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ALEXANDER COCKBURN AND JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

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The Validity of Faith: An Atheist Perspective

By Rachel Ortiz

As a child, I was raised in a reformed Jewish household. My mother is a second-generation American and was raised in an extremely Orthodox Jewish home. When it came time to raise children of her own, she decided against the rigid structure she had been made to suffer through: no pork products, strictly observing the Sabbath every Saturday – which meant no television, telephones, or light switches – and wearing long sleeves and skirts through agonizingly hot Phoenix summers. I, on the other hand, had bacon for breakfast, played video games with my friends on the weekends, and wore shorts and tank tops on sweltering 115-degree days. On Sundays and Wednesdays, I did go to Schul and Hebrew lessons, so as to fulfill my mother's guilty need to raise a good Jewish child. However, at the age of 10, we moved to Texas, the land of the Bible Belt, and my world changed.

In Texas, Judaism was a whole different beast. I was the only Jewish kid in school. Temples charged ridiculous fees for Hebrew lessons and even to simply attend services. As a result, we stopped going to Temple, stopped learning to read the Torah, and I started hanging around with a group of Southern Baptists. I imagine the day I told my mother that I had been saved was very nearly the worst day of her life.

I was 13 years old, and all of my friends went to the same church. I simply wanted to fit in, so I tagged along. All of the music, the joyful singing, the friendly faces, the hugs and the potlucks immediately roped me in – this Jesus stuff was the coolest! I felt emboldened and alive with the Spirit! It was nothing like the cold formalities of Temple, where

ORTIZ CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

The ProPublica and Other Models How Toxic is the Fog of Benevolence in Foundation Journalism?

By Harry Browne

With the idea that journalism is, in effect, a charity case having moved into the mainstream, a small but significant group of journalists and researchers have been examining how journalism has been, and might be in future, funded by charitable foundations. Oddly enough, concerns about bias and control, so prominent in consideration of state and commercial funding of journalism, have been somewhat lacking in the discussion of foundation funding.

Carol Guensberg's 2008 article "Nonprofit News," in the *American Journalism Review*, set a tone of cautious hope, only slightly tempered by critical

concerns. The most oft-expressed worry has been that foundations will be forced to cut back on funding journalism because of their own financial worries in the wake of the global financial crisis.

McChesney and Nichols, left-liberal critics of American mainstream media structure and bias, deal briefly with the issue in their study-cum-polemic on journalism's woes and possible solutions to them, *The Death and Life of American Journalism*. "Leaving aside the issue of whether we want foundations to have this much power," they write, "how realistic is the foundation-funding model

BROWNE CONT. PAGE 3 COL. 2

The kids said, Let's destroy everything! He said No.

Fortress in Stony Ridge, Ohio

By JoAnn Wypijewski

History luxuriates in the victories or near-victories or explosive mass stands of the oppressed. It does not make so much of, or ignores completely, the vain acts, the small, miserable defeats, the early clashes of a few of those not-so-entirely-pleasant or noble people that ended inconclusively, or, actually, badly but not so badly as to make headlines. So, here is a house in Stony Ridge, Ohio, just outside Toledo -- where the great, crushed strike of 1934 prefigured in all but the outcome the sit-downs, that birthed the United Auto Workers,

the eight-hour day and the right to organize in an earlier Depression -- a raggedy band of anarchists plans to hole up, lock down, make a stand against the national disgrace of foreclosure.

They do not have an emblematic hero in Keith Jennings: rather, they have a guy resembling those early labor radicals who called a wildcat without a plan to win, the early fighters for civil rights who refused to go to the back of the bus or give up a seat to a white man, but who weren't thought upstanding enough to be elevated to legend's pedestal: the unremem-

WYPIJEWSKI CONTINUED ON P. 2

bered legions whose life stories did not check all the appropriate boxes to qualify them as heroes.

Keith is one of those. He is 53 and has lost one job after the next, fired even by his own father. He injured his hands probably through repetitive work, but he's done so many jobs that it is impossible to raise him up as the poster boy for destructive work processes. The poster requires one-to-one correspondence. The carpal tunnel, the osteoarthritis, ought to be caused by *x* years hoisting so many axles of a particular weight, so many hours a day at the Jeep supply plant. Keith's infirmities likely were the result of that very activity, but Keith himself never felt sure, and didn't apply for workers' comp because he didn't think he could prove it. His pain is as present as the scars on his wrist and the brace he wears. But it's not a tidy story.

