

Meanwhile, when Fukuyama contends that “the most important way that American power can be exercised [is] through the ability of the United States to shape international institutions” it is not at all clear how this can be done in practice, particularly in those institutions from which the United States has been systematically excluded. Lacking the means to barge into such groups, how will those nations that engaged in forum shopping in the late 1990s react when the Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s confers “legitimacy” upon a Russian-led intervention in Belarus or Ukraine? The limits of Fukuyama’s multi-multilateral order are even more starkly revealed by a hypothetical case of ASEAN sanctioning Beijing’s re-annexation of Taiwan.

Fukuyama cannot reconcile himself to a form of realism grounded in state sovereignty and national interest, and in this respect he is not that different from traditional Wilsonians. In the end, Fukuyama’s “realistic Wilsonianism” is neither realistic (from the standpoint of efficacy) nor realist (from the standpoint of Hans Morgenthau, George Kennan, and Kenneth Waltz).

The chief disappointment with the book is found elsewhere, however. While it is encouraging to see a well-respected scholar assail some of the neo-conservatives’ most sacred of sacred cows, it is disheartening to learn that Fukuyama had doubts about the Iraq War well before the war was launched and that he kept these feelings to himself. Having been so strong an advocate of regime change in Iraq in the late 1990s, Fukuyama’s relative silence in the fall and winter of 2002 and 2003 implied support for the whole misguided venture. We can only speculate as to what might have happened had he lent his voice to the antiwar effort, and we can only hope that he will not choose to stay on the sidelines the next time around. ■

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[*What Jesus Meant*, Garry Wills, Viking, 143 pages]

The Gospel According to Garry

by Jeremy Lott

FOLLOWING PRESIDENT BUSH’S 2004 victory over the junior senator from Massachusetts, the *New York Times* op-ed page let out a primal scream. Thomas Friedman, for instance, wailed that evangelicals had used their “religious energy to promote divisions and intolerance at home and abroad” rather than working to turn the world into a giant pancake. But guest columnist Garry Wills showed the regular lineup how to really let loose. He unironically compared conservative Christians to jihadis, argued that the election signaled the end of the Enlightenment on U.S. soil, and worried that polls show that Americans now believe “more fervently in the Virgin Birth than in evolution.”

That was an interesting formulation because, in addition to being a professional popular historian, Wills is also a professional Catholic with a long and tangled history. He’s both an ex-seminarian and an ex-conservative—William F. Buckley lured him to *National Review* on the same day that Whittaker Chambers agreed to have his name added to the masthead. He is a convert to liberalism in matters political and ecclesial. Wills argues for a bigger, more muscular government that works to expand the positive rights of women, gays, minorities, and the poor, and for a church that is willing at least to relent to that advance.

His intellectual journey makes Wills attractive to a certain kind of reader. He is devout and liberal and learned and the scales have fallen away from his eyes, so he’s safe. When the *New York Times* or the *New York Review of Books* wants someone to sound off on “Catholic issues” or to chide traditional believers

about issues of religion in public life, Wills is the go-to guy.

The zeal of converts is often overstated, but Wills has it. Especially when he’s dealing with intra-church disputes, his words are barbed and he’s incapable of seeing the sense in any position that he used to hold. Once his mind has changed, so should everyone else’s, and he treats people who disagree with him to ridicule, at best.

You get a good helping of this in Wills’s latest book, *What Jesus Meant*, when he is writing about conservatives and especially when the subject is the current pope. He takes sharp issue with the notion of apostolic succession, the idea that (a) Jesus intended the found a religion; (b) by appointing “the twelve” (or “the apostles”) and giving them extraordinary powers, Jesus intended for there to be a separate priestly class that would oversee the new faith; (c) the current hierarchy of the broader Catholic Church (including the Orthodox) are legitimate heirs to that authority; and (d) the whole church shall be led, in some sense, by the successor to St. Peter, the Bishop of Rome.

This story is central to what the Catholic Church thinks about itself, but it’s all balderdash, says Wills. He fumes that Benedict XVI, when he was serving as the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, wrote that it is the “infallible teaching of the church that Anglican bishops and priests are fake bishops and priests, dispensing fake sacraments, because they are outside of apostolic succession. That is, they have not a lineage guaranteed by papal elections, supposedly guided by the Holy Spirit—a line in which bribery, intimidation, and imperial interference were often the deciding factors.”

