

green and orange-dotted orchards carpet the gently rolling plains and hills. Hundreds of trucks lumber from the orchards to town each afternoon with their 12-ton loads of fruit, leaving a trail of citrus rinds and juice along the way. Still, the industry is in crisis. Men between 16 and 70 years old work six hours per day harvesting 20 two-hundred-pound baskets. The men balance high on narrow wooden ladders while picking tangerines, placing them in bags weighing up to 50 pounds. When the bag is full, they climb down and dump the harvest into large baskets, weighing a staggering 200 pounds, which they carry by a strap on their foreheads out of the orchard to the waiting truck—all for \$19 dollars per day. No wonder so many Mexicans decide that it is better to enter the United States illegally.

In the tangerine sector, the problems are also local. The producers lack any internal control or regulation whatsoever, and cutthroat competition has driven prices to unsustainable levels. Mexican juice companies in Alamo pay producers \$50 per ton for lesser “juice-quality” tangerines (plus costs of labor and transport), while the superior table-quality product can fetch up to \$160 per ton. Product quality is excellent, but there are no tangerine exports to the United States, though it is so close—and not because of

NAFTA. Besides self-defeating cutthroat practices among producers and middlemen, the government’s assistance in eradicating the fruit fly has been squandered by local trade and business representatives who steal the donated pesticides for their own use, the surplus of which is sold in local markets—and most local producers cannot afford them. While one farm may be free of the pest, its neighbor will be infested. And, as all the fruit is sold in the same market, the whole region’s produce can be affected. Naturally, as agricultural pests are a threat to the United States, such imports are prohibited. However, Mexican juice companies benefit from the export prohibition, which causes a local glut in production and unsustainable prices. Juice producers also slash prices to sink small producers, thus creating monopolies.

Mexico’s foreign minister, Luis Ernesto Derbez, in an effort to combat capital flight to China from all sectors, has proposed yet more concessions, demanding that foreign investors and manufacturers assist in the development of Mexican industry instead of offering more tax breaks and incentives to potential foreign investors.

Fortunately, not all of Mexico’s farmers have hit the streets in protest or cried for government bailouts. In fact, some, such as Michoacan’s avocado producers, have explicitly told the government “Hands off.” Mexico produces 900,000 tons of Hass avocados annually, the vast majority in Michoacan, with 250,000 tons destined for the United States. The 600 regional producers face pressure from Mexican and U.S. packers to lower prices but have united through their trade organization to maintain fair prices for their product—\$1.20 per kilo for export, 60 cents for domestic consumption. Their trade organizations work closely with the U.S.D.A., which monitors production and packing. In a few more years, California’s avocado production will be sunk by those south of the border who produce higher quality at a fraction of the cost.

Other Mexican agricultural products that benefit from “free trade” are tomatoes, limes, broccoli, cucumbers, asparagus, mangoes, watermelons, and green peppers. They are filling U.S. markets—instead of the producers filling Mexican highways. And there are a few in the Mexican polity who promote more progressive policies in the agricultural sector. Secretary of Economy Fernando Cana-

les Clarion has reportedly encouraged climate-crop adaptation, so Mexico can rescue herself from the results of inefficient farming practices at the grassroots level.

“Free trade” is anything but free. It requires foresight, business planning, research, product and market development, and investment—in other words, strategy—to succeed in a global market.

Reinventing sealing wax or cultivating corn on mountainsides is a sure strategy for economic failure, which will simply produce more roadblocks to progress and benefit only the union bosses and political opportunists who prey on the weakest.

*V. Groginsky writes from Mexico City.*

## Letter From London

*by Andrei Navrozov*

### Made for Love



Vanity plates, I once heard—vehicle registration numbers, in other words, that are believed to hold meanings or to pose riddles, in the pedestrian minds of idle onlookers and fellow motorists stuck in traffic—often cost many times more than the cars to which they are attached. This is good news of sorts. For, however pitiful it is for an aging toothpaste manufacturer to take pride in screwing the numberplate MAD4LOV to his new cabriolet, from the point of view of the West’s survival as a culture, it is far less alarming than seeing that pride of his stimulated directly by a mass-market product of the automotive industry. Gross as it may seem, MAD4LOV is still an insubstantial fancy—not unlike a poem, a prophecy, or an heraldic device—and paying good money to acquire it is an act of sublimation, more Medici than Marx, more Charles the Foolish than Warren Buffett, more Gothic apse than valet parking in rear.

