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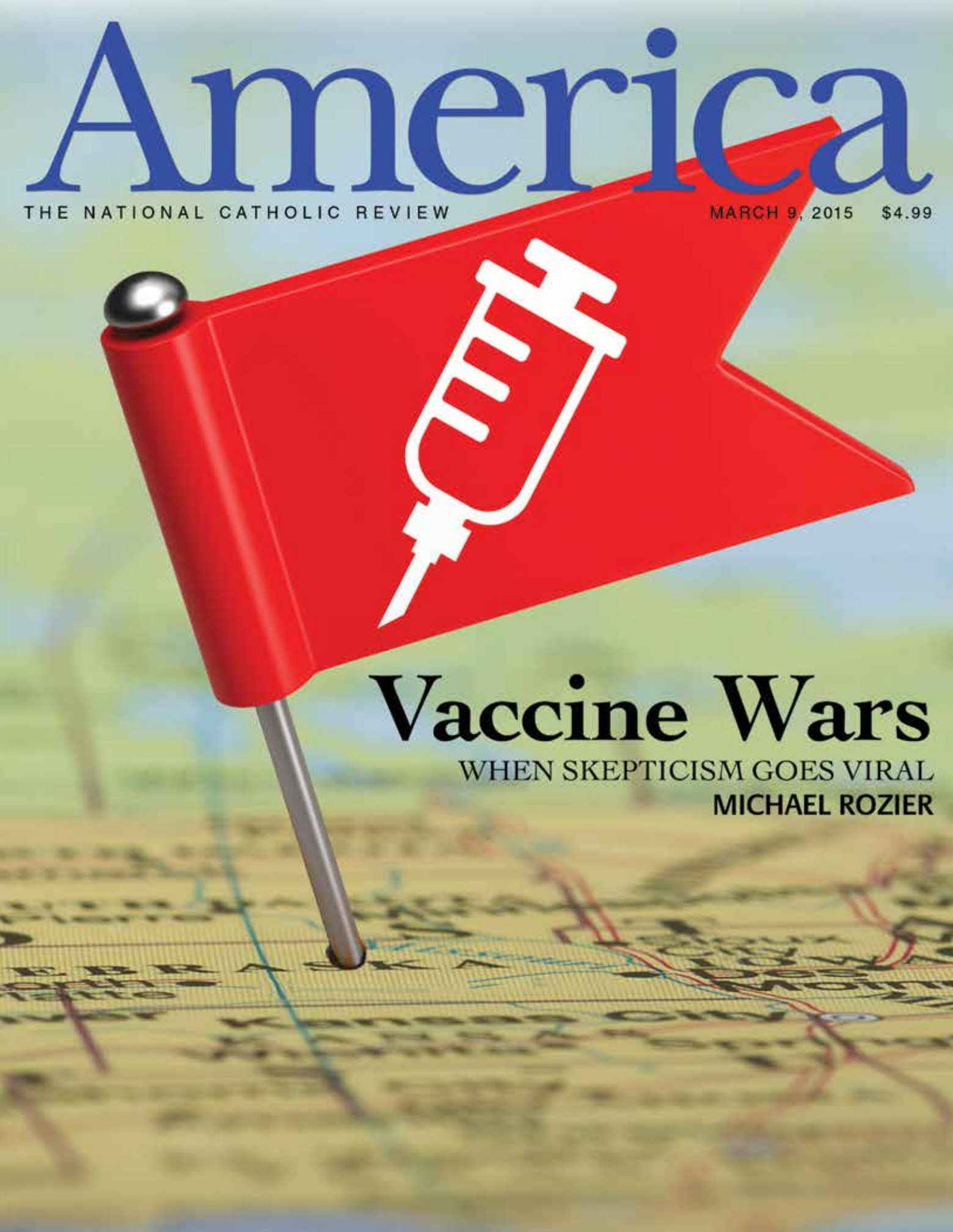

Vaccine Wars

WHEN SKEPTICISM GOES VIRAL

MICHAEL ROZIER

OF MANY THINGS

The management of NBC News announced on Feb. 10 that Brian Williams, the award-winning anchor of its top-rated NBC Nightly News, had been suspended for misrepresenting "events which occurred while he was covering the Iraq War in 2003. It then became clear," said the management, "that on other occasions Brian had done the same while telling that story in other venues."