Forget for a moment that Wills grossly distorts Benedict’s thought here. What’s unclear is why he should take up the cause of the Anglicans, except to use as a cudgel to beat Rome. Wills repeatedly rejects the idea that Jesus tried to found any institutional church at all—one section begins, “If Jesus did not come to establish a church, why did he

come?" Rather, the man that Wills professes as the son of God came to establish his elusive "reign." By reign, says Wills, the Gospel writers had in mind "a dynamic process, not a settled place or structure. ... It is Jesus himself, at first recognized only by a few, but extending his hold by fulfilling his mission from the Father." In other words, the Person *is* the process.

As for Jesus using lowly human agents to extend that reign, Wills balks. Ecclesial structures and the development of doctrine past about the sixth century are rejected out of hand. He explains that these things are all about "exclusion" and thus contrary to the inclusive, egalitarian Gospel that Jesus preached. So let them be anathema.

Jesus did appoint 12 apostles, but, Wills argues, they were figureheads, and the fact that they were all men was irrelevant. Yes, Peter was important, but he had little power and wasn't the

first pope, and he was married. Whenever it looks like Jesus or Paul is holding up celibacy as an ideal, according to Wills, they're either being ironic or too overtly apocalyptic for us to take them seriously.

Doctors of the church admit that it took awhile for her governance to become what it is today, what with one religion forming out of the ferment of another, spreading like kudzu throughout the Roman Empire, and its adherents being persecuted by religious leaders and civil authorities. But that isn't enough of a concession for Wills. This self-avowed Catholic intellectual says that because the words "bishop" and "priest" were not the formal titles used during the period of the writing of the New Testament, the papacy and the bishoprics are made up and contrary to the ideals of Jesus, who was against all organized religion.

The rabbi from Nazareth can be obscured in all of this polemicizing, but he's still here. In the first chapter, Wills renounces the concept of a "gentle Jesus, meek and mild," and he later spends considerable energy rebutting modern presentations of the son of man as the masculine ideal. Mel Gibson's Jesus this is not. But this also is not the Jesus of Thomas Jefferson's revised, non-miraculous New Testament, which Wills calls "not only much shorter than the real one but much duller." And it isn't merely a rehash of the findings of the small group of radical, media-savvy scholars that make up the Jesus Seminar. In fact, Wills looks at the run of historical Jesus scholarship and decides to chuck the lot of it. "The only Jesus we have," he explains, "is the Jesus of faith. If you reject the faith, there is no reason to trust anything the gospels say."

Okay, but whose faith? Catholics believe that Scripture and Tradition form a single deposit of faith. Most Protestants believe in a historic Christian idea that shapes how they read the Bible, since, after all, the church put the book together. And then there's the Garry Wills reading, which combines modern pieties with a dash of literary criticism and a

pinch of opportunistic literalism. Thus the Virgin Birth was only intended to be poetical, any passages that seem to grant the church power can be explained away, but Jesus' indictment of religious leaders and the rich contained no hyperbole whatsoever.

Because he cuts himself off from scholarship and most theology, the portrait of Jesus that Wills paints is incomplete, if interesting. It looks a lot like the one in the musical and film "Jesus Christ Superstar." You have the young pious rebel preaching against the hypocritical religion of his forbears and the religious and political establishments trying to get rid of this severe hippie. The one virtue of this portrayal of Jesus is that it doesn't try to treat him as merely a great teacher who was misunderstood and unfairly martyred. "If he was not God, he was a standing blasphemy against God," Wills writes, and on that much we can agree.

This Jesus is a lit fuse. He is harsh and unpredictable, and he rages against those things that his Father hates. He curses the priests and teachers of the law but extends forgiveness to whores and tax collectors. He overturns the tables of the moneychangers and drives sellers of cattle and fowl out of the temple with a whip, but he renounces plans to turn his reign into a political movement. And he is killed, in part, because the rulers have no idea what else to do with him.

Again, there are problems with this take. By allowing the dramatic meanings to overwhelm the deeper theological meanings, Wills divorces himself from some important truths. Judas is the most interesting and sympathetic bit player in "Jesus Christ Superstar," and Wills goes even further in *What Jesus Meant*. "Judas," Wills explains, "could not bear the knowledge of what he had done. He killed himself for having killed God. It was an act of contrition that redeems him, makes him a kind of comrade for all of us who have betrayed Jesus. He is our patron. Saint Judas." ■

Jeremy Lott is author of the forthcoming In Defense of Hypocrisy.

