

of man himself.

While Shorto does believe there is more to man than biology (materiality), this “more” doesn’t seem to have any supernatural source. He promotes Descartes’ view of human emotion as the glue that binds the breach between faith and reason. However, this premise reduces religion to little more than sentimentality. And that is a concept which has been condemned by the Church as modernism, a heresy that rejects supernatural revelation and reduces religion to psychologically induced emotionalism or mere neural activity.

Shorto contends that the mystery of humanity can be unveiled in face-to-face dialogue. (In fact, he sees the human face itself as the revelatory vehicle of both reason and emotion.) Yet, while no one can deny that dialogue is a starting point for insight and healing, personal encounter alone is not sufficient to overcome the differences between the conflicting paradigms of truth that separate the scientific camp from the various traditions of religious faith. Differences in fundamental beliefs are not easily bridged, as the split between Islam and the West, and the divide between pro-life and pro-choice views, readily attest.

The ultimate answers must come from a source that is bigger than either biology or emotion, and is not limited by manufactured intellectual constructs. However, being open to those answers requires a proper understanding of—and belief in—God. And belief requires humility, which is a gift of all true religion and presumes a respect for the dignity of man that comes from a source outside of man.

This book is clever, informative, and insightful, yet it must be read with care. For in the end, Shorto does not unite what Descartes has separated. He merely promotes secular humanism.

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The Way of the World

by H.A. Scott Trask

Ghost Train to the Eastern Star: On the Tracks of the Great Railway Bazaar

by Paul Theroux
Boston: Houghton Mifflin;
496 pp., \$28.00



In his essay on “self-reliance,” Emerson wrote that “travelling is a fool’s paradise.” He was referring to those who travel to escape the boredom or sadness of their lives, and who hope to return home somehow transformed. Yet we may add those who travel to boast (“Look, here I am at the Parthenon!” or “I kayaked off Antarctica!”), and those who hope to experience, if only temporarily, a state of bliss, as indicated by the demand for luxurious accommodations. Such vain quests are characteristic of the pampered tourist rather than the adventurous traveler. Travelers don’t know where they’re going, while tourists don’t know where they’ve been.

In all of his travel writing, Paul Theroux has never shrunk from telling it as it is. This is what makes his writing so valuable, so essential. Few tourists would wish to observe his rules of travel: Go alone, go cheap, stay on the ground, be patient, avoid luxury, leave all electronics behind. Yet it is only by following them that one learns anything about the world, or has anything to write about or tell about afterward. “Luxury spoils and infantilizes you and prevents you from knowing the world. That is its purpose.”

In *Ghost Train*, Theroux retraces his 1973 trip—as recounted in *The Great Railway Bazaar* (1975), his first travel book—by train through Asia *via* the Orient Express, and back *via* the Trans-Siberian. His only significant deviation is a northern detour around Iran and Afghanistan, which takes him through the southern Caucasus and former Soviet Central Asia.

This is Theroux’s best, most philo-

sophical work. The motif of change, of relentless transformation as a natural law, suffuses this book and gives it a meditative and slightly mystical air. “It is only with age that you acquire the gift to evaluate decay, the epiphany of Wordsworth . . . nothing is perfect, nothing is complete, nothing lasts.” Travel “gives you glimpses of the past and the future, your own and other people’s.” What he sees is a world that, on balance, is getting worse, despite (or is it because of?) progress, development, globalization.

Most people on earth are poor. Most places on earth are blighted and nothing will stop the blight getting worse. . . . [T]here are too many people and an enormous number of them spend their hungry days thinking about America as the Mother Ship. . . . Most of the world is worsening, shrinking to a ball of bungled desolation. Only the old can really see how gracelessly the world is aging and all that we have lost. . . . No one on earth is well governed.

Theroux does not exempt from this judgment the United States, which he views as something of a paradise lost. What bothers him is “the disposable dreariness of American architecture,” the increased crowding, the erosion of privacy, and, above all, the loss of space. “[It] was the way of the world. The population . . . has doubled in my lifetime, and the old simple world I had known as a boy was gone.”

