

be sure, not NBC—it captures the attention but does not hold the mind.

The clock ticking for America is the timer on a bomb: that's Twitchell's message, and he delivers it in a book that is chatty, entertaining, and too informal, finally, for its own good. To be right is commendable, but you win no disciples unless you are convincing too. A funeral notice should arrive on an engraved card, not a Post-it.

—James M. Morris

***THE PARADOX OF PLENTY:
Oil Booms and Petro-States.***

By Terry Lynn Karl. Univ. of California Press. 360 pp. \$55 (\$22, paper)

In Frank Herbert's science-fiction classic *Dune* (1965), whoever controls the spice—the desert planet's most valuable commodity—controls everything. Karl, a political scientist at Stanford University, would disagree. The message of her book is that he who controls the spice will live to regret it.

The author finds proof in the way the oil boom of the 1970s affected five previously poor nations: Venezuela, Iran, Nigeria, Algeria, and Indonesia. Each nation spawned ungainly centralized bureaucracies, all geared solely toward generating more oil profits. Entrenched interests, such as foreign

investors and state officials, acquired additional influence and fought to retain it, creating enormous barriers to change. Policymakers put aside any plans for nurturing long-term, sustainable growth. When the prosperity ended, the results were economic crisis and political decay. In this important addition to the literature on political economy, Karl explains why sudden riches pushed the policymakers of these strikingly different nations toward the same unwise choices.

A wealth of natural resources, the author suggests, can enfeeble a nation's institutions and ultimately bring about economic decline. Conversely, some of today's newly industrialized nations, especially those in Asia, may have had success in part *because* they lacked natural resources: "The need to overcome this poverty may have been one of the chief catalysts for building effective states." To Karl, this is "the paradox of plenty."

She is not the first to recognize the paradox. Juan Pablo Perez Alfonso, the founder of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, said at the peak of the oil boom: "Ten years from now, 20 years from now, you will see. Oil will bring us ruin." He was right, and this valuable book helps us see why.

—Elizabeth Qually

Religion and Philosophy

***STEALING JESUS:
How Fundamentalism
Betrays Christianity.***

By Bruce Bawer. Crown. 352 pp. \$26

When Harry Emerson Fosdick preached his famous 1922 sermon, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?," he answered with a rousing no. "They are not going to do it," he declared, "certainly not in this vicinity." Within a few years, it seemed that Fosdick was right. Following the humiliating Scopes "Monkey Trial" of 1925, fundamentalist Christianity was all but extinct in the vicinity of Fosdick's New York City pulpit and in other urban areas. For the next 50 years, the movement was largely confined to the back hills, storefronts, and radio waves of a white, anti-urban underclass. It was, from the perspective of the national culture, invisible.

Since fundamentalism returned to public view in the 1970s, the mainstream media

have scrutinized its clout, both cultural and political, and its demographics. But, by and large, the culture mavens have given a free ride to fundamentalist theology. Because there have been no modern-day Fosdicks subjecting these tenets to searching examination, many people have come to view fundamentalism and Christianity as essentially synonymous.

Bawer, however, contends that the teachings of fundamentalist Christianity are at odds with American history, principles of reason and fair play, and the Gospel itself. In fact, he argues that the fundamentalists are the heretics and apostates, twisting the text in pursuit of preordained conclusions. Fundamentalist Christianity "has stolen Jesus—yoked his name and his church to ideas, beliefs, and attitudes that would have appalled him."

The author proves surprisingly well suited

to his task. A literary critic and author of *A Place at the Table*, he writes neither as a historian, although he is a good one, nor from within the gilded circle of professional theology. He has grown up in the age of fundamentalist ascendancy; he has had an adult religious experience that caused him to join the Episcopal Church, of which he is a knowledgeable and devout member; and, in addition to having read and understood the literature of fundamentalism, he writes readable, at times even elegant, prose.

Bawer offers sophisticated theological and cultural portraits of Pat Robertson, James Dobson, and other Christian Right leaders, as well as their less-known allies and predecessors. In a distinction that at times becomes too simplistic, he contrasts their exclusive fundamentalism (“The Church of Law”) with inclusive liberal Christianity (“The Church of Love”). At a time when nearly everybody regards “liberal” as an epithet, Bawer lauds liberal Christianity as the essence of the Gospel, the kind of religion that Jesus would both recognize and practice because he preached it. This is a passionate, articulate, timely, and utterly useful book.

—Peter J. Gomes

*PUBLIC MORALITY AND
LIBERAL SOCIETY:
Essays on Decency, Law, and
Pornography.*

By Harry M. Clor. Univ. of Notre Dame Press. 235 pp. \$32.95

It seems positively indecent to speak of indecency these days. Saying that a snuff film or a rap lyric offends public morality offends the civil libertarian in us, an overdeveloped part of our collective personality. In this tightly reasoned book, Clor reminds us that we still have a public morality and, what’s more, that it is compatible with a free society.

The author, a professor of political science at Kenyon College, argues that our moral codes are rooted in religion, but only in part. Habits of restraint come from two other sources, both of which influenced the American Founders: John Locke’s liberalism and the writings of the ancient thinkers about civic virtue and republican self-government. Protecting life, liberty, and property depends on many things, including “supplementary ethical attitudes and restraints among the public at large.” Where that sup-

plementary ethic needs legal support, “it may be supported—not for the sake of virtue but for the sake of preserving the moral environment that liberty and property need.” Compulsion, then, is necessary to maintain a free society.

In Clor’s view, the trouble with today’s liberal political theory lies in the shift from Locke’s emphasis on the rule of law to a new emphasis on personal autonomy. Libertarians, including John Stuart Mill and Friedrich Hayek, radicalize the liberty principle. They assume—wrongly, in the author’s view—that morals legislation is unnecessary because individuals exercise their freedom wisely. Meanwhile liberal theorists, including Ronald Dworkin, John Rawls, and Stephen Macedo, radicalize the equality principle. While the libertarians take good character for granted, the egalitarians find the very idea of good character paternalistic and obnoxious. Laws curbing prostitution and pornography, for example, “affirm that some ways of life are worse than others,” so they violate the Dworkinian principle that citizens have a right to be treated “with equal concern and respect” by their government.

Clor fits feminist theory into its egalitarian context. Feminists object to pornography because it shows men using women as objects; it “sexualizes inequality,” in Catharine MacKinnon’s phrase. When feminists set out to censor, as in an ordinance passed by the Indianapolis City Council in 1984, they depict pornography as discrimination against women. If explicit materials, no matter how violent or debased, were to treat both sexes equally, feminists would be untroubled. To Clor, pornography does indeed degrade women—but it also degrades everyone it depicts and everyone who watches. It is harmful because it objectifies human sexuality, not because it objectifies one gender and not the other.

Supreme Court jurisprudence on obscenity has largely respected community standards of decency while exempting from censorship serious works of art and literature. The Court, however, is increasingly influenced by contemporary liberal theorists. The author’s mild tone never wavers, but the import of his argument is that public morality hangs by the threads of Justice Souter’s black robe. Thin threads indeed.

—Lauren Weiner