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The Message of Mercy

MERCY IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH
WALTER KASPER

Sen. Robert F. Kennedy was fond of quoting Pericles, the statesman in third-century B.C. Athens whose famous funeral oration is almost always the first entry in any anthology of great speeches. As the principal heir to his fallen brother's ideals, Senator Kennedy prized courage above nearly all other human qualities; indeed, he considered it an indispensable personal and civic virtue. It is no accident, then, that the part of Pericles's oration that Robert Kennedy quoted most often, especially in his final years, was the Athenian's own definition of courage: "The bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them, glory and danger alike, and yet notwithstanding go out to meet it."

According to that standard, James Foley, the American journalist who was beheaded last month by radical Islamists, was indeed a very courageous man. He had been kidnapped once before, in Libya, and had seen for himself the savage brutality that marks too much of the day, in too many places, in that part of the world. He was, in other words, well acquainted with the "glory and danger alike" of his mission. Yet he went anyway. As *America's* editors note on page 4 of this issue, Mr. Foley was "compelled by the suffering, particularly of children, to endanger his life in order to reveal to the world the horror in Syria, hoping that he could make a difference toward ending it."

Mr. Foley's sense of his own mission, however, did not stem from some vague but noble concern for his fellow human beings, but rather from the specific mandate of his deeply-held Christian faith, the same faith that had sustained him through his first imprisonment: "Prayer," he later said, "was the glue that enabled my freedom, an inner freedom first and later the miracle of being released during a war in which the regime had no real incentive to free us.... It didn't make sense, but faith did."

In a world torn asunder by the most horrific acts of barbarity, faith is ultimately the only thing that truly makes sense, the only way that we can even begin to understand human acts that are inherently irrational. For faith reveals, not why there is evil in the world, but how it is, in spite of everything, that there is any love at all. Christians have a special obligation to bear witness to the ultimate source of that love, the son of the living God, who is loving us even now. For among the world's great faiths, Christians possess the deepest and broadest mandate to forgive, to reconcile.

The first step toward a more just and peaceful world begins with mercy, the kind of mercy that Walter Kasper describes so eloquently in this issue; the mercy God himself commands us to show one another; the kind of mercy the Islamic State refuses to consider. Without mercy, without the radical acts of love to which the Gospel testifies, then the world, despite every other valiant human effort, will fail to realize the true peace for which every human heart, however debased, ultimately longs.

But such acts require courage, "the one essential, vital quality," Robert Kennedy once said, "for those who seek to change a world that yields most painfully to change." Pericles would have liked that sentiment, but he would have been baffled by the vague and seemingly unmanly goal of peace and justice that Kennedy had in mind. For Pericles, you see, was not just philosophizing when he spoke of courage: he was rousing his people to wage war against their enemies. Yet what Pericles failed to understand, what Robert Kennedy was beginning to understand when his own life was tragically cut short, is the ultimate truth for which James Foley has now given his life: While waging war requires courage, stopping one requires even more.

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Cover: Pope Francis greets people during a meeting with an Italian Catholic association that transports sick people to Lourdes and other Marian shrines. CNS photo/Alessia Giuliani, Catholic Press Photo

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ON THE WEB

Cardinal Walter Kasper, right, talks with Matt Malone, S.J., about his new book *Mercy*. Plus, the return of "(Un) Conventional Wisdom," a blog on politics by Robert David Sullivan. Full digital highlights on page 18 and at americamagazine.org/webfeatures.



Insourcing School Discipline

In an effort to combat what has been called the school-to-prison pipeline system, school districts in Los Angeles have adopted new policies that will reduce the number of students disciplined within the juvenile court system. These new policies will require school officials to deal with students who commit infractions like on-campus fighting or defacing of school property instead of giving citations and forcing students to face the juvenile court system.

Michael Nash, presiding judge over the L.A. juvenile court system, has supported the change, arguing that the system is overtaxed and only students who “really pose the greatest risk to the community” should be directed to the courts. Judge Nash went on to say that school officials must not see the court system as the main instrument for dealing with students who commit what many see as simply age-appropriate misbehavior. Many critics of the school-to-prison pipeline, like Attorney General Eric Holder and Education Secretary Arne Duncan, have stated that this zero-tolerance system disrupts the overall purpose of the educational system and increases the chance that some students will sink deeper into the criminal justice system.

Other districts have rightly adopted similar policies in recent years, including schools in northern California and Georgia. Schools must learn to deal with students and realize, as Judge Nash says, that “the punitive approach clearly hasn’t worked.” Students are our future; our educational system must not undermine them.

The Minority Majority

If you want to know what the United States will look like in 30 years, consider the changing complexion of its public schools. This fall, Latino, African-American and Asian students will outnumber their white K-12 peers for the first time. According to projections by the U.S. Department of Education, non-Hispanic whites will make up slightly less than 50 percent of the student body in 2014-15, and their share will continue to shrink for the foreseeable future, thanks in large part to the population growth of U.S.-born Latino and Asian children.

But students settling into new classrooms this September are unlikely to notice this enrollment milestone. That is because, despite the greater diversity of the school age population overall, individual schools and districts have become increasingly segregated by race and income. According to a report by the U.C.L.A. Civil Rights Project in 2012, three-quarters of black children and 80 percent of Latino children attend mostly non-white schools, and both

groups are likely to go to schools where roughly two-thirds of the students qualify for free or reduced price lunches. On average, black and Latino students are more likely to attend under-resourced and failing schools, be taught by less experienced teachers, have fewer advanced classes and be less likely to graduate from high school.

The growth of majority-minority schools presents unique challenges. In the short term, districts will need to invest in more English as a second language programs, diversify mostly white workforces and reach out to minority parents, who often feel alienated from their children’s schools. Moving forward, the United States must continue to address the persistent geographic segregation and racial inequalities that are at the root of the academic achievement gap. Sixty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, separate is still unequal.

Remembering James Foley

The last few moments of James Foley’s life are impossible to watch; all the moments that preceded it should be impossible to ignore. Mr. Foley became another victim of the remorseless Islamic State in a cruel execution that was seen with horror around the world in a video released on Aug. 19. The depravity of the murder was searing, but what Mr. Foley needs to be remembered and celebrated for is the faith and fearlessness that brought him to this stark appointment in the desert, not the barbarity displayed there.

Having already experienced the deprivations and terror of abduction and confinement in Libya, how, some wonder, could Mr. Foley have returned to another conflict zone and again imperil his life? It is the same reason firefighters return to burning buildings, his father, John Foley, told reporters by way of explanation. He was courageous, the family said, and compelled by the suffering, particularly of children, to endanger his life in order to reveal to the world the horror in Syria, hoping that he could make a difference toward ending it.

Sometimes “vocation” is mistakenly understood to apply only to the church’s vowed and ordained members. But Mr. Foley’s life was a constant celebration of vocation in action. He was called to tell the stories of the forgotten and the undefended in some of the most desperate circumstances around the world.

It was a vocation he embraced at great personal risk, as many of his colleagues continue to do, reporting stories from Iraq and Syria, perhaps the most dangerous places on earth for journalists today. It is to the credit of Mr. Foley and other committed journalists that these stories at and behind the conflict lines are getting out at all. It will be to the world’s shame if they are told in vain.

Following Ferguson

The fatal shooting by Darren Wilson, a white police officer, in Ferguson, Mo., of Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, was followed by protests, confrontations, curfews and arrests. For days after the young man's death, photos of clouds of tear gas, police in riot gear and looters ravaging storefronts dominated newspapers and Twitter feeds. Although these events are important to understanding this ongoing story, perhaps more crucial are the events that preceded them.

Michael Brown's death did not occur in a vacuum but within the context of our nation's history of racial conflict and inequality, both personal and systemic. On Aug. 18, President Obama said that when it comes to addressing racism in the United States, "we've made extraordinary progress, but we have not made enough progress." Our society remains one in which many black parents feel compelled to sit down with their sons and warn them of how they may be perceived simply because they are young black men. It is a nation in which, according to the Department of Justice, black Americans make up 13 percent of the general population and 38 percent of the prison population. And in Ferguson, a place where blacks make up 67 percent of the city population but as few as three members of the 53-member police force.

The establishment of trust and mutual respect among all citizens is crucial to making progress toward a more civil and equal society. But trust has been hard to find in the aftermath of Ferguson. Many have interpreted the shooting as racially motivated. Others have argued that Officer Wilson responded in self-defense. The situation, at this writing, leaves many important questions of safety and motivation unanswered. Yet some are skeptical that a just resolution will be found: A recent Pew survey revealed that 76 percent of black respondents had "not too much" confidence or "none at all" in the investigations of the shooting.

In a healthy community, civilians should be encouraged to view the police force as a group of men and women who are part of a community and seek to serve and protect that community. And law enforcement officials should work in a way that is respectful of that relationship and worthy of that trust. In many places they do.

But there is widespread concern among citizens about another aspect of the police response in Ferguson. Photographs of police officers wearing camouflage and holding military-style weapons as they confront protesters

reveal a disconcerting trend toward the militarization of America's police forces, one that extends beyond Ferguson's city limits. Since 2011, the federal government has awarded over \$34 billion in grants to police departments to purchase military equipment.



While police deserve and require effective and sufficient protection, military gear frequently is unnecessary or even dangerous when used in American cities and suburbs. In addition, the use of this equipment evokes a sense of combat rather than crowd control. Military equipment and tactics, when used by police, can deepen the divide between law enforcement and the community. In places where the police force does not include significant representation from the demographic it serves, a military-style approach can aggravate pre-existing racial tensions as well. Police forces, particularly those that serve a large but politically excluded community, need to seriously re-evaluate tactics and training regarding community relations, traffic or field stops of local residents, crowd control and diversity-hiring to help ease these tensions.

Of course, it is not possible to heal decades of inequality and racial conflict with a single conversation or policy change. The thoughtful, ongoing dialogue that is necessary at all times, but especially following events like those in Ferguson, requires participation from the whole community. Social media have helped to raise awareness and to provide a sense of solidarity, but in some cases they have also facilitated the rapid dissemination of misinformation that can heighten rather than defuse tensions. Essential conversations must take place offline.

Religious leaders have a unique ability to help facilitate this communication. Archbishop Robert Carlson of St. Louis recently celebrated a Mass for peace and justice following Mr. Brown's death and encouraged other parishes to do the same. He also has re-established the Human Rights Commission in the Archdiocese of St. Louis and pledged continued scholarship support to students in area Catholic schools. Catholic Family Services has offered counseling in the area, and parish collections helped support food pantries providing assistance to those affected by the looting.

If we hope to continue to make progress toward greater equality and understanding, this work and these conversations must continue long after the crowds disperse in Ferguson and "#ferguson" fades from our Twitter feeds.

REPLY ALL

Racism in America

I am an African-American woman and life-long member of the Catholic Christian faith. Thank you so much for the dedicated issue, "Black and Catholic" (7/7).

"Civil Rights Aftermath" (Vantage Point, 1964) ends with the statement "Let us get on" with the task of "binding up" the wounds of racism. That challenge, that call to righteousness was made 50 years ago by this magazine. An article or special issue by **America** once every 50 years on the deplorable state, on the stagnant state, on the regressive state of race hatred in the United States is not a sufficient effort to promote real sustainable change of attitudes and hearts of Catholic and white Americans. I truly believe this country would have made more significant progress since the Civil Rights Act if our Catholic and Christian clergy had more fully embraced God's call to promote the rights, liberty and happiness of all. I thank you for acknowledging that most American whites, including Catholics, have yet to admit the truth about the inconsistency be-

tween their behavior and attitudes towards African-Americans and Jesus' way in the Gospel.

Please continue this invitation for dialogue and change.

DENISE HUDSON
DeWitt, Mich.

Cost of Independence

In "A Country in Question" (8/15), David Stewart, S.J., my friend, fellow Scot and fellow Jesuit fails to tell us to what extent the London government is currently contributing to the cost of running Scotland. We already have some control over own affairs; we have always had a separate education and legal system; we have control over certain fiscal matters, which reflect the different cultural and social outlook we Scots have compared with most of our English cousins (e.g., free medical prescriptions for all, no higher education tuition fees); and all three major political parties promise to grant more power to the regional government. Why would we want to saddle ourselves with massive defense and foreign policy costs? The Scottish National Party wants to keep the Queen and keep the pound, so where does that leave "the proud independent state"? The

referendum should be held only when a future London government holds a referendum on whether or not to leave the European Union. If that vote is in favor of breaking with the Union, Scotland should by right have its vote on whether she wants to remain in an isolated U.K.

GERARD GALLEN, S.J.
Online Comment

Tolerating Jesuits

In "Order Restored" (8/4), Thomas Worcester, S.J., recalls a number of significant anniversaries in this "complex anniversary year," none more significant, for Jesuits, than the 200th anniversary of Pope Pius VII's restoration of the Society of Jesus. As Father Worcester says, "this anniversary takes place amid many other anniversaries worth acknowledging, as they provide useful context for the surrounding events."

One anniversary he does not acknowledge may be worth recalling as well: the 200th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Norway. Article 2 of the Norwegian Constitution of 1814 reads: "The Evangelical-Lutheran religion shall be maintained and constitute the established Church of the Kingdom. The inhabitants who profess the said religion are bound to educate their children in the same. Jesuits and Monastic orders shall not be tolerated. Jews are furthermore excluded from the Kingdom."

Norwegians are rightly proud of their Constitution, the second oldest in Europe and considered at the time one of the most liberal and democratic. It has been often amended. The sentence excluding Jews from the Kingdom was dropped in 1851. The part on Monastic orders was dropped in 1897. That left: "Jesuits shall not be tolerated." When was that sentence dropped? Only in 1957.

THOMAS EWENS
Middletown, R.I.

STATUS UPDATE

Readers respond to Pope Francis' remarks in an interview with America's Vatican Correspondent Gerard O'Connell during the return flight from South Korea to Rome.

