faith-based drug treatment program in Texas should lose public funding because it did not meet state licensing requirements—ignored, until we emphasized it was the faith-based success rate, at a great deal less expense.

In short, I am stunned by how much there is out there that is interesting and relevant and (this is important to me) gets people in our newsroom engaged with the subject.

I would not be discussing this subject fully if I were not to dwell for a moment on our religion correspondent, Peggy Wehmeyer, who covered so many of those stories for us. From her base in Texas, she travels all over the country, and her work for us has elicited a greater response from both audience and colleagues than anything else we have done in recent years. Peggy has become an influential intellectual force in our newsroom, so much so (and often provocative) that I feel the need for more like her. Everything she does causes comment.

In the network, some people have been uncomfortable dealing with the issues she confronts, or with the language of spirituality that she often uses. But the support for what she contributes, both inside and out, is tremendous. Peggy has helped us to escape the criticism that Garry Wills leveled at academics, but as Colleen Murphy of the Atlantic Monthly points out, it could just as easily apply to journalists—those of us who have managed to ignore the 120 million people or so in this country who regularly practice their religion. "It is careless," Garry Wills writes, "to keep misplacing such a large body of people. Nonetheless, every time religiosity catches the attention of the intellectuals (substitute journalists here), it is as if a shooting star had appeared in the sky. One could hardly guess," Wills goes on, "that nothing has been more stable in our history, nothing less budgeable than religious believe and practice. Religion does not shift or waver. The attention of its observers does. Public notice, like a restless spotlight, returns at intervals to believers' goings on, finds them still going on, and with expressions of astonishment or dread, declares that religion is undergoing some boom or revival."

Finally, I am a convert to the notion that Stephen Carter puts forward in The Culture of Disbelief. We must stop treating religion as if it were like building model airplanes, just another hobby, not really a fit activity for intelligent adults. The sooner we do, the sooner we will have a greater grasp of our nation. And what journalist could ask for a bigger story?!

Hannah Arendt’s Difficult Freedom

by Patchen P. Markell

Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954
by Hannah Arendt
edited by Jerome Kohn
(Harcourt Brace & Co.; $40)

Hannah Arendt liked to borrow a line from Tocqueville to describe the political, ethical, and philosophical situation of the post-war world: "Since the past has ceased to throw its light on the future, the mind of man wanders in obscurity." The day she learned of Auschwitz, Arendt told an interviewer in 1964 that "it was really as if an abyss had opened"; the "horrible originality" of totalitarianism had decisively severed the Western world's fragile connection to its traditions of thought and action.

Arendt mourned the ruin of the world that totalitarianism wrought, but she also found hope amid the wreckage. By depriving humanity of easy recourse to tradition, the novel phenomenon of totalitarianism threw us back upon our oft-neglected capacity to begin anew, which Arendt would later describe as the "human condition" of "natality."

Though this capacity is always with us, Arendt believed, it assumes special importance and unusual visibility in those "dark times" when the transmission of tradition is interrupted by catastrophe.

By her own account, Arendt discovered "natality" in the writings of Saint Augustine. She had already recognized its philosophical significance when she submitted her dense, technical doctoral dissertation on Augustine at the University of Heidelberg in 1929. (A translation of her dissertation has been published this year as Love and Saint Augustine by the University of Chicago Press.) But this was 1929, when the clouds had only begun to gather. Twenty-five years later, Arendt realized that Augustine had written "under the full impact of a catastrophic end which perhaps resembles the end to which we have come" and found solace in his insight that "the creation of man coincides with the creation of a beginning in the universe." Arendt concluded: "Even though we have lost yardsticks by which to measure, and rules under which to subsume the particular, a being whose essence is beginning may have enough of origin within himself to understand without preconceived categories and to judge without the set of customary rules which is morality."

In her later book-length works, especially The Human Condition, Hannah Arendt would discuss in great detail the concept of "natality" and its implications for political philosophy. By contrast, Essays in Understanding does not describe but exemplifies the human capacity for beginning. In these forty-one previously unpublished or uncollected essays, lectures, book reviews, and interviews (thirty-five of which date from after 1943, when the news of Auschwitz reached New York), we find Arendt in dialogue with the contemporary world: she struggles to make sense of totalitarianism, the concentration camps, the danger of resurgent fascism, Stalin's crimes, and the threat of atomic weapons; and she ventures judgments about the reconstruction of Europe, the denazification and democratization of Germany, the relationship between America and Europe, and the role of religion in politics.

