The Hand of God

A journey from death to life by the abortion doctor who changed his mind

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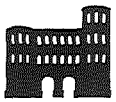

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savage and as primitive as was the Island of Cos in the year 450 B.C., the expression of compassion, of respect for one's teachers, for life itself was and remains a monument to the beauty of the human soul and the dignity of the human person. Such monuments should not be hastily abandoned.

RUTH WAS A CAPTIVATING, INNOCENT, exceedingly intelligent young woman whom I met at a McGill dance in the autumn of 1945, in my first year in Montreal. She was seventeen and I was nineteen. We fell in love. She resembled the young Leslie Caron physically, and while I was no Gene Kelly or Mel Ferrer I actually enjoyed dancing with her (ordinarily I shun the dance floor). We began dating: movies, restaurants, ice skating, skiing, necking (is that word still in use?), and before long I was sleeping at her home on weekends. Her parents—Russian immigrants who had come to Canada in the thirties—and her brother had taken a liking to me, even in the face of an unforgettable gaffe: One evening, while all of us were sitting in her living room talking quietly, I reached into my wallet to extract a picture and the ubiquitous condom fell out. It did not simply drop to the floor but perversely it wheeled around the room and came to rest—like a roulette ball—directly beneath her father's feet. I mumbled something about a finger cot—a rubber device that fits over the examining finger of the obstetrician to allow him to examine rectally a woman in labor—and unceremoniously stuffed it back into my pocket. My explanation was undoubtedly less than convincing since I was only a first-year student at the time and had yet to see my first pregnant woman in a clinical setting.

Despite my unforgivable clumsiness, and despite our ski

weekends in the Laurentian mountains (her mother and father must have known we were sleeping together), the family and I remained close. In my third year I roomed with her brother and sister-in-law. We were spending more and more time together and talking seriously of marriage. And then she became pregnant.

When she missed her third period, I reluctantly stopped making esoteric diagnoses for her missed periods and called my father in New York; he instructed me to send her first morning urine specimen to him for testing in his hospital's laboratory. Two days later he called me and told me rather dolefully that the test was positive.

As I gaze backward over fifty years, I am struck by how naive I was. I had assumed that—as with all other matters of moment—my father would take care of everything. Quite the contrary: He wrote me a letter in which he enclosed five Canadian hundred-dollar bills, and in which he advised me to (a) find an abortionist in Catholic Montreal to do the abortion or (b) travel with Ruth to Plattsburg, to be married in the United States.

Thus was the first of my seventy-five thousand encounters with abortion. I had no inclination to marry; I was still facing another year and a half of medical school and five or six years of postgraduate (residency) training. My father had, for the first time in memory, failed me. I had secretly nursed a notion that he would arrange transportation for her to New York and carry out the abortion himself, concocting some reasonable indication for it. At the time I was unaware that the only loophole in the New York state law prohibiting abortion (dating from 1841) was a threat to the life of the woman.

I asked several of my classmates for the name of an abortionist, and eventually one did come through. I gave the name and

telephone number to Ruth, and she arranged for it. The night before the abortion we slept together huddled in each other's arms; we both wept, for the baby we were about to lose, and for the love we both knew would be irreparably damaged by what we were about to do. It would never be the same for us.

The next day she took a taxi to the doctor's office. She insisted that I not accompany her, that I not be connected in any manner with the abortion for fear of jeopardizing my nascent medical career. I protested, but she was adamant that I not be anywhere near the scene of the crime. So we conspired to meet on the steps of the Redpath Library three hours later. I went to my classes that day but heard little of what was said. At the appointed time I sat down on the steps of the library. It was a soft late spring evening, and I heard the mournful sounds of a dystopic Portuguese *fado* being plucked out on a guitar across the quadrangle. I waited there four long hours, pacing, sobbing, bargaining with the Fates for her safety.