The poor are everywhere. Pope Francis has shown over and over again that he stands with the poor regardless of their geographical location. Like almost everyone, I would love to see the pope and be in his presence, but every time he speaks, as in the press conference aboard the plane from Korea, it is as though he is present to me, answering my questions, leaning in to listen to the pain

in my own heart and reminding me that the Spirit of God is everywhere.
ELIZABETH M. LILLIE

I hope the pope will visit China "tomorrow." It is the hope of generations of Catholics like my family in China. The country needs it!
ASHLEY LU

Thank you for posting this. I had just read a headline "Pope supports U.S. bombing in Iraq." Honestly, where did he say that?
MILENA BARRIOS ANGULO

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Why Divest?

In "For Israel" (8/4), John Conley, S.J., claims that the Presbyterian Church USA's divestment overture is deeply stigmatizing. It is important to have a clear understanding of why the PC (USA) divested from the three companies: Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard and Motorola Solutions. They are complicit in the brutal occupation of Palestinian territories. According to extensive research conducted by the PC (USA)'s Mission Responsibility Through Investment committee, Caterpillar provides bulldozers to the Israeli military, which are weaponized and used to demolish farmland and many thousands of Palestinian homes in the Gaza Strip, the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. Motorola Solutions manufactures fuses for Israeli bombs, the communications system for Israel's military and surveillance equipment for illegal Israeli settlements. And Hewlett-Packard furnishes the computer hardware for the Israeli Navy, which is a central part of the Israeli siege against Palestinians in Gaza, and the biometric scanners for checkpoints, through which all Palestinians (but no Israelis) in the occupied West Bank must pass.

NAHIDA HALABY GORDON
Cleveland, Ohio

Shutting Down Debate

The last sentence of "For Israel" provides a clue to Father Conley's thinking. Equating criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism (let's name it outright, rather than resorting to innuendo) makes any such criticism immediately morally suspect or worse. This is an easy and effective way to marginalize critics of Israel immediately. The atmosphere has become so thick that it's pretty much impossible these days to fight against a charge of being anti-Semitic.

Letters to the editor may be sent to **America's** editorial office (address on page 2) or letters@americamagazine.org. **America** will also consider the following for print publication: comments posted below articles on **America's** Web site (americamagazine.org) and posts on Twitter and public Facebook pages. All correspondence may be edited for length.

I expected a better understanding from someone who is a professor of philosophy at a Jesuit university and more from **America** in publishing this piece.

MICHAEL PAINTER
Online Comment

Sell The Bank

I believe "Revamping God's Bank" (Current Comment, 8/4), about reforms at the Institute for the Works of Religion, is mistaken. I have been long troubled by the inability of the Vatican to properly control the Vatican Bank. It has been a constant source of corruption, scandals and embarrassment. The proposed solution, yet another reorganization with a new director, will only continue this historical pattern. I have never understood why the Holy See needs to be in the banking business. The bank should be sold.

TERRENCE WADSWORTH
Santa Rosa, Calif.

Silent Victims

In his tribute, "My Father's War" (7/21), Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., notes that soldiers on both sides "did their best to slaughter one another" and that today "historians wonder whether this 'war to end all wars' was worth it." He tells his father's admirable story well and knows his father believed that the killing he did in wartime was "right." But who tells the stories of all the soldiers from that horrendous war—from any war—who did not go home to marry, raise children, nurse their own mothers? Who did not feel medals pinned on their chests, hear themselves hailed as heroes? And can anyone really say that a veteran signing up for another war is doing what is "right"? War is stupid, brutal killing. I wish Father Schroth had said that outright just once in his article.

FRANCINE DEMPSEY, C.S.J.
Albany, N.Y.

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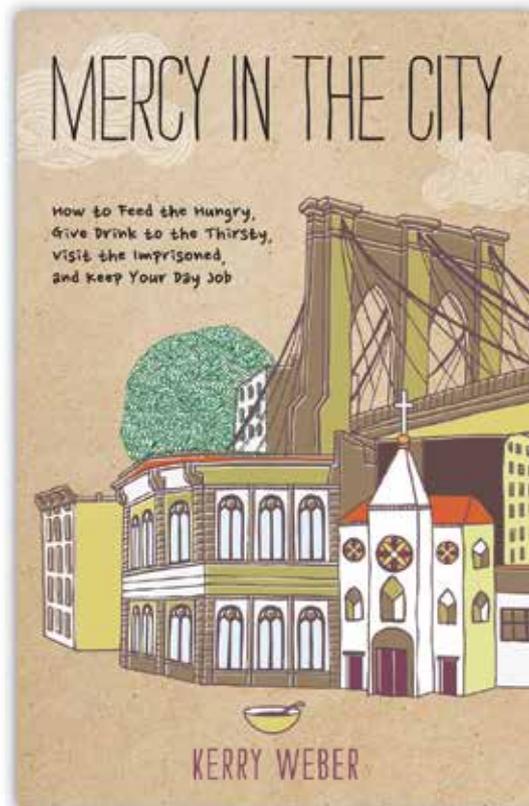
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SIGNS OF THE TIMES

BEIRUT, LEBANON

Catholic and Orthodox Patriarchs Seek International Response to ISIS



SAFE AT LAST? A woman who fled the violence in the Iraqi town of Sinjar at a camp in Syria's northern town of Qamishli.

Catholic and Orthodox patriarchs of the Middle East denounced attacks on Christians and called upon the international community to work to eradicate terrorist groups. The patriarchs met on Aug. 27 at the Maronite Catholic patriarchate at Bkerke, north of Beirut, for a special summit to address the crisis in the region.

“The very existence of Christians is at stake in several Arab countries—notably in Iraq, Syria and Egypt—where they have been exposed to heinous crimes, forcing them to flee,” the patriarchs said in a statement after the summit. The church leaders lamented the indifference of both Islamic authorities and the international community over attacks against Christians, who have been in the region for 2,000 years. “What is painful is the absence of a stance by Islamic authorities, and the international community has not adopted a strict stance either,” the patriarchs said.

“We call for issuing a fatwa [Islamic religious ruling] that forbids attacks against others,” they said. “The international community cannot keep silent about the existence of the so-called ISIS,” the patriarchs said, referring to the Islamic State. “They should put an end to all extremist terrorist groups and criminalize aggression against Christians and their properties.”

The prelates stressed the need to cut off the sources of terrorism and called on the world’s major powers to deprive extremist groups of resources by compelling countries financing them to stop their support. But solutions to the Islamic State

crisis must involve “dealing with the reasons that produced the miseries in the Middle East,” and harmony must be restored between the components of these countries, they said.

The church leaders also stressed “the necessity of working to liberate the towns of Nineveh and facilitate the return of the displaced to their homes, in addition to ensuring the security of these towns with local and international guarantees to prevent displacement.”

Returning to Beirut from a visit to the Kurdish region of Iraq, Syriac Catholic Patriarch Ignatius Joseph III Younan said, “What we, the five patriarchs, saw in Ankawa, Irbil and other cities of Kurdistan, was something indescribable in terms of the violation of human rights and the threat of disappearing of various communities among the vulnerable minorities of Northern Iraq. It is a pure and simple religious cleansing and attempted genocide.”

Patriarch Younan and Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II stayed in Iraq for six days after arriving as part of a delegation of Catholic and Orthodox patriarchs who visited Irbil to give moral and spiritual support to the beleaguered Iraqis from the Nineveh Plain. Members of displaced minority groups—Christians, Yazidis, Shiite Muslims and Shabaks—sought refuge there from their besieged towns and villages, which fell to Islamic State militants in early August.

Patriarch Younan said the most-asked question by many of the Christian refugees was, “Can we ever return?” He said “no answer could be given” to that fearful question.

A number of Catholic organizations in the United States have launched public appeals to fund as-

sistance to Christians and other religious minorities displaced in Iraq and Syria—among them the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, Jesuit Relief Service, Knights of Columbus, Catholic Relief Services and Aid to the Church in Need.

As for the threat to Lebanon from the Islamic State, particularly in light of the Islamic militants' incursion into the country near its border with Syria in early August, the prelates underscored

“the importance of the Lebanese political system that separates between the religion and the state, and which acknowledges religious freedoms.”

About 33 percent of Lebanon's current population of four million are Christian; the majority are Maronite Catholics. But that demographic has changed with the flood of refugees from neighboring Syria, mostly Muslim, who now make up more than a quarter of Lebanon's population.

fenses with Dominican authorities.

Father Lombardi countered that Vatican officials, “from the very first moments that this case was made known to them, moved without delay and correctly in light of the fact that former nuncio Wesolowski held the position of a diplomatic representative of the Holy See.” In its statement, the Vatican insisted that “far from any intention of a cover-up, this action demonstrates the full and direct undertaking of the Holy See's responsibility even in such a serious and delicate case, about which Pope Francis is duly and carefully informed and one which the Pope wishes to address justly and rigorously.”

Moreover, Father Lombardi said in conclusion: “We must finally state that since former nuncio Wesolowski has ended all diplomatic activity and its related immunity, he might also be subjected to judicial procedures from the courts that could have specific jurisdiction over him.”

Francisco Domínguez Brito, the Dominican Republic's attorney general, quickly issued a statement saying it was “just and positive” for the Vatican to remove Wesolowski's immunity and that the country would consider seeking extradition of the former archbishop so he could stand trial there. Authorities in Poland unsuccessfully sought to bring Wesolowski to trial last year. Following Father Lombardi's clarification, Poland's ambassador to the Holy See, Piotr Nowina-Konopka, said Warsaw is considering a fresh extradition request.

GERARD O'CONNELL

THE VATICAN

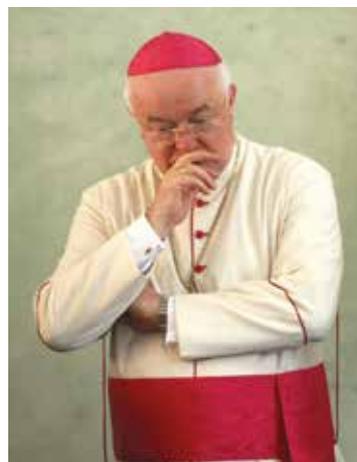
Former Nuncio Defrocked, Loses Diplomatic Immunity

The Vatican has clarified the current legal standing of its former nuncio to the Dominican Republic, Jozef Wesolowski, and has denied allegations that it acted in a manner meant to shield him from judicial proceedings in that Latin American state or in his native Poland. Wesolowski is accused of the sexual abuse of minors in the Dominican Republic. In a statement issued to press on Aug. 25, the Vatican reported that the former nuncio Wesolowski “has ceased functioning as a diplomat of the Holy See and has therefore lost his related diplomatic immunity.”

On June 27, Wesolowski was condemned for his crimes under canon law by a tribunal of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and was removed from the priesthood. The Vatican confirmed that he has appealed that conviction and announced that “the appeal will be judged without delay over the course of the coming weeks, most likely in October 2014.” Church officials said that at the conclusion of the canonical process, Wesolowski will face a criminal trial

under the Vatican's penal code.

The Director of the Vatican Press Office, Federico Lombardi, S.J., clarified Wesolowski's status in a statement to the international media on Aug. 25. He did so in response to questions from journalists raised by a lengthy report in *The New York Times* that described in detail Wesolowski's offenses in the Dominican Republic and alleged that the Vatican had acted improperly, and against its own guidelines, in its handling of Wesolowski. The *Times* and other media charged that by recalling Wesolowski to Rome and invoking diplomatic immunity last year as rumors about his offenses circulated, the Vatican had effectively enabled him to avoid criminal prosecution in the Dominican Republic or in Poland. The reports also alleged that Vatican officials did not share information regarding Wesolowski's of-



Jozef Wesolowski

Hope for Latest Gaza Cease-fire

Catholic aid organizations are hopeful that the most recent cease-fire between Israel and Hamas will hold as they begin to assess the needs in Gaza after 50 days of war. "This is a window of opportunity," said Sami El-Yousef, Catholic Near East Welfare Association's regional director for Israel and the Palestinian territories. "Now it is up to leaders on both sides to make it happen, to move beyond" the same political hurdles. The cease-fire that took effect on Aug. 26 calls for the easing of the Israeli-enforced embargo to allow humanitarian aid and construction material into Gaza under strict monitoring. The agreement was the latest attempt to end a seven-week conflict in which more than 2,100 largely civilian Palestinians and 70 Israelis, including 64 soldiers, were killed. The Catholic organizations have coordinated their aid efforts, with Caritas Jerusalem focusing on food and cash assistance, while Catholic Relief Services is distributing nonfood items and Cnewa is helping to repair damaged homes and institutions.

Room for Everybody

The Catholic Church should make "unconventional couples" feel at home instead of making them targets of "de facto discrimination," the leader of the Italian Bishops' Conference and an ally of Pope Francis said. "Couples in irregular matrimonial situations are also Christians, but they are sometimes looked upon with prejudice," said Bishop Nunzio Galantino, apparently referring to divorced and remarried Catholics. "The burden of exclusion from the sacraments is an unjustified price to pay, in addition to de facto discrimination," he said on Aug. 27 in an address to a national

NEWS BRIEFS

Vatican Radio reports that so far this year nearly **1,900 migrants have died** trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea into Europe—far surpassing the 700 dead recorded in 2013 and 500 in 2012. + **Cardinal Edmund C. Szoka**, a former Vatican official and one-time head of the Archdiocese of Detroit, died at age 86 on Aug. 20 in Novi, Mich. + At 105, the Rev. Jacques Clemens **celebrates Mass** every Sunday at St. Benoit Catholic Church in Ham-sur-Heure-Nalinnes, Belgium, making him perhaps the world's oldest living priest who still holds a regular service. + A **stolen consecrated host** intended for use at a Satanic "black mass," the focus of a lawsuit filed by Archbishop Paul Coakley, was turned over to the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City on Aug. 21. + The global climate campaign 350.org **urged Pope Francis on Aug. 27 to support publicly** the growing fossil-fuel divestment movement and to order the Vatican Bank to sell off any fossil-fuel holdings. + Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, primate of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, in a letter to the world's bishops' conferences released on Aug. 21, denounced **violence against religious minorities** in eastern Ukraine and complained bitterly about "claims and accusations" circulated by Russian Orthodox leaders.