It's hard to disagree with NBC's conclusion that Mr. Williams's actions were "wrong and completely inappropriate." By reiterating stories that he knew to be false, or at least should have known to be false, Mr. Williams seriously compromised his credibility as an honest broker of the news. The likelihood that every one of us is guilty of some form of hyperbolic self-aggrandizement does not excuse Mr. Williams's actions, nor does it mean that he should not be held accountable.

Our shared experience of human weakness, however, should in some discernible way temper our response to Mr. Williams, yet it appears to have had little effect. As much as Mr. Williams is the protagonist in the middle of his third act, it is also true that there is a powerful antagonist at work. In the days immediately following the disclosure, a self-righteous mob of torch-bearing Twitter-azzi and latter-day Thomas Putnams were intent on immolating Mr. Williams. They have very nearly succeeded. Rather conveniently, the phrase "off with his head" contains fewer than 140 characters.

This all seems very familiar, doesn't it? As David Brooks noted in his column in The New York Times on Feb. 10, nowadays "when somebody violates a public trust, we try to purge and ostracize him. A sort of coliseum culture takes over, leaving no place for mercy.... The pounding cry for resignation builds until capitulation comes."

But is this public shaming a proportionate response? Must every misstep by a public figure result in this kind of behavior, from which so many of us seem to draw such perverse satisfaction? The answer, of course, is no, and there is a way to stop it. As René Girard, the Franco-American literary critic, has observed, it is only forgiveness "that is capable of stopping once and for all the spiral of reprisals, which of course are sometimes interrupted by unanimous expulsions, but violently and only temporarily." In other words, tempering our judgment with mercy is the only way to stop the orgy of public shaming that needlessly destroys lives and communities.

Perhaps we should also bear this in mind as we consider the life of Blessed Junípero Serra, as Jim McDermott, S.J., writes in this issue. The fact that Blessed Junípero was a flawed human being, beset by some of the more odious prejudices of his time, does not mean that his legacy is irredeemable. The chief requirement for sainthood is holiness, not perfection, and those two are in no way the same thing for us mere creatures.

At press time, it appears that Bill O'Reilly, the Fox News host, is being readied for the sacrificial pyre. Slate's headline on Feb. 22 was so familiar it's practically a cliché: "Seven CBS Staffers Discredit Bill O'Reilly's 'War Zone' Claims." Here we go again. I have no idea what Mr. O'Reilly did or didn't do; I'm not even sure that I care. But I do know that whatever happens during this latest round of scarlet lettering, we would do well to remember, as David Brooks wrote, that "the civic fabric would be stronger if, instead of trying to sever relationships with those who have done wrong, we tried to repair them, if we tried forgiveness instead of exiling."

"Public Shaming Gives Way to Public Forgiveness"; now that would be breaking news.

MATT MALONE, S.J.

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Margot Patterson **reports from Havana** on Cuban reaction to the breakthrough in diplomatic relations. Also, Rob Weinert-Kendt reviews **"The Ice Man Cometh."** Full digital highlights at americamagazine.org/webfeatures.

Policing Prejudice

It is not every day that a government official quotes a Broadway show tune in a public address. Make that the nation's top law enforcement official and a song called "Everyone's a Little Bit Racist," and it's safe to say the speech given by James B. Comey, the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, on Feb. 12 was unprecedented. Speaking in Georgetown University's Healy Hall—named for Patrick Francis Healy, a man born into slavery who became the 29th president of the Jesuit institution—Mr. Comey gave a frank and nuanced assessment of today's strained relations between law enforcement and the minority communities they serve.

With the legitimacy that only an insider can bring to bear, Mr. Comey said that he and many of his fellow officers "develop different flavors of cynicism that we work hard to resist because they can be lazy mental shortcuts." The antidote to such prejudice in police work, he suggests, is empathy: "We must better understand the people we serve and protect—by trying to know, deep in our gut, what it feels like to be a law-abiding young black man walking on the street and encountering law enforcement."

Mr. Comey did not, however, let the rest of society off the hook. Police officers work courageously in challenging communities "that most citizens are able to drive around" literally and figuratively by ignoring social ills that incentivize criminal behavior. In the national conversation on race, sparked by the events in Ferguson last summer, people have too often spoken past each other. We must all take up Mr. Comey's challenge to confront our own latent biases and see the humanity of police and civilians alike.