Neither is the tale of how he lost the house. It had been his father's, but somehow Keith couldn't keep up with it. The broken line of work, of health; a misunderstood loan condition; an unfollowed rule; a banker with too little sympathy and too much zeal – Keith explained it to me. It's all on tape, but it has too many curlicues, too many hanging questions, too much of the mess of life for easy retelling. It is not a clean drama of greed,

scandal, subprime promises and outrageous interest payments. Things went bad, and Keith faces homelessness: an Everyman except that he refuses to go quietly.

In the way back when, after the army discharged him under a cloud but before he tumbled into this bag of trouble, Keith had a recognizable life. He had a girlfriend. His daughter and grandchild lived with him for a time... But love shriveled, and died. The daughter and child moved on, leaving Winnie the Pooh decorations in an upstairs room for memories. Now Keith's family consists of nine cats and the Black Cherry Collective, which history would like to be solid and sane and theoretically and practically astute, but the members of this anarchist band are not heroes either. They are just kids, with pierced lips and noses, maybe overweight, maybe sullen, maybe jaded at 19, or a little unhinged at 33; maybe struggling with PTSD, maybe convinced that the best life is the one with the least baggage, the least money, the least conventional security; maybe not so clean, not so used to safety; maybe tattooed with the suits from a deck of cards on each finger.

One of them scrawls paltry messages on the wall. One sits on the floor banging at the pieces of a secondhand gas mask, trying to get them to fit together again. One sifts through the sand and plaster dust that has collected on the floor of the house while explaining that the world has left her generation to disintegrate: Reagan's children's children, poof. Maybe they quake a little as they speak, or slit their eyes in a kind of contempt, as they tell you that they have decided to live by any means necessary, and there is no other moral way. They are beautiful and doomed.

They have gathered in Keith's house to defend it from repossession. They dream of lighting the spark that creates a fire through the blasted streets of Toledo. In pursuit of it, they have made the house a pillbox.

They will fail to hold it; all their preparations in making the place unlivable have already conceded that. Their extremity mirrors their condition. Slowly, steadily, they are sealing themselves off from the world. Everything but the side door is now barricaded: that door will be the last to be barred, hours before a marshal comes to evict them.

When you enter, you confront a wall of cinder blocks mortared to thwart entry from the cellar. To the left what had been a small window is obliterated with plywood, 2x4s and tar. This narrow entryway, maybe three feet square, concentrates the claustrophobic, shocking nature of the rest of the house. To the right, in a hasty hand, someone has written, "If you want this house, you're going to have to go through me!" – beside a large decal of Taz, the Looney Tunes Tasmanian Devil.

That is in the kitchen, but the words "kitchen," "dining room," "living room" no longer have descriptive purpose. In the front room, the door and large bank of windows are also cement-blocked, boarded, tarred and braced with thick beams that thrust out at a 45-degree angle and are screwed to the hardwood floor. Between them is another Looney Tunes emblem, with another cartoon balloon boast. Other than Keith's bedroom, where the cats hide and yowl beneath the bed, there is little left that suggests home. It is like a building site in reverse, primitive, except for the computer system and the cameras rigged up so that the group can broadcast its side of the siege in real time, and also monitor what's happening outside.

I asked them if, while they were entombing the house, did they ever pause to think, "Man, this is really crazy"? It was a simple curiosity: at what point – at any point? – do the conventions of life creep up, pull you by the hair, whisper that you have crossed the threshold into something astonishingly alien? The young ones looked at me, suspicious. They were singularly focused on a different question: what does it take to secure the house from police assault?

"Well, so first we decided where we would use cement and where we would use boards. The doors are all cement. With the windows, first we put up the plywood; then we thought, we've got to reinforce that, so, we bolted the 2x4s across. And then we thought, you know, that might not be enough, so that's when we decided to erect the 4x4 bracing boards diagonal to the floor. It was just obvious we would have to brace those, too, so we screwed those horizontal bumpers to the floor. And then we thought, what if they try to cut through the wood? That's how we got the idea for the tar – so that, if they try to cut their

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way through, the tar will totally fuck with their saws. We just did one thing after the other, like that.”

It was all perfectly logical as I recall their description now, the group of them sitting on the floor in the place where they plan to chain themselves together, speaking in calm tones, each one offering another bit of detail. At one point, before they thought of the tar, someone had spray-painted, “Occupy Everything,” across the lintel of the front door. The tar now obscures that, along with the slogan “No Land, No Peace.” Someone spray-painted the anarchist symbol over the cinder blocks, and then brushed a bigger, bolder one in tar beside what had been a window. The angry A, the gestural circle: it is as if the whole history of Abstract Expressionism were a preparation for this one moment, this one, private scream.