Cardinal Edmund Szoka

conference on liturgy in Orvieto, Italy. Bishop Galantino was Francis' choice in March to lead the fractious Italian hierarchy. He has spoken about the need for the church to welcome gays and to consider optional celibacy for the priesthood. In his talk, the bishop stressed that everyone should "feel at home" in the church, and especially at Mass—including migrants, the disabled, the poor and those in unconventional relationships.

Ebola Provokes Panic, Hunger in West Africa

Hunger and panic are spreading among people unable to work because of restrictions aimed at containing the spread of Ebola, say church workers in West Africa. In Liberia's capital, Monrovia, church groups "are trying

to get food and distribute it to families...but movement is heavily restricted and there is little we can do," said Salesian Father Jorge Crisafulli, provincial superior in West Africa, on Aug. 22, speaking from Accra, Ghana. Neighborhoods in Monrovia have been sealed off by a government-imposed state of emergency. Officials report that more than 2,600 people in West Africa have been infected with Ebola since March, and more than 1,400 people have died. Food prices in Liberia are "rising steeply and people are hungry," Father Crisafulli said, noting that usually bustling markets "are now empty and no trading is happening." He said, "Ebola has become an economic and social problem as well as a health problem," noting that "panic and fear are now greater problems than the disease itself."

DISPATCH | MIAMI

Shifting Attitudes Challenge Church

If there was ever a bastion that gay marriage opponents thought they could count on, it was Florida.

From Anita Bryant's successful campaign against gay rights in the 1970s to a 2008 constitutional amendment banning even gay civil unions, the Sunshine State has always been there to beat back same-sex matrimony, as constant as orange juice and the Everglades. But like those flowing wetlands, America's dramatically shifting attitudes toward gay marriage are rolling through the Florida peninsula. In 2008, 62 percent of Florida voters backed the gay marriage ban; last year a Public Policy Polling survey found 75 percent support either same-sex marriage or civil unions.

This summer the ban itself is under sudden and heavy fire from the courts. Since mid-July, judges in four counties, from Key West to Palm Beach, have ruled the gay marriage prohibition unconstitutional. A federal judge followed suit on Aug. 21. "When observers look back 50 years from now, the arguments supporting Florida's ban on same-sex marriage, though just as sincerely held, will again seem an obvious pretext for discrimination," U.S. District Judge Robert Hinkle wrote.

Hinkle and the Florida judges have issued stays on their rulings pending appeals—which legal experts say could end up in both the Florida and U.S. Supreme Courts. If the state high court strikes down the ban, Florida will become one of the largest and most politically influential dominoes to fall in the battle over same-sex nuptials.

TIM PADGETT, *Latin America editor for the NPR affiliate WLRN, is America's Miami correspondent.*

"Florida is late to the game," says Bob Jarvis, a law professor at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale. "But at this point it would be a bigger surprise if the [Florida] Supreme Court upholds the ban."

In an Aug. 17 letter to *The Miami Herald*, Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami called the Florida rulings "raw judicial activism" and stressed the church's belief that marriage must be a union between a man and a woman for

Floridians increasingly see gay marriage as a weightier question of civil rights.

the purpose of procreation.

"In much the same way that abortion and safe sex are promoted to protect one from the inevitable consequences of sexual activity," the archbishop wrote, "...the advocacy of same sex marriage renders the idea of all marriages meaningless."

Archbishop Wenski insists marriage's aim is the "flourishing of upcoming generations." But for him and other Catholics who support traditional marriage, the upcoming generation poses a big problem. Most independent polls show U.S. Catholics support gay marriage—60 percent, according to a recent Quinnipiac University survey, compared with 56 percent of all Americans—and younger Catholics do so by a landslide.

Earlier this year I interviewed a number of young lapsed Catholics in Miami, and most cited the issue as a factor in their distance from the church. When I spoke with Archbishop Wenski about those con-

versations, he insisted that younger Americans are "perhaps the least religiously informed generation.... If they would seek to understand [church] teachings, they might find that they're not as intolerant as they think."

And as Pope Francis de-emphasizes matters like gay marriage, a growing number of Catholics perceive more important priorities, from the priest shortage to America's widening wealth gap. Chris Johnson, a Catholic attorney and parish council president in Miami, puts it this way: "We have bigger fish to fry."

Jarvis says he too has noticed less anti-gay marriage fervor in Florida. The pope, he says, "seems to have given cover" to those who may oppose same-sex marriage, but don't necessarily want to go to the mat on the subject.

The church has another quandary: Latino Catholics. They were considered a stalwart socially conservative group, but this year the Public Religion Research Institute found 56 percent of them support gay marriage. That's a head-turner for those Catholics who were counting on Latinos to bolster not just church membership, but doctrinal fidelity. And it's especially significant in Florida, which has the country's third-largest Latino population.

Archbishop Wenski has sought to play down the Florida court rulings as another skirmish in the culture wars. But as these recent court rulings suggest, Floridians increasingly see gay marriage as a weightier question of civil rights.

In that regard, Archbishop Wenski draws a distinction between what he calls "rights and right." He can only hope the Florida Supreme Court—or the U.S. Supreme Court—draws it too.

TIM PADGETT

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Make Room at the Debate

There is still no consensus in the United States about whether caring for children is a worthy expenditure of women's time. In surveys and in their concrete choices, women express and demonstrate strong interests in caring for children. At the same time, the federal government and influential interest groups insist, in the context of their three-year-old campaign in favor of the Health and Human Services' "contraceptive mandate," that the power to avoid childbearing virtually grounds women's freedom. Some women agree with them.

The contradiction matters. It could be harmful to badmouth caretaking, if—as is likely the case and even recent history indicates—women continue to mother in large numbers. Also, policies about avoiding childbearing could continue to suck all the oxygen out of the room, as they have done in the past, when the topic turns to helping women and men care for children while facing poverty and juggling employment. Parents need a range of policies, and children need caretakers who enjoy community support.

For Catholics, welcoming children is closely tied to the meaning of life—to being a "person for others." Family is the earliest place we are called to exercise loving service. This is not about denying women the paid work we want or need to do. It is not denying that we expect men, likewise, to be "men for others" in the family realm. It is rather concluding that in light of women's continuing choices about mothering, we must honestly engage the matter of

the standing of women's caretaking.

The federal government and some interest groups, however, increasingly deny that there is a difference of opinion among women. They label opposition to the H.H.S. mandate a war on women, or an attack on "lady parts." In the government's brief in the Hobby Lobby case, it argued that free contraception is essential to destroying the "barriers...plagu[ing]" women's economic, social and political integration, and women's "equal access to... goods, privileges and advantages." Sometimes the government's arguments talk about women's health, poor women's access to contraception or reducing abortions; but these are not its leading arguments. This is evident from the lack of care with which they are crafted. Few sources are cited and many sources are inapposite or hopelessly biased. Opposing data and logical arguments are ignored.

It should shock no one that women do not monolithically agree about the mandate or even about the relationship between caretaking and women's freedom. Nearly 90 percent of women have a child at some point in their lifetime; 84 percent of lone-parent households are female-headed; women, not men, take all their given parental leave; single women seek parenthood more than single men. Women, not men, swallow and implant birth control.

Respecting the mandate, women's opposition is multifarious. I learned this first-hand after a friend and I circulated a letter criticizing the mandate to several dozen women. By word of

mouth, 41,000 women quickly signed. This included vegans who won't swallow or implant hormones, even as they won't eat them; medical professionals who have treated one too many young women with a serious illness traced to the pill; women queasy about projects in which government and pharmaceutical companies promote long-acting birth control to poor, minority women, sometimes offering material incentives to remain sterile for three to 10 years; women who have suffered in the "relationship market" built by the pill and abortion, where sex is expected but marriage is not on the horizon; women who have no moral qualms about contraception but are offended by the government's heavy-handed treatment of religious

Women differ, and all their reasonable arguments should be heard.

charities; and women bone-tired of a government devoting legions of lawyers and millions of dollars to defending the mandate while women's preferred and dire needs go largely unanswered.

Many of these women understand, as do I, the legitimate fears of those for whom the mandate is a referendum on women's freedom. These include fears that there are no better ideas to address the feminization of poverty. Fears that women's caretaking will never get its due. Fears that the economy and the job market will never rebound. But these are problems women could tackle together. In the meantime, it is unreasonable to declare the debate on women's caretaking closed. Women differ, and all their reasonable arguments should be heard.

HELEN ALVARÉ is a professor of law at George Mason University, where she teaches law and religion and family law. She is also a consultant to the Pontifical Council for the Laity.



CNS PHOTO/LOSSERVATORE ROMANO VIA REUTERS

WHAT DOES MERCY MEAN FOR THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH?

The Message of Mercy

BY WALTER KASPER

The precept of mercy applies not only to individual Christians but to the church as a whole. Many ask: If God is always merciful, why is the church not the same? Or, why does the church not seem to be as merciful as God? The question expresses the uneasiness of many Christians.

They are right: The church defined itself in the Second Vatican Council as a sacrament—a universal sign and instrument of God’s salvation through Jesus Christ. If the church is a sacrament of God’s love in Christ, it is also a sacrament of God’s mercy. Therefore the command for the church to be merciful is grounded in the identity of the church as the body of Christ. The church is not a kind of social or charitable agency; as the body of Christ, it is the sacrament of the continuing effective presence of Christ in the

CORPORAL WORKER.
Pope Francis in
Campobasso, Italy, on
July 5.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER, the president emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, is the author, most recently, of *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*. This article is based on the Episcopal Lecture given at Boston College on May 1.

world. It is the sacrament of mercy as the “total Christ”—that is, Christ in head and members. Thus the church encounters Christ himself in its own members and in people who are in need of help.

But there is still a second aspect. The church is not only the agent of God’s mercy; it is also the object of God’s mercy. As the body of Christ, it is redeemed by Jesus Christ. But the church encompasses sinners in its bosom and therefore must be purified time and again in order to be able to stand pure and holy (Eph 5:23). Consequently, the church must self-critically and repeatedly ask itself whether it actually lives up to what it is and should be. Additionally, just as Jesus Christ did, so too we are supposed to deal with the flaws and failings of the church, not in a self-righteous but in a merciful way. We must, however, be clear about one thing: a church without charity and mercy would no longer be the church of Jesus Christ.

The message of mercy, therefore, has far-reaching consequences for the teaching, life and mission of the church. The worst reproach that can be leveled against the church—which in fact, often applies to it—is that it does not practice what it proclaims to others. Indeed, many people experience the church as rigid and lacking in mercy. This is why Pope John XXIII said, at the opening of the Second Vatican Council, that the church must, above all, use the medicine of mercy.

This can happen in a threefold way: the church must proclaim the mercy of God; it must concretely provide people with God’s mercy in the form of the sacrament of reconciliation; and it must allow God’s mercy to appear and be realized in its entire life, its concrete structures and even in its laws.

Mercy and the Poor

I will not deal here with each of these three dimensions. There are many things that should be said about the sacrament of mercy, which we have often undervalued in recent decades. But I will limit myself to an aspect that is very important to Pope Francis. The church as a witness of mercy is central to his program to be a poor church for the poor.

This program is not as new as it seems. It is Jesus Christ’s own program. He came to preach the good news to the poor (Lk 4:18). He not only preached; he who was rich became poor so that we could become rich (2 Cor 8:9). The Second Vatican Council took up this message in a chapter of the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church” that was often neglected after the council but that became important for the

theology of the Southern Hemisphere. Pope Francis has now put it on the table for the worldwide church. We have often forgotten that two thirds of our Christian and Catholic brothers and sisters live in the Southern Hemisphere, and we have forgotten their needs, their problems and their claims. Materially they are poor, but spiritually they are vital and vibrant churches we should listen to. They represent the future of the church.

To be a poor church for the poor is, for Pope Francis, not primarily a social program but a Christological issue. Our poor brothers and sisters are part of the body of Christ. As the pope emphasizes, in the wounds of the poor and sick we touch the wounds of the poor Christ. Christ himself told us: What you did to them, you did to me (Mt 25). This was the experience of St. Francis of Assisi, who at the beginning

of his way of conversion embraced and kissed a leper and had the sensation that he was embracing and kissing Christ himself. The same experience was reported by Mother Teresa when she wrapped her arms around an unkempt man dying in her mission

in Calcutta.

From these saints we can learn about the sensitivity and the tenderness of God, a sensitivity and tenderness we should imitate with our neighbors. So Pope Francis is rooted in the best of Christian history. His gift to the church is to make an old tradition into an urgent message for us today. Mercy is the central issue of his pontificate and a great challenge, especially for our rich churches in the North.

Mercy and Canon Law

The question many ask is: What does this mean for the church itself and its behavior not only toward those who are poor in a material sense but toward people within the church who feel neglected, put aside, marginalized and excommunicated—if not in a strict canonical sense, then in a de facto sense—because they are not allowed to take part in the table of the Lord? Often one asks: What about people who are divorced and remarried?

First I want to note: the word *mercy* is often misunderstood and misused. This happens when one confuses mercy with feeble indulgence and with a weak, laissez-faire pseudo-mercy. The danger then exists of making cheap grace out of God’s precious grace, which was “purchased” and “earned” with his own blood on the cross, and of turning grace into a bargain-basement commodity. That is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer meant when he stated, without mincing words: “Cheap grace means the justification of the sin and not the

There is no one typical case of divorce and remarriage; therefore there cannot be one standard solution for every situation.

sinner.... Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession.”

Therefore, we have to ask anew about the meaning of church discipline. The primary New Testament word for church, *ecclesia*, contained legal elements from the very beginning. The idea of an original church of love that is supposed to have become later a church of law cannot be substantiated. According to Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus gave Peter the power of the keys and gave to him, as well as to all of the apostles, the authority to bind and to loose, which means the authority to expel individuals from the community and to readmit them. Already Matthew established a clear rule for the exercise of this authority (Mt 16:19, 18:18).

So the breakdown of church discipline can in no way appeal for support to Jesus and the New Testament. But because church discipline is in keeping with the meaning of the Gospel, it must also be interpreted and applied according to the sense and spirit of the Gospel. For this reason, Paul makes it clear that the punishment of expulsion is meant to force the sinner to reflect on his or her conduct and to repent. If the sinner regrets his or her actions and repents, the community should let gentleness again prevail (2 Cor 2:5-11). Punishment is the last resort and, as such, is temporally limited. It is the drastic and final means used by mercy.