Death by Indifference

Pope Francis met with a delegation from the Italian coast guard on Feb. 17, two days after a massive rescue operation pulled more than 2,000 people from the Mediterranean Sea. That effort followed another tragic loss of life earlier in the month, as more than 300 migrants trying to reach Europe from North Africa were lost in rough winter seas. The pope has consistently brought international attention to the plight of migrants seeking to escape conflict and poverty, and he has appealed for a more merciful response from European states rushing to close their borders to these desperate men, women and children.

Remarkably, some European leaders believe that maintaining a state of readiness to rescue migrants only encourages more escape attempts from North Africa on unseaworthy vessels. The migrants who died in early February, for instance, tried to make their crossing on overloaded rubber dinghies that were soon awash and sinking. This "policy" of indifference only piles cruelty upon cruelty. The Mediterranean's migrants will not be deterred by the threat of a watery demise, since it is the near certainty of death they are already fleeing in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere.

Last November, a cash-strapped Italian government terminated Mare Nostrum, a joint military and humanitarian operation that had saved thousands of lives. It was replaced by the coast-hugging Operation Triton, a European Union effort that has proved fatally inadequate. Border control officials and advocates for migrants warn that 2015 will see a record number of attempts to cross the Mediterranean. The European Union must build up operational capacity to respond and re-evaluate its current policies on migration and asylum so that this perilous crossing no longer appears as the only rational option for people simply seeking to save their lives.

Mass Rape in Darfur

On Feb. 11, the international organization Human Rights Watch released a 48-page report documenting rape committed systematically by the Sudanese army. The attacks, which began on the night of Oct. 30 and lasted over 30 hours, occurred in the town of Tabit in North Darfur. According to witnesses, soldiers went from house to house looking for rebel soldiers; many of the rapes were ordered because the women were believed to be supporters of these soldiers. While the Sudanese government has denied these allegations, H.R.W. has stated that it has "27 first-hand accounts of rape…and credible information about an additional 194 incidents of rape."

In addition to denying these allegations, the Sudanese government has prevented the African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, a peacekeeping mission established in 2007 to help combat the crisis in the region, from investigating these attacks. H.R.W. has now called upon the United Nations to get involved. The report emphasizes the need for "concrete steps to protect civilians in Darfur from further abuse" and to "ensure access to medical care for victims." It also demands that "those responsible for crimes in violation of international law [be] brought to justice." Western nations, including the United States, should take heed and encourage U.N. involvement. While our media attention is focused on today's atrocities, we must not forget about these victims.

A U.N. for Religion?

The headline on the CNN website on Feb. 17 read, "Religion's Week From Hell." In this case, no one can accuse CNN editors of hyperbole. It had been an atrocious week—and month—for religions worldwide. The week began with another Boko Haram attack, this time in Cameroon. In the United States, a Hindu temple was desecrated, and a Muslim mosque was burned to the ground. The murder of three young Muslim people in Chapel Hill, N.C., by a man who posted antireligious diatribes on social media shocked the nation.

Violence continued in Yemen, Iraq and Syria among Muslim communities. In Delhi the Indian government struggled to respond to violence and vandalism directed at Catholics. In Copenhagen, an apparent sympathizer with the Islamic State terrorist group fired on people at a synagogue and a free speech meeting. The week reached a crescendo of cruelty on Sunday with the gruesome beheading of 21 Coptic Christians who had been kidnapped in Libya.

The ongoing strife in the Arab world is generated by a complex of socioeconomic, historical and political forces, but it would be foolish to pretend that a twisted religious component is not an accelerant to the conflict. Likewise historical grievances within the Orthodox tradition and between that tradition and the Catholic Church are an undeniable aspect of the continuing turmoil in Ukraine and other border regions of what was once called Christendom. These historic internecine and geopolitical tensions appear to be now spilling over at the local level as criminal expressions of intolerance and hate begin to appear on the streets of U.S. and European communities, as well as in anti-Semitic outbursts in the high-poverty, low-opportunity ghettoes of France.

Responding to the escalating pace and expansion of the "religious" violence is clearly a responsibility for the world's political leadership and security entities, but there are no quick or easy solutions, and it is becoming clear that secular leaders are running out of ideas. Trying to "drone" or bomb Islamic extremism into submission, for instance—apparently the default response of political leaders from Washington to Cairo—may be succeeding mostly in exacerbating that extremism.