Finally, the taxi drew up to the steps. She was tremulous, ashen. I drew her out of the taxi. There was a spreading pool of blood on the floor of the cab. Reflexively, I paid the driver, then placed her tenderly on the steps of the library where she proceeded to weep copiously; the tears seemed to cascade from some inner inexhaustible reservoir, and her broken sobbing had the cadence and infinite sadness of some arcane prayer in an alien language. I cleaned her as best I could. Mercifully it was growing dark and the blood stains were blending into the evening gloom. I put her in the car I had borrowed, and drove her to her parents' house where I put her to bed with dispatch. I vowed to nurse her night and day until she was well. Miraculously, she recovered remarkably quickly and was able to attend her classes two days later.

She told me later that she had saved me $150 by bargaining the abortionist down; the abortionist was a frail, wizened old man who seemed forgetful and a little abstracted; midway through the procedure the bleeding had increased alarmingly and he seemed incapable of taking any definite action. So he told her to get off the table, get a taxi, and go home; she would pass the remainder of the pregnancy herself at home; if necessary, she might have to report to an emergency room at the local hospital in order to have the operation completed. Evidently, however, he had blundered into completing the operation himself, and nature took care of the rest.

I am some fifty years older now, but the experience is as fresh and quick in my mind as this morning's wedding, yesterday's funeral. Although for a brief period in the immediate aftermath we huddled together as co-conspirators in an unnameable crime, eventually we drifted apart. I am sure—despite her brave face, her loyalty and love, her pragmatic evaluation of the whole sorrowful gestalt—I am sure that in some melancholy corridor of her mind lurked the questions: Why didn't he marry me? Why couldn't we have had this baby? Why should I have had to imperil my life and my future children for the sake of his convenience and academic schedule? Will God punish me for what I have done by making me barren?

For myself, I was the consummate consequentialist; the questions crowding my mind dealt almost exclusively with her future health and reproductive ability: Had he damaged her to the point where she would no longer be able to conceive or bear children? What was to happen to our relationship? Would she sleep with me again, in the same loving, trusting, carefree way we had always had with each other? I did not concern myself with God and His incomprehensible vagaries (to *me,* at

least, at that time and in that place). The stiff-backed Jewish atheist was already freezing into his mold.

As it turned out we saw each other but one more time after the school year ended; it was in a genteel shabby hotel in midtown New York in the searingly hot summer of 1948. We went to bed and had soundless, perfunctory sex. I dressed, went home, and mentally crossed the relationship off my list—resolving to pick up with someone else in my final year at McGill (I did). In 1954, on my way back from Pepperrell Air Force Base in St. John's, Newfoundland (I was then a captain in the air force), I purposefully delayed my return to New York to detour through Montreal; I was overwhelmingly curious as to what had happened to Ruth (this was six years after the abortion). At the airport I called her home, and was advised by her mother that she had married and had borne three lovely children. I wondered if she had ever told her husband about the abortion, and hoped she hadn't. And even at this remove—fifty-one years and counting—I am aware that I could have had grandchildren by now with this loving, beautiful woman.

Lessons? Too many and too sad to rehash here. Suffice it to say that it served as my introductory excursion into the satanic world of abortion. Nor was that the end of it for me *personally:* In the mid-sixties I impregnated a woman who loved me very much. She begged to keep the pregnancy, to have our child. I was just out of residency in obstetrics and gynecology, and was beginning to build a formidable practice in that specialty. I had already had two ruined marriages, both destroyed largely by my own selfish narcissism and inability to love. (I believe it was Father Zossima in *The Brothers Karamazov,* who defined hell as the suffering of one unable to love, and if this is true, I have served my sentence and then some.) I saw no practical way out

of the situation, told her that I would not marry her and that I could not at that time afford to support a child (an egregious example of the coercion exercised by males in the abortion tragedy), and I not only demanded that she terminate the pregnancy as a condition of maintaining our relationship, but also coolly informed her that since I was one of the most skilled practitioners of the art, I myself would do the abortion. And I did.