No, they never thought for a minute that there was anything crazy about what they were doing. “What’s crazier?” one of the kids asked, “This or row upon row of boarded up houses in Toledo while people roam the streets without a roof, with nothing?”

They are right, naturally. Toledo is a living, dying symbol of social insanity. A couple recently opened a business in the remains of downtown called The Wreck Shop. Feel stressed? Hate your boss? Thinking it just might be a good day to go to jail? For \$10, \$20, \$30, you can suit up in a rubber raincoat and goggles and hurl Toledo glass, for which the city was once famous, against a cement-block wall in what used to be a recording studio. People came to throw glass all day long on the grand opening, the ecstatic entrepreneurs, a young husband-and-wife team, reported. Something crazier has created their market too.

But I wasn’t asking the group at Stony Ridge a comparative question. And, unlike his new family, Keith was not so abstracted from human emotion and the small moments of real memories and prospects. Along the way of making his home a bunker, he sighed, remembering he had always loved the Arts & Crafts woodwork of the house: the arch, the interior doors, the linen closet outside the bathroom, the built-in cabinetry with leaded glass doors beneath the dining room windows. He gave me a tour of the remnant of his lost world. He’d always thought those works of human hands were beautiful.

At one point, he told me, the kids said, “Let’s destroy everything!” He said no. It was too painful a proposition. The pretty square dining room windows are boarded, but they were spared the tar. One serves as the group’s escape hatch. (They are anticipating gas.) The cabinet beneath has some screw holes in it, but it is not irredeemably ruined. The leaded glass is intact, preserving, for now, bananas, oranges, peanuts and South Beach energy bars – provisions as the group is borne along, soon, in a few days, to its likely dishonored last stand. CP

JoAnn Wypijewki has been driving America’s roads in these hard times for three years. She has been reporting regularly to *CounterPunch*.

ProPublica not only subsidized a massive corporate news operation, but it did so within traditional American ideological constraints – most obviously, the denigration of Arabs and almost unqualified support for Israel.

BROWNE CONT. FROM PAGE 1

for the next generation of journalists?” The authors – whose major concern is to encourage state support for journalism – really do leave that issue of power aside, concentrating instead on the cash caveat, i.e., how little money foundations have made available for nonprofit journalism: in 2008 it was “less than one-tenth of the annual newsroom budget of ... the *New York Times*.” Having suggested that philanthropy is not equal to the scale of the problem in journalism – “we would feel a lot better if the \$20 million paid to nonprofits by foundations in 2008 had a few more digits attached to it” – they proceed nonetheless to praise the philanthropists – “we welcome foundations that want to write checks” – and to proclaim that “there is much to celebrate in the willingness” of such foundations to support journalism.

I propose here to look at two cases

where journalism has been underwritten by significant foundation-funded journalistic nonprofits: ProPublica in the United States, the Center for Public Inquiry in Ireland, each organization having been brought into being by a particular foundation. Clearly not every case of philanthropic support of journalism will involve such a close and organic relationship as existed in the case studies here. A philanthropically funded journalistic organization might have diverse funders, or an individual journalist might seek once-off financial support for a particular story.

It is my contention that “nonprofit news” raises some of the same problems as commercial journalism – including serving agendas that may possibly be hidden and hewing to establishment-defined ideological limits – while potentially adding some new ones of its own. Even before the financial crisis, foundations such as Bertelsmann in Germany and Gannett’s Freedom Forum in the U.S.A., despite their basis in media empires, were idiosyncratic in their direct support for journalism and for the education and research that might underpin it. However, even when support is fairly reliable, potential problems include encouraging journalists to anticipate and chase after the whims of funders (some academics may be familiar with this phenomenon); creating awkward conflicts of interest due to the often delicate relationships between charitable funders and the state bodies the journalists should be investigating; and subsidizing the very news organizations whose conspicuous failures have helped to create the current crisis for the profession. (Nick Davies, *Flat Earth News*, 2008, has been joined by McChesney and Nichols as required reading of precisely how those existing institutions are blameworthy.) This article occupies itself principally with these three areas of potential objection to foundation funding for journalism.

An additional concern, not addressed here but voiced by some practicing journalists with whom the author has discussed this matter, is the possibility that foundation funding will push reporters toward “long-termism” and excessive seriousness and jargon in their work, moving journalism further away from a mass audience as it becomes increasingly configured for foundation evaluators, policy-makers and other elites.

