There were 28 January - February 2019

EARLY CHRISTIANITY

At the very end of the article (“The Bits the Bible Left Out,” November-December 2018, page 40), we read of “what is valuable about so-called heretical texts...[and] their closeness to the beginning...”

But these texts did not have a “closeness to the beginning,” which is precisely why they were rejected by the earliest followers of Jesus. In contrast, the texts that comprise the New Testament were written by the apostles of Jesus or the followers of the apostles. We have copies of these first-century texts dating from the early second century, compilations of the four gospels and of Paul’s letters in circulation. Later texts—however sincere or pious—were not included with the canonical writings because their provenance was not assured. While the article leaves the impression that only “heretical” texts were not included, in fact, many early texts that were considered orthodox were also excluded. It was not the content that got a text excluded, but the lack of a clear connection to the viva voce of the apostles.

The earliest disciples of Jesus were Jews living in Palestine whose neighbors had also heard Jesus teach, seen him perform miracles, and watched as he died in a very public crucifixion. Those who wrote the gospels and letters in such a period would not have manufactured new Jesus stories because of their allegiance to Christ. The title “apostle” means “one sent with a message”; they were commissioned by Jesus to pass on what they had seen and heard. Moreover, even had they wanted to, they could not have made up new Jesus material because fellow Jews would have known that Jesus had never said or done such things. As the Apostle Paul said to a Roman official, “these things were not done in a corner.”

Dr. Todd L. Lake ’82

Vice president for spiritual development

Belmont University

Nashville

While there are many things I disagree with in the article on

With Our Thanks

We are honored to recognize two artists for their outstanding work on readers’ behalf during 2018, and to confer a $1,000 honorarium on each.

New York-based photographer Robert Adam Mayer is a distinguished and sensitive portraitist—as amply demonstrated anew in his cover and interior images of black-studies scholar Fred Moten, for the January-February issue.

Phil Foster conceived vivid, compelling illustrations to drive home the importance of the arguments made by business and law professor Mihir A. Desai about the new federal tax law, in the May-June issue.

Our warmest thanks to these superb professionals. ~The Editors
Professor Karen King, I will confine myself to comment on just one: it is in Lydialyle Gibson's report on the lecture that King gave at Williams College. About it she writes, “The worshippers whom Irenaeus called Gnostics... were silenced and marginalized. Their sacred texts largely disappeared from the world, ‘at a considerable loss,’ King said, ‘to Christian thought and practice.” Contrary to King, I believe that excluding Gnostic thought from Christian orthodoxy is a good example of the church’s wisdom rather than simply the exercise of the power to silence.

While Gnosticism is a complex and sprawling subject, one of the central ideas that runs throughout its various expressions is that the material world (including the human body) is itself evil and must be escaped for salvation. If the Church had embraced this idea as orthodoxy, all sorts of mischief would have followed. Modern science grew in part out of the Jewish and Christian idea that God had created a good and ordered cosmos which could be studied and comprehended. The exclusion of Gnostic beliefs by Irenaeus and other theologians of the Patristic period led William Temple, archbishop of Canterbury (1942-44), to describe Christianity as the “most awedly materialistic of all the great religions.” Hence, some words of advice to King about Gnosticism: ideas have consequences; bad ideas always have bad consequences.

The Reverend David Montzingo ’71
San Diego

Thankfully, there are other scholarly ways to consider the Christian canon of Scripture than through the lenses of Karen King’s postmodern, feminist American Christianity.

Rob McKee ’74 (’75)
Duncanville, Tex.

Editor’s note: Peter Desmond ’69 queried the identification of the Nag Hammadi facsimile shown on page 42 of the article as part of the Apocryphon of John, Karen King explains. The text that follows is the beginning of the Gospel of Thomas.

ADMISSIONS

I trust the court in the admissions case (“Litigating Admissions,” September-October 2018, page 17) will validate Harvard’s admission policies as both legal and equitable. However, we should also see this as an opportunity to make Harvard’s admissions even more equitable by eliminating all legacy preferences. Legacy students are neither more accomplished nor better members of the Harvard student and alumni communities. In an era when mangled notions of loyalty and heritage are being used to embolden authoritarians and undermine democracy, we in the Harvard community can do better than rely on these concepts when building our future.

I do not expect my daughters to be chosen over other applicants when they apply to Harvard, and am confident that other fair-minded parents feel the same. Harvard has been a leading light of reform in higher education over the past decade on matters of tuition, curriculum, investments, and admissions. Let’s continue that legacy, and stop giving an unearned boost to the children of alumni.

Eric Johnson, J.D. ’05
San Francisco

Harvard should promote diversity of cultures, not diversity of skin colors. Harvard should concentrate on class, not race problems. Harvard’s racial preferences distract American people from the greatest issue—financial inequality—which affects all human races. The Harvard racial engineering is hypocrisy, a fig leaf on the crotch of America’s corporate culture that pretends to be democratic but is definitely not.