Such an understanding of church discipline as the bitter but necessary medicine of mercy conforms to a tradition that understood Jesus Christ, in light of his miraculous healings, as doctor, healer and savior; a tradition in which the pastor, in particular the confessor, is understood not only as a judge, but primarily as a doctor of the soul. This therapeutic understanding of church law and discipline leads us to the fundamental issue of how to interpret and explain church law. That is a broad field that we cannot treat here in a comprehensive way, but only from the perspective of the relation of church law to mercy.

Law and Spirit

So, canon law is not against the Gospel, but the Gospel is against a legalistic understanding of canon law. Canon law should be interpreted and applied in the light of mercy because mercy opens our eyes to the concrete situation of the other. Mercy shows that the individual is not only a case that can be subsumed under a general rule. On the contrary, it is essential for Christian anthropology that before God we are not a “plural”; every person and every situation is singular. So we have to find solutions that are just and equitable at the same time. If we do not, then—as the Romans put it—*summa ius* (highest justice) can become *summa ini-*

uria (highest injustice).

What such reflections mean for the question of divorced and remarried Catholics is now under discussion in advance of the forthcoming Synod of Bishops. I do not have a final answer on this question. It is the responsibility of the synod together with the pope to make these decisions. In my last consistory with the pope, however, I did with his agreement propose some modest reflections on this urgent issue.

No theologian, not even the pope, can change the doctrine of the indissolubility of a sacramental marriage. On the contrary, we all have reason to help and support people to be faithful to marriage for their own good and for the good of their children. So doctrine cannot be changed and will not be changed. But doctrine must be applied with prudence in a just and equitable way to concrete and often complex situations. For these situations are very different. There is no one typical case of divorce and remarriage; therefore there cannot be one standard solution for every situation. Discernment is needed, and discernment, prudence and wisdom are the main virtues for a bishop as a pastor. The best cannot always be done, but we should always do the best possible.

So the question is: If a person after divorce enters into a civil second marriage but then repents of his failure to fulfill what he promised before God, his partner and the church in the first marriage, and carries out as well as possible his new duties and does what he can for the Christian education of his children and has a serious desire for the sacraments, which he needs for strength in his difficult situation, can we after a time of new orientation and stabilization deny absolution and forgiveness? In the Creed we profess: “I believe in the forgiveness of sin.” When God gives a new chance, a new future to everybody who repents and does what is possible in their situation, why not the church, which is the sacrament of God’s mercy?

What is at stake is an adequate hermeneutic of application or, as St. Thomas Aquinas taught following Aristotle, an application of the practical intellect (distinct from theoretical or speculative intellect) to a concrete situation—in other words, the virtue of prudence: the practical wisdom to apply a universal principle to an individual and particular situation. This was the approach intended by some fathers in the early Christian church, especially Basil of Caesarea, carried out using the Orthodox principle of *oikonomia* and, in the Latin tradition, with *epikeia*. In early modern times St. Alphonsus Liguori proposed this approach in his system of probabilism. (He thus became the patron of moral theologians.) So if the synod were to go in this direction, it would find itself in the best church tradition. To be sure, these reflections do not open up a general approach for all situations; perhaps it may be for only a small minori-

ON THE WEB

Matt Malone, S.J., interviews
Cardinal Walter Kasper.
americamagazine.org/video

ty; but it could become a way for those who are earnestly interested and willing to go the way of conversion.

This would be a way beyond the extremes of rigorism, which cannot be the way for the average Christian, and laxism, which would not correspond to Jesus' claim for holiness. Finding a path beyond the extremes has always been the way of the church, a way of discernment, of prudence and wisdom—the way of concrete mercy.

Mercy From Below

The customary perspective in theology starts from above. We know a doctrine or a rule, and we start from there in order to apply it to concrete reality, which is usually complex and manifold. Mercy leads us to a different perspective, to start not from above but from below, to undertake a consideration of a concrete situation to which we are applying the law or rule. This is not situation ethics, because the rule is valuable in itself and is not constituted by the situation. This is the method taught by St. Ignatius Loyola in his spiritual exercises; this is how Pope Francis, as a good Jesuit, practices it. He starts from the situation and then undertakes a discernment of the spirits.

The same approach is shown to us by Jesus. When he was asked, "Who is my neighbor?" he did not give an abstract answer. He told a concrete story, the story of the good and merciful Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37): "There was a man going

down from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell into the hands of the robbers." A priest was going along that road and saw him, but passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite saw the man and passed by on the other side. But when a Samaritan came along and saw the man, he was moved with compassion. He bent down in the dirt and dust, treated the wounds and wrapped them with bandages. Jesus then asked the Jewish teacher: "Which of the three made himself neighbor to the man, who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The answer was correct: "The one who had mercy on him." And Jesus says: "Go then and do the same."

This is exactly how God himself deals with us. God bends down in order to raise us up; to comfort us and to heal our wounds; and to give us a new chance, to bestow on us new life and new hope. And who would be so self-righteous as to think that he would not need such mercy? Mercy is the name of our God. Mercy is the call to be a human being, who feels with other human beings who suffer and are in need. Mercy is the call to be a real Christian, who follows the example of Christ and meets Christ in his suffering brothers and sisters. Mercy is the essence of the Gospel and the key to Christian life. Mercy is the best and most beautiful news that can be told to us and that we should bring to the world. As God by his mercy always gives us a new chance, a new future, our mercy gives future to the other, and to a world that needs it so much. A

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VIDEO

Matt Malone, S.J., interviews Cardinal Walter Kasper about his new book *Mercy: the Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*.



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Deporting the Heart

Unaccompanied child migrants and the globalization of indifference

BY DANIEL G. GROODY

SOJOURNERS. Unaccompanied minors in Ixtepec, in the Mexican state of Oaxaca, June 18, 2014.



PHOTO: REUTERS/JOSE DE JESUS CORTES

There is a story, often quoted in church circles, about a man who lived near a river. One morning he went to get some water and saw a body floating downstream. He dove in, rescued the body, pulled it to shore and gave it a proper burial. Two days later, he went for water again and saw three more bodies floating down the river. He pulled them out and buried them. A week later, there were even more bodies, then more burials. As this trend continued over time, he realized his efforts at burying the dead were not enough. He sought long-term solutions and began looking upstream to understand why the bodies were floating down river in the first place.

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Today one of the strongest northward flowing currents is not in the Bighorn, Shenandoah or Nile rivers but in the surge of unaccompanied minors attempting to cross the U.S. border. A river of desperate children is flooding this country's overwhelmed immigration system. Between 2004 and 2011 about 6,800 unaccompanied minors traveled across the U.S.-Mexico border each year. The number jumped to 13,000 in 2012 and to 24,000 in 2013. By the end of this year, more than 90,000 unaccompanied minors could flow up to the U.S. borders from countries like Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador.

What is happening upstream that is causing such a massive influx of children? Many of these children are coming because of the mistaken belief in their home countries that the United States is giving away green cards, that amnesty is in the works for young people, that there is a free pass for unaccompanied minors. But these reasons account for

only a trickle in the river. The real explanation is much more complex.

In November 2013 I was part of a delegation of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugees Services Committee that journeyed "upstream" to Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras to look at this issue in greater depth. Meeting with high-level government officials and church workers on the ground, especially those from Catholic Relief Services, we received a firsthand look at the root causes for why children are coming north. Given the enormous financial and human cost of reaching the U.S. border, it is amazing they are coming at all.

Up the River: Riding La Bestia

Unaccompanied minors coming from Central America first face a perilous trek to the Guatemala-Mexico border. If they are lucky enough to get into Mexico, they still have a long journey ahead of them. With scarce financial resources, these children—along with pregnant women and many others—hop on freight trains to travel as far as 1,500 miles. This train system is known as La Bestia ("the Beast") or El Tren de La Muerte ("the Train of Death").

Many lose arms and legs jumping on and off these trains. Some are jolted onto the tracks and fall to their deaths. All are easy targets for harassment, robbery and assaults by violent gangs that systematically prey on these vulnerable migrants for profit. Eighty percent will be robbed and 60 percent of the women will be raped.

These criminal actors will require on average \$100 from migrants to ride atop the train. On the way, predators frequently kidnap them and demand phone numbers of relatives from whom the predators can extort money. If they refuse, they are tortured or killed. We talked to one man named Mario, who narrowly escaped death after being kidnapped with a friend. When Mario and his friend did not give the names and numbers of relatives, the captors shot and killed his friend right in front of him.

One would think such dangers would be enough to keep even the bravest of hearts from undertaking the journey north. But even the nearly certain prospect of abuse and exploitation has not stemmed the tide. As Juan Sheenan of C.R.S. in Honduras noted, "What parents would allow their 14-year-old to take a 20- to 25-day perilous journey to the United States? We have to look at the root causes that are pushing Central Americans into the U.S."

Midstream: Economic and Social Issues

There are many push factors that precipitate the northward flow of children, but endemic poverty and the desire to unite with relatives on the other side of the border are important reasons. The average per capita income in many of these countries is between \$4,800 and \$7,500. Most make much less. With few opportunities, they leave home seeking a life beyond subsistence.

But it is not just the poverty. Family ties also draw people northward. When I started working in rural areas of Mexico and Central America two decades ago, many of the villages comprised women and children. The men had traveled north to work. But this scenario is changing. In addition to pregnant women, children are now taking the risk. This is why the bishops argue that the costs of immigration must be calculated not just in terms of the economic and labor equations but the social equation as well.

When I met a 7-year-old named Raúl, he was living in a state-run foster facility in southern Mexico,

where he had been placed after being detained at the border. He left home because his father was in New York and he was tired of growing up without him. When I asked what town in New York his father lived in, he said it is called Vida Mejor—Spanish for "better life."

At the Riverhead: Violence

Our delegation found out that even more than economic pressure and family ties, it is fear for their safety that drives so many north. Violence has made living at home unsustainable. The insecurity stems principally from the coercive and forcible recruiting pressure from gangs like MS-13 and 18th Street. The reach of these gangs is expanding, and they have developed sophisticated networks that infiltrate all sectors of society, including businesses, government, police, the military and the judicial system. Ironically, these gangs were formed and hardened on the streets of the United States and then deported back to their home countries.

Some of these gangs also have diversified, morphed and consolidated into transnational criminal organizations, like the infamous Los Zetas cartel. In addition to smuggling arms and drugs, the cartel now profits from extortion and human trafficking. Some control whole neighborhoods or regions and demand protection money or a war tax from all economic sectors, even the smallest of street corner vendors.

Gangs use children, some as young as 10, for many of

**'If we stay, our
kids will fall prey
to the gangs. If
they migrate, they
may die on the
way.... We have
no way out.'**

their operations, terrorizing students and teachers to gain new members. The gangs force boys and young men to join their ranks, and if these recruits refuse, the recruits—or even their family members—are seriously injured or killed.

Many children and their parents live in constant fear. As Maria, a woman we met in El Salvador, said: “If we stay, our kids will fall prey to the gangs. If they migrate, they may die on the way.... We have no way out.... The only one who can bring us out of this is God.”

Honduras now has the world’s highest number of homicides per capita, and the situation is getting worse. With almost no chance of facing prosecution, gangs murder with impunity. Because of the breakdown of the rule of law, people constantly feel threatened. Many migrants from these countries want to come to the United States precisely because there is a rule of law—even if they have to break the law to reach it.

Mary Hodem, the regional director of C.R.S. in Latin America, sums up the forces driving the mass migration. “The dramatic increase of Central American children and teenagers arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border is a direct result of the growing desperation [of people]...in Central America,” she said. “The violence in these communities makes life all but impossible.”

In the end, young people have no horizon of hope. Many have only four choices: steal to get by, join the gangs and likely die, refuse to join the gangs and be killed—or migrate. The words of one mother capture the dilemma so many face: “It is horrible. We can’t protect our children. Either we see them die here, or they die on the way to a better life.”

Downriver: Choices in the United States

The unaccompanied minors coming to the U.S.-Mexico border are not just leaving their countries but fleeing them. Almost all migrants would choose to stay at home if they could. Until we deal with the root causes of their departures from their home countries, people will keep coming. And unless we deal with issues of human insecurity beyond our borders, we will have weaker national security within our borders.

Meanwhile, many politicians are becoming entangled in their own rhetoric as they make the issue into a political football. While many Republicans see this border crisis as an opportunity to vilify the Obama administration, the president himself—having overseen the deportation of almost two million immigrants while failing to achieve any significant immigration reform—has earned his reputation as “Deporter in Chief.”

But the situation of these migrants cannot be understood in the narrow, partisan terms of U.S. political theater. Honduras is a failed state, El Salvador and Guatemala are failing states and Mexico is a falling state. This is why

the most vulnerable parts of their populations are seeking refuge elsewhere. Given their well-founded fear of being killed upon deportation, many of the children at the border are not just economic migrants but refugees. Most are not criminals and should be given every applicable protection under international and domestic law.

But there is another kind of failed state. It is the failed state of mind and heart that thinks we have no responsibility to these children. Pope Francis condemns the “globalization of indifference,” our having so normalized the suffering of others that we have lost the capacity to weep, to suffer with victims and respond with compassion. As one worker in El Salvador put it, “If the migrant is not your brother or sister, then God is not your father.”

Catholic social teaching emphasizes that the moral health of a nation is gauged by the way it treats its most vulnerable members. There are many religious organizations and even government agencies throughout the Americas that are doing everything possible to alleviate the suffering of those who have no good options. These groups are committed to building better bridges instead of constructing longer walls and to developing stronger bonds rather than erecting tougher barriers.

But beyond domestic policy are some hard spiritual questions at the heart of the nation’s immigration debate: Might these children be the Holy Innocents of our own day and age? Are we more aligned with the armies of Herod than those of the crucified and risen Christ? Do we seek the self-interest of empire rather than the justice of God’s kingdom? In the face of the injured and suffering of the world, are we more like the priests and Levites, who do what is legally justifiable but morally scandalous, than the good Samaritan?