None of these issues should be regarded as reasons to dismiss foundations as potential sources of funding for journalism, which has never been pure and cannot afford to be choosy. But taken together they do suggest causes for serious concern.

In a passage about the ethical confusion that may be engendered by foundations, Rick Edmonds offers a basic note of caution about philanthropic funding of journalism:

Here's a journalistic proposition: it would be ethical for a reporter to accept a grant from the Ford Foundation for coverage of Eastern Europe. ... But it would be wrong to accept a grant from General Motors to cover international trade. GM's economic interests in the matter would create a perceived conflict of interest...

Lost in the benevolent fog that surrounds most foundations is the notion that they may have more of an agenda, not less, than a sponsoring corporation.

("Getting Behind the Media: What are the subtle trade-offs for foundation-funded journalism?")

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Philanthropy.)

Edmonds' example, contrasting attitudes toward funding from a foundation based on an automotive dynasty to funding from an automotive dynasty per se, is not purely theoretical: it is based, he writes, on the news-policy manual of America's National Public Radio, which makes precisely this distinction between foundation support (good) and corporate sponsorship (bad, at least potentially). The broadly skeptical thrust of Edmonds' research has had remarkably little echo in the years since it was published. (Media analyst Jack Shafer, fired from Slate.com in 2011, has been perhaps the most persistent and prominent critic of the foundation model.)

Concerns about the power and influence of foundations appear more likely to be voiced on America's conspiracist right, where George Soros in particular is a *bête noire*, than on the academic or political left. Occasionally, a specific foundation comes under critical scrutiny from the left, as when economist Rob Larson attacked the Clinton Foundation for being "funded by the people, governments, and companies that help create the problems that the charity seeks to address." Research, and, indeed, polemic, from the underdeveloped realm of "critical foundation studies" has tended to focus on the effects of foundation funding on the priorities of academic researchers and global-development organizations. According to Robert Arnove and Nadine Pinede ("Revisiting the 'Big Three' Foundations," *Critical Sociology*, 2007), basing their findings on long-term studies of the "big three" U.S.-based foundations – Ford, Rockefeller and Carnegie – the three have played the role of unofficial planning agencies for both a national American society and an increasingly interconnected world system, with the United States at its center, with an "elitist, technocratic approach to social change." They quote from a 1930 essay by Fabian theorist Harold Laski, who wrote: "The foundations do not control, simply because, in the simple and direct sense of the word, there is no need for them to do so. They have only to indicate the immediate direction of their minds for the whole university world to discover that it always meant to gravitate swiftly to that angle of the intellectual compass."

Chasing after the mind of a proprietor or editor has always been a constant in

journalism. However, the supposition that the foundation represents a cleaner, less capricious form of direction than the commercial proprietor does not always stand up to scrutiny. "In 1996 and 1997... the Ford Foundation... sent shock waves through the academic world by calling into question the validity of area studies programs that had been largely established and sustained by the Rockefeller Foundation and Ford Foundation." (Arnove and Pinede, 2007) The authors documented how, in the 1990s, the foundations created bitter divisions in African and Eastern European academia.

Within the world of philanthropy it is not controversial to say that the activities of foundations are intended as an exercise of power for particular ends, though those ends are typically depicted as benign. Sean Stannard-Stockton, a columnist for the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, has written of how philanthropists "attempt to shape events by providing or withdrawing grants"; he calls this "a form of hard power that leans heavily on the idea that influence is best achieved through offers of incentives or threats of penalties."

The central critique of foundations by critical scholars is more fundamental: they are an important component of the establishment and maintenance of existing structures of elite control, both in particular states and within the larger global system. The extent to which, therefore, they can contribute to changing, or even scrutinizing and critiquing, those structures must be in some question. "We must continue to ask whether or not foundations can achieve an end that runs counter to the core interests of those who have contributed to create these foundations," as David Fasenfest put it in *Critical Sociology*. Foundations themselves are rarely held to account by journalists, often because they nourish the secret thought that one day they might be applying for a grant or hoping for a prize from some emblem of the nonprofit sector.

In 2007, a charitable foundation, and effectively its single benefactor, created what is by its own account the largest investigative newsroom in the world, in the form of ProPublica. The New York-based nonprofit organization, directed by a former managing editor from the *Wall Street Journal*, Paul Steiger, is the creation of Herb Sandler, who, with his

wife, Marion, was boss of World Savings Bank. The couple was named in *Time* magazine in February 2009 as among the “25 people to blame for the financial crisis” for promoting “tricky home loans” with “misleading advertising.” (No mention was made by *Time* of the Sandler’s munificence to journalism.) The Sandler Family Supporting Foundation, a funder of liberal causes in the U.S.A., supports ProPublica with \$10 million annually. “Stories which have moral force, stories that are important to the sustainability of a democracy,” Sandler, chair of ProPublica, as well as its chief benefactor, said, “those are the stories I hope we will be doing.”

