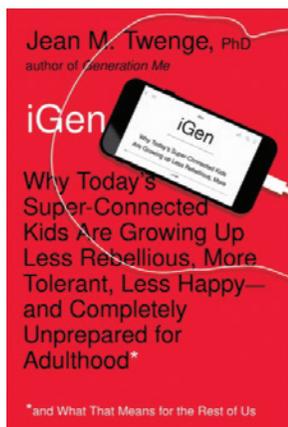


iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—And Completely Unprepared for Adulthood and What that Means for the Rest of Us

by Jean M. Twenge

Reviewed by Chaplain (Major) Delana Small



Dr. Jean M. Twenge of San Diego State University is an expert about the surprising cultural, sociological, religious, and philosophical shifts sweeping the nation. Twenge affirmed her niche for demarcating definitive generational and cultural fault lines by sifting through 11 million nationally representative surveys dating back as early as the 1960s. Twenge's analysis traced the primary culprit behind a sweeping national transformation down to a single, hand-held device—the smartphone. Twenge isolated behaviors, beliefs, and practices from these 11 million surveys to show that individuals born between 1995 to 2012 are unique among her sampling.¹ The correlation she identifies is too significant for science to ignore. Twenge discovered what she calls the *iGeneration*, or *iGen*—those born and bred on the cusp of this specific, revolutionary, and emergent technology.

Twenge describes these phenomena in her book, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, and Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood and What that Means for the Rest of Us*. Her punchy title reveals a smattering of themes to which she brings the rigors of a scientist, and the humor and caution of a parent. Her work both presents viable causation for the mental health

crisis among young people and unpacks core iGen values like inclusivity and political independence. This book illuminates trends in iGen praxis and belief that will shape the nation's religious and cultural identity in the future. Twenge's must-read project deserves consideration from educators, religious leaders, chaplains, clinicians and all varieties of strategic leaders committed to the spiritual health and strength of the nation and in coming generations.

Secular, Not Spiritual

iGen'er epistemology is irreligious, according to Twenge. Her research shows that iGen'ers are not "spiritual, not religious," as is often claimed; instead, they are thoroughly secularized, less religious, and less spiritual than any generation in American history.² In 2016, one in three iGen'ers said that they did not believe in God while one in four said that they never prayed—even once.³ iGen'ers describe themselves as religious illiterates. As the children of Generation X and Millennials, iGen'ers represent—in the flesh—the results of a decline in religious affiliation and spiritual belief over time. Twenge reports that even generic belief in the afterlife has diminished for young people.⁴ What complicates matters is that iGen values emerge apart from any

religious orientation, or at times, in reaction against to organized religion. The “elephant in the room,” as Twenge quips, is distrust among iGen’ers (and the Millennials preceding them) in institutional religion. This is particularly the case because they view institutional religion as a platform for things that are antithetical to their values, such as antigay agendas.⁵ Despite some religious denominations’ efforts to align religion with iGen values, many iGen’ers have entirely disengaged. Twenge predicts a fundamental transformation in American religion in the wake of a lack of religious nurturing in the upbringing of iGen’ers or broad societal expectations that affirm the need for and practice of for religious affiliation, institutional religion, spirituality, and all things ethereal.

A possible byproduct of this dissociation from religion remains an uptick in polarization across American socio-economic, racial, and regional groups. While Twenge reports a general, staggering decline of religious adherents within the iGen population, she draws out nuances in the rates of decline across demographics. Young white adolescents, for instance, are attending religious services at a far lesser rate than young Black adolescents. This demographic divide is amplified as Twenge explores the sharp contrasts in general religious beliefs across these planes of difference. Ironically, in a time of declining religious adherence, religious identity remains a powerful force for instilling difference.⁶

This disenchantment with religion and spirituality has left iGen’ers increasingly ill-equipped to address or even recognize spiritual concerns. iGen’ers tend to leverage the language of other domains to express the intangible, transcendent, and even the components of the self. Twenge cites well-known rhetoric among theologians and sociologists who

suggest iGen’ers’ movement toward “moralistic therapeutic deism.”⁷ Science is a primary conduit for iGen’ers to express belief and explain all existence.⁸ Yet iGen spiritual appetites, declared or otherwise, are unsatiated; Twenge chronicles how ultra-connectivity silences this generation’s need for silence.

No More Silence and Solitude?

In the late-nineteenth century, spiritual seekers aggressively retreated from the “noisy society” of the newly urbanized, industrialized world. Modern marvels like the steam engine, assembly line, telephone, and automobile dashed into the imaginations and realities of everyday people. The collision of innovation and tradition resulted in a cacophony of shifting culture. These transformations progressed society gradually, and perhaps subliminally, to disaffiliate the average person from nature, rest, and the village. In response to this changing world, vested agents of both religion and spirituality reaffirmed the value of silence and solitude over and against the noise in ways both traditional and novel. Harnessing emerging and ancient spiritual disciplines revitalized spiritual seekers and provided ways to calibrate the soul. As solitude became vogue, religious and spiritual practitioners enjoyed its restorative powers to the mind, the body, and the soul.⁹

This natural human instinct to withdraw into the power of silence and solitude is disrupted by the smartphone. Smartphones connect people to one another in ways that can crowd out spaces and times for silences and solitude. According to Twenge smartphones to reach market saturation in eight short years. The ubiquity of the smartphone marked an unprecedented

epoch in human history.¹⁰ No technology in human history—not even the wheel or the printing press—achieved such global domination so quickly. These devices inundated humans in less than a decade and since have become part of everyday life for most cultures across the globe. Today, iGen’ers (along with their parents and grandparents) reach for their smartphones first thing in the morning and the last thing before bed.¹¹ Constant connectivity, Twenge reports, leaves iGen’ers feeling unable to unplug. One teen admits that the continuous texting from friends feels like incessant tapping on her shoulder.¹² While the average adolescent spends roughly 17 hours a day attending school, sleeping, doing homework, and participating in extracurricular activities, he or she still spends six hours engaged with social media on his or her smartphone.¹³ The bustling world that Emerson, Thoreau, and Alger escaped periodically has followed iGen’ers into their classrooms, locker rooms, living rooms, and bedrooms. The elusive silence and solitude, desired in and achieved by bygone eras, evades the smartphone generations, and the iGen in particular.

Twenge charts the toll that forgoing silence and solitude has had on America’s iGen. Reading in general, whether in print or on digital platforms, has declined among this generation exponentially in the last almost two decades. According to a twelve-year-old iGen’er that Twenge interviewed, reading proves difficult because, as this tween says, “I just can’t sit still and be superquiet.”¹⁴ Another student admitted lacking the patience to read, particularly because books are “boring” compared to immediate entertainment that is digitally available and visually stimulating. Standardized test scores also reflect a generation that is struggling to sit still. Written

scores and assessments of critical reading skills reveal startling declines even from the Millennials a generation before.¹⁵ With YouTube, Twitter, and Netflix at one's fingertips, disconnecting and achieving silence is difficult to experience.¹⁶ Hyper connectivity is leaving iGen'ers overstimulated and spiritually undernourished especially when a growing disinterest in general reading can lead to religious and spiritual illiteracy of sacred texts. Twenge bemoans that forgoing healthy solitude for hyper connectivity ultimately is recasting the iGen from the most linked generation of all time to the loneliest.

Cyber Communities and Lingering Loneliness

The Internet and smartphone introduced unprecedented connectivity for human beings. While earlier media afforded novel forms of long-distance communication, the Internet and the iPhone introduced seemingly face-to-face communication, including FaceTime, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams, in a development that rivaled technologies only dreamed of in science fiction like *Back to the Future* or *Star Trek*. Physical human connection and community have been harmed; human relationships and communities migrated to mystical platforms of the virtual, invisible, and the ultimately impersonal.

