those anti-spiritual attitudes expressed even more strongly by its members, which is why I finally gave up on it. Until a candidate of the Greens can speak the language of love, kindness, generosity, and awe and wonder at the grandeur of the universe, the Greens are going to continue to be a losing force.

STEIN: You're making a very important point. This discussion has been going on in the Green Party, especially at the level at which we are most effective and engaged: the local level. We're a new party, and we're learning to build toward a broader, more affirming community and to transcend holier-than-thou technocratic attitudes that prevail in some activist circles. The spirit of love, generosity, and community—in my experience—is very much alive in the Green Party. There is a real effort to build on this, locally and globally. The incredible web of life of which we are a part is hanging in the balance. It is our gift as human beings that we can transcend this cycle of destruction, and we need all the kindness, love, and generosity we can muster to do this. It is my hope that this campaign itself will be a healing process—and a growing process—for us as individuals and as a community. Transforming fear and isolation into courage, love, and community is what we must do if we are to have a future. ■

EXTENT AND NATURE OF CIRCULATION

Average number of copies of each issue published during the preceding twelve months; (A) total number of copies printed, 6184; (B.1) paid/requested mail subscriptions, 3795; (B.3) sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales, 74; (C) total paid/requested circulation, 3868; (D.1) samples, complimentary, and other nonrequested copies, 5; (D.3) nonrequested copies distributed through the USPS by other classes of mail, 251; (E) total nonrequested distribution (sum of D.1 & D.4), 256; (F) total distribution (sum of C & E), 4124; (G) copies not distributed (office use, leftover, unaccounted, spoiled after printing, returns from news agents), 2062; (H) total (sum of F & G), 6186.

Actual number of copies of a single issue published nearest to filing date: (A) total number of copies printed, 5099; (B.1) paid/requested mail subscriptions, 3177; (B.3) sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales, 70; (C) total paid/requested circulation, 3247; (E) total nonrequested distribution, 0; (F) total distribution (sum of C & E), 3247; (G) copies not distributed (office use, leftover, unaccounted, spoiled after printing, returns from news agents), 1852; (H) total (sum of F & G), 5099.

Above the Roofs of the Jewish Village

I and my imaginary lover hover
above the roofs of the Jewish village.
Above the courtyards, dairy barns, animal pens.
Above the awnings of the chicken coops.

Amid smells and clucking, cold air and wind
muss her imaginary hair, soft, colorful, flapping like cards.
My love is not Jewish, she's an urban girl, from the city of Tel Aviv,
giggling a pleasant and liberating laugh.

I'm an inhibited village boy, and as I hover,
the stammering
and blushing poems have completely disappeared, my voice is eloquent.
We kiss. Quickly. In the middle. Of the air. Without stopping.

My hands, my tender beard, my ear locks, my hat and my two feet—it's nice
to face her, up there, in the skies like so many countless lizards.

The heat of our bodies creates a white cloud, pale and streaming above
humpbacked mountains, sorry tin shacks and village squares.

And so we embrace, up there, in the center,
in the blue, in the middle of the blue sky,
right above the church, above the cross.

And everyone in the Jewish village stares, watches,
like ten eyes stabbing my back.

But we are into our thing, rising!
Disappearing into the clouds, high! So high!
In a heavenly kiss, close to God!

O painful arrow, my love!
My imaginary, non-Jewish love
cleaving the village in my heart like gunshot,

with a very daring, heavenly
kiss, and all the rest—

that is to say, all of life
that comes after, in the village, is
an allegory about an injury.
An injury I've dragged along with me for years—

like this lovely, artistic etching,
of a sacrificed child, face fallen,

or like
the slash of a plow, bleeding sorrow,
on top of the furrows of time—

—Admiel Kosman
(translated by Lisa Katz with Shlomit Naim Naor)