Everyone he meets on his journey wants to move to America, or Canada, or the western fringe of Europe. In Eastern Europe, “the great wish was to travel west, to leave home.” Rumanians are on the move, “furnishing western Europe with factory workers, hookers, and car thieves.” In Georgia, the young and educated all want to flee to America. The same is true of Azerbaijan, despite its oil wealth and abundance of jobs. Theroux is taken aback by a young and well-employed Azeri patriot, who, after praising the beauty and glory of his country, an-

nounces, "I'm going to Canada." Theroux also puzzles over an Uzbek he met who "seemed to dislike America, but he badly wanted to go to America." He finds this a common attitude among Muslims. Even in Vietnam, a beautiful country whose people Theroux finds self-confident and prosperous, there is a crowd lined up at the American consulate in Saigon "waiting for visas." Hanoi may be a "kind of Asiatic Paris," but the young still "want to go to America."

Everywhere, it seems, "the world of settled people had evolved into a world of people wishing to emigrate." That, of course, is a problem, and not only for the developing world, which cannot afford to lose its most talented and best-educated citizens; it is a problem for us, too. (Even worse, such countries as India and China *can* afford to lose their teeming surplus of younger people.) Theroux finds the universal and foremost motivation for migration to be economic. Whether people are destitute or reasonably well off, they calculate that they can dramatically and instantaneously improve their standard of living simply by moving west, so why stay where they are? I suspect that the image of a sensual paradise projected by film and television is another, possibly more powerful, draw. Who would not want to live in the land of wish and dream? Regardless, the demographic pressure upon the western lands seems certain to increase.

Like Tom Jefferson and Ed Abbey, Theroux hates cities—"I think of them generally as snake pits, places to escape from"—but he loves wilderness and openness as well as unspoiled places, which are vanishing. Some places he visits are being preserved only by violence (*e.g.*, Sri Lanka, which is bedeviled by the Tamil Tigers) or brutal repression (Myanmar), and in such places, the citizens are impoverished. Yet wherever there is development, there is exploitation (of man and nature) and overpopulation. Despite India's boast that "we are modern now," there are 400 million of her people living in poverty. Indian employers refused to tell Theroux how

much they pay their employees. He discovers that low-level tailors earn a mere \$1,000 per year; entry-level call-center workers, as little as \$2,500. Yet meager salaries, made possible by an inexhaustible labor pool (much of it well educated), are what drive the Indian economy:

the half-billion people earning a dollar a day are producing India's food surplus; the sweatshop factory workers are the backbone of its textile industry; and low-paid employees are the workforce of its high-tech sector.

He notes the paradox: "India's poor were its wealth."

Indians wanted him to be dazzled by the new Bangalore ("like Silicon Valley!"), but he is "more horrified than awed." Because of the frenetic construction, "the whole place smoldered in the foul dusty air of a building site." He has difficulty even crossing the street through the throng of people. All the cities are choked with people and traffic. In Chennai (formerly Madras, a city of two million metastasized into a "sprawl of eleven million"), he makes the mistake of trying to walk instead of taking a taxi, and soon repents of his error. The "mobbed streets" are "un-

endurable, pure horror," the exploding cities "nightmarish in new ways."

China, too. Kunming, "a small habitable city I had once visited," has become "an ugly sprawl of . . . four million." It is a microcosm of the new China, "ugly and soulless." He decides to fly to Japan, "reveling in the thought that I was done with China—its factory blighted landscape, its unbreathable air, . . . its honking horn capitalists."

In Tokyo, he glimpses what could be our dystopic future. It is a regimented city in which everything works, and "the worst social problems were solved," but there is little freedom, "an almost robotic obedience, decorum, rigidity, order with no thrills, a scaling down of space, . . . the virtual abolition of private cars, an intimidating police presence." "The price to be paid for success in the future was surrendering space and privacy." Is there no hope, then? There is always hope. Robinson Jeffers points to the mountains, Theroux to the next journey (he is planning to travel through Scandinavia), the Christian to the *Terra Nova*.

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A Pearl and Some Swine

It's Lent, so naturally I'm thinking about Barack Obama. Well, specifically, about his inauguration. You remember, don't you—the day that hope became sight?