What is it like to terminate the life of your own child? It was aseptic and clinical. She was put under anesthesia in the operating room of a major teaching hospital; I scrubbed my hands, gowned and gloved, chatted briefly with the scrub nurse, sat down on a little metal stool directly in front of the operating room table (after having examined her once again to verify the length of the pregnancy and the size of the uterus), and put the Auvard speculum in the vagina after prepping the area with antiseptic solution. I then grasped the cervix with two tenacula (hooks), infiltrated a solution of pitressin (a drug designed to firm up the uterine wall so I would be better able to appreciate the limits of the uterus and avoid perforating it), sounded the uterus (a sound is a long, thin steel instrument with centimeter markings on it, to show how far in the instruments can be safely placed), then dilated the cervix with the graduated shiny steel dilators. When the cervix was dilated to the desired diameter, I placed the hollow plastic cannula into the uterus and with a nod to the nurse indicated that I wished the suction to be turned on. When the gauge hit fifty-five millimeters of negative pressure I began sweeping the cannula around the interior of the uterus, watching the shards of tissue streaming through the hollow, translucent cannula on their way to the gauze trap where they would be collected, inspected, and then sent to the pathology

laboratory for confirmation that pregnancy tissue had been—in our euphemistic vernacular—evacuated.

The procedure went on without incident, and I felt a fleeting gratification that I had done my usual briskly efficient job and left the operating room while she was still struggling up from general anesthesia. As an integral part of the procedure, every abortionist must examine the material in the gauze bag to assure that *all* the pregnancy tissue has been evacuated—to be certain none had been left behind to cause bleeding or infection later on. I peeled the bag open as was my custom, mentally gauged the amount of tissue and satisfied myself that it was proportionate to the length of the pregnancy; none had been left behind. I then took off my mask, stripped off my gloves and gown, picked up the hospital chart, and wrote the postoperative orders and the discharge note. I walked over to a dictating machine, dictated the operation onto a disk to be transcribed into an "op note" on the hospital chart, then made my way to the locker room to change my clothes while exchanging the usual badinage and cheery greetings with the other nurses and physicians and orderlies in the halls along the way to the lockers.

Yes, you may ask me: That was a concise terse report of what you *did,* but what did you feel? Did you not feel sad—not only because you had extinguished the life of an unborn child, but, more, because you had destroyed your *own* child? I swear to you that I had no feelings aside from the sense of accomplishment, the pride of expertise. On inspecting the contents of the bag I felt only the satisfaction of knowing that I had done a thorough job. You pursue me: You ask if perhaps for a fleeting moment or so I experienced a flicker of regret, a microgram of remorse? No and no. And that, dear reader, is the mentality of the

abortionist: another job well done, another demonstration of the moral neutrality of advanced technology in the hands of the amoral.

Not to drag the European Holocaust yet one more time into the abortion conflict (I have steadfastly refused to draw the tempting parallel between the two in arguing the pro-life case; they are distinct and different phenomena), but what I felt in my starved, impoverished soul must have been closely akin to the swelling satisfaction of Adolf Eichmann, as he saw his tightly scheduled trains bearing Jews to the extermination camps leaving and arriving exactly on time, to keep the extermination machine moving with celebrated teutonic efficiency.

I have aborted the unborn children of my friends, colleagues, casual acquaintances, even teachers. There was never a shred of self-doubt, never a wavering of the supreme confidence that I was doing a major service to those who sought me out. My preoperative counseling consisted of a brief description of the procedure, pre- and postoperative instructions (no douching, no sexual relations, no tub baths for two weeks; start your oral contraceptive medication on the fifth day of your next period, which should begin about six weeks following this abortion; and see me again in my office for a check-up two weeks after the procedure), and a perfunctory assurance that the "procedure" (those of us who practiced it never spoke of it as an abortion, but rather used the term "termination of pregnancy" or "procedure") would have no effect on future fertility or on general health. We spoke with such confidence regarding these matters then, in the mid-sixties and the seventies; now it turns out there may be a relationship between abortion and breast cancer; thousands of women have indeed been rendered sterile in the aftermath of a botched abortion; and the death rate of

women seeking abortion after the thirteenth week exceeds that of childbirth. The arrogance of those practicing medicine has always been recognized as an ugly appendage of the profession, but the massive hubris of the abortionist was and continues to be astonishing.

