Boggs appointed him to the prestigious Annapolis military college. A search of Boggs's archives found no evidence of the appointment. There is broad public concern about Biden's mental acuity. A *Wall Street Journal* poll found that 73% of respondents believe he is too old for office. Biden turns 81 this month. ■

HABITS MADE OF IRON

Randall B. Smith

The Trinity & the Moral Life

During the horrible years of the Holocaust, when Jews were being arrested and shipped to an uncertain fate in Eastern Europe, the people in a small mountain village in southcentral France collaborated to harbor, protect, hide, and ultimately save thousands of Jewish refugees from imprisonment and death. What happened in this town remained largely unknown until historian Philip Hallie wrote *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and How Goodness Happened There* (1979). Shortly before his death in 1994, Hallie wrote a series of essays for a book titled *In the Eye of the Hurricane: Tales of Good and Evil, Help and Harm*. In one essay, "Magda and the Great Virtues," he recounted again, with even greater eloquence and the benefit of hindsight, his encounter with the villagers.

I use Hallie's essay in my class on "Christ and the Moral Life" to propose to my students that every moral act is a participation in the threefold communion of love that has existed from all eternity in the Triune God. I suggest that the relationship of these villagers to God and God's law was not one of servant to master but Son to Father. And if, as Josef Pieper has written, the "whole point of a Christian's life is to become like Christ," then these villagers serve as a prime example of what that means.

But what made their actions possible, I tell my students, is grace, which, as St. Thomas Aquinas says, is the presence of the Holy Spirit by whom "the love of God is spread abroad in our hearts." Not only did this gift of the love shared between the Father and the Son in the Person of the Holy Spirit make it possible for these poor, humble, mountain villagers to obey the commandment to "not kill" and "protect innocent life," it worked in them preveniently, preparing them in advance with the virtues and dispositions they would need to mourn the sorrows of the Jewish people, to be merciful, and to hunger and thirst for righteousness for the strangers who came to their doors. (This is also, by the way, a lesson in the Beatitudes.)

Before we get to the Trinity, let me recount some details about the village.

Hallie was an infantryman in the U.S. Army during the Second World War and had seen, as did many soldiers who served in that war, terrible, ter-

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rible things. He was Jewish, so he knew the Nazi evil had to be fought. For most his life, he had been a "bitter opponent of the belief that love can conquer all." He explains:

> Too often I had found nonviolent people to be too patient — patient with the murder of others. They would let their nonviolent resistance go on and on while thousands of victims of violence were being killed every day. I had long felt that the amative optimists were sentimental ideologues who would start off by being the accomplices of the strong by their refusal to fight and then would be crushed themselves…. Hitler encouraged and even rewarded pacifism in countries he had conquered, while he destroyed the pacifists in Germany.

But fighting evil, Hallie discovered, meant involving himself in evil. "I had to become a killer," he acknowledges, "in order to help stop Germany." After the war, as he researched the atrocities in the Nazi death camps, he imagined himself victimizing the victimizers (think of the Quentin Tarantino movie *Inglourious Basterds*) and fell into depression, wallowing in vengeful thoughts.

One day, while sitting in his office staring at his bookshelf, Hallie took down a book of essays on the French Resistance and happened to open it to an essay titled "Chambon-sur-Lignon." There he found a description of the rescue efforts in a village he had never heard of. He began to weep. He recounts:

> All of a sudden, I was witnessing help that was not lethal or even wounding…. I was seeing in my mind's eye flesh-and-blood actions that did not involve force or threats of force, and yet these actions were preventing cruelty and murder. I was seeing spontaneous love…. I was seeing a new reality, undergoing a revelation. Here was a place where help came from love, not from force!

But there was another reason he wept. When he was a child, bullied in a tough Chicago neighborhood, Hallie would spend Friday evenings with his mother, fascinated by her Sabbath prayers. "I watched her," he writes, "bent over the [candles] with her own mother's black shawl on her head and pray to the vast darkness around us." Mysteries usually irritated him, says Hallie, who was a secular Jew, not a theist, when he wrote this. "But the shadowless mystery in which my mother prayed was something positive and comforting. It was full of peace, and it was as real as the candlelight. The peace we felt circulated in and around us like the air we breathed. That peace was God…. That feeling seemed to unite us with each other and with the rest of the universe." This, however, was before Hallie learned to fight in the streets. After he learned to fight, his prayers stopped.

Once he read about Le Chambon, Hallie knew he had to learn more. Through friends he discovered that André Trocmé, the Protestant minister who had led the rescue activities in the town, had died some years earlier. But his widow, a tough Italian woman named Magda, was still alive, recovering from surgery in a convalescent home in southern France.