Last August, the Duke of Buccleuch had a hundred-million-dollar Leonardo stolen from his home in Scotland. “It is no consolation to the Duke, or to the unfortunate insurers,” commented the writer A.N. Wilson (prone, like most Londoners, to real-estate similes), “but isn’t it rather wonderful that our lumpen, boring society sets such a price

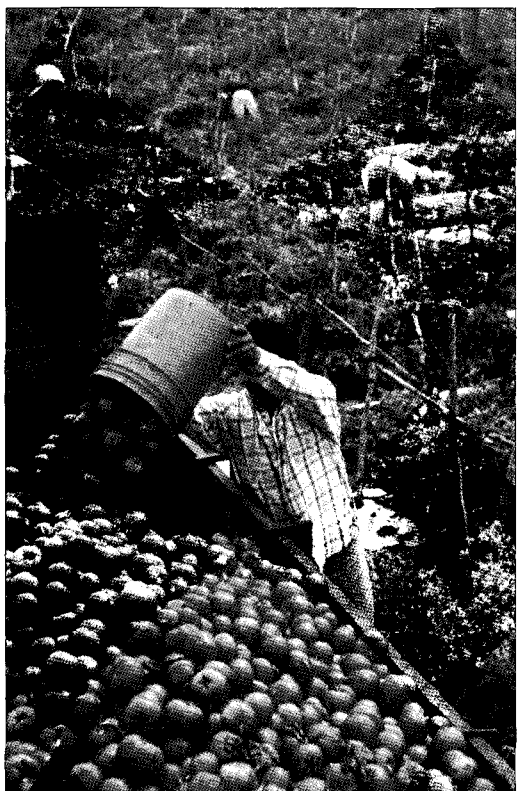


Photo © Russell/Condor.net

*Indigenous families harvest ripe tomatoes on huge coastal plantations.*

on art that it values one painting by a genius 80 times higher than a big London house?" Indeed, some paintings still cost more than each and every one of the walls on which they hang. The most expensive house in modern history, sold in Tokyo for \$600 million ("It was a one-bedroom," I hear you jest), belonged to the father of a friend of mine, a Syrian immigrant to Japan. But surely the contents of a single Sotheby's "Impressionist and Modern" sale can match that in a couple of rainy Mayfair afternoons.

The historical sense of these intimations of qualified optimism is that the Good Lord appears to have conceived the human ego—a man's soul, if you like—as a creature with many mouths, wherein lies both our problematic salvation and our almost certain perdition. Because, according to His complex, life-giving design, man is obliged to feed all of this potential monster's mouths (as a mother is bound by nature to suckle her whole brood and becomes monstrous when she does otherwise), despite the psychological fact that it can easily survive if only one of them is given nourishment (as the mother's genes can survive even if all but one of her offspring should starve to death). Rationalism, which is the temptation to keep the ego alive by means that are necessary and sufficient—by feeding it, ergonomically and economically, through a single orifice—is central to the demise of Christian civilization. The monster ego peculiar to our epoch is not obese because it is overfed but because it is swollen from malnutrition. It is made to subsist on a diet of carbonated drinks, rum-raisin ice cream, and chocolate-covered doughnuts.

Heroin addicts—who, quite literally, obtain satisfaction by nourishing their egos through a single opening in the skin—are an extreme terminus of this progressive rationalization of means and methods, but of course there are others. Prostitutes find it difficult to resume a less perilous life not because their egos have been crushed but because they too have grown addicted to the gratifications of extreme simplification. And, as one or the other of these social outcasts leans on the peeling windowsill to look down through the rusting tracery of fire escapes at the world without, he or she has very good reason to claim that what lies below is every inch as artless, mass-produced, and apparently godforsaken as the fetid mattress and the bleating television within.

"From pop stars and royal princes to

crack whores and street kids, from the Groucho Club toilets to the poppy fields of Afghanistan, we are all partners in crime," trumpets the jacket blurb of a current bestseller. "*High Society* is a story about Britain today, a criminal nation in which everybody is either breaking the law or knows people who do." And an FBI spokesman tells the *Sunday Times* that "teenage girls from wealthy middle-class homes" are turning to prostitution "for affirmation." Apparently, in the past three years, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, "we've seen a 70% increase in kids from middle- to upper-middle-class backgrounds who become prostitutes" without having "suffered mental, sexual, or physical abuse." Of what value, then, is any present-day attempt at moral or social differentiation?