What should most concern us is not just the northward-flowing river of unaccompanied minors but the rivers of compassion in the human heart that seem to have evaporated. When people in Murrieta, Calif., protest and confront buses carrying young migrants and their families, and citizen militia members in Texas are told to take aim at “illegals” and tell them “Get back across the border or you will be shot,” we have bigger problems in our country than a broken immigration system.

The main issue is not just why children are coming but what kind of nation we are becoming as a result. In the midst of Israel’s moral drought, the prophet Amos said, “Let justice surge like waters, and righteousness like an unfailing stream” (5:24). If not even these children can move us in our own times, then the rivers of compassion have dried up within us. Not only have we lost touch with our origins, our history and our faith; we have become a desolate spiritual landscape and have deported something of our own hearts and souls as well. 

American Exodus

Encountering Christ in the child martyrs of migration

BY GABRIELA ROMERI

Forced migration is a story of human desperation and survival as old as the written word. It is central to the earliest biblical accounts of the people of God: from the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden to Joseph's enslavement in Egypt to the exodus of the Israelites. Throughout recorded time, people have been forced to move by powers beyond their control.

Fleeing Herod's violence, even the Holy Family was forced to uproot itself and seek sanctuary in a foreign land or risk the death of their son. That is why at Christmas, when our thoughts turn to the poor but precious birth that changed the world, we set up manger and tiny cribs in our homes, eagerly awaiting the coming of the Christ Child. We make room.

Since his election, Pope Francis, himself the son of immigrants, has reminded us repeatedly of the human cost of forced migration. In May, while addressing new ambassadors to the Holy See, he took the opportunity to say:

We could also consider it to be in a certain sense cynical to proclaim human rights and at the same time ignore or fail to take account of the men and women who, forced to leave their homeland, die in the attempt or are not welcomed by international solidarity.

The pope could well be talking to us, in these United States of America, where our immigration laws are exacerbating a humanitarian crisis. Fleeing certain violence and oppression in their home countries, refugee immigrants from Central America are driven underground and beyond safety, where they are frequently targets of a powerful criminal class.

These immigrants face numerous tragedies during their journey. Organized extortion, systematic rape, disappearances, mass executions, wholesale human trafficking, the commercial sexual exploitation of children and the permanent separation of families have grown common and extreme.

Though adult migration to the United States from Latin America is at a historic low, the number of minors seeking sanctuary at our door has reached crisis levels. Unofficially, workers at child detention centers along the border were told last year to prepare for as many as 100,000 unaccompanied children. The White House now confirms that 90,000

minors are expected this year, with over 100,000 minors expected in 2015.

While the youth migration crisis began dominating national headlines in mid-2014, the Women's Refugee Commission already was sounding the alarm, documenting the "exodus of children" fleeing Central America. The commission noted a surge, beginning in October 2011, of unaccompanied immigrant children crossing the U.S. border. Most of them came from Guatemala (35 percent), El Salvador (27 percent) and Honduras (25 percent).

When asked why they wanted to leave, children from these countries said they were subject to violent attacks from all sides in the war between drug cartels, youth gangs and the police. The W.R.C. cites "longstanding trends in Central America, including rising crime, systemic state corruption and entrenched economic inequality" as primary reasons for the exodus.

Elizabeth G. Kennedy, an immigration scholar, writes: "Girls as young as nine were gang-raped in all three nations. Most children regularly see murder being committed, some have lost their parents to gang violence, and some no longer attend school because gangs actively recruit from school grounds."

It is difficult to believe that Central American countries could bear any more violence after the civil wars and turmoil of the 1970s, '80s and even '90s, when citizens were tortured and made to disappear by their own governments. Yet today, El Salvador has the highest murder rate of women in the world, and Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico endure raging femicide.

Honduras, the murder capital of the world, saw 920 children murdered in the space of three months in 2012. So it can no longer come as a surprise that today children are fleeing, by themselves, in search of sanctuary.

Making It Through Mexico

Young people from Central America who are apprehended at the U.S. border have traveled over 1,000 miles, often on foot but also by bus, truck and train. To make it that far they must first survive the journey through Mexico.

A delegation from the Catholic Church went on an observation mission with journalists and activists last year to witness the condition of migrants crossing Mexico. They concluded their report with a simple statement: "Mexico

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BREAKING BORDER. Unaccompanied migrant children at a facility in south Texas.



CNS PHOTO/HANDOUT THE OFFICE OF U.S. REP. HENRY CUELLAR, REUTERS

is a graveyard for migrants.”

Amnesty International calls migration through Mexico “a major human rights crisis,” reporting that an estimated six out of 10 migrant women and girls are victims of sexual violence. People are robbed on highways, even kidnapped from buses. In one instance, horrific but not unique, young women were forced out of a moving bus by gunmen, stripped and raped in front of the passengers, then driven away in trucks.

In 2009, Mexico’s National Human Rights Commission reported 10,000 abductions of migrants in six months, with “almost half of interviewed victims saying that public officials were involved in their kidnapping.” Today, experts in organized crime report that the police and border patrols have been infiltrated by criminal gangs on nearly every level.

Though no one yet knows the number of migrant young people sold into modern-day slavery in Mexico, the Mexico-based Foundation of Social Assistance and Humanitarian Aid estimates that more than half of Central Americans who migrate to the United States experience some form of trafficking.

If you ever wondered who won the “war on drugs,” it was the Zetas. As Mexican drug cartels rose in power in the 1990s, overshadowing even the notorious Colombian cartels, they took control of drug smuggling routes into the United States and trapped Central America between South American suppliers and the U.S. drug market. These cartels now travel in armored tanks and broadcast executions with impunity.

Largely as a result of the government’s war on drugs,

Mexico witnessed over 120,000 homicides from 2006 to 2012. During that same period the Mexican government confirms more than 26,000 were “disappeared,” many by their own police and military.

As they did in Argentina after that country’s Dirty War (1976–83), the mothers of the disappeared in Mexico are marching. On Mother’s Day they come to the capital with posters of their missing children, looking for answers. Luz María Durán Mota, whose 17-year-old son was taken away by police in June 2011, said: “It is a daily torture, not knowing where he is. If they are torturing him. If he has eaten anything.”

Journalists also are targeted, and throughout Latin America, religious martyrdom has sharply increased. For the fifth year in a row the region has seen the largest number of Christian pastoral workers killed, including four priests assassinated in Mexico in 2013.

Tomás González Castillo, a Franciscan friar, and Ruben Figueroa, who run La 72, a migrant shelter between Guatemala and Mexico, face constant death threats. Their crime: interfering with market forces by offering migrants a brief respite from the extortion and violence they are sure to experience crossing Mexico. Mr. Figueroa says migrant abuse has reached “epic proportions.”

“By its nature, migration is a humanitarian tragedy,” said Mr. Figueroa, “but when there are governments that are complicit with organized crime, it becomes a holocaust.”

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has been investigating child migration through Mexico for some time. In their report “The Changing Face of the Unaccompanied Alien Child” (2012), they document that 85 percent of children interviewed in U.S. detention suffered “some type of traumatic experience” such as “kidnapping or sexual or physical assault, during their journey to the United States.”

At the Diocesan Migrant and Refugee Services of Texas, which provides free legal aid to detained young people, children spoke of being held hostage for months in Mexico. Criminals often use whatever phone number the child took with them on their journey for extortion. The farther away the child’s country of origin, the more money is demanded. Some young people were passed from one extortionist to the next “like cash machines.”

One intake interview done by D.M.R.S. involved a pair of siblings from El Salvador, who were taken hostage in Mexico. A 9-year-old boy witnessed the rape of his 15-year-old sister by their captor. He managed to escape during one such incident and recruited a band of street kids to help him.

They overtook the man, and the siblings escaped, making it to the U.S. border and detention.

Children who make it to U.S. custody are the fortunate ones. Though detention offers these traumatized young people

a brief respite and sanctuary, victimization and sexual abuse still occur in detention. Although it is illegal to detain children with adults, minors were being held in adult detention even before the 2011 surge of unaccompanied young people. The Women’s Refugee Commission, in a report presented to the United Nations last March, concluded that mi-

grant children taken into custody by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol regularly face “excessive force” and treatment that is “inhumane and degrading.”

Children who make it to U.S. custody are the fortunate ones.

Market for Migration

In Mexico, those who profit most from the migration market are the criminal cartels and coyotes (smugglers). Here in the United States, the clear winners are private prisons and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or I.C.E.—now the second-largest federal agency, with an annual budget of \$5.614 billion in 2013.

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With roughly 400,000 detentions and deportations annually, there are now more immigrants detained in the U.S. in any given year than the entire population detained in the U.S. Japanese internment camps of the 1940s.

The prison industry charges \$164 per immigrant detainee per day, and detains about half of all undocumented immigrants caught by I.C.E. for an average of five months. The Corrections Corporation of America and the GEO Group, the two largest private prison companies, had a combined revenue of \$3.3 billion in 2012. Instead of posting bail or wearing an ankle monitor—a practice allowed for even violent criminals at a cost of 30 cents to \$14 per detainee per day—immigrants are detained at a total cost to U.S. taxpayers of \$5 million per day.

This does not factor in the cost of foster care for the children left behind.

In 2011 the United States formally detained 6,854 unaccompanied young people in child detention facilities overseen by the Office for Refugee Resettlement. By 2013, the United States had detained 24,668 young people. Since October of last year, over 57,500 minors have already been detained.

President Obama has acknowledged this humanitarian crisis and called on the Federal Emergency Management Agency to organize a response. Makeshift shelters are being set up to accommodate the surge of children. With so many passing through detention, their processing time can be as short as 35 days; still, as a result of political pressures, the White House is trying to expedite their deportation.

These children could be granted Temporary Protected Status until suitable guardians are found; instead they are being sped through expensive court proceedings in front of immigration judges and, when possible, with attorney representation and translators.

In 2012, 40 percent of unaccompanied children taken into custody were found eligible for asylum or other forms of legal relief; if the child cannot be reunited with a qualifying family member in the United States, asylum often leads to a child being put into foster care.

The remaining 60 percent were repatriated to their country and the conditions they had managed to escape—possibly to begin the trip again, and again risk being abused or disappeared.

Our Hearts and Homes

As this exodus of traumatized young people reaches our shore, we as a nation and as individuals must decide how to respond.

Some of those who make it to our border have a relative or friend in the United States who could look after them. Others have no one left in the world. All of them have as little as 30 days to navigate immigration laws and find someone to take them in or vouch for them.

In his remarks on World Refugee Day in June 2013, Pope Francis said:

We cannot be insensitive to these families or towards our refugee brothers and sisters. We are called to help them, opening ourselves to understanding and hospitality. May there be no lack of persons and institutions around the world to assist them. In their faces is etched the face of Christ!

Prophetically, the U.S.C.C.B. and Catholic Charities, among other religious and nonprofit organizations, have led the way in protecting these lost children and provide information on how to sponsor an immigrant child. Families and individuals who foster a child receive annual stipends to cover the cost of their care. Shelters that can take them in receive compensation. Individuals can also become guardians, agreeing to mentor a child so the young people can try to qualify for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and not be automatically deported.

Imagine the life that might again be breathed into religious orders and seminaries if each community opened its doors to a few of these many lost children. Imagine if these young people were kept safe and taught daily by the words and examples of holy people.

Imagine if people of all faiths came together to make room. ▲



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Francis Wins Korean Hearts

The Catholic Church in Korea has hit the jackpot with Pope Francis! That's what Thomas Hong-Soon Han told me in Seoul as the pontiff's amazingly successful visit ended. He believes many Koreans will now want to join the church because of Francis, but he's not sure it's prepared for this.

Han knows the situation well, having been president of Korea's Catholic Lay Apostolate Council (2005-10) and South Korea's ambassador to the Holy See from 2010 to 2013.

Han and several Korean reporters said no leader in living memory has received such a tremendous welcome from Koreans, both Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The welcome given to Presidents Obama, Xi Jinping and John Paul II paled by comparison.

Koreans have never seen a leader like Francis, so humble, so sensitive to the sufferings and concerns of people, so coherent. "He does what he says," several sources said. "There's no leader like him in any of the Christian churches or among the Buddhists in Korea, and none in the political world," Sung Jin Park, reporter for Yonhap, Korea's main news agency, told me.

The Argentine pope reached Korean hearts by his warm, joyful personality, his use of a Kia-Soul economy car, his closeness to those who have suffered, his kissing of children and his openness to everyone.

They were profoundly moved that he met relatives of the victims of the Sewol ferry disaster four times, where-

as President Park Geun-hye met one for the first time at the airport while waiting for Francis. The relatives gave him a yellow ribbon, which he wore on his cassock. The ribbon is a symbol of protest by the relatives who want an investigation into the disaster. When, after wearing it for half a day, someone told him, "It's better not to wear the ribbon; the pope should be neutral," he retorted, "One cannot be neutral in the face of human suffering." President Park had hoped to gain political advantage from the visit, but the pope's response to the Sewol relatives cast her in poor light.

Throughout Korea, people were touched as they watched on TV his tenderness with children bearing disabilities at KKottongnae, and his gentleness as he greeted seven elderly comfort women in Myeong-dong cathedral on Aug. 18 before Mass.

Francis reached people's hearts too by recalling the suffering Koreans have endured "from years of violence, persecution and war" and the division of their homeland. He offered hope by assuring them that "peace can be won through quiet listening and dialogue, rather than by mutual recriminations, fruitless criticisms and displays of force." Celebrating a Mass "for reconciliation in the Korean family," he urged everyone, including the authorities, to show forgiveness and solidarity, saying it is the path to peace. Afterward, he was given a crown of thorns made out of wire from the fence at the demilitarized zone that divides Korea. He brought it back to the Vatican as a reminder of their suffering.

During Francis' visit, he inspired this young, dynamic church of 5.4 million faithful (11 percent of the population) by beatifying 124 martyrs—all but one were laypeople—and by encouraging Catholics in this prosperous country to imitate these martyrs, who followed Christ and shared what they had with those in need. Aware that Korea's Catholics come mostly from the middle and upper strata of society, Francis, in

his talks, urged them to reach out more to those less well-off and on the periphery. He called on the whole country to become a leader in solidarity.