For every ten thousand Ruths there is one abortionist: icy; conscienceless; remorselessly perverting his medical skills; defiling his ethical charge; and helping, nay seducing, with his clinical calm, his oh-so-comforting professionalism, women into the act that comes closest to self-slaughter. It is no accident that the next step in the perverse mutation of medical skills is to be played where physicians are endowed by the state to assist, always in the name of compassion, in the act of suicide. How the world would have been changed had some misguided "expert" in the calculus of suffering climbed up on the cross and fed Jesus a dose of hemlock within an hour of His crucifixion.

CHAPTER 5

A Perfunctory Jew

IN MY INTERNSHIP YEAR AT Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago, a teaching hospital affiliated with Northwestern University, we were rotated monthly from one specialty area to another in an effort to give each of us a scientific overview of the profession. It was a Jewish hospital, the brand of medicine practiced was superb, and the academic teaching program for the interns and residents was exemplary. But the ethics of the institution—or lack of same—quickly became known to even the least morally percipient house officer. The amount of unnecessary surgery at that imposing institution was astonishing; the flourishing business of fee-splitting was scandalous. There was a sardonic joke among the members of the house staff that one had to knock loudly on the door of the men's room before entering, to give warning to the attending physicians divvying up kickbacks from patients.

I do not believe that this ethical vacuum was a result of the hospital's Jewishness—I know my profession too well for that. Rather, the moral tenor of the place was lowered, as in the case

provide a badly needed escape valve for the massive head of pressure building in the frustrated oppressed pro-life legions and establish him as a receptive, broad-minded peacemaker on the domestic front.

True, he would get some flack from the pro-choice side, but the net result would, I believe, translate into significant political capital for him, especially in light of the returns from the 1994 midterm elections: recall, please, not a single pro-life incumbent member of Congress (or governor) of either party was defeated by a pro-choice challenger, but more than two dozen hard-core incumbent pro-choice members of Congress were defeated by pro-life challengers, and on net there was a shift of forty seats in the House and six seats in the Senate in the pro-life direction. Because the issue has been effectively removed from the political sphere by the Court, that electoral shift will not automatically have the effect it might be expected to in a democracy. But it stands for a political and moral passion too strong to be safely excluded from consideration by the nation's leaders if in fact they want to lead us to some resolution rather than simply wait for the firestorm.

CHAPTER 15

The Hand of God

I HAVE BEEN HOLDING LENGTHY conversations with a priest of Opus Dei, Father John McCloskey, for the past five years, and it is my hope that I shall soon be received into the Roman Catholic Church. It was not supposed to work this way; the whole unimaginable sequence has moved in reverse, like water flowing uphill. The usual and customary progression is: Belief in God and His splendid gift of life leads the believer to defend it—and to become pro-life. With me, it was just the opposite: Perversely, I journeyed from being pro-life to belief in God. I was not seeking anything spiritual; my desires have been—for the most part—earthly and of the flesh, my goals concrete and tangible—and readily liquefiable into cash. To make matters worse, I was openly contemptuous of all this as a stiff-backed Jewish atheist, or as Richard Gilman would have taxonomized, "a perfunctory Jew."

Getting from there to here wasn't easy. I went through a ten-year "transitional time"—perhaps 1978–1988—when I felt the

burden of sin growing heavier and more insistent. It was as if the contents of the baggage of my life were mysteriously absorbed in some metaphysical moisture, making them bulkier, heavier, more weighty, and more impossible to bear. I found myself longing for a magical phlogiston, a substance that would contribute a negative weight to my heavy burden.

During this decade, it was the hour of the wolf that was the most trying time. I would awaken each morning at four or five o'clock, staring into the darkness and hoping (but not praying, yet) for a message to flare forth acquitting me before some invisible jury. After a suitable period of thwarted anticipation, I would once again turn on my bedside lamp, pick up the literature of sin (by this time I had accumulated a substantial store of it), and reread passages from St. Augustine's confessions (a staple), Dostoevski, Paul Tillich, Kierkegaard, Niebuhr, and even Lewis Mumford and Waldo Frank. St. Augustine spoke most starkly of my existential torment but, with no St. Monica to show me the way, I was seized by an unremitting black despair.

