

I SAY By Melissa Walsh

# America 'undragoned'



the Dawn Treader," from "The Chronicles of Narnia."

The story's principal character is a greedy, lazy boy named Eustace, who lands in Narnia. Seeking to avoid the joyful, unselfish Narnian community and its work, Eustace sneaks off to an old dragon's den for repose. When he falls asleep "on a dragon's hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he has become a dragon himself."

Dragons are selfish monsters that feed off the flesh of other dragons, animals and humans. When Eustace finds he's a dragon, at first he's pleased with new power to enact revenge against those he dislikes. But soon Eustace experiences the loneliness of being a monster.

A lion sees Eustace crying and summons him to a well. The lion tells him to undress and get into the water. Wearing no clothing, Eustace attempts to

remove the ugly dragon scales covering him. Multiple times, he peels away a layer of scales, only to reveal another deeper layer. Finally, the lion says, "Let me undress you."

The lion tears away the layers with his claws. The first tear is the most painful, ripping right into Eustace's heart. When the scales are removed, Eustace climbs into the water. It hurts, but he is undragoned and sees his true identity as a boy.

Lewis' story is about personal, spiritual reform. The transition from self-love to loving others is the process an individual undergoes in realizing his or her best self, Lewis believed. He called undragoning the "radical surgery" of allowing virtue to free us into our true selves; it is painful, necessitating risk, vulnerability and faith in goodness.

The virtue for undragoning America into its best self is civil reform, articulated in our

Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Recent events cause us to examine the first two amendments in the Bill of Rights. We see high school students applying the First Amendment to bring clarity of how the Second Amendment ought to be interpreted. We see those interpreting the right to "a well-regulated militia" and "to keep and bear arms" as the right of civilians to purchase weapons designed for combat. We see some with this view attacking speech of the students, accusing them of being crisis actors.

Our nation's founders would be appalled. They would urge us to allow civic virtue to peel away the layers of America's dragoning of self-aggrandizement at all costs. They would call on a reawakening of the civil liberties on which this nation was built — what made America great.

Achieving community of harmonious peace, they might add, requires more than flatly follow-

ing stipulations written into and amended to our constitution; it requires good acts and just policies, trumping any individual's or group's right to trample on the common good of protecting us from ourselves and to feed the dysfunction in our nation leading to murders of young people at Columbine High School, Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook Elementary School, Stoneman Douglas High School and on our city streets.

As citizens in community, let's examine how we treat our children and teens. How about our elderly? Do we blame the poor for the crises they face? What about the sick without health insurance? Do we really believe in rehabilitation for the imprisoned? Why do we allow unequal "justice" for the wealthy and the poor?

For those applying our First Amendment right of freely practicing a faith, isn't there room for a Golden Rule-like force in politics? How about giving to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's? Or what about not pursuing dishonest gain, but being

eager to serve?

The lyric in "Talk Talk" by Perfect Circle cries out: "You're waiting on miracles. We're bleeding out. Thoughts and prayers, adorable, like cake in a crisis. We're bleeding out. While you deliberate, bodies accumulate."

In his book "Generous Justice," theologian Tim Keller said human community is only strong when individuals weave and reweave themselves into it, strengthening it — not only with sharing, understanding, mercy and love — but our souls, our unique ideas, experiences, talents. This is how shalom — or harmonious peace — is achieved. The individual knows his or her true north for discovering good purpose and weaves that good into society, engaging with others in their good purpose.

Good purpose is not "safe," but it is right and will make America civil again. Let's undragon ourselves as individuals in community, liberating the soul of American politics from the bondage of pride, fear, greed, hate and complacency.