

WINTER 2017 • ISSUE 6

# PROVIDENCE

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIANITY & AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY



## REINHOLD NIEBUHR & THE PROBLEM OF PARADOX

By MARC LiVECCHÉ

## THE GREAT WAR & THE DAWN OF THE AMERICAN CENTURY

By JOSEPH LOCONTE

## WILL CHRISTIANITY SURVIVE IN THE MIDDLE EAST? A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

By KENT R. HILL

ALSO: ROBERT NICHOLSON LOOKS EAST TOWARD THE SYRIAN CRISIS • MARK TOOLEY CONSIDERS CHRISTIANS & EMPIRE • LUBO ONDRASEK PAYS TRIBUTE TO JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN • MICHAEL NOVAK IS COMMEMORATED • WAYNE SCHROEDER CALLS CHRISTIANS TO PEACE WORK • THORIN OAKENSHIELD MAKES A DEATHBED CONFESSION • DOUGLAS BURTON REPORTS ON MOSUL • AMITAI ETZIONI PRESCRIBES MORAL TRIAGE • HERMAN MELVILLE REMEMBERS THE BATTLE OF SHILOH • & ALAN DOWD REFLECTS ON AMERICA'S LONG DEFENSE OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

# PROVIDENCE

WINTER 2017 | NUMBER 6

## FEATURES

---

# 4

MARC LIVECCHÉ  
REINHOLD NIEBUHR  
& THE PROBLEM OF PARADOX

---

JOSEPH LOCONTE

THE GREAT WAR & THE DAWN  
OF THE AMERICAN CENTURY

# 16

---

# 26

KENT R. HILL  
WILL CHRISTIANITY  
SURVIVE IN THE MIDDLE EAST?  
A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

---



Portrait of Reinhold Niebuhr by Hannah Strauss, original commission, 2017. A pensive Reinhold Niebuhr considers the scene before him, surrounded by iconic images from the Second World War. While referencing historical events, horrific locations, and the machinery of warfare, these images also suggest the focal points of Niebuhr's internal conflicts as he wrestled with his own theological and ethical conceptual dilemmas. Immediately behind Niebuhr is an amphibious assault, with warfighters disembarking a landing craft and wading toward a shoreline already engaged with the fire, smoke, and din of battle. Above him, bombers swarm in deadly formation. Below are rendered scenes depicting the hated guard towers and dreaded gate of Auschwitz-Birkenau and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan. Taken together, these scenes begin to describe the reach, the moral and political complexity, and the devastation of human conflict.

## ESSAYS

---

- AMITAI ETZIONI**  
MORAL TRIAGE **38**
- MARK TOOLEY**  
CHRISTIANS & AMERICAN EMPIRE **43**
- ALAN W. DOWD**  
A SHIELD FOR FAITH **46**
- WAYNE A. SCHROEDER**  
JUST CALLING:  
THE CHRISTIAN BASIS  
FOR A CAREER IN PEACEMAKING **57**
- LUBOMIR MARTIN ONDRASEK**  
JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN:  
AN AUGUSTINIAN AT WAR **66**
- DOUGLAS BURTON**  
THE BATTLE FOR MOSUL  
& THE END OF HISTORY **72**

## REVIEWS

---

- DANIEL STRAND**  
PARADISE LOST:  
ON THE POWER OF NOSTALGIA  
IN POLITICS  
Mark Lilla's *The Shipwrecked Mind* **76**
- MATT GOBUSH**  
PARADIGM LOST  
Richard Haass' *A World in Disarray* **78**