Suicide runs in my family. (Is there a gene for suicide?) My paternal grandfather and sister killed themselves, and my father made at least one attempt at suicide in his mid-forties. He had used tranquilizers and sleeping pills. My reading in those unbearably painful hours in the morning turned to what Camus once described as the central question of the twentieth century: whether or not to commit suicide. As a physician, I had the ability to write the necessary prescriptions to end my life. Was I up to the task?

Which was, of course, precisely the question posed by Prince Hamlet: Was it rank cowardice to commit suicide, or was it even more cowardly to shrink from the deed? And, like the

good prince, I waffled into the decision of indecision: not yet. I reasoned that there were pragmatic considerations. I had patients who needed me (every physician comforts himself with the fantasy that he is irreplaceable to the patients), and there was pro-life work to be done. I knew there were cleaner hands to do this work, but I told myself that somewhere, someday, someone might profit from the story of the travails through which I was feeling my way.

Like the diagnostician I was trained to be, I commenced to analyze the patient's humors, the patient being myself. I determined that I was suffering from an affliction of the spirit; the disorder had arisen, at least in part, from an excess of existential freedom, and this had created a penumbral despair. I had been cast adrift in a limitless sea of sensual freedom—no sextant, no compass, no charts, simply the dimly apprehended stars of the prevailing penal code, an imitative grasp of the manners and mores of society (a chimpanzee could be trained to do as well), a minimalist concept of justice, and a stultified sense of decency. I required not a cure but healing.

I had performed many thousands of abortions on innocent children, and I had failed those whom I loved. Of my second and third marriages, I cannot write in any detail—it is still so painful for me. Suffice it to say that both of my spouses, though neither were churchgoers when we met, had retained a core of innocence from their Protestant childhoods that kept them pristine and curiously innocent—at least until I got my hands on them. At least my father, who died in 1990 at the epic age of ninety-four, had been reconciled before his death. My son Joseph was living in his grandfather's apartment and taking care of him at the time. My father had not believed in God but only in some "superior power." All his life he had proclaimed

that he wanted nothing to do with primitive rituals like funerals. Thus it came as a surprise that his will stipulated that he was to be buried at the side of his daughter, whom he had in life reduced to less than a nonentity. I was making the arrangements for the cremation and was stunned when my niece produced a document verifying that he had bought the burial plot alongside my sister and had always planned to be buried there—despite his own proclamations to the contrary.

At the time of this writing, I have already tried the traditional panoply of secular remedies: alcohol, tranquilizers, self-help books, counseling. I had even indulged myself in four years of psychoanalysis in the early 1960s. The analyst was a highly respected psychiatrist who adhered largely to a Freudian model, contributing little while allowing the patient to babble on. Unfortunately, he suffered from a terrible case of hay fever year-round and took heavy doses of antihistamines. The result was that twice weekly I would slump on his couch excitedly recounting my dreams, while he would slump in his wide leather chair, snoozing peacefully from the antihistamines. After several sessions devoted to keeping him awake by surreptitiously kicking him, I, too, took to napping. (I was, in a perverse sense, sleeping with my psychiatrist.) I don't know why I clutched at this straw so long.

The keenest of human tortures is to be judged without a law, and mine had been a lawless universe. Santayana once wrote that the only true dignity of man is in his capacity to despise himself. I despised myself. Perhaps I had at least arrived at the beginning of the quest for human dignity. I had begun a serious self-examination (the examined life is barely worth living) and had begun to face the twisted moral homoculus reflected in the mirror of self-examination.

I knew now that the primary illness is the severing of the

links between sin and fault, between ethically corrupt action and the cost. There had been no concrete cost to my corrupt actions, only behavioral exegesis, and that would not do. I needed to be disciplined and educated. I had become as Hannah Arendt had described Eichmann: a collection of functions rather than an accountable human being.