Its provenance in the financially and politically active elite must raise questions about ProPublica, notwithstanding its particularly clear and comprehensive coverage of financial issues. ProPublica’s first major report was a national/international story, produced jointly with the commercial news network CBS and its TV flagship, *60 Minutes* program. It was an investigation into another news organization – the U.S. government-funded Arabic TV station Al-Hurra. The questions raised by the report go beyond the fact that it hardly filled a media void, given that the *Washington Post* did a similar exposé about Al-Hurra on the same day.

The joint report carries the ProPublica logo but is otherwise difficult to distinguish from an ordinary *60 Minutes* report. It sets out to show that the U.S. government had been wasting its money by creating an Arabic news channel – and part of the report’s method is to engage in borderline caricature of “dysfunctional” Arabs and to criticize the Virginia-based station for airing points of view, critical of Israel in particular, that are largely uncontroversial in the Arab world. The report certainly does nothing to challenge the common U.S. mainstream view that opposing Israel is inherently wrong: indeed, it essentially and implicitly adopts that view. A revealing passage of the transcript includes an interview with an American who had been brought in to Al-Hurra on what proved a futile mission to straighten out the “imported” Arab staff:

Larry Register, a former CNN executive with 20 years of experience, who was brought in a year-and-half ago to rescue the channel ... says he

found his staff of Arabs, imported from the region, divided along religious, ethnic and political lines.

Asked what state the channel was in when he first walked in the Al-Hurra newsroom, Register tells [*60 Minutes* reporter] Scott Pelley, “Dysfunctional, extremely dysfunctional”

“Words like militias were thrown around,” he explains. “There was this militia that was in charge of this, and this militia in charge of that.”

“It felt like you were living in the Middle East. It felt like somebody had picked up the Middle East and brought it to Springfield, Virginia, of all places,” Register remembers.

When Register wanted to put on breaking news his first week, he says he found his staff was out to lunch, literally. “There was nobody there. The whole newsroom was empty,” he remembers. “Everybody’d gone to lunch. So I’m asking, ‘Well, what is this?’ ‘Well, they take three hour lunches in between programs.” (CBS News, 2008)

The “militia” comment, which could be interpreted as a suggestion that paramilitaries controlled various departments within the station, is left to rest as though it were a normal bit of Arab “color,” its significance unexplained.

Al-Hurra, to be sure, could be legitimately criticized. A particularly egregious item on the Arabic station from a credulous reporter at an Iranian Holocaust-denial conference came in for appropriate opprobrium (CBS News, 2008). But Scott Pelley’s line of questioning to a station executive lumped it together with other aspects of the programming that would surely not have enhanced its credibility among Arabs:

“There’s a pattern here, critics of this channel say. You have Nasrallah [the Hezbollah leader] given an hour of air-time. You have the Holocaust deniers conference covered. Now, you have this person saying that Israel is a racist state. Is this the kind of thing the American taxpayer should be paying for?” (CBS News, 2008)

For its first major report, ProPublica not only subsidized a massive corporate news operation, but it did so within traditional American ideological constraints – most obviously, the denigration of Arabs and almost unqualified support for

Israel.

Centre for Public Inquiry

In addition to its major funding from Sandler’s foundation, ProPublica also receives some funding, albeit a relative drop in the ocean, from the Atlantic Philanthropies, the charitable foundation based on the fortune of Irish-American, airport-duty-free entrepreneur Chuck Feeney. Atlantic was the sole significant funder of the Centre for Public Inquiry (CPI), a short-lived Dublin-based investigative organization run by one of Ireland’s leading investigative journalists, Frank Connolly – whose reporting on political corruption, mainly in the planning process, had helped to bring about major state-run tribunals of investigation in the late 1990s. The brief year of operation of the CPI in 2005-06 tells a complex and cautionary tale about the nexus into which journalism enters when it forms relationships with the philanthropic sector.