When he met her, Hallie wanted to know all about the villagers. What made them so different from others in Europe? Magda's stories, however, were only about the refugees, especially the children. When Hallie told her, "But you are good people, good," Magda exploded at him. "What did you say? *What?* 'Good?' *Good?*… I'm sorry, but you see, you have not understood what I have been saying. We have been talking about saving the children. We did not do what we did for goodness' sake. We did it for the children."

This was Hallie's first lesson about the villagers and what made them different. It guided all the others. This encounter was merely the first step of his journey.

Magda directed Hallie to meet with Edouard Theis, the man who had been the associate pastor during the rescue operations. Hallie asked him, "Didn't you ever hate these Germans for what they were doing?"

After a long silence, the Frenchman replied, "Not really. No. You see, we weren't only trying to save the children; we were trying to keep the Germans from staining their lives with more evil." (Hence the title of Hallie's book *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*.)

Hallie visited the town often over a two-year period. One day, after a church service, he accompanied Theis through the church doors over which were written the words *Aimez-vous les uns les autres* ("Love one another"). On the way out, Theis, a poor minister who had almost nothing, put his hand in his trouser pocket, pulled out whatever cash he had, and, without looking at it, put it all in the poor box. Hallie blurted out, "But Monsieur Theis, all that money you gave — where is it going? How will you do without it?"

Theis was silent for a long time, and then he replied quietly, in that dismissive French way, "Oh, I don't know. Somebody needs it."

"And that was the end of his answer," writes Hallie, "but not the end of my thoughts about his answer." Hallie continues:

> There came to my mind one of the phrases [villager] Gabrielle Barraud had half-whispered again and again when somebody thanked her for something: "*Toujours prête à servir*," "Always ready to help." It occurred to me that I had heard the phrase in the village, usually with those exact words but also in many other forms. I remembered Magda Trocmé's greeting to new refugees whom she suddenly found standing in terror and in hunger outside the presbytery door…. "*Eh bien, naturellement, entrez, entrez*." And they came in, "naturally," "of course," and that was that. They remained with Magda's family sharing the beans that could never be cooked enough to soften, so that they *pinged* when they were dropped on the plates. They remained for a few hours, a few days, or sometimes for a few months, and even a few years. They had come into a world where people were always ready to help.

I use this story to illustrate for my students what a *virtue* is. There is, of course, Aquinas's definition that goes back to Augustine and Aristotle. At this point, I could simply show the YouTube video on "Virtue" from the *Aquinas 101* series, which would undoubtedly inform them that a virtue is "a good quality of the mind by which we live righteously of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us and without us." Very true. Instead, I read my students this passage from Hallie's article:

> For centuries people have understood that habit can be second nature, as much a part of our feelings and behavior as the physical traits that we were born with. People have also known that habit can be made of invisible, intangible iron. It can be hard to break. The iron of the habit of helping was embedded in the soul of Gabrielle Barraud and others in Le Chambon. From this habitual readiness helping the refugees sprang "naturally," like sparks from struck iron.

Naturally is a mysterious word in this context, however, because Magda's welcoming into her home Jews who were being hunted by the authorities was not exactly a natural — in the sense of a *common* — thing to do. Rather, it was very *un*natural. And yet, when I ask my students who in Europe they would wish they could have been like during that time — when I ask who they think was most humane, a word that is simply the adjectival form of *human* — they all answer, "Magda and the villagers."

Here is an odd paradox. In this village, we find people acting "naturally" in ways that are not common, and yet we consider them to have followed the natural law and to be the most humane. We could say the same about Mother Teresa. "What a humanitarian!" we say, only to add paradoxically, "very much *unlike* most humans."

Hallie titled his article "Magda and the Great Virtues" as an echo of a distinction he found in the work of Italian novelist and essayist Natalia Ginzburg (1916-1991), who distinguished between the "little virtues," like thrift and caution, and the "great virtues," like compassion and generosity. Ginzburg "urged us to stop drumming self-serving penny wisdom into the heads of our children," writes Hallie. For "if all we do for our children is pound into their heads reasons for protecting their own hides, their second nature will be as wide as the confines of their own self-seeking skins. One's life is usually about as wide as one's love. But if we make the often-impractical great virtues part of their lives, their second nature will be as wide as their love."

This is how I introduce my students to the relationship between *charity* and the virtues. One's virtues are about as wide and as strong as one's love.