Arendt's engagements with these issues are sometimes direct, as in her brilliant pair of essays on Germany written at the end of the war, and sometimes oblique, as in her philosophically rich review of Hermann Broch's The Death of Virgil and her surprisingly hopeful 1944 essay on Franz Kafka's "nightmare" world. They are often eloquent: Arendt had an affinity for the essay form, and anyone who has labored with the unwieldy Origins of Totalitarianism (continued on following page)
nation of Nazism in terms of "Germanic aggression" was intimately connected to the mistaken notion of the continental governments-in-exile to restore an increasingly obsolete European nation-state system.

"Fly identifying fascism with Germany's national character and history," Arendt wrote, "people are inclined into believing that the crushing of Germany is synonymous with the eradication of fascism. In this way it becomes possible to close one's eyes to the European crisis which has by no means been overcome," and which is "first of all a crisis of the national State."

The best-known complaint about Hannah Arendt is that, in Gersthom Scholten's careful words, she displayed a lack of "love of the Jewish people." Her criticism of certain strong forms of Zionism in the 1940s had already made her a suspect character within the American Jewish community when she published her account of the 1963 trial of Adolf Eichmann. There Arendt coined the misunderstood phrase "the banality of evil, which, her critics thought, betrayed her insensitivity to the moral weight of the Holocaust. Arendt's Eichmann report also disconcertingly claimed that some of the German Judenrat had aided in the implementation of the so-called "Final Solution," a charge that sounded to some readers like a tacit defense of Eichmann and, indeed, of the whole German nation.

Warning in Essays in Understanding that Arendt had always refused the simplistic distinction between German monsters and Jewish victims, even in the final year of the war, when the immensity of the Nazi crimes might have made such generalizations viscerally attractive. In the 1945 essay "Approaches to the German Problem," for example, Arendt insisted that Nazism was not fundamentally a product of German national character, although the weakness of the German civic tradition did make Germany an especially fertile ground for the growth of totalitarianism. And in "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility," published the same year, she rejected the idea of the "collective guilt of the German people," referring in passing to "the sorry reports about Latvians, Lithuanians, or even Jews who have participated in Himmler's murder organization" as evidence that "it requires no particular national character to become a functionary of the Nazi killing machine."

But Arendt's purpose in these passages was neither to pardon Germany nor to suggest that the Jewish people bore responsibility for their own near-annihilation. Rather, Arendt thought that the explanation of the "crisis" of the nation-state was frustratingly vague, and in some respects, after fifty years and with the benefit of hindsight, it was obviously wrong. In 1945, Arendt could not have foreseen that the shape of international politics would be defined for decades by the ideological cleavages of the Cold War, nor could she have anticipated that the sudden dissolution of those cleavages would breathe new life into outdated nationalistic ideologues. But on page 10 of old-fashioned Nationalist ideologues across Europe and the former Soviet Union. But precisely because Arendt wrote at a moment when the future of Europe was still radically uncertain, her essays remind us of political possibilities that were quickly closed off and obscured by the "restoration of the status quo." We learn that the European resistance movements, whose members knew all too well about the weakness of the nation-state in the face of totalitarianism, had strongly supported a federal political structure for a united Europe; members of the Dutch underground had insisted that "one of the central problems of the coming peace will be: how can we, while preserving cultural autonomy, achieve the formation of larger units in the political and economic field?" The question of the relation between political sovereignty and national identity has taken on renewed salience in the nineties, and while Arendt's reflections offer no easy answers, they teach us the disastrous consequences of failing to face the problem.

In contrast, Arendt's essays on post-war European politics clarify her objections to the demonization of Germany. Essays in Understanding sheds only a little light on Arendt's relationship to her identity as a Jew, not because Arendt was silent on the subject but because her editors have chosen to devote a future collection entirely to her writings on "specifically Jewish themes." (One much briefer anthology, The Jew as Pariah, was published in 1978 but has since fallen out of print.) In the 1964 television interview that opens Essays in Understanding, however, Arendt did confront the accusation that she lacked "love of the Jewish people."