At the same time, I was moving deeper into the pro-life movement with my lectures, films, books, and political activities. I perceived the sense of peace that emanated from so many of these people. But my pro-life views were scientifically based, and I made this clear to all audiences, even the most rigidly Catholic. At the prayers and invocations at pro-life rallies, I would unbend enough to recite the Pledge of Allegiance when it was called for, but the prayers found me with my eyes fixed rigidly in front of me, lips unmoving. Though pleasant and civil to the various clerics at these rallies, I made certain they knew that I held myself at a distance from their beliefs—except in our shared detestation of abortion. Nevertheless, there was an indefinable air of selflessness, even genuine altruism, at the gatherings that I noted with marked interest.

Then I attended an action by Operation Rescue against Planned Parenthood in New York City in 1989. I was planning an article to be published in an ethics journal on the moral and ethical aspects of such demonstrations: Were they legitimate protests or domestic terrorism—that is, the denial of constitutionally based rights to pregnant women?

The morning of the Rescue was bitterly cold. I joined the legion, approximately twelve hundred demonstrators, at their rendezvous in the west forties in Manhattan and proceeded with them by subway and foot to the clinic on Second Avenue and Twenty-first Street. They sat themselves down in rows in

front of the clinic, effectively blocking entrances to and exits from the abortion clinic. They began to sing hymns softly, joining hands and swaying from the waist. I circulated on the periphery at first, observing the faces, interviewing some of the participants, making notes furiously. It was only then that I apprehended the exaltation, the pure love on the faces of that shivering mass of people, surrounded as they were by hundreds of New York City policemen.

They prayed, they supported and encouraged each other, they sang hymns of joy, and they constantly reminded each other of the absolute prohibition against violence. It was, I suppose, the sheer intensity of the love and prayer that astonished me: They prayed for the unborn babies, for the confused and frightened pregnant women, and for the doctors and nurses in the clinic. They even prayed for the police and the media who were covering the event. They prayed for each other but never for themselves. And I wondered: How can these people give of themselves for a constituency that is (and always will be) mute, invisible, and unable to thank them?

After I wrote my article and it was published in the Hastings Center Report, several pro-choicers accused me of having taken an active part in the demonstration, in violation of an injunction against such activity issued by federal Judge Robert Ward. I was tried and cleared in a federal court in New York. At the same time, my wife was charged with violating another injunction against demonstrating at an abortion clinic in Dobbs Ferry. We settled her case, and between the two cases, it was expensive, though I certainly don't regret a nickel of it. I observed a subsequent demonstration in New Orleans and another in a small town south of Los Angeles. I was shaken by the intensity of the spirituality at these demonstrations. The

demonstrations were ecumenical, with as many Catholics as Protestants, and nonviolent, and they were so deeply rooted in spiritual conviction that even the police hung back, in deference, I believe, to the purity of the action. The only brutality I personally witnessed at the California rally was committed by female police officers, who seemed personally offended by the demonstrators. (Randall Terry, the founder of Operation Rescue, later assured me that indeed female officers are especially aggressive at these demonstrations; they hated the demonstrators individually and collectively.)

Now, I had not been immune to the religious fervor of the pro-life movement. I had been aware in the early and mid-eighties that a great many of the Catholics and Protestants in the ranks had prayed for me, were praying for me, and I was not unmoved as time wore on. But it was not until I saw the spirit put to the test on those bitterly cold demonstration mornings, with pro-choicers hurling the most fulsome epithets at them, the police surrounding them, the media openly unsympathetic to their cause, the federal judiciary fining and jailing them, and municipal officials threatening them—all through it they sat smiling, quietly praying, singing, confident and righteous of their cause and ineradicably persuaded of their ultimate triumph—that I began seriously to question what indescribable Force generated them to this activity. Why, too, was I there? What had led me to this time and place? Was it the same Force that allowed them to sit serene and unafraid at the epicenter of legal, physical, ethical, and moral chaos?

And for the first time in my entire adult life, I began to entertain seriously the notion of God—a god who problematically had led me through the proverbial circles of hell, only to show me the way to redemption and mercy through His

grace. The thought violated every eighteenth-century certainty I had cherished; it instantly converted my past into a vile bog of sin and evil; it indicted me and convicted me of high crimes against those who had loved me, and against those whom I did not even know; and simultaneously—miraculously—it held out a shimmering sliver of Hope to me, in the growing belief that Someone had died for my sins and my evil two millennia ago.