Even a generation ago, a social outcast's claim to being no worse "than the rest of you hypocrites out there" would have rung more hollow. I am told that, in the late 1940's, when Isaac Stern bought himself a Stradivarius for \$5,000, an average orchestra player could easily acquire a fine violin, say a Guarneri, for a third of that amount. Some 50 years of wholesale social homogenization later, a reasonable instrument costs more than ten years' worth of an orchestra violinist's gross annual salary, and a Stradivarius will make five million dollars at auction. In other words, musical instruments can now make more than the people who play them, because violins, paintings, houses, cars, and lace doilies have been swept up in a lopsided whirl of material consumption—in this case, of an antiquarian cast—that mercilessly rationalizes and drastically abbreviates the full scale of ethical values that, until recently, could provide the human ego with endlessly diversified nutrients.

Accordingly, though one must take it as given that drugs and prostitution are extremes at least in theory, one fails to detect a qualitative, substantive difference between them and the social mainstream of the present epoch. Consider, if you like, the most common form of ministration to the ego—so unlike playing a once-affordable Guarneri—which goes by the houseproud name of *work*, but is in reality just as monotonous, self-abusive, and ultimately deadening as the scoring of hits or the turning of tricks. Deprived of work, an upstanding denizen of the civilized world is, if anything, more helpless than a desperately strung-out drug user. "You see," Isabel, the heroine of Somer-

set Maugham's once-famous novel, *The Razor's Edge*, says of her husband, a stockbroker ruined in the crash who is still unemployed three years later, "he feels it's a man's business to work and if he can't work he may just as well be dead."

Yet not by bread *alone* must a man live, it has been clearly written, not *only* by working and certainly not *solely* for the sake of money. When the chance reversal of fortune came, Isabel tells the narrator,

I simply couldn't believe it. It seemed inconceivable to me that we should be ruined. I could understand that other people should be ruined, but that we should be—well, it just seemed impossible. I went on thinking that something would happen to save us at the last moment. And then, when the final blow came, I felt that life wasn't worth living anymore. I didn't think I could face the future; it was too black. For a fortnight I was absolutely miserable. God, it was awful, having to part with everything, knowing there wouldn't be any fun any more, having to do without everything I liked—and then at the end of a fortnight I said: "Oh, to hell with it, I'm not going to give it another thought," and I promise you I never have.

At least to my own obsessive and tententious ear, Maugham's heroine is venting the textbook anxieties of the novice gambler. For roulette is spiritual training in the reversal of fortune, and the poet player knows better than to walk through the world thinking that everything he may have to part with—all the fun to be had that he will never have again and all the things he has had that he will have to get along without—depends on the outcome of a single spin of the wheel. He knows that the human ego has many mouths, even as his father's house has many mansions, and so, whatever the circumstances of the crash peculiar to his destiny, he can never feel that he's been ruined and nothing's worth anything any longer. He plays not for money, but against it.

And if, in the end, money wins, he shrugs. He has a whole life to live.

Andrei Navrozov is *Chronicles'* European correspondent.

# Letter to the Bishop

by Joe Ecclesia

## Eucharistic Seconds



Your Excellency:

Recently, having finished my post-Communion prayers at Mass, I was sitting along with everyone else, listening to our priest make a few announcements and deliver his last joke of the day, when I noticed my young neighbor in the pew—she was 15 or 16 years old—toying with the Host she had received at Communion. The young lady had nibbled one of the edges of the Host, had apparently either disliked the taste or else wished to carry it home where she might spread some jam on it, and so was flipping it around between her fingers to while away the time. I mentioned to her grandmother that the young lady might want to consume the Host, which is, after all, the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The grandmother passed the word to the young lady, at which point, after a brief struggle, the grandmother consumed the Host.