Invoking the vocabulary of The Human Condition, Arendt insisted that such national solidarity with members of one's own group is "politically sterile," because it collapses the crucial distance that both links and distinguishes members of a public "world." Arendt regarded politics as an activity characterized by contentious diversity that was, as such, wholly incompatible with the admittedly precious comfort that comes from inhabiting a secure community of the like-minded. In an address on G. E. Lessing delivered a few years earlier (and collected in the volume Men in Dark Times), Arendt even suggested that what a powerful need men have, in such dark times, to move closer to one another, to seek in the warmth of intimacy the substitute for that light and illumination which only the public realm can cast. But this means that they avoid disputes and try as far as possible to deal only with people with whom they cannot come into conflict. Hardly hiding her identification with her subject, she added, "For a man of Lessing's disposition there was little room in such an age and in such a confined world, where people moved together in order to warm one another, they moved away from him."

Arendt's willingness to speak what she deemed true, even in the face of protest from the Jewish community, was ultimately grounded in not some psychological confusion about her Jewish identity— as some of her critics have suggested—but in her deeper philosophical rejection of what we would call "identity politics." Theories of the collective guilt of Germany and the antipolitical demand that all Jews exhibit a proper "love of the Jewish people" are related ways of sidestepping the tasks of innovation and understanding in the wake of disaster, for they attempt to erect new, secure structures of identity and difference to shore up the ruined tradition. We may
doubt, as Arendt herself sometimes did, whether many people will have the strength to leave behind the comforts of "identity politics" and seek the difficult freedom that Arendt espoused. But Arendt's vision of politics deserves to be taken seriously by anyone engaged in contemporary disputes about the viability of political movements based upon homogeneous constructions of group identity.

Although she studied both philosophy and theology before the war in Germany, the mature Hannah Arendt did not often write explicitly about religion. Her longest essay on the subject, "Religion and Politics," was delivered at a conference on the role of religion in the "struggle between the free world and communism" and published in 1955. Only a few years earlier, Arendt had commented acerbically that organized religion had proved "weak and helpless" in the face of totalitarianism, and in "Religion and Politics" she sharply dismissed the idea that religion might become an effective weapon against communism. "Confronted with a fully-fledged ideology," she wrote, "our greatest danger is to confront it with an ideology of our own. If we try to inspire public-political life once more with 'religious passion' or to use religion as a means of political distinctions, the result may very well be the transformation and perversion of religion into an ideology and the corruption of our fight against totalitarianism by a fanatism which is utterly alien to the very essence of freedom."

It would be easy to interpret Arendt's comments as evidence of her unrepentant liberal hostility toward all religion—a position that seems awkwardly out of step with these days, when prominent representatives of liberalism are believerly welcoming religion into the public sphere (though with varying degrees of enthusiasm and never without reservations). Yet Arendt's position in "Religion and Politics" is, as usual, more complex and more interesting than it first appears. For Arendt was opposed not to religion per se but rather to those invocations of religion that sought to submit public affairs to the stabilizing governance of a transcendent, extrapastoral authority. (Arendt thought this governance had once been effected by the widespread belief in reward and punishment after death, but that the political secularization of the modern world had eliminated this "fear of Hell" from public life.) For Arendt, respecting the autonomy of the political meant coming to terms with, rather than trying to overcome, the fragility and unpredictability of politics.

But as Arendt herself must have known, religious insight need not be expressed only in authoritarian ways. Arendt's own appreciation of politics as a fragile and unpredictable activity was often expressed through discussions of the Christian teaching of human finitude: in The Human Condition, for example, Arendt assigned the capacity of "forgiveness" a central role in her political thought. As in the Gospels, forgiveness is essential to Arendtian politics because the effects of political action are never perfectly governed by the intentions of their authors: we forgive, says Arendt, because we know not what we do. Religion cannot inform politics by offering solutions to its problems and answers to its questions, but it can, perhaps, teach us to respect the autonomy of politics and to resist the temptation to close down politics in the name of supposedly eternal truths or incontestable identities.