But so, too, faithful love demands virtue. When I ask my students what virtues these villagers needed to do what they did, they immediately hit on *fortitude* and *courage*. You don't hide dozens of Jews in your house with Nazis all around because of a vague sentimental feeling. You need thicker skin than that. You need to be motivated by something other than protecting your own skin. Hallie writes:

> Being motivated by another person's need is not so easy to justify or describe in common-sensical terms; it is not always conducive to self-preservation or comfort or security to help desperate strangers. When you try to talk about the heart virtues, you are always in danger of lapsing into vague sentimentality and empty metaphor, or into mysteries that only faith can embrace whole-heartedly.

Hallie was no religious believer, so when he speaks of "faith" here, he is not referring to himself. He could not really understand the faith of his mother or of the villagers. But he did understand that something was at work in the village, something that worked peace, that united him with others and with the rest of the universe. And for that unifying peace, he had no other word than *God*, even if that word remained a mystery to him.

Perhaps the courage and self-sacrifice we find in Le Chambon is something that, as Hallie suggests, "only faith can embrace whole-heartedly." But Hallie, who confesses to his lack of explicit faith, seems to have embraced it whole-heartedly.

Many of my students are like Hallie; they have an implicit faith they do not fully understand. But they know who they want to be like. A young woman came into my class one day after reading Hallie's account and said of Magda, "I love that woman! I want to *be* that woman!"

Later in the class, I asked my students whether they thought the villagers had acted with the virtue of *prudence*. No, it was *not at all* prudent, some maintained. Their response has much to do with the modern corruption of the word *prudent* to mean careful or not risky. "It was *crazy*," said one young man. Others agreed. The villagers could have been killed. Yes, they could have.

"How about you?" I asked the young woman who had announced her desire to *be* Magda. "Do you think she was crazy?"

"Yes," she said without a pause.

"You want to be like a crazy person?" I asked her.

"Yes," she said again, enthusiastically. People laughed. "No, see, she was crazy *in the right way*," the young woman said.

You can imagine my next question: How do we distinguish crazy *in the right way* from crazy *in the wrong way* or just plain crazy?

We should be forthright about this: The virtues, especially virtues animated by charity, can (and often will) seem "crazy" to people whose primary goal is self-preservation and rational maximization of self-interest. Acting temperately, making others' needs one's own, or having the courage to stand firm for justice against the will of the majority is not easy, especially in a society that favors self-indulgence. Virtue is a lot more difficult than *virtue signaling*.

Hallie cites an old Danish saying: "If there is room in the heart, there is room in the house." This is true but perhaps a little too facile. Hallie notes that one summer during the Nazi occupation, the Trocmés housed and fed in their little presbytery, along with their own four children, 60 Jewish refugees. The problem with the Danish saying, writes Hallie, is that "it makes rescue look easier than it often was." He explains:

> Danger and fear and hunger were always there in the presbytery and elsewhere in Le Chambon. Hospitality is not always easy to give. That this is so is one of the main reasons why there were so few — so very few — rescue operations like that of Le Chambon in the first few years of the forties. That beautiful Danish saying suggests that rescue is no more problematic than opening your heart to people who are not in your family. Life is sometimes more dangerous and harder than the best of old sayings.

Charity demands virtue. And virtue is hard work.

I think it's best to present students with the options and ask them, "Who do you want to be in this story: the villagers, the Nazi soldiers, the obsequious go-along-to-get-along Vichy authorities, or the other Europeans who stood by and did nothing? Who are you *preparing* yourself to be?"

My students know who they *want* to be. They're just not sure that's the kind of person they *can* be. They have so few examples of the virtues to emulate, and so little to help them build habits of selfless self-giving, courage, or temperance.

If the moral life were merely a matter of thinking through moral dilemmas, then academic courses in ethics and moral philosophy might help. But the moral life isn't merely a matter of thinking, and most of those classes do more to confuse students than to help them.

So, what help does understanding Christ and the Trinity offer? I ask, "Who, for Magda and the villagers, was their ultimate authority, their 'king,' and whose law was for them the ultimate rule?"

My students respond immediately, "God's law was their ultimate rule, and God was for them their ultimate authority."

The villagers saw themselves first and foremost as citizens of the Kingdom of God, I suggest, something that was not contrary to their duties in the earthly city but perfective of them. It's not as though they made a point of violating the laws of the French government. But when those laws required them to do something contrary to God's law, they knew whom they needed to obey.

If we wonder what the Kingdom of God is — this "thing" Jesus established that we are supposed to carry on — could we not look at what happened in this little French village and say, "That's what doing our part to establish the Kingdom of God looks like"? This seems reasonable to my students.

"Now, consider," I say. "What was the relationship between Magda and God and God's law?" Did she obey God as a servant obeys her master, out of a spirit of slavery that falls back into fear, as St. Paul puts it? Or did she receive a spirit of adoption that allowed her to look upon God as "Father" (cf. Rom. 8:14-15)?