Each cruelty cloaked in religion, each act of violence in the name of God or in honor of the Prophet reduces all religious traditions; it provides false evidence of something irredeemable at the heart of religion itself. Astute observers of religious phenomena, of course, reject "the idea that 'religion' is a trans-historical and trans-cultural feature of human life," as the theologian William T. Cavanaugh has written, one which is "essentially distinct from 'secular' features such as politics and economics and has a peculiarly dangerous inclination to promote violence." At the same time, believers understand these expressions of violence and barbarism as something completely contrary to the essential injunctions of mercy, peace and brotherhood at the heart of the world's great religions.

Like other religious leaders from different faiths around the world, Pope Francis has said the right things when such outbursts trouble television news reports. But this time of accelerating crisis demands something more substantial from world religious leaders.

The Vatican has hosted interreligious prayers for peace in Assisi. It maintains regular channels of dialogue with other Christian communities and other faiths, but these are in effect irregular and small outreach efforts, largely invisible to the wider world. A demand is frequently made that Muslim leaders step forward to condemn the violence perpetrated by Islamic militants; they have repeatedly done so, but how many people ever hear of these denunciations? Whether on the front lines in Ukraine or at a madrassa in North Waziristan, a bolder, consistent expression of religious cooperation, tolerance and mercy is needed.

The real and imagined conflicts within the Islamic world and between Islam and Christianity, Christianity and Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam—and on and on—demand a regular, transparent and frank forum for dialogue and conflict resolution—a United Nations for world religions, as former President Shimon Peres of Israel proposed at the Vatican last September. The Vatican may be uniquely capable of creating and sustaining such a forum, and it should put its good offices, together with influential representatives from other faith traditions, to work to do so.

Politicians can combat extremism nonviolently with greater social and economic investments in troubled spots around the world, but only the world's religious leaders—working together—can confront the emptiness within a person's soul that can lead to "religious" violence. They need to do so in a representative, authoritative and permanent forum, that. while avoiding reductionism and relativism, is devoted to discussion of historic grievances and the promotion of tolerance and cooperation. Messages of intolerance and hate need to be combated with acts of mercy and practical expressions of all that is good in our common humanity and faith.

REPLY ALL

Local Process

Re: "The Annulment Dilemma," by Msgr. Paul V. Garrity (2/16): Finally, a seasoned pastor who is able to put a human face on the trials, tribulations and trauma faced by faithful Catholics seeking an annulment in our overly complicated and overly legalistic process. While I am fortunate to have been married for nearly 30 years to a woman I loved dearly, I can empathize with those Catholics who are not so fortunate. Monsignor Garrity does an excellent job presenting the problems faced by Catholic laymen and laywomen in negotiating the current annulment process.

The church has moved somewhat toward the exercise of subsidiarity in the process by no longer requiring archdiocesan and Roman tribunals to review and confirm findings of local diocesan marriage tribunals. I believe that there is still the need, however, for three members of the local tribunal to sign off on the decisions regarding a particular case. If a larger portion of the process could be done on the local parish level with a recommendation from the pastor or another representative of the clergy working on a case, this might expedite matters. I realize that this is additional work for the local clergy, but it would make the process less threatening to the petitioners.

THOMAS SEVERIN
Connellsville, Pa.

No Federal Fix

Re "Among School Children" (Editorial, 2/16): Sending billions to the federal government to be sieved through a bureaucratic morass and then redistributed to the states has not helped students succeed in school. The Catholic social teaching of subsidiarity should inform how we address issues in education. Clearly, more money on its own is not working. Among public school districts that receive the highest per-student funding are the lowest performing schools in urban areas, even in our nation's capital. I understand the desire to bring up the level of schools in low-income areas to that of higher income areas. This can better be done at a state or local level than in Washington, D.C.

Further, schools cannot make up for what is behind many students' inability to succeed: chaotic, unformed or missing families. The increase in poor performance correlates to the increasing single motherhood, lack of father involvement and the poverty and chaos that this life creates. We should not expect the schools to do what society cannot.

Catholic social teaching would be such a benefit in society overall, but political leaders ignore the truth and effectiveness of this approach and instead ask for more money for yet another unproven, ineffective or wasteful government program.