## AD ORIENTEM

---

- ROBERT NICHOLSON**  
MORALITY & THE CRISIS IN SYRIA **81**

SPONSORED BY



THE INSTITUTE ON  
RELIGION & DEMOCRACY



THE KING'S COLLEGE  
NEW YORK CITY

### PUBLISHERS

MARK TOOLEY  
ROBERT NICHOLSON

### EDITOR

MARK TOOLEY

### MANAGING EDITOR

MARC LiVECCHIE

### DEPUTY EDITOR

MARK MELTON

### SENIOR EDITORS

KEITH PAVLISCHEK  
JOSEPH LOCONTE

### ASSOCIATE EDITOR

SUSANNAH BLACK

### CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

MARK AMSTUTZ  
FRED BARNES  
NIGEL BIGGAR  
J. DARYL CHARLES  
PAUL COYER  
MICHAEL CROMARTIE  
DEAN CURRY  
ALAN DOWD  
THOMAS FARR  
MARY HABECK  
REBECCA HEINRICHS  
WILL INBODEN  
JAMES TURNER JOHNSON  
HERB LONDON  
TIMOTHY MALLARD  
PAUL MARSHALL  
FAITH McDONNELL  
WALTER RUSSELL MEAD  
PAUL MILLER  
JOSHUA MITCHELL  
LUKE MOON  
ERIC PATTERSON  
MACKUBIN THOMAS OWENS  
GREG THORNBERRY

### INTERN

LOGAN WHITE

### LAYOUT & DESIGN

JOSEPH AVAKIAN

### PRINTED BY

LINEMARK

BASIC SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE  
\$28 FOR A YEAR, FOUR ISSUES.  
STUDENT RATES AVAILABLE.  
FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:  
PROVIDENCE@THEIRD.ORG

### WEBSITE:

PROVIDENCEMAG.COM

### ISSN

24713511

# PARADISE LOST: THE POWER OF NOSTALGIA IN POLITICS

Review by Daniel Strand

## THE SHIPWRECKED MIND: ON POLITICAL REACTION

MARK LILLA, *New York Review Book*, 2016, 168 pages



In the Woody Allen film *Midnight in Paris*, the main character, Gil Pender, travels back in time to 1920s Paris to mingle and chat with figures he idolizes—Jean Cocteau, Pablo Picasso, Cole Porter, F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, and on and on. Gil idolizes this period as the Golden Age of high Parisian artistic creativity and cultural achievement. During one of his forays, he meets and falls in love with Adriana, a lover of Pablo Picasso. They end up traveling further back to Paris circa 1890, the Belle Époque period of Gauguin and Degas, which Adriana considers the true Golden Age of Paris. She attempts to convince Gil to stay with her there; however, Gil at this point comes to a realization about nostalgia, both Adriana's and his own: it is just a seductive

form of escapism. He decides to return to the present rather than live in the past.

Mark Lilla has discovered what Gil Pender discovered. His new book *The Shipwrecked Mind: On Political Reaction*, examines the power of nostalgia in its political manifestation. In his previous, staunchly future-oriented book, *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics*, Lilla examined the roots of radicalism in contemporary politics. In this latest book, he sets out in the opposite and uncharted direction to examine the role of the reactionary mind, which is oriented towards the past, or in his phrase “stuck in the past”. The book focuses more on conservative figures since conservatives have a stronger propensity to yearn for the lost Eden of some Golden Age from which we have fallen. This is also true of American Christians, who pine for the good ole’ days before the 1960s inaugurated the fall into godless hedonism and secularism. But unlike conservatism, Lilla’s reactionary is similar to the radical in that they are both driven by a form of utopianism: “The militancy of his nostalgia is what makes the reactionary a distinctly modern figure, not a traditional one” (xiii). The power of nostalgia is that it is rooted in the past and not in a future utopia that can fail to materialize. “Hopes can be disappointed,” Lilla avers,

“Nostalgia is irrefutable” (xiv).

Interestingly, it is the Germans who dominate the book’s narrative. Opening chapters on Franz Rosenzweig, Eric Voegelin, and Leo Strauss sketch the influences and mindset of the reactionary. Each thinker is critical of modernity, and two of them were directly affected by Nazi Germany. There is a similarity to their diagnosis of the present sickness in the West. “Healthy” thinking at some point devolves into sick thinking or deviation from the healthy whereby the “new thinking” initiates a decline leading to the present rot. What each intellectual purports to offer is a therapy that will return thinking to a state of health.