The philanthropist behind Atlantic, Feeney, is famously shy. However, the veteran Irish journalist Conor O’Clery got considerable access to write his biography and was subsequently involved in an Irish television documentary in 2009, a flattering portrait of the admirable and modest “secret billionaire.” (In that program one interviewee intoned, “I think he’s a saint” and not need have feared any contradiction.) The book and program, made with Feeney’s cooperation, show that Feeney, through his quiet and conditional offers of cash from the late 1990s onward effectively directed some higher-education policy in the Irish state and, among other things, brought about the creation of an allegedly state-directed funding initiative, the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions. Whether this was a good thing is not a matter of concern here; the point is, like many charitable foundations, Feeney’s Atlantic Philanthropies was operating not simply in the NGO sector but in close cooperation with elements of the state itself. For example, in 2003 the foundation threatened the prime minister, Bertie Ahern, that Atlantic would stop paying for research in Ireland if the government insisted on cutting its own contribution: Ahern obliged by using private pressure and press leaks to force the hesitant education minister to maintain state support for the sector (O’Clery, 2007).

Feeney had met journalist Frank Connolly during the 1990s in the course of the billionaire's involvement, together with other Irish-American business people, in the Northern Ireland peace process. After several friendly meetings, they came to discuss Connolly's work on political corruption, and Feeney told Connolly that Atlantic had helped to fund an investigative body, the Center for Public Integrity, in the United States. By 2004, Connolly and Atlantic Philanthropies had developed a plan to establish an analogous body in Ireland. "Connolly, a serious, methodical investigator, seemed an ideal choice" as director, O'Clery wrote in his book on Feeney. The CPI would get €4 million funding for its first five years of work, beginning in 2005. Former Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern (himself later the subject of investigations, including by Connolly, that forced him out of office in 2008) told the documentary makers that, when he heard of this plan to finance such an organization, he approached Feeney directly to tell him that it was not necessary or advisable (RTE, 2009).

The matter was complicated by the fact that the CPI director, Connolly, was known for his left-leaning views and investigative pursuit of Ahern and other senior political figures. Furthermore, Connolly had family ties to the IRA – his brother Niall had been arrested in Colombia in 2001, allegedly making contact with rebel groups there. Strong criticism of Connolly and the CPI was voiced publicly by politicians, and some journalists, especially in Tony O'Reilly's Independent group of newspapers, took up the campaign against the CPI (O'Clery.)

The center's first two investigative reports were published in the second half of 2005 in what were intended to be the first two editions of a new publication, *Fiosrú* ("inquiry," in the Irish language). They were generally seen as scrupulous studies of, first, conflicts of interest in planning around a historic site in Trim, County Meath, and, second, the complex legal and political history of a controversial Shell gas-pipeline project in County Mayo. The latter, in particular, was a strong intervention in a major public dispute that had seen (and has continued to see) hundreds of police dispatched to a remote coastal location in the west of Ireland, and the arrest and imprisonment

of a number of protesters. The CPI report came carefully down on the side of the protesters against Shell, the government and the pipeline, and raised questions about the political and planning decisions in the background to the project and in relation to other deals for oil and gas exploration off the Irish coast. (Providence Resources, an oil and gas exploration company, is controlled by the same O'Reilly family that dominates the Irish newspaper industry.)

The next CPI investigation intended to probe the Dublin Docklands Development Authority, where politics, finance and property development intersected. Like the first two reports, the sort of story that needs a lot of time and context, the resources that "ordinary" journalism finds itself largely unable to provide. The CPI's five-year plan was, according to Connolly, a program that would have taken it to the highest levels of the political establishment.

At this point, late in 2005, the Minister for Justice Michael McDowell, by his own public admission, leaked to a well-known journalist for Tony O'Reilly's *Irish Independent* newspaper some documents from an investigation into Frank Connolly that appeared to suggest Connolly had, several years earlier, given false details in a passport application in order to travel to Colombia. Connolly made a public statement on December 7, 2005:

"The minister has sought to interfere with, if not jeopardize, my employment as executive director of the Centre for Public Inquiry. By disclosing confidential information from Garda files to a member of the board of Atlantic Philanthropies, which funds the CPI, which is clearly insufficient to support a prosecution against me, he has intended to damage my reputation and my career as an investigative journalist.

Furthermore, confidential documents from a Garda investigation file were copied to Independent Newspapers to the damage of a citizen, who is entitled to the presumption of his innocence and to the protection of his good name."