Twenge suggests physical human connection as a protective factor against mental illness among iGen. One study of iGen adults revealed that those who frequently opted for Facebook connection rather than in-person encounters experienced more mental illness and less life satisfaction. Conversely, those who communed with others in the flesh—and in the same room—experienced improved mental health and expressed more satisfaction in life.¹⁷ Twenge further expounds that daily social networking in lieu of in-person connection compromised mental health by increasing feelings of loneliness, isolation, and exclusion.¹⁸ Additionally, obsession in teens with phones and social media actually interferes with in-person contact, drawing them away from others at school and social gatherings and pulling them back to their screens.¹⁹ Such behaviors produce higher risks for and rates of depression among teens, while activities like playing sports or attending religious services, which are not dependent on phones, reduce this risk by almost 27 percent.²⁰

This epidemic of loneliness is particularly surprising among iGen'ers when one considers this generation's capacity for healthy community. Twenge acknowledges an affinity for philanthropy and charity among iGen individuals. Following the 2009 economic recession, many hoped that the iGen, then children,

would transform culture, particularly in the areas of economic restraint and social reform.²¹ Twenge reports that these are the values that iGen'ers express across their social media platforms. iGen activists enthusiastically leverage social media to engage their political preferences and beliefs and to support their causes; the challenge, Twenge remarks, remains that of matching words and deeds.²² Twenge encourages drawing out iGen'ers from their "echo chambers" as they "cluster" exclusively with other like-minded people on their social media platforms.²³ Bridging iGen'er ideals and practice may be the solvent for which they long so deeply.

Conclusion

Twenge exposes the longings among America's youth for community, connection, and spirituality through empirical research. Twenge's project is about the problems experienced among the iGen, their parents, and the generations navigating new technologies, post religious landscapes, and political polarization. In writing of these subjects, she offers solutions to be considered and applied in all arenas of strategic change. This book is a vital resource for those hoping to understand our culture and promote such positive change.

Today, **Chaplain (Major) Delana Small** is serving in the United States Army Institute for Religious Leadership (USA-IRL), Fort Jackson, South Carolina. In this strategic capacity, Delana is helping modernize the resources and practices of the Chaplain Corps to help build healthy Army communities and empower life-change in Soldiers, Families, and Civilians.

NOTES

1 Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood and What that Means for the Rest of Us* (New York: Atria Paperback, 2017), 6.

2 Twenge, *iGen*, 132.

3 Twenge, *iGen*, 126.

4 Twenge, *iGen*, 128.

5 Twenge, *iGen*, 139.

6 Twenge, *iGen*, 132-7.

7 Twenge, *iGen*, 138.

8 Twenge, *iGen*, 139.

9 See Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012).

10 Twenge, *iGen*, 2.

11 Twenge, *iGen*, 50.

12 Twenge, *iGen*, 56.

13 Twenge, *iGen*, 51.

14 Twenge, *iGen*, 61.

15 Twenge, *iGen*, 63.

16 Twenge, *iGen*, 66.

17 Twenge, *iGen*, 79.

18 Twenge, *iGen*, 80.

19 Twenge, *iGen*, 81.

20 Twenge, *iGen*, 82.

21 Twenge, *iGen*, 173.

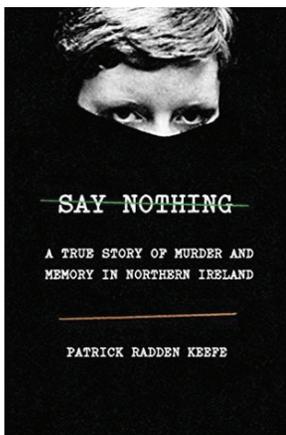
22 Twenge, *iGen*, 174-5.

23 Twenge, *iGen*, 287.

Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland

by Patrick Radden Keefe

Reviewed by Chaplain (Captain) Anna Page



The one who controls the narrative, controls the truth. The one who controls the truth, holds the power. This power then becomes a tool; a tool wielded for healing, or a tool wielded for suffering. It is this discussion of power, truth-making, and truth-telling that journalist Patrick Radden Keefe explores in his book *Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland*.

Say Nothing documents the strife and unrest in Northern Ireland from the 1960s through today by weaving together narratives from multiple sides of a conflict. This conflict, known as “the Troubles,” raged for over 30 years and pitted Catholic nationalist against Protestant loyalist, Northern Irish against British, and even neighbor against neighbor. The Troubles erupted after centuries of ethno-nationalist-religious tensions between Ireland and Great Britain. In particular, Keefe suggests in *Say*

Nothing that the Troubles began in response to the oppression and injustice faced by the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland. The ensuing conflict appears to have been fought like many irregular wars. As is common in irregular warfare, grey area exists in the moral discourse of right versus wrong. Keefe captures this nuance in his narrative history.

Throughout the book, Keefe uses first person accounts to humanize a history that is often simplified – or even forgotten about – by people not of Irish descent. Through the use of interviews primarily taken from the John J. Burns Library at Boston College, Keefe inspires readers to critically consider ‘Who is in the right?’, ‘Who is in the wrong?’, and ‘How does history faithfully tell a story?’. This nuancing of “right” and “wrong” is accomplished by the storylines of those who experienced the Troubles. *Say Nothing*

introduces readers to members of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) who wrestled with responding to perceived injustice and fought in the Troubles, families of victims who had been “disappeared” during this era, British political figures whose policies impacted lived experiences of minority groups, and even clergy who found themselves operating in the grey of ethno-religious conflict. As Keefe writes, “This is not a history book but a work of narrative nonfiction.” As a piece of nonfiction, *Say Nothing* provides a historical account to be learned and considered. As a narrative, humanity—in all its complexity—is strewn throughout the pages from the interpersonal to geopolitical dialogues.

Overall, *Say Nothing* is a captivating read for anyone interested in contemporary ethno-religious conflict, civil rights movements, and reactions to oppression, violence and political change, the radicalization of people and movements, healing from individual and collective trauma, and the mythologizing and truth telling of history. Subplots also exist within these major themes. The first is the role of women in warfare and political movements. Keefe’s research includes interviews from the Price sisters who were key players in the Provisional IRA. Keefe details the operational and strategic support provided by these women during the Troubles. In this vein, *Say Nothing* is reminiscent of *The Daughters of Kobani: A Story of Rebellion, Courage, and Justice* by Gayle Tzemach Lemmon.

Another subplot is the role of clergy and the local church during times of conflict. Interviews recount that clergy provided both sacramental and political support during the height of the Troubles and the peacemaking process. This makes *Say Nothing* an interesting read when considered alongside Phil Klay’s *Missionaries*, which discusses the role of clergy in the peacemaking process in Colombia in the 2000s.

Finally, the last subplot is about reckoning with the past. In part three of *Say Nothing*, Keefe explores the healing process. He details his conversations with former members of the IRA and with the surviving family of Jean McConville, one of the “disappeared.” Moral injury becomes obvious when talking with former IRA members. Many of them express regret, a sense of betrayal, guilt and shame, and signs of moral distress. When talking with the surviving family, the importance of closure and truth-telling in healing become paramount. The McConville family longs for an acknowledgement from the members of the IRA of their role in the disappearance and death of their mother. For those familiar with the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in South Africa or the *desaparecidos* in Argentina and Chile, the healing and reconciliation process in *Say Nothing* will sound familiar. Keefe’s book provides another perspective on this global human rights issue.