ELISABETH ANDERSON
Online Comment

Members on a Mission

Re "Pope Francis Sends Pallium Home," by Gerard O'Connell (2/16): Long ago in my theological studies, I was taught by an eminent church historian that the pallium was introduced as a vestment of commissioning and communion that was given to missionary metropolitans, founders of new churches when they went out from Rome to "barbarian lands" as missionaries. We were taught that it was to be a sign of the mission church's link with the universal church. I would suggest that today all of Christ's faithful, whether in an archdiocese or diocese, are members of a missionary church, as we are all called to be men and women on mission.

WILLIAM DOLAN
Online Comment

STATUS UPDATE

Readers respond to "Cruel and Unusual? Court to Decide on Lethal Injections," (Signs of the Times, 2/16).

The death penalty is legalized murder and costs the taxpayers much more than keeping the prisoner in jail for life. And of course, there is always a possibility the person may be innocent of the crime he or she was accused of. One-third of people on death row were found to be innocent of the crimes they were put on death row for—not good odds. The system is not infallible, and I would not like to be on a jury that wrongly accused an innocent man put on death row.

JEAN MARCHESCHI

That the death penalty is an affront to human dignity seems obvious to me. But it is also true that highly moral people do accept the death penalty. It is necessary, as part of the debate, to put forth alternative methods of removing evil people from society. And there should be a debate. We should not have our courts legislate this matter, but rather it should be decided by our society at large if it is to be properly effective. Why do we want the death penalty? Is it revenge, "justice" or protection of society? These questions must be addressed in order for our society to accept any alternative.

DAVID KNOBLE

From a moral perspective, capital punishment is a pro-life issue. But as far as the law is concerned, it is permissible under the Constitution. Abortion is not mentioned in the Constitution, so it falls under the 10th Amendment. If Roe v. Wade were overturned, abortions might be banned in Utah, but it is unlikely they would be in California. That Justice Scalia recognizes the difference shows he is consistent in his legal assessment even if it goes against his religious beliefs. It would be nice if all the judges were similarly guided by the law.

PAUL CURRAN

Modern Apostles

"Take These Gifts," by Mary Ann Walsh, R.S.M. (2/9), provides interesting descriptive and statistical information on the status of women in the church. But regardless of the high-level positions held by women, church teachings and pastoral policies that affect everyone in the church are decided by the ordained male clergy. I celebrate that Pope Francis has appointed some women in the Roman Curia dicasteries and councils, but I doubt, given their minority status, their influence in governing the church will be significant, at least in the near future.

We are constantly reminded that men and women are not the same (biologically true) and are therefore called to different roles. It seems that in the secular world, those differences are not an obstacle to appoint or elect women for the highest political positions in most countries.

CODY SERRA
Online Comment

A Sister's Gift

In an especially good issue of **America** (2/9), with excellent book reviews (Schmidt, Shelley and Himes) and fine columns (Padgett, Sullivan and O'Connell), nothing could match the marvelous "Take These Gifts," by Mary Ann Walsh, R.S.M. I cannot imagine a better synthesis of the pluses and minuses of the state of women in today's church.

Sister Walsh has laid it all out as she, former spokesperson for the nation's bishops, is uniquely qualified to do. And she has pointed the direction that the bishops of today and tomorrow must unquestionably move toward. Maybe, as we today rejoice in the "Francis effect," we may eventually come to enjoy the fruits of the "Mary Ann effect."

TOM QUIGLEY
Online Comment

The Pope's Presence

In "The Pope in the Poncho" (2/9), Gerard O'Connell describes Francis' memorable visit to Tacloban, which was cut short by a tropical storm. The word that's going around here in the Philippines is that he never even got to eat with the survivors. He was allotted 20 minutes with them (from the original one to two hours) because a hasty decision was made to fly him out before the typhoon made landfall. So he spent the 20 minutes walking around and individually meeting all the survivors assembled in the room. He then went to his place at the table and, instead of eating, spent the time listening to the survivors' stories and responded with much silence and compassion. It is said that all he had to eat was the chips and water that the plane had on the flight back to Manila.

Pope Francis really did make time with the people. I read stories of survivors who recovered their faith not because Francis came to give them answers but because he came to be with them, in silence, in their pains, to bring to them the compassion of God.