The allegations against Connolly were never proven; however, the now wide-open hostility between Connolly's CPI and the Irish government was causing discomfort among Atlantic's representatives in Dublin – who had to work with state bodies in relation to other proj-

ects – and through them at Atlantic's headquarters in New York. In December 2005, in an answer to a parliamentary question, McDowell (under parliamentary privilege) tied Connolly's alleged activities to the Colombian rebel FARC organization and to narco-terrorism. At an Atlantic board meeting in New York, a fax arrived from Dublin containing McDowell's charges: after reading it, the board decided that the foundation could no longer fund CPI while Connolly was in charge. Connolly, however, would not step down, and the CPI's own board of directors (comprising a senior journalist, a lawyer, a theologian and a former high court judge) released a statement to the press expressing support for Connolly.

Atlantic nonetheless withdrew funding, and the CPI was out of money and, therefore, within a few weeks, no longer able to operate. Several years later, its brief history remains open to debate; however, for the purposes of this inquiry, it is relevant to know that Atlantic Philanthropies abandoned its funding of an investigative journalism organization because of sensitivity about the relationship between its director and the government – or, by the very best interpretation, because, encouraged by the government, it came to negative conclusions about that director's character and behavior without due process. (Connolly is today press officer for Ireland's largest trade union.)

Atlantic has since gone on to support the Huffington Post Investigative Fund, causing McChesney and Nichols to praise it as "a journalism-oriented, highly engaged foundation."

The increasing role of direct foundation funding for journalism might nonetheless be a cause for celebration, if there were strong reasons to believe that the ultimate source of subsidy was both (1) always clear to readers and (2) democratic and responsive to the wider public. However, on examining the cases outlined above and considering the arguments about the nature of foundations themselves, there is abundant reason for concern as to whether these conditions can be met, or whether such support brings new worries for the credibility and viability of journalistic institutions. **CP**

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ORTIZ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

everyone recited passages in a weird foreign language and sang odd dissonant melodies. I felt so much warmth from the church members and greatly appreciated their warnings given to me shortly after I began attending services: if I didn't accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, I was sure to burn in hell with the rest of my Jewish family, forever and ever. Why did no one tell me this before?! People this amazing, this warm, this kind could not possibly have been lying to me, so, right then and there, I became a Born-Again Christian.

For the next three years, I attended services in my quaint little church every Sunday, went on youth group retreats all over the country, read my Bible every night, evangelized to my entire family about their sure demise, boycotted Disney for their "pro-gay" message, and renounced alcohol, cursing, and sex before marriage. My life and my free will were completely at the mercy of my church and my God. Eventually, due to my questioning of various rules, I began to feel less and less welcome among my peers and their parents. I was the teenager who, God forbid, asked questions about the rationale of the Lord's word. As a result, I began attending church less and scouring my Bible more. I wanted answers. I wanted truth. I wanted something that resonated within my bones to the very core of my being, and I wasn't getting it.

After a particularly troubling incident with the youth group leaders of my church, I avoided church services for over a month. I resented my friends for rejecting me simply because of my curiosity. But, eventually, guilt got the best of me and I returned. However, instead of sitting with the youth group as I had every Sunday for years, I sat in the very back pew, simply watching. I began to notice that when children "spoke in tongues," it sounded remarkably similar to the way their parents sounded when they spoke in tongues. I noticed that everyone simultaneously knew when to bow their heads, when to stand, when to sit, when to clap, when to say Amen! It was in that moment that I knew to the very core of my being that I had been, and all of them were, brainwashed. Finally, something resonated with me!

After that day, I never returned to church again. I struggled for years afterward to find something to believe in. I re-

turned for a short stint to Judaism, played with Buddhism, read the Bhagavad Gita, dabbled in Taoism. But nothing seemed to stick – except science. I read Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, Carl Sagan, and Christopher Hitchens. And that is where my religious searching ended. People have a need to belong, a need to believe in something, and I had decided to belong to the group who believed that there was probably nothing more than meets the eye. I found peace in the idea that life was for the living here and now, that I controlled my destiny.

I began to speak out very openly

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against the church, against religion, and what it does to invade the innocent minds of young people. I hated the fact that years of my life had been robbed in pursuit of the approval of a being that didn't exist, certainly at least not in the form that I had come to know "Him." The thought that other children were having the same experience killed me. I wanted everyone to open their eyes, to see the ridiculous things that they believed. Really, a man can live inside the stomach of a whale? Talking snakes and parting seas are a total scientific possibility? I couldn't and I still can't understand how perfectly intelligent people can accept this as fact. I debated openly with friends, acquaintances, and co-workers about the validity of God. To this day, it is still one of my favorite subjects to discuss, because I so desperately want people to ask questions, to live their lives for themselves, to meet their *own* standards, not those of some omnipresent invisible being.