Though Keefe highlights many important and timely themes in *Say Nothing*, it is exactly these myriad themes that make

Say Nothing a cumbersome read. *Say Nothing* came to a natural end in section two of three. Section three, “Reckoning,” could be its own book focusing on the aftermath of collective trauma. If one were not reading Keefe’s book for a review or for research purposes, it would have been easy to overlook themes or be tempted to skim multiple chapters. *Say Nothing* is one of those books best used as a reference if interested in a specific theme. To this end, Keefe provides an index for quick reference.

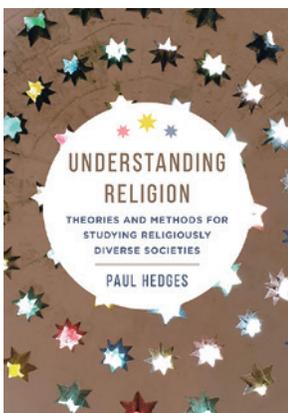
Ultimately, *Say Nothing* is a worthwhile read for chaplains. The connection between the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps and *Say Nothing* may not be apparent at first given the setting of the book. However, the themes discussed transcend the immediate conflict and have applicability for a variety of situations. For the Chaplain as religious advisor, *Say Nothing*’s context of ethno-religious conflict underscores the importance of Commanders understanding the religious and ethnic dynamics at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. For the Chaplain as religious leader, *Say Nothing* is a nod to the positive impact that clergy can have in the peacemaking process during and after conflict on the personal, interpersonal, and political levels. Finally, as persons who are concerned with truth-telling and truth-making in a power-wielding institution, *Say Nothing* is a reminder to Chaplains of the pain and strife that comes when nothing is said.

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Understanding Religion: Theories and Methods for Studying Religiously Diverse Societies

by Paul Hedges

Reviewed by Chaplain (Major) Andrew Shriver



Paul Hedges, in his book *Understanding Religion: Theories and Methods for Studying Religiously Diverse Societies*, provides several key lenses that facilitate key chaplain competencies. The views he presents enable religious advisement research and analysis capabilities to be developed to provide relevant and critical information to military leaders and service members. Hedges is a distinguished scholar in the field of religion and international relations who has worked with a diverse range of military professionals in understanding this domain's impact on their future enterprises. This broad experience brings invaluable insight to the book.

This work does not follow in the common model of World Religions Paradigm (WRP) footsteps like Christopher Partridge's *Introduction to World Religions* (2018), Jeffrey Brodd's *Invitation to World* (2021), and the most recent work by the team that included the late Willard Oxtoby, *A Concise Introduction to World Religions* (2019). *Understanding Religion* is an incredibly useful text because it provides methods and theories that help develop a perception about religious impacts around the globe and by establishing a foundation for strategic, operational, and tactical military leaders. Hedges employs a dynamic approach to religion:

Whatever 'religion' may be (and taking seriously critiques that suggest we abandon the term altogether), it is neither monolithic, sui generis, nor clearly definable.

Therefore, being multidisciplinary, or even interdisciplinary, is essential. We should have a diverse toolkit. This I term methodological polymorphism, which is to say that our method must take on a variety of forms in differing circumstances.¹

The fusion of viewpoints within this text models discernment of the utility of various methods that are crucial in developing religious impact assessments. Members of the Chaplain Corps will find tools to analyze spiritual effects on military operations as well as the social, political, spiritual, and cultural aspects that faith and belief systems have in many communities.

Hedges articulates these lenses in a book that assists in bringing clarity and understanding to concerns such as: insider-outsider perspectives, the effects of gender and sexuality on religious practices. The book also touches on the history of religions, the use of power and authority, and social constructionism as they related to religious expression. Hedges reveals the importance of identity and its role in spiritual communities, the legacies of colonialism and decolonization on people's understanding of religion, the cognitive science of religion, and its effects on ethics. Hedges also discusses the material aspects of spiritual experiences to include the importance of buildings, clothing, and physical movement. Especially significant is this work's discussions of the power of ritual and myth to influence the information domain, theories of

religious violence, warfare, and conflict. Hedges confronts secularism's effect, the geography of religion and sacred sites and different conflicts related to place, and the relationship of religion and governance within a faith or belief system as well as its impact on local, regional, global politics.

Researchers and publishing firms over the last twenty years have filled niche areas on religion, spirituality, international relations, and their interactions within political and military dynamics. Presses like Palgrave, Routledge, Notre Dame Press, Harvard University Press, Oxford University Press, the Army War College, the Naval War College, and other publishing outlets, continue to produce specialized work that continues to shape the contours of the field. There is, however, a lack of entry-level generalist work that can help teach some of the critical basics in how to carry out high quality research in this field.

Authors other than Hedges tend to rely on one specific focus or discipline to develop external religious advisement capabilities within learners. They do so by using lenses as diverse as: comparative religion, the phenomenology, anthropology of religion, sociology of religion, philosophy of religion, theology, ethnography, religion and literature, material religion, critical theory, feminism, postcolonial theory, de-colonial theory, and hermeneutics. *Understanding Religion* proceeds differently by touching on a wide multitude of different disciplines. These approaches are seamlessly interwoven throughout each of the book's eighteen chapters.

Each chapter includes a reflection section and a questions that help to deepen critical thinking skills. Each also includes a further reading section that can aid those interested in certain topics

to delve deeper into the best current literature on a particular topic.

Throughout the work, there are text boxes that explain important concepts and their relevance. An example is the Chinese term *xiejiao*, "which goes back to the Ming Dynasty to identify, 'unacceptable traditions'. The Chinese characters are *xie*, meaning 'false', 'erroneous', 'unorthodox'; and *jiao* meaning 'tradition/teaching'. Decisions as to what is *xiejiao*, that is, 'heterodoxy/heresy,' are not normally theological, and the classification has been the government's prerogative."² This term is currently being used to rout numerous religious group that are seen as a danger to the Community Party. Taiwan has developed especially after the end of martial law in the 1990s a freedom of religion and has a myriad of faith and belief groups that have impacted in positive ways on the culture and society of the island and have provided humanitarian assistance across south-east Asia to include efforts on mainland China. An invaluable glossary defines many key technical terms while also describing significant scholars and their areas of expertise. A number of case studies are relevant to U.S. military operations. These delve into topics such as mosques, minarets, and power or illustrates the varied approaches within Buddhism on violence. In sum, Hedges explains the importance of religion in this context, "In its varied uses, civil religion broadly refers to common aspects of national belief that provide a unifying bond and give a sacred underpinning to national life."³ The fusion of these horizons help to develop discernment about the utility of various methods for developing religious impact assessments that military leaders will find beneficial.

Hedges highlights several constructs that are crucial within the religious advisement domain. He explains:

If religion's place in society is changing in the modern world, secularization may be only one trend. Jayeel Serrano Cornelio speaks of four different trends [secularization, sacralization, detraditionalization, and universalization]... These are not all necessarily seen in the same place, and can be at times conflicting or overlapping trends. The rise of the so-called mega-church is indicative of aspects of these. Contemporary forms of religiosity can never simply be a "return" to the pre-modern. Tradition is rethought and re-expressed, or selectively kept. Nevertheless, in our context, some scholars suggest that whereas secular modernity gave us disenchantment, we are today witnessing a re-enchantment of the world.⁴

Military leaders need to comprehend that the sacred imbues powerful influences on numerous local populations around the world and to disregard these could jeopardize the success of any offense, defense, or stability operation.