ERWIN MONTOJO
Online Comment

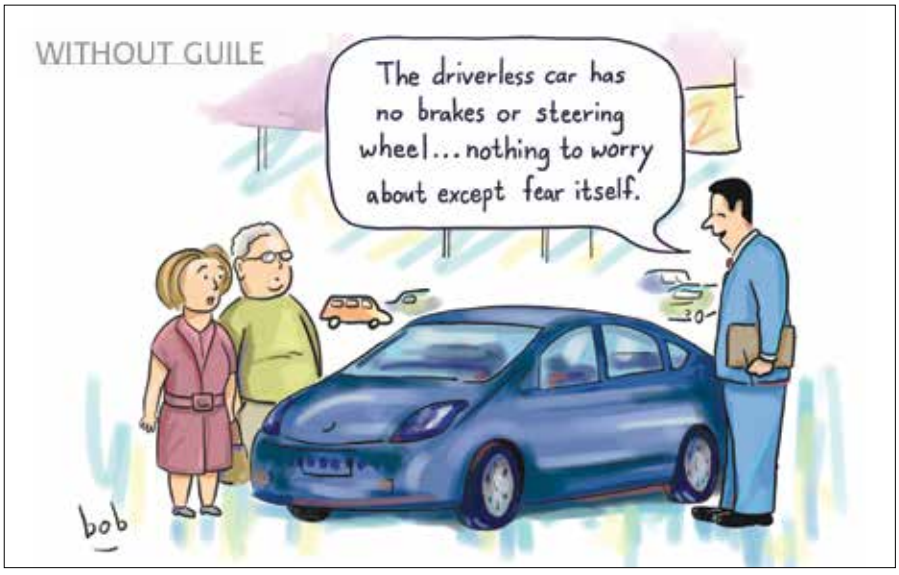
Always a Pupil

Re "Following Faithfully," by Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman (2/2): The authors want to provide Catholics with arguments to justify contraception and divorced and remarried people receiving the Eucharist. They present no understanding of why the church teaches that contraception is intrinsically wrong and why divorce violates God's plan for marriage.

A responsible use of liberty requires the guidance of a well-formed, and truthful (non-erroneous) conscience. We do not establish or make up moral truth. We only discover it. God gave us the gift of reason, by which we can search for and attain moral truth. But conscience is always a pupil, not a teacher (John Henry Newman). When the teaching church repeatedly defines contraception as contrary to God's plan for spousal love, then we are to accept that teaching while making every effort to understand it. One would think that dissenting theologians would be able to see the devastating effects that contraception and sterilization have brought to marriage, spousal love, families, youth and society at large. To ignore the consequences of a contraceptive society is not an exercise of prudence. Rather, it is one of folly.

Recognizing that we often make wrong decisions and engage in flawed reasoning should make us suspicious of following faithfully and relying too heavily upon frail, unaided human reason.

MATTHEW HABIGER, O.S.B.
Atchison, Kan.



CARTOON: BOB ECKSTEIN

U.S. ECONOMY

Will Walmart Hike of Entry-Level Pay Be a Retail Game Changer?

Walmart reported on Feb. 19 that it would increase wages and establish more predictable work schedules for employees. New employees will receive a minimum wage of $9 an hour beginning in April 2015 and $10 starting in 2016.

In a letter to Walmart "associates," Walmart's chief executive officer and president, Doug McMillon, explained the new policy: "We're always trying to do the right thing and build a stronger business.

"We frequently get it right but sometimes we don't. When we don't, we adjust," he said. "When we take a step back, it's clear to me that one of our highest priorities must be to invest more in our people this year."

Business analysts say the retail giant's wage decision is being driven by pressure from other large retailers like the Gap, which similarly adjusted its pay scale upward last year. The new wage schedule should help with employee retention and would allow the company to unify wage standards that have become complicated by successful local and statewide campaigns to raise minimum wages around the country.

In a statement to the press, Emily Wells, an organizer with the worker-advocates group OUR Walmart, said, "The company is addressing the very issues that we have been raising about the low pay and erratic scheduling." Wells added, however, that "this announcement still falls short of what American workers need to support our families." She argues that Walmart can do much more. "With $16 billion in profits and $150 billion in wealth for the owners, Walmart can afford to provide the good jobs that Americans need—and that means $15 an hour, full-time, consistent hours and respect for our hard work."