Even though the church in Korea owes its existence to laypeople, it has become clericalized. Addressing the bishops, Francis insisted that

the laity be given their proper role and quipped that in the church of the first Korean martyrs "there was no temptation of clericalism; they were laypeople!"

Surprisingly, he did not have a meeting with the priests. The bishops had advised against it because of division among the clergy between those who are more socially-politically engaged and those who are not. Francis nevertheless addressed priests directly during the Mass for reconciliation.

Before that Mass, he embraced the country's Christian, Buddhist and other religious leaders, saying: "We are all brothers. Let us walk together as brothers before God!"

During his visit, Francis reached out beyond Korea to the whole continent, but that's another story.

GERARD O'CONNELL

'One cannot be neutral in the face of human suffering.'

GERARD O'CONNELL, *America's Rome correspondent, recently traveled with Pope Francis to South Korea. America's Vatican coverage is sponsored in part by the Jesuit communities of the United States.*

Holy Spirits

Encounters with a drinking culture in college

BY CARLOS MESQUITA

I first began to deepen my relationship with God in high school. I attended a small, Catholic, all-boys school sponsored by the Congregation of the Brothers of St. Francis Xavier. As a result, I was always presented with opportunities that encouraged me to explore my faith and reflect on what presence God had in my life.

I was enrolled in religion courses, which were required each year, but I longed for a way to focus on the deeper spiritual aspects of the faith and to learn more about the theology behind my Catholic beliefs. Each week, during my free period, I visited the school librarian, who helped me grow in my faith by answering some of these questions. We would discuss topics like the perpetual virginity of Mary, the concept of time in relation to purgatory and what indulgences were. These conversations helped spark my interest in developing a deeper relationship with God.

Another aspect of my high school experience that encouraged me to reflect and pray about who God was to me were the various required and optional retreats. These opportunities helped me to truly strengthen my relationship with God and in the process learn more about myself. The growth and increased understanding that I found on the retreats and other experiences that my school's campus ministry department offered inspired

me to become a peer minister during my senior year, in the hope of helping other students achieve the same spiritual growth through their own retreat experiences.



When I got to college, things were different. I wasn't interested in drinking, but it seemed everyone else was. During the first couple of weekends, when other students decided to "go out," I usually would hang out with a small group of people who chose to engage in dry activities. But as the weeks went on, this group grew smaller and smaller. It seemed that for most people, the question was not "Should I drink?" but rather, "Should I get drunk?" This drinking culture, in which many of my peers seemed to disregard their own well-being, came as a shock to me.

After a few weekends spent alone

in my room, watching a movie or getting some homework done, I began to wonder if maybe I was the one who was not acting "normal" and why I never had the desire to get drunk on the weekends. I asked some of my friends why they drank to excess, and while some just said they enjoyed it, many responded that they were drinking to forget something or to relieve stress. They described trying to avoid or escape some part of themselves.

These responses didn't clear up my confusion. I didn't know what to make of the fact that so many of my friends shared the same morals and values as me but also were engaged in this culture. I decided to get someone else's opinion on the matter. That was when I met with one of the Jesuits who lived at the university. He helped me to understand that, while my peers and I were experiencing the stress that comes with college life, we were dealing with it differently.

Deepening my relationship with God in high school had helped me to turn to God when I experienced rough times and to find consolation in the friendship I had with God. I felt gratitude that I had developed relationships with others, whom I felt comfortable going to when a problem became too big for me to handle alone. And I also felt comfortable talking with God about anything that bothered me.

I also understood that I couldn't let my relationship with God grow stagnant. In an effort to grow this relationship, I sought out my university's cam-

CARLOS MESQUITA is a sophomore at Fairfield University, Fairfield, Conn.

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pus ministry department. In my first semester, I became a eucharistic minister, attended several retreats, went to adoration once a week and attended some of the Masses offered on weeknights in the residence halls.

The most significant part of engaging in these different activities was meeting new people who either did not engage in the drinking culture, or drank responsibly and were of age. Meeting people who actually shared my interests—both socially and spiritually—was very encouraging, and it brought me joy to be in their company. It was a comfort to know that these friends would not suggest that we go to a party where people would be drinking, or that they would respect the fact that I didn't want to drink. Despite the fact I was a freshman and many members of this group were upperclassmen, I always felt welcome. They invited me to spend time with them, and it was always easy to strike up a conversation if I ran into one of them. These people, especially those in the eucharistic minister community, helped me with my transition to life in college and became mentors and role models for how I could have fun and get the most out of my college experience without drinking.

Through participating in my campus ministry and strengthening the relationship I made with the other members of this community, I continued to develop my relationship with God, too—something that brought me profound joy. In times of trouble, I knew I could turn to them rather than to alcohol, as some of my peers did. The friends I made also helped me to surround myself with a feeling of consolation. I felt encouraged to be myself and live my faith, despite the challenge that the culture of drinking posed. Little did I know that by opening myself up to new—and now cherished—relationships with others, I was once again accepting God's invitation to know him better, and to grow in that relationship, too. **A**

BOOKS & CULTURE

TELEVISION | JIM McDERMOTT

ENRAPTURED?

The sad, strange comfort of HBO's 'The Leftovers'

When HBO first announced that it had greenlit a television series about the Rapture, one would have been forgiven for assuming we were in for yet another twist on Hollywood's seemingly endless obsession with the post-apocalyptic. Given the popularity of recent "scripturally inspired" projects like "Noah" or "The Bible," some sort of high-profile, supposedly Christian pseudo-science fiction was inevitable. If anything, the only surprise was that it had taken the industry this long to get there.



Some two years later, that television show, **The Leftovers**, has just concluded its first season. But instead of religious kitsch, its co-creators, Damon

Lindelof (co-creator of "Lost") and Tom Perrotta (author of the novel on which the series is based), have created what may be the most thoughtful and brutally honest exploration of grief and loss ever portrayed on television.

The set-up is simple: On an ordinary day, 2 percent of the world's population vanishes. No parting of the clouds, no voice from the heavens, just *poof*. Some believe it is the Rapture. And indeed, Pope Benedict is among those who vanish. But so is J-Lo. And Gary Busey. And Anthony Bourdain. (Apparently even God is always looking for a new place to get a nice gazpacho.) Others speak of the disappeared as "victims," though of what no one can be certain. The only thing that is clear is that they are gone.

But instead of using this event as the

THE GUILTY REMNANT. A mysterious cult protests a parade honoring the departed in the first episode of "The Leftovers."



PHOTOS: HBO/PAUL SCHIRALDI

“[Lohfink’s] is a vision, deeply grounded in scripture, that I believe is our future.”

—Stanley Hauerwas

Gerhard Lohfink



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jumping-off point for world wars (the president is secretly the anti-Christ!) or some kind of Last Judgment (Jesus carries an Uzi!), “The Leftovers” leaps three years ahead to follow the effects of the disappearance on the townspeople of rural Mapleton, N.Y.

Father Matt Jamison (Christopher Eccleston) spends his time researching the vanished, uncovering their sins so as to prove that the event was not the Rapture. Sheriff Kevin Garvey (Justin Theroux) has taken to day drinking, and may or may not be hallucinating that packs of feral dogs are running the streets at night. His son, Tom (Chris Zylka), has secretly dropped out of college and now works for a supposed faith healer, while his straight-A daughter, Jill (Margaret Qualley), has taken to attending orgy-like parties with her classmates.

Meanwhile Kevin’s wife, Laurie (Amy Brenneman), has left him to join a burgeoning local cult called the Guilty Remnant, better known as the G.R., whose members do not speak, dress all in white and smoke constantly as they stand outside people’s homes, watching them.

Though some people seem to be handling things better than others, every character we meet is in fact grappling with the same issues of grief and loss. They stumble through their lives less and less sure of what is meaningful or real, and in many cases grow more and more furious. This gives the narrative a serrated, whiplash sort of energy; you never know quite where the story is going, and the mood can shift in an instant from intimate to volcanic.

And as the characters wrestle on, their fellow townspeople in the G.R. silently stalk them, disrupting any private or public events from which people might draw solace. The group’s central insight seems to be that most of what we do as human beings is meant to help us avoid the truths of life—that we die, that life is random, that we are not special or safe but cast

out and alone. Religion is a fiction that we hide within. So are holidays like the Fourth of July or Christmas. For the G.R., even family is a human construct meant to keep out the Big Bad Wolf of reality.

It is disturbing stuff, especially as the group’s methods grow more provocative. (The show is worth watching simply to witness the horrible, ingenious ways in which the G.R. try to shake people’s faith.) But the more time we spend with them, the harder it is to tell whether they are the most militant and hateful of atheists, or the most profound of spiritual disciples. Many of the questions they raise are not far from those of Buddha or Jesus. Nor are the reactions that they provoke.

When “The Leftovers” debuted, Todd VanDerWerff in the A.V. Club called it “some of the most desolate, despairing television on air” (6/26). The TV critic Alan Sepinwall labeled it a “tour de force of devastation and grief” (Hitfix.com, 6/25). More recently Emily Nussbaum of The New Yorker described the show as “obsessed with grief and terror” (8/4). (To be clear, these are the words of critics who adore the show.)

Some might label the show a theodicy, except this is not a story about trying to understand why bad things have happened or about getting to the heart of some crucial mystery. No, “The Leftovers” is about the profound struggle to survive in tragedy’s wake. It is probably not a story for everybody; but for viewers who have struggled to put themselves back together after tragedy, who have watched as initial catastrophe continues to spider-web across their lives over many years like cracks in a sheet of glass, splintering open so much that had seemed firm, definitive and stable, “The Leftovers” will be familiar territory. It may even prove a comfort.

JIM McDERMOTT, S.J., a screenwriter, is America’s Los Angeles correspondent.

MINDS AT WORK

The 50 Year Argument,” a new documentary by Martin Scorsese about The New York Review of Books, opens with a quotation from the essay “Speak, Memory,” by Oliver Sacks, in that periodical (2/21/2013):

This sort of sharing and participation, this communion, would not be possible if all our knowledge, our memories, were tagged and identified, seen as private, exclusively ours. Memory is dialogic and arises not only from direct experience but from the intercourse of many minds.

Sacks is writing about the nature of memory, but Scorsese clearly sees a connection with the journal in which the essay appeared. A magazine is, if nothing else, a communal enterprise, an “intercourse of many minds.” In the case of The New York Review of Books, those minds include many estimable thinkers. But it also includes thousands of anonymous readers who will never find their names in the pages of the review.

And that is just fine. There are other joys to be had from reading a well-written (and well-edited!) journal. The nature of reading is, of course, private, but part of the thrill of reading a magazine is the knowledge that others are reading the same material at roughly the same time. If you are lucky, you may know some of these people and can seek out conversation with them. I don’t think it’s overstating the matter to liken this experience to communion.

Or so it was for 200 years or so.

MAURICE TIMOTHY REIDY, *is an executive editor of America.*

With the advent of the Internet and social media, a new kind of reading community now exists. You can now comment on stories in real time and see responses from other readers, and sometimes from the author herself, within minutes of posting. It is a new kind of thrill, one that allows for more voices to be heard. This system, we are told, is preferable to having a select group of gatekeepers dictate the terms of the conversation.

There is some truth to this argument. Online conversation, when moderated prudently, serves an important purpose. Sometimes you don’t want to wait a week before discussing today’s news. Sometimes news happens when editors aren’t paying attention. The Internet allows these conversations to take place.

But these conversations are rarely as enlightening as the arguments taking place in traditional journals. I don’t see this as an elitist argument, as some do, but one born of humility. I do not know about many things, a fact I am reminded of time and again when I read my favorite magazines.

“The 50 Year Argument,” which airs on Sept. 29 on HBO, includes a charming confession from Zoe Heller, a British novelist and contributor to the NYRB. “Quite often I pick it up and I think, I have no idea of anything to do with this subject,” she admits, “... what I’m saying is I like it because it educates me.”

I know the feeling. In the Aug. 14

issue, I read about the perils facing the Great Barrier Reef and a dispatch from the Arab state of Oman. Both subjects are far outside the realm of my experience, but that is precisely why I found it so exhilarating to encounter them. I knew that the essays would be well written and well argued. That was reason enough to read them.

There are many fascinating things to read online, of course, but the reading experience there is a bit more scattered and less reliable. Jumping from link to link in search of a good argument is bracing, but it can also be disorienting. I would prefer to pay for a subscription and let expert editors spread the content before me like a fine meal. I also enjoy the quiet time afforded by long magazine articles, away from the nagging imperatives of my iPhone, asking me to

I would prefer to let editors spread the content before me like a fine meal.



print, share and forward by email.

A magazine also allows you to see minds at work—the minds of the writers, of course, but also the intellectual curiosity of the editors, who come together to create something anew with every issue. It is a marvel to behold.

The New York Review of Books is edited by Robert Silvers, one of the founding editors. He still works the phones every day, nurturing his writers, always looking for an intriguing new title. He rarely writes for the review, but you get to know him the more you read it. His is a single, restless intellect, more edifying perhaps than a thousand voices blooming online.

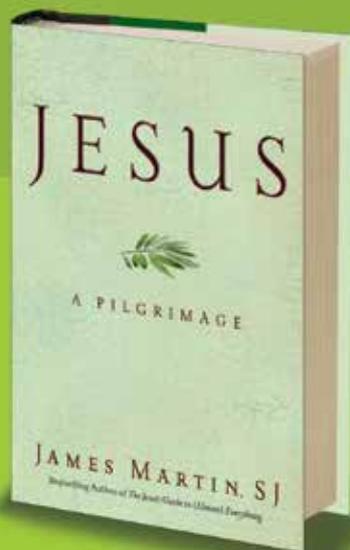
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BACK TO BURKE?