I highly recommend this book as a resource for developing a more multifaceted and dynamic Army Chaplaincy that can provide religious support while also being able to advise military leaders in this contemporary age of mosaic warfare.⁵

Hedges has worked with and trained senior military professionals from many different nations at his current post in Singapore's military academic research center, which is comparable to the U.S. Department of Defense's National Defense University. His current work is a byproduct of these experiences that have revealed what he sees as a blind spot within these military leaders who do not understand that religion effects many regions across the world. The

effects of this influence are crucial in the creation of superior tactical and strategic religious advisement products that support military operations, command teams, and service members. This book can assist everyone in the entire Army Chaplain Corps, from the newest professionals in the Corps to the more seasoned Chaplains and

Religious Affairs NCOs, in becoming better subject matter experts who can convey significant religious dynamics in a timely manner. There are many tools that we use in providing religious support and conducting internal religious advisement to Command Teams. There are few current, relevant texts that are comprehensive or affordable regarding

external religious advisement despite this being a significant part of the Chaplain Corps mission. This text is a primer in this unique area of study that would benefit Army leaders in advisement. Using this resource, the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps can build the capacity to carry out this critical task in the forge of future operations.

Chaplain (Major) Andrew Shriver serves with 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division. He holds a M.A. (Christian Formation and Ministry) Wheaton College Graduate School M.A. (Christian and Islamic History), Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary B.A. (History), Gordon College. He has researched Global Religious Dynamics for the past 24 years, enjoys supporting many Senior Chaplain Leaders in DoD, and looks forward to providing relevant analysis in this unique field of study in future positions.

NOTES

1 Hedges, Paul. *Understanding Religion: Theories and Methods for Studying Religiously Diverse Societies*. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 8-9.

2 Hedges. *Understanding Religion*, 27.

3 Hedges, *Understanding Religion*, 431.

4 Hedges, *Understanding Religion*, 386.

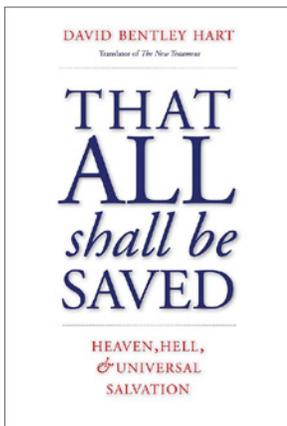
5 The term coined by Thomas Burns, Director, Strategic Technology Office, Defense Advanced Research Project

Agency (DARPA), to explain the new system of systems that incorporates both lethal and non-lethal effects (to include taking into account religious soft power elements in a given region) to achieve success in future military operations.

That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation

by David Bentley Hart

Reviewed by Chaplain (Major) Sean A. Levine



In a poignant and concise book entitled *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation* David Bentley Hart addresses what he considers to be one of modern Christianity's most troubling theological, philosophical, exegetical, logical, and moral problems.¹ In short, Hart finds the concept of eternal damnation to be not only theologically and philosophically incoherent but also exegetically unnecessary, logically fallacious, and morally repugnant. He takes issue with this doctrine in the eloquent and straight-forward voice that Hart's readers have come to admire.

Hart organizes his book masterfully. After the brief introduction, Part One defines and interrogates of the idea of an eternal hell. Part Two of Hart's book lays out the philosophical, theological, and exegetical rationale for *apokatastasis*, and he presents this part of his argument in four meditations. Part Three, "Final Remarks," serves to bring the major lines of the book's arguments together in a brief conclusion. This book challenges widely held conceptualizations of heaven, hell, and salvation as these are conceived of in Western (and in much Eastern) Christianity, and his arguments merit reflective engagement.

According to Hart, it is not the Bible that stands in the way of our potential acceptance of his lines of reasoning (about Christ, free will, the Gospel, heaven, hell, and universal salvation) but rather our longstanding loyalty

to previously, often uncritically, accepted systematic theologies. "Theologians are often the most cavalier in their treatment of the [biblical] texts, chiefly because their first loyalty is usually to the grand systems of belief they have devised or adopted; but the Bible is not a system."² All readers of the Bible read it within a context that conditions and determines what the Bible is allowed to mean. Hart points out, as do many hermeneutics scholars, that theological systems form the determinative lenses through which Scripture is read.

Along these lines, Hart suggests that the course of Christian thought in the West has been misguided at key points in Christian history. Examples of this include Augustine of Hippo and Anselm of Canterbury as progenitors of what Hart perceives as disastrous theological systems that have dominated Western Christianity for millennia. Hart asserts that the systems of theology developed under the influence of such missteps predispose people—theologians, clergy, and laity alike—to interpretations of Scripture that contradict good sense, compassion, and sound theological and philosophical logic. Some readers will object to the idea of holding God to the standards of human logic. Throughout this book, Hart consistently points out that retreat into a feigned, convenient mysteriousness as a cover for pervasive logical contradiction is an impoverished method of philosophical, theological, and exegetical discourse.

Hart exposes the problems inherent to widely held Christian visions of heaven, hell, and salvation. He offers an alternative Christian vision: universal salvation. Hart's treatise focuses on an explanation and defense of *apokatastasis*, or the ultimate redemption of the entire created order, including the redemption of all rational life and of all human beings. He steps beyond the popular idea of a universalism that dares to hope for universal salvation despite obvious exegetical and dogmatic odds.³ Instead, as he explains,

The position I want to attempt to argue, therefore, to see how well it holds together, is more extreme: to wit, that, if Christianity is in any way true, Christians dare not *doubt* the salvation of all, and that any understanding of what God accomplished in Christ that does not include the assurance of a final *apokatastasis* in which all things created are redeemed and joined to God is ultimately entirely incoherent and unworthy of rational faith.⁴

Apokatastasis includes the redemption and salvation of all rational beings—the finding of their ultimate fulfillment in the unhindered pursuit of the Good defined here as an unimpeded growth in relationship with God, the Creator.

Hart bases his argument for *apokatastasis* on ancient philosophy, Eastern patristic Christian sources, and biblical exegesis. At the core of his argument, is Hart's assertion that there is no need to postulate an everlasting hell, for there will, in the end, be no eternally unrepentant rational beings to inhabit such a horrid place. Further, he asserts that no biblical texts require belief in an everlasting hell. Hart points out the deep incoherence of the idea that an All-Loving God would set the necessary conditions for a rational being,

a human person, to consign him/herself to an everlasting hell. Whether through ignorance or error in the temporally finite world, no waywardness warrants an everlasting, infinite measure of suffering and pain as punishment. In other words, is it truly reasonable to insist on an everlasting and non-contingent penalty for a temporal and contingent earthly condition and behavior?

Hart also argues that the idea that a truly free and rational human being would eternally resist the love, mercy, and acceptance of God seems preposterous. The idea of everlasting resistance to God's merciful acceptance—to the love and the very essence and source of the Good toward which the rational human being is designed to aim—violates the philosophical definitions of the terms being used. For example, in popular American thought human freedom connotes unlimited personal choice. The classical definition of human freedom, however, describes an unhindered, free pursuit of the Good—the unimpeded progress toward the final cause, the teleology, toward which a person's existence is ontologically directed. For Christianity, human freedom is the unhindered pursuit of an ever-growing and ever-deepening relationship to God. The idea that human freedom *must* contain the ability to endlessly refuse God's offer of reconciliation contradicts important and often ignored streams of historic Christian thought and belief, Hart argues. One may reasonably ask under what rationally conceived conditions might a truly free and truly rational being, created to pursue the Good, having finally found the Good in God, not freely and rationally chose relationship with God? Furthermore, what truly Good and Loving God would end the opportunity to turn toward God at the moment of death; at the *terminus* of a contingent earthly existence?