The Rev. Sinclair Oubre of the Catholic Labor Network cautioned that the Walmart decision still leaves much room for improvement, and not just on wages. He pointed out that the higher wage remains far from a genuine living wage for the many retail workers with families to support.

"Anything that helps workers move closer to a living wage," said Father Oubre, "we would support." Though the Walmart minimum is now about 25 percent above the federal minimum wage and about 50 cents to a dollar more per hour than its entry-level workers had been receiving, the increase falls far short of the $15 an hour currently sought by labor activists in the retail and fast-food industries.

Beyond the relatively minimal impact on what Catholic social teaching suggests should be a just wage for workers, Father Oubre points out that the Walmart move does not increase the chances that its superstores will become more welcoming of union organizing efforts. Walmart has been notoriously aggressive in efforts to keep unions out of its stores.

"As Catholics, what cannot be lost in this discussion is that for 120 years our church has insisted that it is a natural right of workers to join together in associations [that allow workers to engage] in collective bargaining," he said. Catholic consumers, Father Oubre said, should treat with concern "retail or even ecclesial institutions which believe they do not need to have collective bargaining because they know what workers need and don't let workers articulate what those needs are themselves." He said such paternalism undercuts workers' human dignity.

ALWAYS LOW WAGES? Maybe not: Walmart announces a wage hike on Feb. 19.

"Walmart could pay $20 an hour," Father Oubre added, "but there would still be a justice issue here because of the natural right of workers to join in associations and represent themselves continues to be virulently denied."

The Walmart move should put pressure on other low-paying retailers to follow suit. Because of Walmart's mammoth scale—it employs more than 1.4 million people at its hundreds of locations in the United States—it essentially establishes wage and benefit policy for the entire retail sector. For good or ill, Walmart can call the tune.

"This very positive action should not distract [U.S. Catholics] from the larger goal, which is two-fold," Father Oubre said. "Employers have a responsibility

to pay a living wage to employees, and we as consumers have a responsibility to be willing to pay a premium so that our fellow workers have a just wage."

KEVIN CLARKE

LIBYA

Executions Unite World In Horror

The leader of the Catholic Church in Libya called for dialogue and understanding in his violence-torn country on Feb. 16, even as prayers and calls for action followed the horror of the beheading of 21 Coptic Christians. The men, who had come to Libya from Egypt in search of work, had been kidnapped in two separate incidents in December and January by extremists operating in self-professed allegiance to Islamic State. Their deaths provoked universal outrage in Egypt; the government declared seven days of mourning and launched retaliatory air strikes on extremists' training camps.

Bishop Giovanni Innocenzo Martinelli, apostolic vicar of Tripoli, has vowed to stay in Libya even as the last foreign nationals scramble to escape. Speaking to Vatican Radio, he confirmed that jihadi militants were currently in the city and that at any moment he and his parishioners could be taken by terrorists. But Bishop Martinelli said he is not leaving his church and the few Christians left in Tripoli. "We are ready," he said, "to bear witness to whom we are and to what we do, according to the words of Christ."

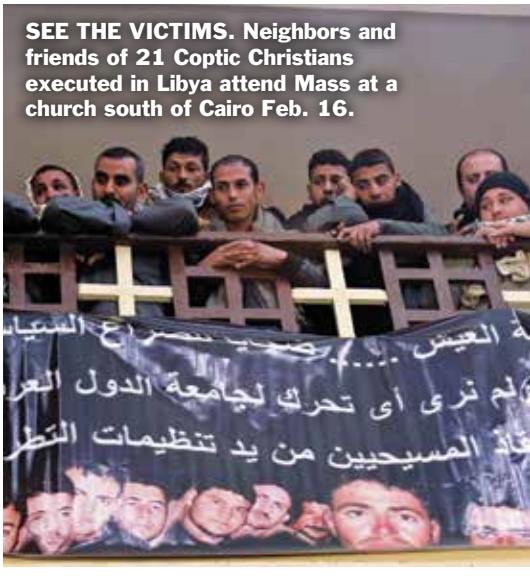
Martinelli denounced a lack of dialogue aimed at ending the nation's crisis, arguing that the international community should sponsor talks with the opposing sides in a divided nation that needs—first of all—to find internal unity. Referring to the nations of the West, he said, "We have helped ourselves to oil; we have guarded our own interests, we have put dialogue and a sincere human exchange between [different groups] to the side."