Anatol Zukerman, M.Arch. ’75
Plymouth, Mass.

Editor’s note: For more on the litigation, see pages 5, 15, and 30.

ACADEMIC PRESSES

The article on George Andreou’s becoming director of Harvard University Press (“Taking a Page from Knopf,” November-December 2018, page 32) illustrates the real biggest challenge facing academic publishing—the commercialization of academic presses! If the focus on marketing is to avoid
“turning the presses into a mere extension of the academic process by which scholars publish work to gain tenure”—what if that work to gain tenure is the best? Who needs academic presses whose decision to publish is based on marketing rather than innovative scholarship?

Laura Nader, Ph.D. ‘61
Department of anthropology, U.C. Berkeley

THE S.G.
The main thrust of Lincoln Caplan’s “The Political Solicitor General” (September-October 2018, page 47) is that the SG should be a pure exponent of what the law is. There are several impediments to this idealized view:

1. Federal statutory and constitutional law are not religious dictates, but are derived from political processes and judgments; thus it is impossible to separate law from politics entirely. The most effective way to keep the politics out of legal interpretation is to be an originalist or a textualist, but that is not necessarily appropriate nor does it square with Caplan’s progressive bent or the idea of the “Living Constitution” that he obviously favors.

2. In arguing that the president and the attorney general, both of whom rank above the SG, are too political to decide what the law is or should be and therefore defer to the SG, Caplan is taking a position that there are areas of executive-branch activity and authority over which the president should not exercise any control or discretion. That is untenable politically except with independent agencies that are so organized with an explicit independence mandate from Congress. A venerable tradition surely counts for a lot, and the SG

7 WARE STREET

What Legacy?
Sometime in 2019, U.S. District Court Judge Allison D. Burroughs will rule on whether Harvard College impossibly discriminates against Asian-American applicants, the claim brought by Students for Fair Admissions. Her ruling, if ultimately appealed to the Supreme Court, may significantly affect selective institutions’ affirmative-action criteria and admissions processes (see page 15).

Meanwhile, the arguments advanced by the plaintiff, and the University’s response, shone a light on other factors that go into Harvard’s review of applicants, including consideration of legacy status (the children of alumni); athletic ability; family philanthropic support for the institution; and affiliation with faculty and staff members. The existence of such factors came as no surprise to close observers of admissions. But given the public’s focus on the importance of winning a golden ticket to an elite college in an era of enormous applicant pools and single-digit admission rates, the practices detailed during the trial became fodder for news coverage in The Boston Globe, New York Times, and Wall Street Journal. The Times even ran an article headlined “Getting into Harvard Is Hard. Here Are 4 Ways Applicants Get an Edge”—a seeming blow to meritocracy.

And in an era of widening socioeconomic inequality—mirrored in growing gaps between public and elite private institutions (see “The College Chasm,” November-December 2017, page 50, by Duke’s Charles T. Clotfelter, Ph.D. ’74)—and rising public resentment of the costs and culture of the elite schools, it would be fair to say that such institutions have a problem.

Is it a problem Harvard ought to do something about?

Lawrence S. Bacow inherited the lawsuit when he became president last July. He brought to the job an affecting life story: growing up as the son of refugees, and, as a result of a superb higher education at MIT and Harvard, being presented with unimagined opportunities. Access and financial aid were themes of his entire Tufts tenure. In mid-September, on his first major trip as president, back home to Pontiac and Detroit, his core messages were access to higher education—whether at Harvard, the University of Michigan, or Wayne State University (where his father earned degrees at night, paying his way by parking cars during the day)—and the resulting opportunities (see harvardmag.com/michigan-trip-17). “Talent is flatly distributed,” he said then. “Opportunity is not.” His values could not be clearer.

Nor could his concern about the external environment. His Harvard presidency comes amid changing public perceptions of the value of higher education and populist criticisms of the kind of institution where he has studied and worked since 1969. The difficulty arises from the very factors that made them excellent—and elite. During a conversation at Mass Hall as the trial concluded, Bacow observed, “This place did not build itself.” Prior generations gave of their resources and time “to create the institution that exists today,” and is therefore able to advance understanding and educate new cohorts of students. “Each generation helps the next,” he urged a “thumb on the scale” equal in force to the legacy preference.

Would Harvard move in such a direction? Absent a larger student body (the route Princeton and Yale are now pursuing), doing so would seem to imply some other trade-offs, at a time of ever scarcer slots in every entering class. It may be awkward to conduct such a conversation while the current litigation proceeds. But over time, Harvard may want, or need, to examine its admission preferences—including those extended to athletes and its employees’ children. Doing so would seem to present the University, again, the opportunity for leadership.

