

life in the here and now, but the abundant life that has been promised to us. We sing (with Miss Peggy Lee), "If that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing. Let's break out the booze and have a ball."

Even otherwise solid Catholic theologians have come to overvalue the here and now to such an extent that they oppose the death penalty. Yes, there are also reasons of prudence and humanity that should give a Christian pause

before signing his fellow man's death warrant, but in this age of fear and denial we cannot see much beyond the end of our nose that is said to grow sharp when we are at the point of death. To the arguments of fear whined from every *New York Times* editorial page and preached from every electronic soapbox, we should do as the Pilgrim did when he "put his fingers in his ears and went on crying, 'Life, Life, Eternal Life.'" 

Saint-Séverin, I

by Catharine Savage Brosman

Left Bank, Paris

To pass the time, and get another caffeine fix before the beadle opens up Saint-Séverin, right at eleven, we sit down on a café terrace, just across, and order our *express*. Except for bustle at the doors of tiny restaurants—unloading vegetables, rinsing down the sidewalks, putting out the chairs and pocket-sized iron tables—it is very quiet here, with tourists still in bed, or having coffee

and croissants in their hotel, and not yet ready for another day of obligations. The only other clients at this hour are from the neighborhood, most, I think, *habitués*, one slightly drunk already. The church is buttressed in my memory: *porche*, nave, rose window, late Gothic spires, hooking clouds today—and the cloister, where ten years ago we drank champagne; and at the prow, breaching

waves of the old town, the apse—rebuilt from rubble after explosives, sparing the rest, sheared it off in nineteen-forty-four: low vaulting, mellow stone, glass of garnet and Aegean blue, a cypse of tracery and branching pillars, and the spiraled lines of the famous twisted column at the center, —a sinewy torso by Michelangelo, or a woman in a swirling gown, cut along the bias, arms lifted,

dancing for the Lord. That May morning, fugue, toccata, and chorale by Bach leafed out, with sprays of bridal white and, niched into the great trees of the nave, greenery like resurrection vine. Tourists lingered, stared a bit—I heard some whispers at the side—then ambled on, as the officiant read the vows, and you two repeated them. Visitors this time, we'll walk there now, recalling Cana's wine

and benediction, gracious gifts from One who made life more abundant, whose long torture—nailed to a denatured tree, his body writhing in great pain—caused earth to quake, split rocks, extinguished day, and rent the veil of the old covenant, until an angel pointed to the bare sarcophagus, and light restored the world—stone, wood, and bodies reconciled and whole, all holding heaven's word.

by Joseph Sobran

Media Bias Revisited

Complaints about “media bias” usually boil down to uninteresting charges that the news media tilt their reportage in favor of one party—usually, but not always, the Democrats. So say the Republicans, with some justice, but put this way the indictment is somewhat superficial. Conservatives more keenly accuse those media of being “liberal”—that is, principled enough to prefer a liberal Republican candidate to a notably corrupt Democrat.

I have studied the news media for many years, from afar and from within, and I know that most journalists do try to be impartial. When they fail, the failure is usually unconscious. The code of political neutrality survives its frequent minor violations.

“The style of your own time is always invisible,” the critic Hugh Kenner used to say, citing the true story of a statue, a supposed Etruscan horse that turned out to be a forgery. How was it detected? The 19th-century forger had endowed it with every ancient Etruscan mannerism he could see, Kenner explained, but also with every 19th-century mannerism he (and his contemporaries) couldn’t see. Finally, in the mid-20th century, its 19th-century style gradually “rose to visibility,” and a keen critical eye urged carbon dating, which confirmed suspicions of its true age.

So what unconscious prejudices of our time are passing largely unnoticed in the media? We can spot at least a few. One of the most striking was displayed in the media frenzy earlier this year over the messianic and “inspirational” candidacy of Barack Obama.

Not all such prejudices are political; the deepest one is perhaps materialism, a view that denies any supernatural authority and supports sexual license. The materialistic version of the theory of evolution enjoys a virtually dogmatic status in the news media, which are quick to trumpet any discovery that seems to confirm it.

I was impressed by one detail in the American coverage of the Olympics in China, which was by no means uncritical. The trouble was that the criticism was limited to the Chinese government’s “crackdown on dissent”—deplorable, to be sure, but trivial when compared with its denial of a far more basic freedom: the freedom of the family. Beijing’s monstrous conduct in this area is blandly referred to as its “one-child policy.”

Policy! You might expect those who call abortion “freedom of choice” to be horrified by forced late-term abortions, but this is not the case. Most abortion advocates say nothing about it; others actually defend the “policy,” explaining that, after all, China has a “population problem.” I would prefer to suggest that the Chinese population has a “government problem,” namely tyranny, but our media don’t seem to see it that way.

This old world has always abounded in tyrannies of various sorts, but very few of them have ever thought to restrict the natural right to have children and large families. That area of privacy, at least, has usually gone undisturbed even by otherwise aggressive despotisms.

The most significant thing about this fact is that our news media don’t find it shocking. The phrase “reproductive freedom” has become a dishonest euphemism for legalizing feticide, but this most flagrant outrage gets very little mention. Would Western secularist liberals, who evince indignation far more about restrictions on political dissent than about grisly forced late-term abortions, object very strongly if our putatively democratic regimes adopted similar “policies”?

Our rulers—both actual and would-be—recognize no principled limits on the power of the state. As C.S. Lewis put it, it’s no use telling them to mind their own business, for our whole lives



are their business. Consider what is now called “sex education,” for example: Professedly neutral, it actually encourages children to sin—or in the preferred locution, to be “sexually active”—and to speak the devil’s language, which is “value-free” and “non-judgmental.”

Notice how readily the supposedly neutral news media pick up the lingo of the “progressive” side in these moral controversies: *gay*, *choice*, *women’s* (meaning “feminists”), and all the rest. To be “progressive” means to reject Christian standards of sexual morality. (If termites could talk, they would no doubt call what they are doing to the house progress.)

The sexual revolution has taken place not so much in the homosexual bathhouses of San Francisco and Manhattan as in the marriage bed. That is where contraception, abhorred as immoral and revolting by nearly all professed Christians before 1931, is now accepted as normal for married couples. Few Protestants see anything wrong with it; and even most Catholic priests are now too timid to condemn it in the pulpit. (One of the few who did dare to preach against it in my own staid Northern Virginia parish told me he later found his car vandalized. This happened more than two decades ago!)

Contraception, a taboo topic on television within living memory, has achieved such full respectability that today contraceptive products are freely advertised on prime time. Hardly anyone notices anymore. The style of your own time is always invisible.

