

The Liberals Killed Kenny!



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“HATE conservatives,” says *South Park* co-creator Matt Stone, “but I really f***** hate liberals.” Some conservatives—those of us who are a little older, perhaps, and remember when liberals ran absolutely *everything*, from law and government to the media and the overall culture—are grateful for comments like this one, because they demonstrate just how far into the mainstream conservatism has progressed. The irreverent libertarianism of TV’s *South Park* mocks left-wing shibboleths, as with the following ditty: “There’s a place called the rain forest that truly sucks a**. / Let’s knock it all down and get rid of it fast. . . . / You only fight these causes ’cause caring sells. / All you activists can go f*** yourselves.” This is conservatism as insurgent counterculture, a movement showing exactly the same kind of cheeky spunk that gave Sixties liberals their cultural advantage back in the day; that this energy is now on the right speaks volumes about the political transformation of the U.S. in recent years.

In his breezy new book, *South Park Conservatives: The Revolt against Liberal Media Bias* (Regnery, 191 pp., \$24.95), *City Journal* senior editor Brian C. Anderson uses the *South Park* phenomenon as metaphor for a broader cultural movement away from the stifling old liberal orthodoxies. (He credits blogger Andrew Sullivan with coining the phrase “South Park Republicans,” to describe Americans who are hawkish on foreign policy and “extremely skeptical of political correctness” but also have social-liberal leanings.) In the new-media

world—the blogosphere, right-wing talk radio, Fox News, and so on—conservatism is finally getting a fair hearing, and is winning the battle for the American mind. Writes Anderson: “Liberals yearn for the good old days when everybody who didn’t read *National Review* had to get his news and analysis from ‘unbiased’ old-media sources like CBS and the *New York Times* and conservative arguments could be dismissed with an insult or, better still, simply ignored.” Those days are over. While it would be an overstatement to say conservatives have *won* the culture war, it is undeniable that—in Anderson’s words—“the Right is no longer losing.”

■ Anyone looking for a splendid novel that grapples seriously with religious ideas would do well to seek out *Sophia House* (Ignatius, 488 pp., \$24.95), by Michael D. O’Brien. The plot is deceptively simple: A heroic Polish bookseller hides a young Jew from the Nazis while wrestling with his own sexual cravings. But the book’s themes are broad, gripping, and intelligently handled; O’Brien’s concern is nothing less than the meaning of love, sin, fatherhood, and redemption, and his eschatological vision is compelling.

In the course of their long (and consistently fascinating) conversations, Pawel, the bookseller, explains to David, his young charge, the Christian understanding of Christ’s Incarnation. “He came among us,” says Pawel, “to teach us that we are greater than we conceive ourselves to be. Each person is his icon. To burn even one, to hurt even the least of human beings, is to assault God. He shows us his face, and to our shock it is a human face.” This idea is made real in the book’s narrative, and especially in its remarkable final chapter. During the novel’s dénouement, Pawel reflects: “Had not every father once been a child, each suffering in turn those blows and absences that chained all souls, link by link, back into the shadows of time? What, then, would break the link? What would turn a man’s vision from the dictates of the past toward the future?”

The answer is: only the irruption of pure divine grace into the fallen world.

Another character explains early in the book: “We wish to be *worthy* of being saved . . . which is another way of saying that we, every one of us, whether we know it or not, wish to be our own god, that is, to save ourselves. We want paradise without his Cross, forgetting that the Cross is the only way to reenter the original harmony we lost in the Fall of Man. *This* is the narrow gate.” (A concise and engaging explanation of the doctrine of justification by faith.)

To quote more from the book would be to risk convincing potential readers that it’s merely a religious tract dressed up as fiction. Rest assured: *Sophia House* works as a thriller—a human drama—as well as a novel of ideas. It’s actually a prequel to an earlier O’Brien novel, the 1996 *Father Elijah: An Apocalypse* (Ignatius, 597 pp., \$14.95), which is one of

the most suspenseful books I have ever read. The subject of *Father Elijah* is the End Times; readers of the multi-million-selling *Left Behind* series might be interested to see that subject discussed from a Roman Catholic perspective, and others will enjoy the book as a thriller on the same high level as *Sophia House*.

■ Those inclined to romanticize a past Golden Age of journalism would do well to read Laurel Leff’s new book, *Buried by The Times: The Holocaust and America’s Most Important Newspaper* (Cambridge, 426 pp., \$29). Leff is a former reporter for the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Miami Herald*, now on the faculty at Northeastern University; her book is a realistic account of how bias is always capable of subverting the telling of important stories. In the 1940s, the *New York Times* consistently downplayed what hindsight would judge to be a crucial story of the 20th century. “The *Times*’s first story on the Nazi extermination campaign [against the

Jews], which described it as ‘the greatest mass slaughter in history,’ appeared on page five,” writes Leff, “yet the deaths of other civilians, often fewer than 100, regularly appeared on the front page.” Why? One reason was the assimilationist strivings of *Times* publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger. Faced with an America just starting to emerge from a culture of iso-