At the center of Hart's argument are two key ingredients: first, a metaphysics that allows for repentance after death and, second, a call to return to the classical vision of human freedom. In the standard Western vision of metaphysics and of human freedom, human beings misuse their freedom to willfully rebel against God and are sealed forever in that rebellion at death. In the classical Greek and in the Eastern Christian vision of human freedom, free will was compromised by the premature acceptance of the responsibility that comes with the power to deliberate. This premature acceptance of deliberative responsibility compromised, disoriented, and confused human freedom through the introduction of a foreign deliberative, or gnomic, element.⁵ Wayward freedom will be overcome only by the beatific vision in death when the veil that covers the mystery of God's Being is finally lifted. In this view, the path to the Good and the Beautiful will remain ever open to the penitent no matter how long it may take for each prodigal to find his/her way home.

Hart's explication of the classical Christian concept of human freedom is worth exploring in relatively intensive detail. It is informed by his description of the free will experienced by Jesus as described by St. Maximus the Confessor. If true freedom is the capacity for a rational being to finally reject God through an exercise of the gnomic, deliberative will (as opposed to the natural will aimed toward relationship to and union with God), then Jesus Christ could not have been fully human. Instead, Jesus would only seem to be human, for Christ did not embody the gnomic, or deliberative, will that would have made Him morally deficient and rationally weak enough to turn from the will of the Father.⁶ Christ, the true human being, embodied an unhindered, natural human will oriented completely toward God the

Father; his was a perfect and thus true, authentic, and complete human freedom uncorrupted by sin. The tragic turning away from God that has characterized humanity since the disobedience of our primordial first parents does not result from a natural human capacity but from the corruption of the human will through sin. This is a sickness, a character flaw that Christ did not embody.

Hart's arguments open many opportunities for objection from those who disagree with him. Yet, the imperative to read and think through the arguments in this text, its premises and conclusions, comes not from Hart's historical, theological, exegetical, and philosophical acumen but from his moral sensibility; the moral objection in particular impels pastoral attention.

Hart's views have many disapprovers and opponents. However, I encourage thoughtful readers to engage this text. If you are a Christian pastor, or a non-Christian cleric interested in Christian theology, reading and considering Hart's arguments, whatever your visceral and/or intellectual response might be in the end, will be of great benefit to your pastoral approach and practice.

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NOTES

1 David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell & Universal Salvation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

2 Hart, *Saved*, 161.

3 The German theologian Jürgen Moltmann emphasized

universal salvation as a "certain hope" and there are many other brands of merely "hopeful universalism" that are denied any dogmatic status, as if to suggest that we have no idea what it is that God intends, but we can "hope for the best." <https://www.sdmorrison.org/universalism-certain-hope-jurgen-moltmann/>

4 Hart, *Saved*, 66.

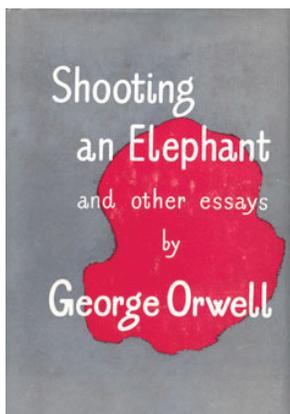
5 Hart, *Saved*, 36. Here, Hart relies on the looming patristic figure of St. Maximus the Confessor (c. 580-662), arguably one of the most brilliant post-Nicene Church Fathers.

6 Hart, *Saved*, 189.

Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays

by George Orwell

Review by Chaplain (Captain) Caleb Miller



There are three reasons the *U.S. Army Chaplain Corps Journal* benefits from a review of classic essays from the author George Orwell. First, there is considerable overlap between the theme and focus of each of Orwell's essays and the subjects chaplains would do well to study in-depth anyway. Second, because of the time-tested quality of his work, his insights have an even sharper edge when they cut into the biases of our own time, or they may strike us with their applicability to current events. Third, his works have gone the way of classics that are often referenced but seldom read or engaged at a deep level—and his non-fiction, rather than his more popular fiction, provides a helpful corrective.

Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays is a collection of writings published between 1931 and 1949 by the essayist/novelist Eric Blair, better known today by his pen name George Orwell. The essays appeared in magazines of literature, politics, and culture. Orwell deals with a wide range of topics in these essays—from memoirs of life as part of an imperial peacekeeping force in Burma in “Shooting an Elephant” and “A Hanging,” to musings about the love of nature in “Thoughts on the Common Toad,” to a reflection on the mundane realities of life as a time-crunched book reviewer in “Confessions of a Book Reviewer.” In each work Orwell blends memoir with the sort of commentary typical of an explanatory or academic essay.

As mentioned above, the essays are chock full of the kind of content chaplains already

demonstrate interest in by drafting books, articles and curriculum year after year to address: themes like trauma and moral injury, the corrosive effects of vague or illogical writing, a simple love of nature and the encroachment of technology on what makes life worth living (“if we kill all pleasure in the actual process of life, what sort of future are we preparing for ourselves?”¹), and the dynamic relationship between a competitive nature, nationalism, and violence. There are crisp quotes on nearly every page that could easily be integrated into presentations and studies.

The three opening memoirs justify exploring the book: a description of policing with running commentary on colonialism (“Shooting an Elephant”), accounts of an execution (“A Hanging”), or suffering in an unsanitary and unsafe hospital (“How the Poor Die”). Orwell explains in a visceral way his emotional and intellectual struggle between the wracking guilt of acting for despotic and cruel British imperial foreign policy in the East and the hatred and resentment he felt for the Burmese people. This visceral quality remains throughout the events leading him to stalk an elephant out of a sense of personal embarrassment and wanting to save face with the locals.

Orwell wrote before the terms “PTSD” or “moral injury” were coined, but provides these concepts with more lived-body detail than any clinical rehearsal of symptoms or behaviors can. In one well-known account of an execution, he writes:

“When I saw the prisoner step aside to avoid the puddle I saw the mystery, the unspeakable wrongness, of cutting a life short when it is in full tide. [...] His eyes saw the yellow gravel and grey walls, and his brain still remembered, foresaw, reasoned—reasoned even about puddles. He and we were a party of men walking together, seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding the same world; and in two minutes, with a sudden snap, one of us would be gone— one mind less, one world less.”²

Orwell was by all accounts an atheistic humanist and socialist. He was critical of capitalism and organized religion. Even so, he offers us (as chaplains from a variety of faith traditions who have our own convictions on such matters) concrete examples of what it looks like to face one’s past or provide live-giving hope, encouragement, and a chance to reflect to others when the world is frightening and confusing. We seek to offer similar reassurances to a demographic of Soldiers that may be closer to Orwell’s way of thinking than our own. Consider how remarkably applicable these lines about the beauty of nature remain even in the political discourse of today, with COVID-19 continuing to spread at alarming rates, civil unrest evident in conspiratorial accusations, and the tensions in eastern Europe exposing the reality of an ongoing Cold War:

So long as you are not actually ill, hungry, frightened or immured in a prison or holiday camp, spring is still spring. The atom bombs are piling up in the factories, the police are prowling through the cities, the lies are streaming from the loudspeakers, but the earth is still going round the sun, and neither

the dictators nor the bureaucrats, deeply as they disapprove of the process, are able to prevent it.³

A second reason to read or revisit Orwell has to do with what it means to be well-read—that is, what it means to regularly digest new books while simultaneously serving as staff officers and religious leaders. GEN (R) Stanley McChrystal has recently challenged military leaders to read “eclectically,”⁴ that is, outside of their profession to break out of old patterns and search for new concepts. In a similar vein C.S. Lewis famously recommended to readers that they never allow themselves a new book till they first read an old one—a necessary practice because readers “need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period.”⁵ Orwell is an example of being “eclectic” in both senses. Though not “old” by Lewis’ standards (Orwell and Lewis were contemporaries), and not too far outside the realm of what chaplains and other leaders are discussing today, Orwell’s various essays are aging. In nine years the oldest of the collection turns one hundred years old. Their quality and popularity make them ageless.