More and more, Your Excellency, people at our little parish church appear confused by the Host. Some are undoubtedly Protestants who either do not understand that the Host is the Body of Our Lord or are unaware of the Church's guidelines regarding the distribution of Holy Communion; I have seen them leaving the altar carrying the Host in their hands, staring at It with either amused or perplexed looks. Others are, I believe, Catholics who are unaware of much of anything regarding the Faith. (One quick note: My family usually sits at the front of the church because we find that our youngest son, who is five years old, pays closer attention there. Since I'm praying much of the time during Communion, head bowed, eyes closed, that sort of thing, I rarely observe those receiving the Eucharist. Nonetheless, occasionally I lift my head for a few moments and almost invariably notice someone leaving the front of the altar with the Host either in hand or dropped surreptitiously into a pocket.)

Stressing or requiring Communion on the tongue might help solve this sacrilege, though requiring Communion by tongue will be difficult. (Many American

parishioners have trouble swallowing the idea, your Excellency, if you'll pardon an atrocious pun.) To receive Communion on the tongue would eventually require kneeling—a 5'6" priest cannot give communion on the tongue to a 6'6" parishioner, not without a footstool—and most churches have now shorn themselves of kneelers and altar rails.

Since I've never heard a priest address from the pulpit this behavior of carrying the Host away, I would assume, Your Excellency, that we are moving in the direction of the carry-out Host. Living in a country of fast-food restaurants and Chinese take-out, I suppose this trend is inevitable. Before this take-out Communion becomes much more acceptable, however, I wanted to offer several possibilities in terms of looking to the future.

First, to ensure quality control, let me suggest that an altar server be stationed at the elbow of the priest or eucharistic minister dispensing the Body of Our Lord. The server might offer those choosing take-out a tiny sealable baggie in which to store Our Lord. (Notice how well the word *server* works here, similar in meaning to a restaurant waiter.) This baggie would help avoid scandal in case the Host became smashed in a pocket. It would also ensure sanitation. If such a practice of putting Our Lord in baggies catches on, the diocese might move to the zip-lock variety for the convenience of the Church's customers.

Clearly, there is the possibility of scandal or misuse of the Eucharist for those choosing the take-out service. Satanists—we have quite a coven of these here in our county, and, having read the Charlotte newspaper a few times, I assume there are a few down your way as well—might steal the Host for inclusion in their Black Mass. Other parishioners may get home, feel disinclined to consume the Host, and feed it instead to the birds. (Despite the stories regarding St. Francis, I'm not sure that all birds—crows and blue jays in particular—are Christian, much less Catholic.) Here I confess that I am at a loss as to a solution, Your Excellency. In the old days, we might have inserted a note into the baggie declaring the abuser of the Host to be anathema; today, however, such a warning simply wouldn't take. Most people don't know what *anathema* means, and many won't bother to look it up. Given the widespread lack of regard for other Church teachings among modern Catholics as well as the modernist proclivity for rebellion, I'm not sure a

note would deter anyone from sacrilege anyway. Since I can't find a solution here, I'm afraid that you're on your own on this one, Your Excellency.

Next, you might consider instituting a similar take-out procedure with the Precious Blood of Our Lord. We could offer the Precious Blood in tiny, sealed bottles that customers—I won't call them communicants, for you have to commune to be a communicant—would take home, consume at their leisure, and return the next week for purification. We might have the bottles designed in the shape of a chalice to add authenticity.

Speaking of the Precious Blood, four weeks ago, a Mexican deacon helped serve our Spanish Mass. After Communion, the deacon glanced into the chalice in his hands, swirled it a few times, then called parishioners back to the altar for seconds on the Precious Blood. "We have some left," he said, "so come on back." (He delivered this invitation in Spanish, of course, but I won't attempt to reproduce it here.) Though our priest looked somewhat surprised, he didn't attempt to stop the deacon; our priest is an Anglo and perhaps felt uncomfortable correcting the deacon before his countrymen. Or is theology at work here? The priest must consume the remaining Precious Blood; he therefore gets "seconds": We are all priests these days; therefore, we should all get "seconds."

Let me suggest, however, that, if this action constitutes a new trend in our Church, if indeed we are going to begin offering seconds, then we need to ensure an ample supply of victuals. My mother always said that, if you're going to offer more food, make sure there is enough for everyone at the table. Therefore, we should consider the extra expense involved in offering seconds. In our parish, where having a Mass said now officially costs \$10.00 and attending FFC (that's Faith Formation Class) costs \$30.00, we are aware of the need to watch our pennies.

Just a few thoughts for your consideration, Your Excellency. Keeping you in my prayers—

Joe Ecclesia

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