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[*Sands of Empire: Missionary Zeal, American Foreign Policy, and the Hazards of Global Ambition*, Robert W. Merry, Simon and Schuster, 320 pages]

History for Aspiring Imperialists

By Charles V. Peña

In *Sands of Empire*, Robert W. Merry has taken to heart philosopher George Santayana's maxim that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." And what Merry wants us to remember is "if there are lessons in history, certainly one teaches that there is no such thing as a benign hegemon. Hegemonic ambition inevitably inserts the hegemon into environments that turn out to be threatening, brutal, and savage. And then, if it wants to remain a hegemon, it can no longer be benign. We don't have to look to Roman history for this lesson; America's current Iraqi adventure serves nicely."

As alternatives to hegemony—rooted in President Theodore Roosevelt being "thrilled to the idea of American empire on the British model, with American boys spreading national power to whatever corners of the world were still available for colonization"—Merry examines four other strains of U.S. foreign policy: liberal or humanitarian interventionism, conservative isolationism, liberal isolationism, and conservative interventionism.

As a historical analysis of American foreign policy and the current state of affairs with the wars on terrorism and in Iraq, Merry's book is excellent. He shows us how Theodore Roosevelt's ambitions of American empire were tempered by a brutal guerrilla war in the Philippines that left 4,000 Americans and 200,000 Filipinos dead. Chastened only for a time, U.S. foreign policy gave way to World War I and Woodrow Wilson's grandiose

vision of a world order with America at the center and based on the notion of humanitarian interventionism—that the exercise of U.S. military power could be justified by the humanitarian needs of a foreign country rather than vital U.S. interests. The period between World War I and World War II saw the emergence of conservative isolationism as espoused by Robert Taft: "We should be prepared to defend our own shores, but we should not undertake to defend the ideals of democracy in foreign countries." Conservative isolationism became a victim of World War II, which resulted in conservative interventionism and the Cold War strategy of containment based on using force to protect America's vital interests, defend the West from Soviet expansionism, and maintain a global balance of power vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and communism. Liberal isolationism was the natural product of the Vietnam War and the view that America was waging an immoral war.

Showing that history does indeed repeat itself, Merry correctly points to the latter days of the Bush 41 administration and the November 1992 decision to send troops into Somalia to aid its starving inhabitants as the rebirth of Wilsonianism and humanitarian intervention. The Clinton presidency inherited and expanded this mission, which went terribly awry on the streets of Mogadishu in October 1993, when three Black Hawk helicopters were shot down and 18 American soldiers were killed, as depicted in the movie "Black Hawk Down." Instead of learning a fundamental reality of humanitarian intervention—that it rarely remains humanitarian—the Clinton administration embraced Wilsonianism with its Balkans policy, including the bombing of Kosovo. Merry uses the Balkans to highlight a second fundamental reality of a humanitarian interventionist foreign policy grounded in moralistic impulses: "inevitably it exposes a selective morality."

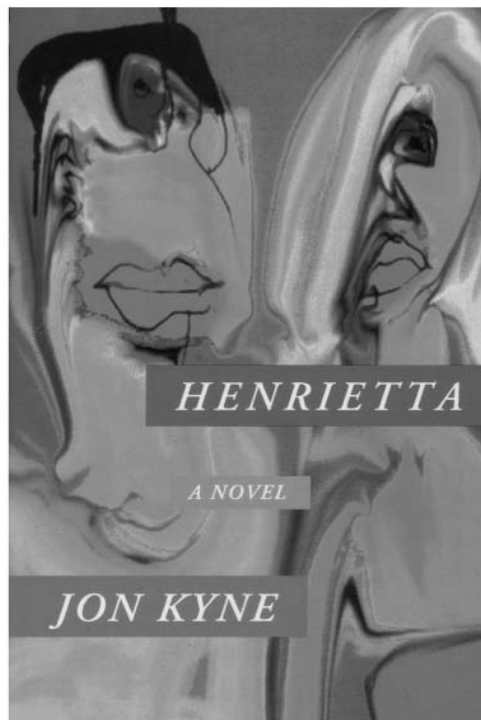
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by Jon Kyne

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