Orwell’s work is old enough to highlight some “mistakes” in our period in history yet not so old as to make for arduous reading. An example of a challenge to our way of thinking comes in a warning that competitive international sports promote a type of dangerous regionalism or nationalism—“sport is frankly mimic warfare”⁶—a sentiment that clashes with uncritical acceptance of the normalcy of the Super Bowl, World Cup, or Olympic Games, yet might help explain why modern athletes (and many hapless referees) regularly receive death threats. On the other hand, Orwell offers commentary on cultural

attitudes towards violence that are remarkably similar to the sort of fixation encountered on 24-hour cable news or live and graphic Twitter updates. He notes the media coverage of nine recent murders in England: “the amount of literature surrounding them, in the form of newspaper write-ups, criminological treatises and reminiscences by lawyers and police officers, would make a considerable library.”⁷

A final reason to read Orwell goes beyond practical considerations and into deeper engagement with Orwell as an author as an exercise in empathy and careful analysis, and discover things that literary critics have long known. His works have gone the way of so many “classics,” often referenced but less often read and seldom engaged at a deep level. In terms of literary accomplishment, Orwell is a towering figure synonymous with descriptive analysis and an economy of words. In terms of political commentary in pop culture, Orwell’s name has become synonymous with vague and ominous complaints about tyranny. There is nothing inherently wrong with the popularity of *Animal Farm* and *1984*, but to stop there is to miss out on Orwell’s original and greatest capacity for insight. When his mind was not preoccupied with fictional world-building it was freer to find an object of interest, and then ruthlessly direct all its creative powers on that point.

Take away Orwell’s fiction and he may not have become the household name he is today, but there would be other dystopias or subversions of communism to read—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Ayn Rand, and Aldous Huxley come to mind, though their ideological relationship to Orwell is more contrastive than complementary. Take away his style of essay, however, and a whole genre suffers—the Neil Postmans, Joan

Didions, Malcolm Gladwells of recent decades may still have emerged, but they would lack quite a bit of source material, and a key role model.

The essays reveal some of how Eric Blair has been lost behind the façade of Orwell. In the novels we encounter Orwell the prophet, but in the essays we get glimpses of the man behind the pen name—former Imperial police

officer fluent in Burmese, dish washer, professional book reviewer, aspiring poet, school teacher, voracious reader, homeless journalist, war correspondent, broadcaster, and literary editor. In “Politics and English Language,” Orwell complained that modern political writing “consists in gumming together long strips of words which have already been set in order by someone else,”⁸ and his own

vocabulary has been co-opted for that purpose in a way that, if he were living today, would probably horrify him.⁹

Those who have read more extensively on Orwell know this is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg.¹⁰ Unit ministry teams and leaders from across the Corps, and officers across the force, may make many more connections than can be listed in a brief review here.

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NOTES

1 Orwell, Thoughts on the Common Toad, *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays*, 165.

2 Orwell, “A Hanging,” *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays*, 15-16.

3 Orwell, “Thoughts on the Common Toad” in *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays*, 165.

4 Included on GEN McChrystal’s suggested reading list is Alexander de Toqueville’s *Democracy in America*, written by a cultural outsider in the 1830’s. “Read Eclectically: Stanley McChrystal’s Book Recommendations.” *From the Green Notebook*, 02/21/2021 <https://fromthegreennotebook.com/2021/02/21/read-eclectically-stan-mcchrystals-book-recommendations/>

5 C.S Lewis, Introduction, *St Athanasius’ On the Incarnation* (London, 1944), v.

6 Orwell, “The Sporting Spirit” in *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays*, 152.

7 Orwell, “Decline of the English Murder” in *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays*, 157.

8 George Orwell, “Politics and English Language,” *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1950), 85.

9 1984 is a work of its time, yet also relevant for the political and cultural realities of today’s globally networked online world. References to “thought crime,” “thought police,” and “Big Brother” from the novel multiply online on a daily basis, often by people

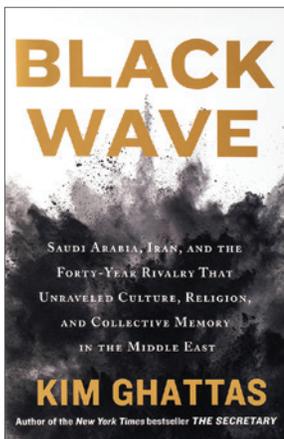
diametrically opposed to one another politically but convinced the other side constitutes totalitarianism. As one among a host of recent reviewers of 1984 has noted, “it’s almost impossible to talk about propaganda, surveillance, authoritarian politics, or perversions of truth without dropping a reference to 1984.” “Doublethink Is Stronger Than Orwell Imagined: What 1984 Means Today” *The Atlantic*, July 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/07/1984-george-orwell/590638/>

10 For other nonfiction by Orwell, see *Homage to Catalonia* (New York: Harcourt, 1952) and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (New York: Harcourt, 1958). One recent biography is D. L. Taylor, *Orwell: the Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003).

Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Forty-Year Rivalry that Unraveled Culture, Religion, and Collective Memory in the Middle East

by Kim Ghattas

Reviewed by Sergeant Major Daniel Roberts



Black Wave is a highly detailed and compelling book by Kim Ghattas, an Emmy Award-winning author from Lebanon. The book begins in 1977 with the lead up to Ayatollah Khomeini's triumphant return to Iran and carries readers through the 2018 murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, an event that sparked an outcry around the world. Ghattas takes readers on a 40-year journey through the Middle East that includes violence, political intrigue, religious zealotry, and patriotic activism. Ghattas layers a depth of biographical details of the key players who shaped narratives and activated pivotal events that define the current state of the Middle East. I provide here a short treatment of the main themes of the book as well as practical ideas for religious professionals who work in the context of national defense.

Ghattas spends little time in describing the United States' involvement in the Middle East during this period. Instead, she zeroes in on the region's internal actors and the efforts they made to destroy the hopes of people who did not want to see the area become a bastion of bigotry and oppression: "Nothing has changed the Arab and Muslim world as deeply and fundamentally as the events of 1979...The radical legacy of 1979...began a process that transformed societies and altered cultural and religious preferences."¹

Chief among the bad actors in *Black Wave* are Ayatollah Khomeini and the Saudi royal family. Khomeini was a Shia Muslim. There are many Shias who hold moderate views, but Khomeini's version was ultra-conservative in its interpretation of religious law. Saudi Arabia promoted a strictly orthodox form of Islam called Wahhabism. In truth, Khomeini and the Saudi royal family used religious conflicts between Wahhabi and Shias to further their own political pursuits. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia, in Ghattas's view, supported radical Islamists and waged proxy battles against each other. "The Saudi-Iran rivalry went beyond geopolitics, descending into an ever-greater competition for Islamic legitimacy through religious and cultural domination, changing societies from within-not only in Saudi Arabia and Iran, but throughout the region."² The Saudis gave billions of dollars in loans to Saddam Hussein's Iraq to prolong the Iran-Iraq war. Meanwhile, Iran infiltrated pilgrimages to Mecca with Iranians and Libyans carrying everything from political pamphlets to explosives. Khomeini was not satisfied with the House of Saud "as the guardian of the two holy sites" (Mecca and Medina). To further cement his kingdom's importance in the region, King Fahd changed his title from His Majesty the King to Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. These two nations opposed each other throughout the decades covered in *Black Wave*.