I did not instantly experience a blinding epiphany and begin to recite "Hail Marys" in the manner Richard Gilman described in *Faith, Sex, Mystery,* his sad, shabby little tale of conversion from Jewish atheism to Roman Catholicism, and who invoked all manner of magical and mystic coincidence. In my case, I was led to a searching review of the literature of conversion, including Karl Stern's *Pillar of Fire*. I also read Malcolm Muggeridge, Walker Percy, Graham Greene, C. S. Lewis, Cardinal Newman, and others. It was entirely in character with me that I would conduct a diligent review of literature before embarking on a mission as daunting and as threatening as this—searching for God. It was also a search for authenticity in what was—for me—a revolutionary enterprise.

I read voraciously. The two experiences with which I could most closely identify were Gilman's (we had almost identical backgrounds) and that of my former professor, Karl Stern. Although I reread Gilman several times, I found it irrelevant to my concerns: Gilman had converted to Catholicism at the age of thirty and then had been embarrassed by the conversion, even regarding it as an illness from which he had to recuperate. Gilman spoke frequently of the "pain" of being a Catholic. He also demonstrated a contempt and disdain for his surrender to such doctrines as that of the Trinity and the Incarnation. I found him immensely unhelpful. As for the undeniably brilliant Simone Weil, she thoroughly detested her Judaism, while I merely found mine unhelpful and inadequate.

Stern's experiences resonated much more forcefully with me. A brilliant psychoanalyst, he divests himself of all the paraphernalia of his intellectual and professional accomplishments and opens himself to a simple, unquestioning faith, as innocent as that of his heroine St. Teresa of Avila. Here was a man I would emulate—if I could. Following his conversion, Stern wrote a letter to his brother, who was then living in Israel, that is a paean to the discovery of Christian faith. Stern's letter to his brother is so eloquent and so sensitive to the doubts and questions of a trained professional such as himself. With each reading, I found myself fighting back the tears.

But, as Newman said, no one was ever converted by argument. At every pro-life rally at which I speak, I still apprehend the ecstatic faces, radiating such love and joy that I find an icy knot deep within me (Where? The pineal gland? The marrow of my bones? Does it matter?) slowly thawing into rhapsodic waves of warmth.

Like Simone Weil, I have found myself forever on the threshold of blessed surrender to faith but always reluctant to take the last, irrevocable step. Father McCloskey supports me and encourages me by paraphrasing the words Pascal uttered four hundred years ago: "The cost of believing in God is minimal; the consequences of doubt may be significant."

I am sure that Pascal did not mean this statement to represent some calculus of belief, and I repeat this to myself frequently during my waking hours, a conscious mantra. For I have such heavy moral baggage to drag into the next world that failing to believe would condemn me to an eternity perhaps

more terrifying than anything Dante envisioned in his celebration of the redemptive fall and rise of Easter. I am afraid.

Although my fears are great, I know something now that I did not know. A few years ago, I was asked to review a book by an internist, Dr. Larry Dossey, who claimed to have adduced scientific proof that intercessory prayer works. I remained unconvinced by his data, but nevertheless one of the stories, that of Dossey's visit to a patient dying of cancer, has stuck with me. The man was constantly praying. When Dossey asked what he was praying for, the man said he wasn't praying for anything.

"Well," said Dossey, "if prayer isn't asking, then what is it for?"

"It isn't for anything," the patient replied. "It mainly reminds me that we are not alone."

I am no longer alone. It has been my fate to wander the globe in search of the One without Whom I am doomed, but now I seize the hem of His robe in desperation, in terror, in celestial access to the purest need I have ever known. My thoughts return to the hero of my medical school years, Karl Stern, who was undergoing a spiritual metamorphosis at the very time he was instructing me in the arts of the mind, its orders, and its sources, and the words he wrote in a letter to his brother:

"And there was no doubt about it," Stern wrote, "toward Him we had been running, or from Him we had been running away, but all the time He had been in the center of things."

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