I don't want to be overdramatic, but it now seems obvious to me that President Obama's inauguration explains just about everything that's wrong with Christian churches in America.

And really, this has little to do with Obama and everything to do with his choice for the inaugural invocation, "America's Pastor" Rick Warren.

The day after the prayer in question was uttered, I declaimed at length on the *Chronicles* website about Rick Warren's syncretism. The god to whom he prayed had a dash of Christian, a sprinkle of Muslim, and a schtick'l of Jewish. The Word Who became flesh was referred to simply as the "one who changed my life," and that *one* was called by Hebrew, Arabic, Mexican, and English names, in that order.

A number of Christian critics of the prayer agreed with me, at least up to a point. *But*, said they, *at least he ended it on a distinctively Christian note!* Yes, it is true, Warren closed the inaugural invocation by leading the citizens of earth in the Lord's Prayer, "Yeshua, Isa, Hey-zeus, Jesus, who taught us to pray, 'Our Father . . .'"

And that's the greatest horror of it all, especially if we think about this along with the Church Fathers—Saint Augustine in particular.

The season of Lent evolved around the great tradition of baptizing converts at the Easter Vigil, the beginning of Pascha, the Feast of the Resurrection. As the original "Forty Days of Purpose," Lent was a time of preparation for the catechumenate, who were subjected to rigorous discipline, examination, and instruction. In fact, you weren't even allowed to be called a catechumen ("instructed") until you had demonstrated that you had ceased to practice the gross outward sins of

pagan idolatry and adultery. Before that, you were just an "inquirer," a "listener" (*audientes*). It wasn't very seeker sensitive.

What about church? There were no popular songs designed to appeal just to the catechumen, no dramas, no overhead projectors—all had to be memorized. And there was even . . . segregation! The catechumen could go to church along with the faithful, but he was only allowed to participate in half of the service, before he was kicked out and the doors, *the doors* were manned. Why? The ancient Liturgy of Saint James, celebrated at Jerusalem at least as far back as the fourth century, explains it fairly well in one simple line: "Holy things for the holy people." (Response: "One is holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ . . .") The unwashed catechumens are not holy, and so they cannot partake of or even look upon the holy things—the Body and Blood of Jesus. So they are dismissed before the Service of the Faithful.

(Spoiler alert, and question for Rick Warren: Were there any prayers reserved especially for the Service of the Faithful?)

Eight days before Easter, those catechumens deemed fit were elevated to the rank of the *competentes* and began to experience something that isn't a part of your average New Members Class these days—daily exorcisms. Why, you ask? Because these people believed in the Devil, that's why. And who would be the most vulnerable to satanic attacks if not the *competentes*, just days before Baptism?

On the first of the eight days, the *competentes* were given two special treasures, secrets (*Disciplina arcani*) that they were to guard with their lives: the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. The first, preached Augustine, "so that you may know what to believe," and the second, "so that you may know whom to call upon."

"You see," he declared to the about-



to-be-baptized, "you have begun to have God for your Father, and you will have Him so when you are born anew." The *competentes* were learning that, when a Christian prays, he is not addressing Zeus or Baal or some far-away vengeful deity, but his Father. And this is not by accident; it is the result of a special privilege, a holy sort of family planning, one in which the unworthy is united to the Son and adopted into the Father's household.

Parents sometimes, when they have one or two or three children, fear to give birth to any more, lest they reduce the rest to beggars. But because the inheritance He promises us is such that many may possess it without anyone being put in a bind, He has called into His family the peoples of the nations; and the only Son has numberless brothers and sisters who say, "Our Father which art in Heaven, . . ."

In those times, the Church wasn't hawking a product, wasn't selling a road map for life, wasn't convinced that the customer is always right. *These pearls may not be for you.* I mean, yes, they are for you and for the "peoples of all nations," but only if you are willing to count their cost. Who wouldn't want to call God his Father? Well, you perhaps, if you are not willing to go through the Son. Holy things for the holy people; pearls are not for swine. If you are baptized, you can stay for the part of the service where we say the Lord's Prayer.

How's that for marketing? ◊