

partisan divide, are a vanishing breed because districts are growing more politically and ideologically homogeneous.

Unfortunately, the best the authors can do is recommend that America return Congress to Democratic control, though they admit that Democrats may not do things any differently. Notwithstanding this partisan solution, they concede that the legislative branch's current problems have their roots in 40 consecutive years of Democratic rule in the House, or at least in the last decade of that rule in the 1980s and early '90s, when "cracks in the institution began to show." But Mann and Ornstein leave no doubt that the open fissure today is primarily the responsibility of the Republican revolutionaries who came to power in 1995 under Newt Gingrich.

While in the minority, the authors contend, Gingrich and his firebrands launched an aggressive campaign to discredit Congress and its leaders as corrupt. Once in power, the Republicans ruled with near-total disregard for the Democratic minority's right to participate in the legislative process. And since the election of George W. Bush in 2000, they say, congressional Republicans have been little more than presidential handmaidens. Expressing shock that Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) announced proudly "that his primary responsibility . . . was to pass the president's legislative program," they take Republicans to task for distorting the Speaker's role as a neutral House officer, "above normal party politics." Yet in 1992, when Mann and Ornstein issued the first report of their Renewing Congress Project, they called for strengthening the Speaker's powers as party leader (though it's clear from the report that they were not contemplating a Republican Speaker).

The authors do not point to some past "golden age" as a model to resurrect; nor do they offer a yet-to-be-tried ideal that is in any way practicable. Committee government gave us arrogant and autocratic chairmen, while today's party government can produce haughty, hammer-handed leaders. Voters, Mann and Ornstein conclude, are the only ones who can mend the broken branch,

if they are given proper guidance from leaders "intent on shaking up the existing party system." In this regard, they foresee the possibility of a presidential candidate emerging in the next election, Teddy Roosevelt fashion, "to build a political center where none now exists." In a book devoted to restoring Congress's self-image and independence, a president seems a peculiar savior—especially a TR type. He barely got along with his more conservative party leaders in Congress and had a tendency to bypass them altogether, using executive orders.

In the end, *The Broken Branch* offers few realistic prescriptions for Congress other than closer adherence to the rules (known as "regular order"), greater institutional loyalty, and more deliberation. The authors are vague about how these admirable goals are to be achieved without replacing members of Congress with apolitical philosopher-kings or sending them all to a cultural re-education camp. They never grapple with the central reality of Congress: Its members are re-election seekers whose primary loyalty is not to their party, president, or institution, but to their constituents. Their parties keep them in office with generous servings of pork and plenty of time off to spend with their constituents—meaning less time in Washington for deliberation and oversight. Changing that reality would require voters to insist that their representatives ignore their parochial interests and work full time on the national interest. Now that would be a paradigm shift.

—Don Wolfensberger

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Sanctity for Sale

EVERY SUMMER, A FEW tourists in Jerusalem fall prey to something psychiatrists call Jerusalem syndrome. Overwhelmed by the sight of the actual holy city, they become convinced they are biblical fig-

**SELLING
JERUSALEM:**
Relics, Replicas,
Theme Parks.

By Annabel Jane Wharton.
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ures and wander the streets prophesying, often wrapped in white sheets from their hotel beds. Jerusalem authorities and paramedics take these episodes in stride: They know they live in a city whose daily reality pales beside its existence in the world's imagination.

How Jerusalem came to belong as much to its visitors as to its residents intrigues Annabel Jane Wharton, a professor of art history at Duke University. Jerusalem, she points out, didn't become the pinnacle of world sanctity without the church's active "selling" of that status throughout the centuries. (Though Jerusalem is holy to three religions, the book treats its role in Judaism and Islam only in passing.) And selling Jerusalem, in her account, has been accom-

Today, purportedly authentic pieces of the True Cross and Jesus' crown of thorns are hawked on eBay.

plished not by devious or unscrupulous means but by the production of a long series of material objects—from relics to postcards to Bible theme parks—that allow believers to experience Jerusalem vicariously. It's wonderful terrain for an art historian, especially

one interested, as Wharton is, in authority, authenticity, and fakery. Who would guess that the Vatican collections contain the alleged fore-skin of Jesus? Or that even today purportedly authentic pieces of the True Cross and Jesus' crown of thorns are hawked on eBay?

But Wharton doesn't pursue such themes far; she has a broader and odder argument to make. The evolving nature of these surrogate objects over two millennia, she contends, shows curious parallels to the development of the global economy in the same period. In late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, when the world ran on a gift-and-barter economy and profit and usury were considered sins, believers trafficked in relics of saints and pieces of the True Cross. These could not be legitimately bought or sold but only given as gifts. Later, the Crusades spurred international contact and

commerce. The Knights Templar, an order of military monks based in Christian Jerusalem, may have been the first to build replicas of the Jerusalem "temple"—the Holy Sepulcher, the structure traditionally considered to house Christ's tomb—in Paris and London. When Jerusalem came under Muslim rule, the Franciscan order encouraged the construction in France and Italy of sacred mountains, actual mountains reconfigured into detailed landscapes that reproduced the experience of traveling to the Holy Land. A trip to one of these could earn a pilgrim the same plenary indulgence, or remission of sins, as a visit to the real thing, which was then relatively inaccessible.

This drift toward copies, Wharton argues, mimicked the rise of negotiable currency and credit. In today's electronic, postmodern age, in which money is virtual, concrete souvenirs or experiences of Jerusalem have yielded to "the progressive abstraction or commodification of sacred space." As examples, Wharton cites Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ* and places such as the Holy Land Experience theme park in Orlando, Florida, where visitors can "experience" the events and characters of the Gospel in roughly the style of Disney World.

One may quibble with these definitions—what makes a movie rendition of the Passion more abstract than, say, a medieval passion play?—but the real problem with Wharton's argument is that it seems overly schematic, or worse, simply beside the point. People pay for their pilgrimages today with credit cards instead of gold coins, but their religious impulses—to stand on holy ground, to take away a piece for themselves—appear consistent from age to age. If believers have so utterly embraced postmodern abstraction, then why, as Wharton reports, would the official website for *The Passion of the Christ* offer fans the opportunity to buy their very own concrete object, a replica of one of the iron nails used in the movie's crucifixion scene?

—Amy E. Schwartz