~John S. Rosenberg, Editor
must be scrupulously honest about what the law is and resign if the bosses disagree, but no one should expect them always to defer to the SG. To illustrate: many would have called for the previous administration’s SG’s head on a pike had he told the president flatly that there is no right in the Constitution guaranteeing same-sex marriage.

3. Caplan also tries to have it both ways on *stare decisis*. He decries Charles Fried’s amicus brief urging that *Roe v. Wade* be overturned 16 years after it was decided and a few years after it had been affirmed by a narrower majority, yet applauds Archie Cox’s recommendation to the Court to enter the thicket of reapportionment in 1962 only 16 years after characterizing the matter as non-justiciable. Caplan is mum on the Court’s invention of a right to same-sex marriage equality even though it overturned a settled understanding that reaches back to the dawn of time. Cases like those, like *Roe v. Wade*, and like *Brown v. Board of Education* may be necessary as game-changers to reflect major societal developments and shifts—but, then, cases like *Citizens United* and *Janus* should be viewed in the same light. My sense, though, is that in the Caplan world, *stare decisis* is designed only to protect gains that progressives achieve in the courts when they cannot get them at the ballot box. His is not a new theory, either. It was called the “ratchet theory” when Caplan and I went to law school in the years just after the Warren Court. Coming full circle, it is an attractive political theory which may be quite beneficial to us as a nation, but it is hard to support on neutral legal principles.

Robert Kantowitz, J.D. ’79
Lawrence, N.Y.

ANTISEMITISM

I CAN’T LET slip Alex Bruner’s off-target letter (November–December 2018, page 2) that conflates Judaism, the religion, with the government of the country of Israel. If you love your Jewish neighbors but despise the clearly brutal and apartheid policies of the Israeli government, you have a right to support the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement without being called anti-Semitic. Roman Catholics don’t take offense when the Italian government is criticized, and Presbyterians have no stake in what the Scottish government does, so U.S. Jews also need to see that they are totally separate from the Israeli government. You can’t have it both ways!

John F. Miller ’66
Williamsburg, Va.

ROE V. WADE

In his letter (November–December 2018, page 4), Martin Wishnatsky states that “immoral mandates” like Roe v. Wade “facilitated... a holocaust of infant life.” Leaving aside the loaded word “holocaust,” two things: a fetus is not an infant; and the decision did not change the total number of abortions. It only made more abortions legal and safe.

According to Planned Parenthood, one in four women in the U.S. will have an abortion by age 45. Therefore, Wishnatsky is calling one-quarter of American women immoral. He has nothing to say about the men who played their part in these unwanted pregnancies.

I reject this kind of shaming. I got an abortion for the same reason most women do: I was not ready, financially or emotionally, to support a child. Like about half the women who get abortions, I was using birth control, but the contraception failed.

Nobody is happy about having to terminate a pregnancy. But I take motherhood seriously. When I did have children, I wanted to be able to keep them safe and healthy, and raise them in a stable household. Bearing and then taking care of a child is a huge responsibility. Nobody should be able to force anyone else to do it.

If people like Wishnatsky who are so passionately against abortion would show any concern for children once they are born; if they fought for affordable childcare, housing, healthcare, and education; if they supported free contraception and sex education, which are proven to cut abortion rates; if they cared about the children and pregnant women killed by American bombs every day; then one might consider their claim to righteousness. Otherwise, they’re just hypocrites.

Jane Collins ’71
Medford, Mass.

29-29

George Howe Colt’s piece on the 1968 Game (“The Players,” November–December, page 58) notes the geographic transformation of Harvard in the 1960s from a bastion of Northeastern privilege to “something more attuned to the country at large.” My experience of this process had nothing to do with football but reinforces Colt’s thesis. Coming from a public school in western Virginia, I was matched in Eliot B-12 with a group of similar non-preppies from North Dakota, Alabama, Florida, and Kentucky. We became and remain fast friends. One can only imagine the “patrician” Master Finley’s chagrin at having these outlanders thrust into his “handpicked” cohorts from St. Paul’s, Groton and Exeter, but we drank deep from the Finley spring, and he remains a revered legend among us. If he was troubled by our pedigrees, it did not show in his stories of recommendation to graduate schools. Not at the stadium (which Master Finley might have preferred), but academically, we and no doubt throngs of others vindicated Harvard’s outreach to the hinterlands.

William C. Wooldridge ’65
Suffolk, Va.

Editor’s note: A caption in “The Players” credited “an anonymous undergraduate” for the headline “Harvard Beats Yale, 29–29.” We forgot that our March–April 2001 issue included letters from Thomas M. Zubaty ’72 and William J. Clark ’66, each claiming to be the source (see *harvardmag.com/29-29-re-cap-18*). We thank Mr. Zubaty for pointing out our error.