Did Magda obey God because she *had to*, I ask my students, or did she act like an adopted Son who does what the Father asks because the Son loves the Father? And if, to quote Josef Pieper again, the "whole point of a Christian's life is to become like Christ," then didn't these villagers exemplify and embody that life? Didn't they become Christ for others?

And if so, what made this possible, this amazing courage and self-sacrifice, this mysterious gift of self to others? Magda insists they didn't do it to be "good." So, what motivated it? Wasn't it *love*? Not the sort of love that is only a feeling one enjoys for a while and then moves on. The love of these villagers was a selfless love, a love embodied in acts of courage and self-sacrifice. It was something like Christ's love for us.

What makes this sort of love possible? It is *grace*, which, as St. Thomas teaches, is the presence of the Holy Spirit by which "the love of God is spread abroad in our hearts." We love because God loved us first, calling us into and allowing us to participate in His Trinitarian love (cf. 1 Jn. 4).

In his book *Mere Christianity* (1952), C.S. Lewis poses this question: If we can scarcely imagine a three-person God, what is the good of talking about Him? To which Lewis rightly replies: The goal isn't to talk about Him. "The thing that matters is being actually drawn into that three-personal life." Lewis explains:

> An ordinary simple Christian kneels down to say his prayers. He is trying to get into touch with God. But if he is a Christian he knows that what is prompting him to pray is also God: God, so to speak, inside him. But he also knows that all his real knowledge of God comes through Christ, the Man who was God…. You see what is happening. God is the thing to which he is praying — the goal he is trying to reach. God is also the thing inside him which is pushing him on — the motive power. God is also the road or bridge along which he is being pushed to that goal. So that the whole threefold life of the three-personal Being is actually going on in that ordinary little bedroom where an ordinary man is saying his prayers.

So, too, I propose to my students that every moral act animated by charity is Trinitarian in character. We seek to do the will of the Father, and, in doing so, we seek to make ourselves "like Christ," the incarnate *Son* of God, as members of His Body. So, God is the goal (God the Father). God is also the road or bridge connecting us to that goal (God the Son). And God is also the thing inside us pushing us on, the motive power (God the Holy Spirit). And so, on the Christian account, our moral life — the acts

we do and our preparation for those acts through penance and spiritual development — should be understood as a participation in the divine nature: our sharing in the threefold communion of love shared for all eternity between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And that, for what it's worth, is how I introduce my students to the relationship between the moral life and the Church's teaching about the Triune God. The Trinity is mysterious, but so is love. My goal is to suggest to them that the Trinity is not some side issue in moral theology; rather, it should be constantly affirmed as that which is at the heart of everything we do. ■

AN ANALYSIS OF ANTI-LIFE ATTITUDES

Christopher M. Reilly

Engaging the Morally Unconscious Person

Advocates of the pro-life ethic can do more to understand those who promote or tolerate practices such as abortion, abortion-inducing contraceptives, euthanasia, and physician-assisted suicide. The ancient military advice of Sun Tzu to know one's adversary as well as oneself applies here, and not for purely strategic reasons; we might consider Oscar Wilde's playful counsel that nothing gets under a rival's skin more than forgiveness. Still, if we fail to understand our interlocutors' patterns of moral reasoning, we cannot easily forgive, and we most certainly cannot debate amicably across the dinner table.

Dismissing every anti-life utterance as self-interested and rhetorical distortion will not improve pro-life evangelization or convert hearts and minds. Most certainly there are people and corporations who have chosen an evil path and blatant self-interest in their domination of the most vulnerable in our society, and we must assertively oppose them. But, perhaps more importantly, mischaracterizing a large majority of the anti-life population will likely alienate the very persons we hope to persuade and will reinforce the perception of irreconcilable differences. How, then, can we achieve honest insight into anti-life attitudes while retaining the firm conviction that such mindsets are gravely mistaken?

Such attitudes are characteristic of what Catholic philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1977) called the "morally unconscious person," the kind of individual who teeters casually and heedlessly on a precipice above the depths of a more conscious evil, who meets our pleas to return to a respect for life with blank stares, amusement, sullen grumbles, or even outright resentment. Von Hildebrand's description can be found in his classic work *Christian Ethics* (1953; republished in 2020 as *Ethics*), in which he observes that the morally unconscious person has not decided to be a bad actor; rather, he often perceives and responds to moral values by performing good deeds for others, is sensitive to social norms like politeness and tolerance, and can appreciate non-moral values like the beauty in a sunrise. Still, this kind of half-hearted congeniality is inspired

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