Lilla then moves to two contemporary figures, Jacob Taubes and Brad Gregory, who serve as modern examples. Taubes and Gregory exemplify reactionary thinking on the left and right. Gregory’s narrative is more interesting because it touches on Catholic anti-modernism that has been in ascendant in many contemporary intellectual circles. Lilla largely dismisses this narrative as a “just so story”, and I am inclined to agree. In it the late medieval world is described in glowing tones as a wondrous world of harmony and order only to be rent asunder by the Protestant Reformers and the Radical Reformation.

---

*Shipwrecked Mind* is an impressive little book that packs a punch or two; the most important of which is how Lilla opens “reactionary” as a fruitful category to understand our current moment both in America and around the world. One cannot help but see Donald Trump’s rise and his politics illumined, in part, by this reactionary impulse for long lost days of prosperity before globalism’s rise and its depredations. The new category also explains how Trump’s politics often run counter to conservative politics, even if they find their home in the current Republican Party. Of contemporary relevance, if we grant Lilla his narrative, it is noteworthy that the reactionaries he describes have a much more moderate effect on politics than their radical brethren, whose utopianism is more susceptible to ideological tyranny and destruction.

As would be expected, reactionaries, rooted in nostalgia,

are not well-reconciled to modernity or the fruits of modernity. While Lilla functions on the assumption that not being reconciled to modernity is a problem, he gives little in way of explaining why. Perhaps he wants one to accept all that modernity is and has wrought simply, *thereby*, to avoid becoming reactionary? Indeed, one gets the impression that Lilla, at a minimum, defaults to this assumption; though the efficacy of the proposal seems quite questionable in itself.

As with all critical narratives that offer no alternative except the unmasking of “false” narratives, *Shipwrecked Mind* leaves one feeling a bit unsatisfied. Nevertheless, the power of this little book to unlock Gil Pender’s insight into nostalgia—that we all long to return to a Golden Age, to a paradise lost—is timely and sheds much light on our present situation. It offers an important caution to those who are intoxicated by the desire to

remake the Garden of Eden in our contemporary world. There was only ever one garden, and we cannot return to it. While I do not share the opinion that things are getting better all the time, I do not think that being hopelessly nostalgic for the days of low rates of divorce and out of wedlock births is the solution. It is an illusion that we would be happier if we just lived in a better time or place. If we look back, it should be to the one event that truly changed all of history; and if we look forward, we should look forward to the coming of a renewed reality that shall not be brought about by human design or will. P

**Daniel Strand** is a postdoctoral fellow in the Center for Political Thought and Leadership at Arizona State University. His scholarly interests are in history of political thought, religion and politics, and St. Augustine of Hippo.



---

DOMINION /də'mɪnyən (IS NOT)  
DOMINATION /dəmən'nāSH(ə)n/

“Let us make mankind in our image; and let them have dominion over all the earth...” Called to share the Divine likeness, human beings were made to exercise rule in the form of dominion: delegated, providential care—responsibility—for the conditions of history, in history. Such care is characterized by other-centered acts of self-donation. This contrasts sharply with domination. Since the Fall in the Garden of Eden, human beings have been afflicted by the *libido dominandi*—we have been ruled by the lust to rule. Domination is characterized by self-centered acts of other-donation that feed our hunger for power, advantage, and glory through the forced submission of the powerless to our will.

The political-theological patrimony of the Christian intellectual tradition, including just war casuistry, helps guide human beings back to the just exercise of our governing vocation. In our private and public lives, including through the work of government, human dominion is approximate, limited, and imperfect. Following after God’s work of creating, sustaining, and liberating all of creation, human beings exercise power with the aim of peace, characterized by the presence of justice and order as oriented toward genuine human flourishing.

---