Political leaders of other nations in the region contributed to the morass of violence and despotism. Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Hafez al-Assad, president of Syria who was later followed by his son, Bashar al-Assad; and Muammar al-Gaddafi, ruler of Libya, lavished wealth on their favorite clerics and militant groups while suppressing the rights of their other citizens. Ghattas describes Saddam's despot activities that seemed to be repeated in other countries:

Saddam became the fifth president of Iraq. He went on to crush anyone who represented an alternative. He squeezed the Shias tighter, expelling hundreds to Iran, putting clerics under house arrest. They had no recourse anymore against the brutality of the Baath regime. They were now stuck between two crazy men: Saddam and Khomeini. The Iraqi president also dismantled the backbone of progressive Iraq society, the left, by harassing and jailing people in droves: intellectuals, professors, journalists, artists, women activists—all went into exile.³

For religious professionals, several important ideas emerged in *Black Wave*. While religion can offer truth perspectives, elevate the soul, revitalize a community, and heal relationships, it can also be used for dark purposes. The term, "black wave" in the book's title refers to the takeover of much of Middle Eastern culture and religion by fundamentalists who waved black flags, diminished the opportunities of women, enforced strict dress codes, eliminated entertainment of all kinds, enacted the most stringent interpretations of Islamic law, and handed out corporal punishment. These groups were led, coached, and supported by religious leaders who disregarded previously-established theologies to issue new

fatwas that justified and promoted violence and tyranny. The value of the lesson offered here should not be missed: the force of religion in the hands of highly revered religious leaders who cannot be questioned may be used as a cudgel to bludgeon the innocent and incite evil.

Ghattas elucidates the rivalry between two coalitions of forces that is at the heart of relations in the Middle East. On one hand are the academics, entertainers, and journalists who see the Middle East as a region rich in history, art, and scholarship, but also as lacking freedom for all. In a sorrowful summary, Ghattas describes these individuals as:

Intellectuals, poets, lawyers, television anchors, young clerics, novelists; men and women; Arab, Iranian, and Pakistani; Sunni and Shia; devout, some secular, but all progressive thinkers who represent the vibrant, pluralistic world that persists beneath the black wave. They are the silenced majority, who have suffered immensely at the hands of those who are relentlessly intolerant of others, whether wielding political power or a gun.⁴

These groups are pitted against the coalition of militant groups, religious zealots, and dictators who are willing to resort to violence, religious dicta, and fiscal corruption to transform the region through their own lust for power and control. Ghattas illustrates these complicated dynamic in part through her discussion of The Liberation Movement of Iran (LMI), a somewhat moderate revolutionary group that was eager to guide Khomeini's government into an orthodox theocracy but found itself on the sidelines. Seeing the writing on the wall, that Khomeini was far more interested in supporting militant activities

in an effort to take over the entire Middle East with his version of Islam, some LMI members, such as its founder Mehdi Bazergan, moved into his camp. The factions seeking to impose a puritanical version of Islam were well funded by the governments of Iran and Saudi Arabia through a variety of secret funds and investments in media outlets and religious schools. The professors, Imams, journalists, businessmen, and activists who benefited from truckloads of cash flowing into the region were expected to promote ultra-conservative Islamic views. Ghattas chronicles the fates of those who did not meet this expectation; those who refused were censured, fired, jailed, tortured, or assassinated.

This struggle between the coalitions played out through international warfare, murder, and national rivalry across the Middle East. The war for the hearts, minds, resources, and political systems of people in the Middle East pulled in Iraq, Pakistan, and Syria and others throughout the region. No one seemed to remain untouched from the impact of exploding bombs, religious intolerance, and political savagery. The conflict precipitated the loss of free thinking, the destruction of promising careers, the stifling of liberal arts, and the death of innocent bystanders. To tell part of this story, Ghattas focuses on Farag Foda, a secular intellectual and "thorn in the side of Islamists...was working to build a secular party, Al-Mustaqbal, the Future, bringing together Muslims and Christians."⁵ Foda's day of reckoning came in 1992:

They couldn't even face him when they killed him...He was coming out of his office with his son and a friend, in a residential suburb of Cairo. Two illiterate men who had never spoken to him or read his work sped by on a motorcycle and fired seven bullets

into his back. They shot and injured his fifteen-year-old son, too. They were simply following orders. Safwat Abdel Ghani, detained but never charged in the plot to kill Sadat, had passed on a message through his lawyers to recruit the killers.⁶

Of particular interest for religious professionals is Ghattas's deep engagement with the variety that exists within a single religion. By diving deeply into political and religious fractures in the Middle East over the past 40 years, Ghattas illustrates some ways that divisions within a religion can be just as keenly, even violently, felt as the gulfs between different religions. Ghattas writes about the many variations and interpretations of Islamic doctrine to situate her discussion. Her attention to the sheer variety of ways of constructing

and practicing Islam is crucial. A large number of people in the West have not bothered to learn about Muslim beliefs; for them, there is only one version of Islam—the violent kind that is often highlighted by the media and Western politicians. Many of the book's figures who stood on the side of freedom, academia, entertainment, and journalism are dedicated Muslims. They maintain some version of religious dress codes, offer daily prayers, maintain families and lifestyles in accordance with Islamic principles, and love Allah. These adherents do not believe that being a Muslim means choosing between the beauty of the world and religious commitment. My experience of reading the book underscores for me that in the interest of humanity, community, and pluralism, all people should remember

that Muslims should not be painted with a broad prejudicial brush, there are a variety of sects in any given religion.

Finally, *Black Wave* illustrates that corruption and greed are not merely problems in politics or business. The book demonstrates the possibility that when religion is entrusted to the hands of fallible people, it can be appropriated for evil ends. The experience of reading the book leads me to note that religion is an important part of the human experience and should not be discarded because some use it to harm others. Neither should a small number of religious leaders be given carte blanche authority to dictate every aspect of human life. Religious authority is at its best when it is invested in a community of diverse leaders who speak both for themselves and the faithful at large.

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NOTES

1 Ghattas, *Black Wave*, 2.

2 Ghattas, *Black Wave*, 2.

3 Ghattas, *Black Wave*, 86-7.

4 Kim Ghattas, *Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Forty-Year Rivalry That Unraveled Culture, Religion, and Collective Memory in the Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2020), 3.

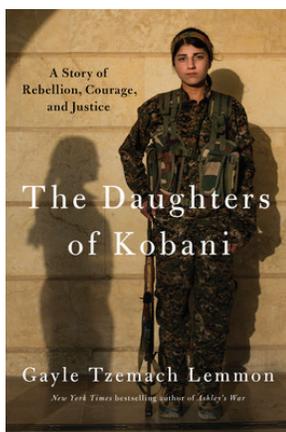
5 Ghattas, *Black Wave*, 189.

6 Ghattas, *Black Wave*, 190.

The Daughters of Kobani: A Story of Rebellion, Courage, and Justice

by Gayle Tzemach Lemmon

Reviewed by Major Jessica Dawson



Writing about war has largely been consigned to men. So too, writing about women and war has also been the realm of men. The male experience has defined war. When women enter this domain, it is as an interloper, an outsider—someone who does not belong. And yet, some of the most important books about the over 20 years of conflict in Iraq, Afghanistan, and now Syria, are by women. Gayle Tzemach Lemmon's *The Daughter of Kobani* is a critical new addition to the growing body of work about war written by women, and, in this important case, about women.