It has always been easy to disagree with Hannah Arendt because her polemical style and independence of mind invite controversy. Essays in Understanding does not make it any easier to agree with Arendt—agreement was not the response she sought—but it does encourage us to appreciate and perhaps even to emulate the manner of her thought. Arendt begins her beautiful essay on "Understanding and Politics" with a line from Franz Kafka: "It is difficult to speak the truth, for though there is indeed only one truth, it is alive and therefore has a lively, changing face." Hannah Arendt teaches us that understanding, in its search for this elusive truth, must cultivate a healthy mistrust of settled doctrines and established positions and pursue instead an "interminable dialogue" with the world.

Patchen P. Markell is a doctoral candidate in political theory in the government department at Harvard University. He has written on Hannah Arendt and democratic theory, and his annotated bibliography on Hannah Arendt and feminism appears in Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt, edited by Bonnie Honig (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

Jesus and the Marketplace
by Alexis Macon McCrossen

Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture
by R. Laurence Moore
(Oxford University Press; $25)

Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays
by Leigh Eric Schmidt
(Princeton University Press; $25)

In a class that I am teaching about consumerism, I asked my students to define the consumer culture. Since I teach in Dallas, the city of quite conspicuous consumption, their biting descriptions, highly critical stances, and seeming disdain for the consumer culture and all its trappings impressed me. I detailed various academic approaches to the subject and spent a good deal of time explaining "the symbolic life of goods." We started discussing what happens after the moment of purchase, and to my surprise, the student who had been the most aggressive in his critique of the consumer culture practically leapt out of his chair exclaiming "I love my Lexus!"

And so it goes for most of us. On the one hand, critics of the consumer culture point to the countless ways that we have allowed materialism and commercialism to gut cherished values. On the other hand, few fail to gravitate toward some aspect of the consumer culture (a stereo, the movies, or perhaps a bottle of liqueur). The rest of us, however, have not succeeded (if we have tried) in shutting out its images, sounds, and sights. We cannot escape the consumer culture, for it is our culture. But we can negotiate how we deal with it. I know people who don't own televisions, and others who never buy new things, and still others (even in Dallas) who don't own cars.

Scholarly interest in consumerism has been gathering momentum since the seventies, and the field has finally reached maturity in several disciplines, above all in interdisciplinary efforts. Religious studies has been slow to join this trend, but the publication of R. Laurence Moore's Selling God and Leigh Eric Schmidt's Consumer Rites has made a significant contribution to the field and to the understanding of consumerism. Both books establish the leading past American Protestantism (and to some degree Catholicism) played in the rise and continued vitality of the consumer culture. Conversely, each also illustrates the multivalent effects of the consumer culture on American religious styles, habits, and beliefs, not to mention institutions.

The maturity of the field notwithstanding, the definition of the consumer culture is a slippery one. There is no consensus about what we mean when we talk about the consumer culture, though a good deal of recent scholarship suggests that it exists only when several conditions are in play: mass consumption, institutions devoted to promoting consumption, and politics geared toward protecting the right to consume. It is fairly simple to identify a consumer when we see one, but culture is somewhat more difficult to grasp. It is in the definition of culture that Moore and Schmidt part company. Whereas Moore fixates on the buying of "culture" (that which elevates and improves), Schmidt's sense of the subject is anthropological (a way of being in the world that consumption deeply informs, even forms). This difference is noteworthy, because it explains how one book could succeed so stunningly, while the other, worthwhile and honest as it is, stumbles.

II

Culture, religion, and the market are the subjects of Selling God. Moore argues that during the nineteenth century, religious institutions, leaders, and believers worked to advertise the benefits of "high culture" found in books, certain recreations, museums, and so on. Furthermore, this project led churches and church leaders into playing innovative roles in the developing commercial culture. As a result of its role as consumption's helper and handmaiden, religion itself was commodified; it became a good (in "the marketplace of culture," as the book's subtitle tells us), promising access to a higher and better self. Moore also proposes that culture was the research and development lab for techniques that the religious appropriated in order to sell their products. This culture is not the realm of social elites and the well-educated; it is the rough-and-tumble world of popular entertainment. Each of these meanings for culture circulates unevenly in fascinating vignettes.

(continued on following page)