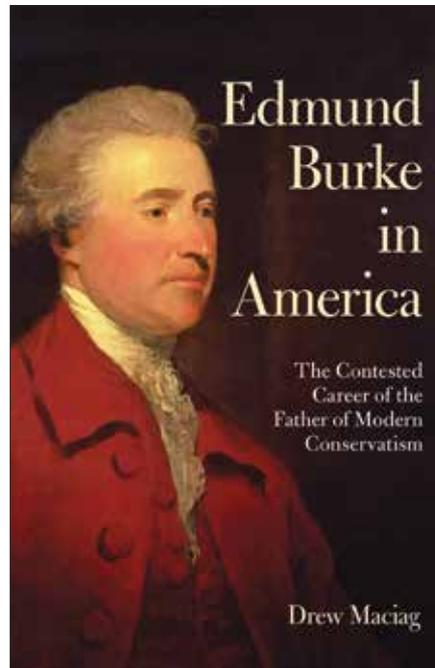
EDMUND BURKE IN AMERICA The Contested Career of the Father of Modern Conservatism

By Drew Maciag
Cornell University Press. 304p \$29.95

The rise of the Tea Party and ongoing Republican efforts to define their national platform make this an opportune time to explore the roots and contours of American conservatism. Drew Maciag's *Edmund Burke in America: The Contested Career of the Father of Modern Conservatism* employs Burke to investigate wider themes in American political culture, arguing that Burke—unlike John Locke—is not important because of the substance of his ideas. Rather, Burke's unique combination of progressive and traditional paradigms made him a "curious type of half modern" attractive to conservatives because he urged change and progress tempered by continuity and tradition.

Although remembered as a conservative, Burke (1729-97) was committed to Enlightenment liberal reform. He opposed slavery and most forms of capital punishment, supported religious toleration, objected to harsh penal codes in Ireland and condemned corporal punishment for sodomy (leading to accusations that he was a "sodomite sympathizer"). In the context of British constitutional monarchy and imperialism, in a highly publicized trial, Burke accused the governor general of British India, Warren Hastings, of abusing Indian natives. Yet Burke rejected radical social engineering or the chaotic rule of the "mob." For these reasons, he opposed the French Revolution and the easing of divorce laws. Burke described

his approach in "A Letter to a Noble Lord": "To innovate is not to reform.... The French revolutionists...refused to reform anything; and they left...nothing at all *unchanged*."



According to Drew Maciag, this Old Whig distrust of egalitarianism and revolution has provided American conservatives—from the 18th to the 21st centuries—a "significant intellectual counterpoint" to "utopian confidence in democracy, equality, and the sensibility of perpetual revolution." Because American political culture is rooted in a struggle between the followers of Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke, Maciag insists that we can understand the "perpetual tension between competing sets of American ideals" by looking at how different generations fought over Burke. Exploring that tension might have revealed how the American right and left have often coalesced around a core set of liberal ideals or the paradoxical cross-fertil-

izations that have led the Tea Party to adopt elements of Paine's libertarianism while rejecting his desire to protect individuals from the effects of capitalism (e.g., Yuval Levin's *The Great Debate: Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, and the Birth of Right and Left*, Basic Books 2013, as well as Adam Gopnik's "The Right Man: Who Owns Edmund Burke?" *The New Yorker*, 7/29/13).

Disappointingly, Maciag neither traces the impact of Burke's ideas nor provides an argument for why Burke shines light on the American political tradition. His claims boil down to how many Americans mentioned Burke (e.g., John Adams, Woodrow Wilson) because Burke provided eloquence or "ever-quotable prose" or Americans had a Burke-like sensibility (e.g., Theodore Roosevelt). The fact that Wilson wrote about Burke does not mean he was Burkean or "firmly entrenched in his conservative outlook." As Maciag admits, Wilson was a liberal in politics, economics, foreign policy and diplomacy. Occasionally and outrageously, Maciag calls on similarity of biography or psychological state (e.g., whether Burke and John Adams's sons were successful in politics or they both felt underappreciated in old age). Ultimately, Maciag demonstrates that Burke's ideas did not affect the development of American conservatism. Burke simply provided quotations (which could be molded to just about any new idea) and philosophical authority as Americans forged new institutions.

For example, 20th-century Catholic writers fought positivism by reinventing Burke as a theorist of natural and higher law in the tradition of St. Thomas Aquinas. Catholics used Burke's name (e.g., the Burke Society of Fordham University, the Burke Newsletter at the University of Detroit) to legitimate their cause. Like the other public intellectuals, writers and politicians Maciag describes, Catholic scholars like Peter Stanlis

“twisted” Burke to fit “the Catholic mold.” Burke provided no argument for natural law, but he legitimated the claims and provided useful rhetoric.

Although there are some wonderful moments in the book (e.g., how “Thoughts on the Causes of the Present Discontents” wove criticism of Andrew Jackson together with Burke’s 1770 attack on the corruption and despotism of George III) readers will not gain much depth or breadth of understanding regarding American conservatism. Important schools of thought or major conservative thinkers (e.g., Hamilton, Hayek, Buckley) are never seriously addressed. Huntington’s famous claim regarding Burke (e.g., the “shock of events” drives people to conservatism when institutions they take for granted are affected) is mentioned but not analyzed. For Maciag, conservatism focuses on “order, stability, hierarchy, religious orthodoxy, institutional authority, social conformity, property rights, discipline, and established cultural standards,” but these themes are neither discussed systematically nor critically interrogated. Given the importance of religion, capitalism, immigration, sexual orientation, crime and punishment and race in 21st-century conservative rhetoric, it is odd that these themes—all addressed by Burke—are virtually ignored. Modern conservatives have run against government and favored popular recall, but how can this be squared with Burke?

Is the French Revolution really the Maginot line of the American political traditions? Maciag never provides convincing evidence. Differing understandings of nationalism (Hamilton and the Federal Bank) and federalism (John Adams and the Alien and Sedition Acts) defined party lines, but can these ideological differences be traced to the social engineering of the French Revolution? Maciag refers to the market as a substitute for monarchy, aristocracy and restrictive customary practices but fails to acknowl-

edge that slavery (mentioned in that same paragraph) was, quite literally, a “restrictive” customary practice that defined American political life. Slavery and states rights warrant careful discussion, given modern conservatism’s reliance on local control rather than national supremacy.

As a work for general audiences, Maciag fails to provide crucial background information on events or unfamiliar people (e.g., the XYZ Affair, Friedrich von Gentz and Ralph Adams Cram); and for academic readers, he ignores major debates in the literature and makes grand claims without pro-

viding adequate evidence. Although Maciag unearths some fascinating material, he fails to demonstrate how investigating Burke casts light on the development of American conservative ideals. As he writes, “American conservatism as actually practiced in politics, economics, and social policy has had almost nothing to do with Burke’s philosophy.”

SUSAN P. LIEBELL is an associate professor in the department of political science at Saint Joseph’s University in Philadelphia. Her recent work is *Democracy, Intelligent Design, and Evolution: Science for Citizenship* (Routledge, 2014).

HOLLY J. GRIECO

SAINTS AMONG US

WHY CAN THE DEAD DO SUCH GREAT THINGS? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation

By Robert Bartlett
Princeton University Press. 816p \$39.95

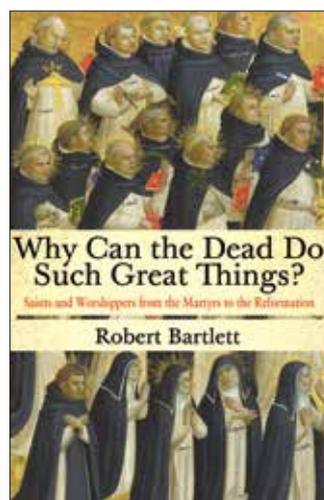
Robert Bartlett titles and commences his magisterial work on saints and worshippers with a quote from St. Augustine’s *City of God*: “Why can the dead do such great things?” For 21st-century readers, living in a time in which David Hume’s skeptical critique of miracles may speak more convincingly than does Augustine’s affirmatory exclamation, Bartlett’s study will be a fascinating and illuminating read. Even for some Catholics, the practices and beliefs that Bartlett describes might seem outside the scope of contemporary experience. But Bartlett’s book will also be welcome to those who have experienced something

of the power of the cult of the saints in their own time and place.

Poring over Bartlett’s book, I recalled participating in the vigil of the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes at the eponymous parish in Toronto, Ontario. Hundreds of parishioners fingered rosary beads, praying in unison as we circumambulated the church in the frozen night, marking off a sacred space in the middle of the city. Until I had experienced and

been moved by it, I had not associated this kind of devotion or spectacle with the contemporary practice of Catholicism in the United States or Canada. And yet it exists, in some cases with a vibrancy and vivacity that might rival its expression in the period that Bartlett describes.

While the proportions of Bartlett’s book are daunting, his style balances rigor and a near-encyclopedic breadth with accessibility and humor. These traits do not always go hand-in-hand, though they



do here. Approaching the subject chronologically as well as thematically, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?* will remain a classic study of the saints, their cults and the faithful for a long time.

Bartlett examines myriad examples of the interactions between the saints, living and dead, and the faithful. A handful will have to suffice here.

It is well known that the faithful often travelled on pilgrimage to encounter the saints; many Christians do this today too. Neither were the bodies of the saints stationary. Sometimes a saint would be translated to a place of greater honor. Translations

gave the faithful greater access to the saints through their relics, which were on display as part of the celebration. Disturbing the saint had to be done with care, because even a pious disruption could result in a display of the saint's power. In some cases, the saint refused to be moved until certain conditions were met. The relics of St. Margaret of Scotland, for example, could not be budged until the body of her husband, King Malcolm, was brought to join her in the new chapel constructed after her canonization in the mid-13th century.

Relics of the saints conferred prestige and honor upon a church. The lure of this prestige and the desire to benefit from a saint's intercession meant that relics were sometimes stolen. Perhaps surprisingly, these thefts were not always considered impious. In the ninth century, one abbot in Aquitaine gained a reputation for arranging the thefts of relics so they could become part of his abbey's collection. When the abbot conspired to wrest the body of St. Bibianus (or Vivianus) from a nearby town, one of

Gather the Clouds

and all floating implements
star studded saints
and gemstone dreams
moon smoke incense
squandered speech
hearts that have wandered
strangers squinting at the sky
the cello notes rising
light escaping through a crack in the wall
dandelion fluff on a newborn's head
owl wind
the old woman's wave to her lost boy.
Kiss every fingertip every bruise dust mote and shadow.
Lie down in the grass with your own bright life.

CLAUDIA MONPERE McISAAC

Claudia Monpere McIsaac teaches writing at Santa Clara University. Her poetry and fiction appear in The Massachusetts Review, The Kenyon Review, Prairie Schooner, Nimrod and elsewhere.

his co-conspirators feigned demonic possession in order to gain access to the church and the saint on reasonable pretenses. The abbot was proud of his accomplishments in relocating the saint, which he characterized as "a happy sacrilege." Monks and clerics in possession of stolen relics often sought to emphasize the neglect the saint had suffered in her previous location, arguing that she was more content in her new home. In an account of the theft of the relics of St. Auctor that were taken from Trier and brought to the church of St. Giles in Brunswick, the Saxon noblewomen Gertrude of Brunswick was visited by the saint himself, who claimed that he was treated without reverence or respect in Trier. The saint purportedly led Gertrude to his tomb, permitted her to take his remains and bring them to a new church and aided her in evading capture for the theft.

Sometimes the laity desired more personal access to the saints; one way to do this was to snatch bits of a saint's clothing, hair or body. After Bishop

Caesarius of Arles died in 542, the congregation there tore off his clothes as contact relics, which the local clergy struggled to recover. In the 14th century, a desire to be in contact with the saints extended beyond the bounds of orthodox Catholicism to communities of men and women in the south of France known as Beguins. A number of Beguins were burned at the stake as heretics in 1321 at Lunel. Some considered these men and women martyrs and divided the bodies of the executed to keep their remains as relics.

In the case of Peter of John Olivi (d. 1298), a Franciscan theologian

whose writings inspired these southern French Beguins, a full-fledged—albeit unauthorized—cult developed at his tomb in Narbonne and remained active until Olivi's bones were exhumed and scattered and the *ex votos* offered in thanks had been destroyed. The physical remains of the deceased and the site of the tomb featured prominently in the veneration of the saints during the Middle Ages; eliminating these was one way to discourage or even destroy an unauthorized cult.

Within Christianity, the cult of the saints developed out of the cult of the martyrs. Although the Christian cult of the saints had similarities with the worship of Greek and Roman deities and heroes, critical differences separated them—most important, the Christian rejection of animal sacrifice as fitting tribute to God and his saints. Parallels exist, too, with Judaism and Islam. Here as well, though, important distinctions separate Christian understandings and attitudes toward those recognized as saints from those of

Jews and Muslims. These distinctions are rooted primarily in the Christian preoccupation with the bodies of the saints and the movement of the bodies of the “very special dead,” as Peter Brown has called them, from spaces designated for the dead to spaces designated not only for the living, both public and private, but also to spaces designated for worship of the divine—spaces that, in Jewish and Islamic practice (as well as in Greek and Roman practice), would be defiled by the presence of human remains.

Early on, the martyrs and saints were recognized by public acclamation. That is, a group of people—perhaps even those who had known the holy man or woman during this life—attested to the sanctity of the deceased and began to venerate him or her as a saint. By the late 12th century, Pope Alexander III declared that Christians could not venerate saints unless the Roman church had officially recognized them as saints. By the mid-13th century, Pope Innocent IV pronounced that only the bishop of Rome could canonize saints. This understanding of sanctity reflects a Western Christian outlook; without a centralized hierarchy, Greek Christendom and Eastern Christian traditions did not develop a controlled process of canonization. Nonetheless, despite efforts on the part of medieval pontiffs to dictate those officially recognized as saints by the Roman Church, in the later Middle Ages hundreds of men and women were still recognized as saints by public acclamation. Likewise, among some Catholics today, men and women, including the martyred Archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero, and the co-founders of the Catholic Worker movement, Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, are considered saints without having received official recognition from the Vatican.

Bartlett’s account of the intimate connections among the living and the dead, the saintly departed and the

saints among us, bring to mind the tapestries designed by John Nava for the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles, Calif. In the series of tapestries entitled “The Communion of the Saints,” the artist depicts contemporary Catholics standing together in prayer intermingled with saints from across the ages. The tapestries simultaneously celebrate and complicate our understanding of sanctity; the work of art powerfully argues not only that the saints look like us, in all our diversity, but also that there are saints among us today.