The Daughters of Kobani tells the story of several women—commanders and soldiers—on the front lines of the fight against the brutally violent Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS). The book foregrounds the women's experiences and biographies; these critically important stories are about what led them to enter the fight against ISIS and their struggles during that fight. The book focuses on several commanders: Nowruz, a commander of a Women's Protection unit, Rojda, a subordinate commander in a Women's Protection Unit, Rojda's childhood friend, Azeema, who ISIS attempted to kill multiple times due to her skill with a sniper rifle, and Znarin, a soldier on the front lines. These women chose to engage on the battlefield because of something that many middle class women in America never directly experience: the need to use violence to defend themselves and their loved ones against brutal enslavement if they fail.

Lemmon makes clear that the Women's Protection Units do not seek to turn the women into men—instead the units focus on making them skilled fighters in their own rights. How women engage in war in ways that are both similar to and different from their male counterparts goes unspoken in this book. Azeema is a thorn in ISIS's side—they continually try to kill her because she represents feminine lethality. Azeema's skill with a sniper rifle is key to keeping ISIS fighters from the surety they need to support their ideology: if, as ISIS claims, women are so inferior, how does this one keep picking them off one after another? Her success on the battlefield also singles her out as an important symbolic target. ISIS nearly succeeds in killing her twice. Her dedication to leading her team, however, is something that any soldier can understand. The men she serves with also taunt ISIS, at one point they dare ISIS to come for her. The men she serves with are loyal both to her and to the ideas for which they fight: freedom not just for themselves, but also for the women fighting alongside them.

Intertwined with facts about the war, the terrain, and ISIS brutality are the stories of women who balance family and war. Rojda's mother calls her every day to make sure she is still alive. While her mother does not approve of her presence in the war, she does not cut her daughter out of her life. In one potent moment, Lemmon describes Rojda answering the phone so her mother can hear

the sound of gunfire to let her know she cannot talk. But Lemmon conveys the sense that Rojda's roles as a soldier and daughter are deeply intertwined: she inhabits both identities at once. Even in the middle of a firefight, she responds to her mother's need to know that her daughter is still alive by answering her phone.

Znarin's story began with heartbreak—prevented from finishing her education and denied the freedom to marry a man she loved, she fights for the very nation that kept her from both things. By “nation,” I mean a people with a shared sense of self and stories, not a nation state—the Kurds still struggle to gain that marker of international legitimacy. And yet, they are a nation that is split across borders. These two heartbreaks lay the seeds of Znarin's awakening. She begins accompanying other women to meetings of the Congress Star, learning about women's rights, and engaging with the work of Abdullah Ocalan, a man declared a terrorist by Turkey but who is a hero to many of the Kurds fighting for their right to self-governance.

Facing the threat of enslavement and worse by ISIS, the Women's Protections Units were both a radical political experiment and an on the ground necessity. The women, arguably, had much more to lose should ISIS win—they wanted to be at the forefront of the fight against ISIS so that when they won, they could fight for their own liberation inside the nation they fought to build. The ideology advocated by Ocalan served as their watchword: he argued that civilization had been built on the enslavement of women and society must treat women equally if it is to be just. These women embody the powerful feminist idea that the personal is political but they also coopt more traditionally masculine ideals of citizen

soldiers: by shedding blood in the fight against ISIS, they lay claim to their equal role in the nation that comes after.

Juxtaposed to Lemmon's detailed descriptions of these women are the faceless ISIS fighters, men made banal by their brutality and their smallness. These men joined a movement that was centered on violence, cruelty, and torture. They cannot fathom a world where a woman gives orders or is in command of her own life. Central to their ideology is the brutal enslavement, not only of women, but of anyone who they deem inferior and unworthy. This is the ideology of weak men who are afraid to live in a world that they are required to share with others. The Kurds, as Lemmon describes these women, have demonstrated is the strength of their position—their values are based on shared sacrifice, courage, and equality. That strength is also demonstrated in their willingness to die for others, not in a willingness to inflict hurt, pain, and suffering on others. In that difference lies the starkest distinction between the small, weak men of ISIS and the nation that rises from fighting it: one uses violence to dominate, the other uses it to protect.

To illustrate this: *The Daughters of Kobani* spends a large portion of the book laying out the geopolitical complexities of the Syrian Civil War that gave rise to ISIS as well as the realities of terrain, logistics, and other aspects of fighting a war against a larger, more well-equipped force. It moves seamlessly between the high-level geopolitical discussions to the more local concerns about terrain and tactics. While the political context is critical to understanding the local significance of each city and town, I wish the author spent more time with the women and how they interacted with their peers,

particularly their male counterparts. There certainly are glimmers of this dynamic throughout the book, but it does not feel like the central focus. Perhaps that is the book's greatest strength: it does not spend time on proving that women belong or unpacking how men feel about it. It simply operates from the position of reality: these women are frontline fighters in a brutal urban conflict. They are soldiers, who are driven to fight by factors that are tied to their status as women. Their competence, courage and commitment speak to their fit on the battlefield.

The most powerful moments in the book are the quietest. When the women liberate towns and meet some of the women who had been brutalized by their captors, what the significance of their role as women soldiers becomes achingly clear to them. Though they are hardened by war, theirs is a war that comes with clarity of purpose and comradery that many American veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan hunger for long after they return home. American Iraq and Afghanistan vets was sometimes acutely felt a lack of purpose when they came home to a nation that barely realized we were still at war. For the daughters of Kobani, their purpose links the battlefield to the political sphere in especially meaningful and clear ways. They know what their sacrifice has provided—they have shed their blood for a new constitution, one that enshrines their status as equals before the law.

The fight against ISIS may be in its waning days, but the ideology that ISIS represents is still very much present around the world in a variety of incarnations. The idea that men's rightful place is to dominate women is a powerful drug, one being seeded into boys and men through memes and toxic online forums that tells them that women and

feminism are the reason they are not getting what they deserve. It is present in the military formations in which we serve—that women in combat make the team weaker and more vulnerable. The violent misogyny that fueled ISIS is the source of the motivation for these daughters of Kobani and that is the real power in Lemmon’s book: she shows the real threat of these ideologies and the lengths to which these women have gone to prevent it from claiming more victims.

This book should be required reading in Professional Military Education and for civilians interested in strategy and the complexities of geopolitical situations like Syria. Decisions made in Washington,

D.C. had personal and dramatic consequences on the ground and these women help illuminate what is at stake when far off decision-makers squabble about things that can be the difference between life and death. This book should be introduced into commissioning sources as well—especially because it treats the presence of women soldiers on the battlefield as normal rather than as a political football to be bandied about on the evening talk shows. Furthermore, this book should be included in curriculum that focus on women’s studies. The fight in Kobani and the broader fight against ISIS demonstrates what women have to lose if they are not willing to sacrifice everything for the freedom that so many

in the West take for granted. In this, the book offers a complex view of female liberation: one that is both at odds with and aligned with aspects of modern American feminism. *The Daughters of Kobani* demonstrates that when the political process fails, violence may often be the only solution left to secure rights. Rights not defended become mere words unless backed up with the guarantee of the state. These women have demonstrated their willingness to defend their rights, using violence because it was necessary and thus have earned their seat at the table designing their new nation. They are the epitome of citizen soldiers and embody a powerful lesson for all military leaders.

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