There is, however, one person with whom I do not debate religion, and that is my best friend. Interestingly, she is the person who took me to church for the first time. If anyone is responsible for me becoming a Christian, it is her. And yet, I have nothing but the utmost respect and admiration for her because she is a better person *because* of her belief in God. She is a Christian in the way that Jesus intended Christians to be – good, kind, loving, compassionate, and overwhelmingly generous. She is a true follower of a beautiful set of rules to live by, and her commitment to religious indoctrination ends there. When her daughter was born, she asked me if I would be her godmother, and I proudly accepted that honor. But with that honor comes a sense of responsibility – to be there for the important moments in her life and to encourage her to follow the path on which her parents would lead her. As believers, her parents are raising her Christian, and so it is something that I must respect. Recently, I was in Texas while my goddaughter was to be blessed in a special service at church. Her mother asked if I would come to the service to see her blessing. Knowing the importance of the ceremony, I told her "yes" without hesitation, although I had not been to church in nearly 15 years.

It wasn't the same church I had gone to, nor was it even a Southern Baptist church. It was a massive, stadium-type church with megatrons and intricate Broadway-style theater lighting. There was a huge amplified rock band on stage that was armed with a killer sound system and back-up dancers. Everyone in the audience was standing in the aisles singing, clapping, and waving their hands in the air, moved by whatever spirit – perhaps serotonin – was filling them in that moment. It was a room of all ages, but the majority of the crowd was under the age of 25. I arrived overdressed, expecting everyone to be dressed as they were at my previous church. However, because of the age group and the hipster vibe of this church, almost everyone was in torn jeans, tank tops, and Tom's slip-ons. Admittedly, my first thought was that it was inappropriate to be dressed like that in church, but I quickly realized that those thoughts were the old brainwashing sneaking in. After all, who says God doesn't wear sensible, comfy clothes on Sundays, too?

return service requested

When the pastor came out on stage for his sermon, he literally rolled in on a Harley. The sermon was relating to the role of men and fathers in society. He quoted Bible verses pertaining to the importance of men to be providers and good examples for their sons, just as God was for Jesus. It was the biggest religious spectacle I have ever witnessed. I sat quietly listening to the sermon, listening to the way in which the pastor used a very familiar speech pattern also used in Neuro-linguistic Programming (I did my fair share of hypnosis on my quest for “truth”). I noticed how nicely dressed he and his wife were, as they bantered on stage together in perfectly pressed denim and pearly white teeth. I even sat a little upright when he openly made a joke about their sex life. Everyone in the audience laughed, but I couldn’t help but think that it was nervous laughter. Is this the way a pastor is supposed to speak to his congregation of 300 people?

Although in many ways this was unlike any church I had been to in the past, many things still remained the same. Everyone bowed their head in unison. They all hugged and welcomed and

smiled. There was the ever-present uncomfortable “Turn and Say Hi to Your Neighbors” moment. They all played nice in the presence of the Lord. Even the songs were just jazzed-up versions of the hymns I had been singing for years.

It was obvious that the appeal to this church was the theatrics and the fun. At one point, while the band was playing some really high energy tunes, I couldn’t help myself, and I, too, stood up to dance and sing along. What I experienced was not your average Sunday church service – it was a complete sensory inundation. The pastor, the band, and the performances at this new church were all a way to show young people that Christianity can be cool and not so uptight.

After the service, the youth group, the young adults group and a few other clubs were mingling about in preparation for their respective Bible Study sessions. Parents were laughing, children were playing tag, and the older folks sat down together over coffee and cake. Watching them all connect, I remembered the fun that I used to have with my youth group. I remembered the feeling of belonging, of camaraderie. I began to reminisce on all

the inside jokes and how my best friend and I became best friends through our involvement with the church.

Although my actions and thoughts may have been suppressed during my years as a Christian – and even as a Jew, to some extent – it was, in many ways, a fantastic time in my life. It helped me to develop a moral code, introduced me to new ways of life, allowed me to see into the faith of others, and kept me out of the trouble that most teenagers got into. I could see in this new church the validity of religion. Congregation, brotherhood, traditions, and positive energy make people feel better about their lives. It gives them a sense of purpose and support. For many people, this place and this belief are needed. Although I may have found a different path to happiness, away from an omniscient being, this visit to church reminded me that some paths to God are worthy roads. **CP**

Rachel Ortiz is a US Military spouse, personal chef, student and yoga enthusiast. She and her husband are stationed in Germany, where they enjoy traveling, hiking, and not going to church.