KAREN SUE SMITH

GENIUS IN SILENCE

BEETHOVEN The Man Revealed

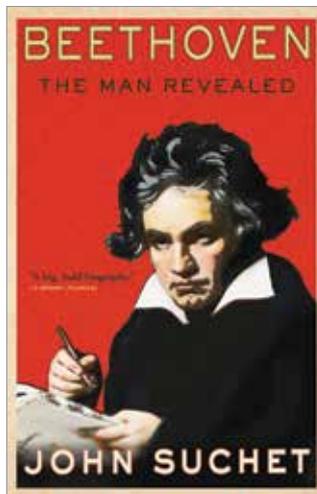
By John Suchet
Atlantic Monthly Press. 400p \$30

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, 31, though not feeling well, was hard at work composing the opera “Don Giovanni” when he was asked to listen to a 16-year-old pianist from Bonn who had traveled to Vienna in the hope of studying with him. The teenager played a prepared song, then improvised at the keyboard. The improvisation impressed Mozart. “Watch out for that boy,” he told the people in the next room. “One day he will give the world something to talk about.” Four years later Mozart lay in a pauper’s grave. The teenager who had played for him, Ludwig van Beethoven, was headed for Vienna, capital of the Holy Roman Empire, where he would spend 34 years dazzling Europe’s music lovers in fulfillment of Mozart’s prophecy.

Robert Bartlett’s masterpiece, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?* brings us back to the sacred (and sometimes profane) origins behind Nava’s moving work of art, so we can develop a better understanding of the saints, their cults and those who have venerated them in the past even as we continue to develop our understanding of the body of Christ among us today.

HOLLY J. GRIECO is assistant professor in the department of religious studies at Siena College in Loudonville, N.Y.

This story, as the biographer John Suchet admits, is a second-hand account written 60 years after Mozart’s death, but it positions Beethoven as Mozart’s true musical heir. Like Mozart, Beethoven was a musical prodigy, though his father was not as adept as Mozart’s father in marketing his son’s talent. Beethoven had mastered the entirety of J. S. Bach’s “Well-Tempered Clavier” by the age of 12. At



11, Beethoven showed Christian Gottlob Neefe, his teacher, his first composition for the piano. “The Dressler Variations” is based on the work of Ernst Christoph Dressler, a German composer. Neefe, to his lasting credit, made sure that his pupil’s manuscript was published. Next Beethoven composed three piano sonatas, which, Suchet argues,

deserve to be added to the standard 32. And at age 13, Beethoven secured his first paying job as assistant court organist (not apprentice) to Neefe. These

were extraordinary accomplishments.

Mozart may never have given Beethoven a single lesson. The Vienna trip was cut short when word came that Beethoven's mother was seriously ill; she died within three months. Six years later, Beethoven, 22, made another trip to Vienna, where Joseph Haydn, 60, taught him musical theory and counterpoint. This time Beethoven learned that his father had died. For years Beethoven had been the family breadwinner, so at the news he hunkered down away from home to make his name. He studied, performed, composed and quickly took Vienna by storm. He was, writes Suchet, "a piano virtuoso unlike any this city had seen, not excepting Mozart."

Beethoven's grandfather Ludwig had been Kapellmeister, the leading musician in Bonn, prominent in the community and stable financially. But Beethoven's father, Johann, a talented young tenor, never lived up to his potential. Instead he became a notorious alcoholic who failed to develop his talents and shirked his role as a provider. Fortunately, the little genius had a long list of other mentors.

The two central dramas (both "tragedies") of Beethoven's life make the most compelling reading in the book. First, Beethoven had trouble forming close reciprocal relationships. He managed to make several important friendships. Stephan von Breuning, for example, Beethoven's closest and longest lasting friend, was at his bedside on the day Beethoven died. Stephan was a child in an aristocratic family that virtually embraced Beethoven as a member, though he was hired to teach the children piano. That said, Beethoven floundered repeatedly at intimacy. He fell in love with several women and had one genuine romance—the "immortal beloved" (still unidentified) he addressed in a famous love letter. Yet Beethoven never found a marriage partner. What makes this fact tragic is that Beethoven manifested an extra large heart, enormous passion and an outsized longing for intimacy.

A very different example also ended tragically. Upon the death of his brother Carl, Beethoven filed suit for custody of his nephew, Karl. That would have given Beethoven a son and an heir. But once Uncle Wolfgang took in Karl, his dominating style of guardianship ultimately sent the youth packing. Given his own father as a role model, it is not surprising that Beethoven would fail as a surrogate. Neglect was not Beethoven's failing, but rather overzealousness to the point of suffocation.

Deafness is the best known drama of Beethoven's life, though I had not realized how young Beethoven was, 26, when he began to lose his hearing. Deafness is also central to the most poignant passage in Suchet's book, a page-turner account of the premiere performance of his Ninth Symphony. The lead-up includes the usual conflicts and reversals that made difficult any concert with Beethoven. There were arguments over the venue, the costs, the singers and musicians, the performance dates and the conductor. In those days the composer, as his own agent, had to do all of that work and assume all the financial risk.

This time Beethoven insisted on conducting the symphony himself, though all of Vienna knew that Europe's foremost composer had grown stone deaf. Somehow Michael Umlauf was engaged, but only as a backup conductor. After Beethoven mounted the dais, Umlauf stood directly behind him.

Beethoven conducted the music, hearing it only in his head, but Umlauf led the musicians, who played "as if their lives depended on it." After months of anticipation, the audience was rapt, and Umlauf moved the music at a driving pace. At the final chord, the audience rose to cheer the composer, chanting his name and stomping their feet in praise. But Beethoven, oblivious, was still conducting at a slower tempo (I assume he had his eyes closed in concentration). Seeing this, the contralto touched his shoulder, and he nodded toward the crowd. Suchet writes: "At that moment Beethoven knew the gift he had given to the world."

The climactic reference recalls one of the most significant points Suchet makes in this general interest biography aimed to show Beethoven as both man and musician. Musical genius left Beethoven feeling extreme isolation and rejection at times; deafness magnified the effects. Once when Beethoven contemplated suicide, his acceptance of responsibility for genius saved him. He realized he had been given a musical gift for the world and felt compelled to use it fully. John Suchet, a radio host, Beethoven scholar and enthusiast, shows how "the greatest musical genius in Europe" buckled under the strain at times, but ultimately bore up and triumphed.

KAREN SUE SMITH is the former editorial director of *America*.

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The Ways of God

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), SEPT. 21, 2014

Readings: Is 55:6–9; Ps 145:2–18; Phil 1:20–27; Mt 20:1–16

“Nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord” (Is 55:8)

What are the ways of God? There are twin dangers for us when we consider this question. On the one hand, some people consider God’s ways so inscrutable that they no longer trust we can know how God acts or what God demands of us. This draws some people to the point of disbelief. If God’s ways challenge or confound human expectations, can God be trusted? On the other hand, some might march in the direction of rigid certainty, confident that with the revelation of Scripture and the sure guidance of the church and its tradition, there is no way of God left unknown, no answer they cannot give, regardless of the question, for the ways of God are always obvious.

But while the danger of turning one’s back on God is apparent for Christians, there is peril in reducing God’s ways to the certainty of our assumptions. To claim to know the ways of God in every respect implicitly rejects the possibility that God can do something new and reduces our relationship with God to a set of presuppositions. Isaiah beseeches his readers to repent, “to seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts.” In this context, that of God’s plan to redeem Israel, God promises that “my thoughts are not your

thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.”

The claim of the otherness of the thoughts and ways of God in Isaiah with respect to ancient Israel should be kept in mind in every historical context and every human life. While we might not comprehend how God is working in the world or in our lives, amid doubt or confusion, do we trust that God is in control, working on behalf of the world to bring good out of the evil we have chosen? For those who grasp God as the essence of all being, God is always in charge, even when we do not understand God’s ways.

Paul was imprisoned—we are not certain where—when he wrote his letter to the Philippians, and he faced the necessity of trusting in God while not understanding what path his life would take. He did not know what the outcome of his imprisonment would be, though capital punishment was a strong possibility, but he trusted that death would allow him to “be with Christ,” a state he considered “far better.” Yet, though he desired to “be with Christ,” he hoped that he would “remain in the flesh,” which he saw as “more necessary for you.” Paul’s desire ultimately was to serve the ways of God, whichever path he would be required to follow.

It is especially in times of crisis and change that the deep wisdom of Paul’s

stance emerges. Paul’s advice to the church, whatever the outcome of his imprisonment would be, whatever situation would befall the Philippians, was simply to “live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” To do this we have to be prepared to accept paths that turn where we did not expect them to turn, which entails constant attentiveness to the voice and call of God.

Matthew’s Gospel contains a parable about the kingdom of heaven in which a landowner seeks laborers for his vineyard. Some of these workers are hired in the morning at 6 a.m. and 9 a.m.; some are hired later at noon, 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. All of them are paid the same wage, regardless of when they began to work, so the parable has rightly been seen as a comment on God’s justice.

The grumbling of the laborers hired early makes it



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Are you ready to encounter the ways of God?

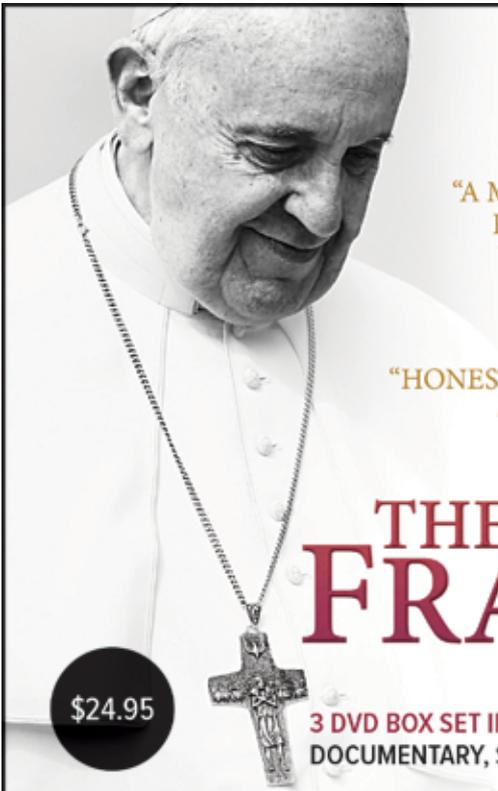
clear that this is an essential element of the parable: God’s generosity with the workers hired late does not align with ordinary human expectations for the just management of workers. But we can also see this parable as a comment on the readiness of the workers. For the laborers hired late, the day was almost over when they were hired, but they had remained ready and prepared. They were rewarded because they remained attentive when hope seemed gone.

God’s ways are not our ways, God’s thoughts not our thoughts, but if we remain open to God doing something new, we will find the way.

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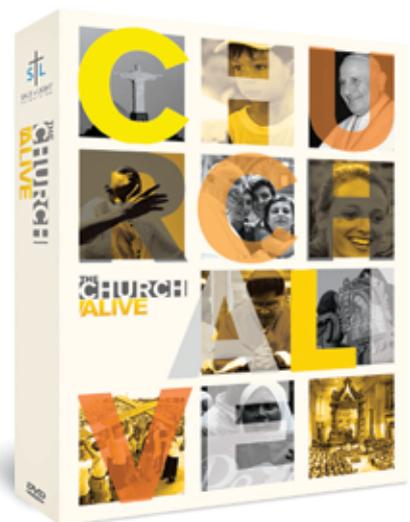
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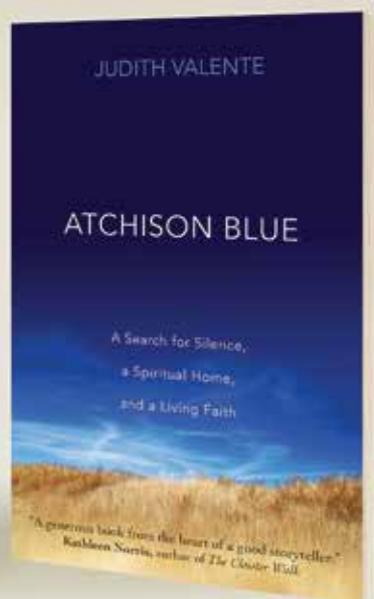
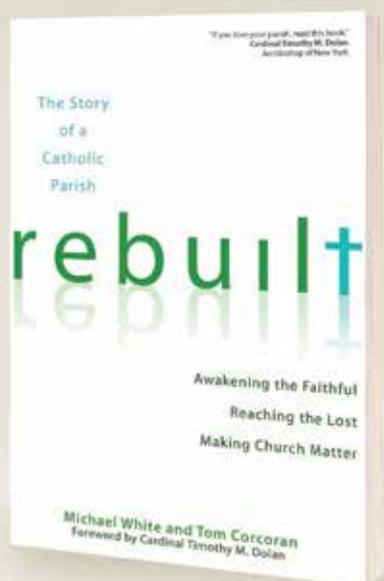
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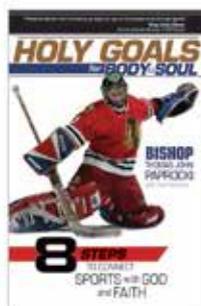
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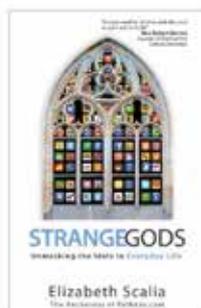
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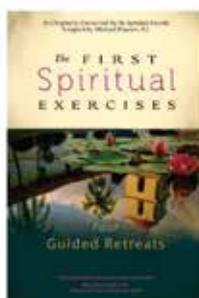
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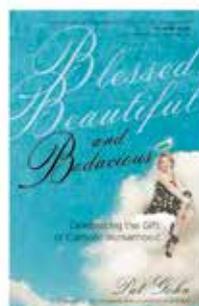
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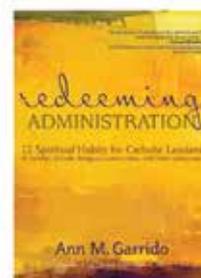
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