At his morning Mass in Rome on Feb. 17, Pope Francis called for prayers for the slain Egyptians he called "our 21 brother Copts," and he asked people to pray for the victims so "that the Lord welcome them as martyrs."

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state, said, "The situation [in Libya] is serious, and it demands a united response from the international community—a rapid response, the quickest possible from the U.N." Jordan's King Abdullah II, whose country is also fighting Islamic State militants in neighboring Iraq and Syria, called the beheadings of the Egyptian Christians a "heinous crime" committed "at the hands of the terrorist gang... hostile to all human values."

Jordan's information minister, Mohammed al-Momani, accused the Islamic State of "inciting blind hatred" with the killings, while the Rev. Rifat Bader of the Catholic Center for Studies and Media in Amman called the beheadings a "crime not only against Arab Christians, but a crime against humanity." The foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates, Sheik Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, meanwhile, referred to the Islamic State extremists as "sick souls frantic to shed the blood of innocents."

Auxiliary Bishop William Shomali, chancellor of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem, noted that President Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine called for three days of mourning following the beheadings. "It is unbelievable that this is happening in the 21st century," said Bishop Shomali. "There is too much brutality. But what gives us comfort as Christians is the strong Muslim reaction against [the beheadings]. We do not feel alone, and Christians are united with all moderate Muslims, who are the majority."



SEE THE VICTIMS. Neighbors and friends of 21 Coptic Christians executed in Libya attend Mass at a church south of Cairo Feb. 16.

Jesuit Freed by Taliban

On Feb. 22 Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India announced the release of Alexis Prem Kumar, S.J., in a comment on his Twitter feed. The Indian Jesuit had been seized in June 2014 in western Afghanistan after a visit to a Jesuit-supported school for the children of returning refugees he supervised as the Afghanistan country representative for Jesuit Refugee Services. Peter Balleis, S.J., the international director of J.R.S., said in a statement released to the press: "The last eight months have been a long and difficult period of uncertainty.... You cannot imagine our relief that he is now home, safe and sound. We are aware of the tireless efforts at many levels to achieve his release and we are grateful for the consolation we have received from the prayerful support of countless friends—including those of the school children from the school where he was kidnapped." Despite the abduction, J.R.S. has continued its work in Afghanistan. "We were close to the Afghan people before the abduction of Father Prem and we will continue to accompany them in any way we can," said Stan Fernandes, S.J., the J.R.S. regional director in South Asia.

'Fast Track' on Trade

The Washington-based Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment called the Obama administration's efforts to fast-track the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement "undemocratic" in a statement on Feb.17. The trade pact between the United States and about a dozen Asian countries is expected to lift tariffs on goods and services on an estimated 40 percent of U.S. imports and exports. Fast-track negotiations "would limit Congress to only 90 days of deliberation for the bill with only 20 hours of debate and no amendment process," the group said. A letter from the group to the White House and Congress complained that "'fast track' is a broken and undemocratic process because it privileges the views of powerful global corporations...while excluding voices of those adversely impacted." Trade agreements should "receive a fair hearing in the public square, protect people living in poverty, promote the dignity of all workers, and responsibly protect God's creation," the letter said.

Acts of Conscience

Congress should reaffirm the principle that government "should not force anyone to stop offering or covering much-needed legitimate health care" because of a conscientious objection to abortion or other procedures, said Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley, O.F.M.Cap., of Boston and Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore. In a letter on Feb. 13 to the House of Representatives, the bishops, who chair the Committee on Pro-Life Activities and the Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, urged legislators to support and co-sponsor the Health Care Conscience Rights Act (HR 940). "It is increasingly obvious that Congress needs to act to protect conscientious objection to the taking of innocent human life," wrote Cardinal O'Malley and Archbishop Lori. "Recently California's Department of Managed Health Care began demanding that all health plans under its jurisdiction include elective abortions, including late-term abortions. This mandate has no exemption for religious or moral objections, and is being enforced against religious universities, schools and even churches."

From CNS, RNS and other sources.

NEWS BRIEFS

Colleen Hanycz

In a letter on Feb. 19 to state legislators, **Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone** of San Francisco wrote that he respects the legislators' right "to employ or not employ whomever you wish to advance your mission" and expects the same courtesy after several had urged him to remove sexual morality clauses from handbooks for archdiocesan teachers. ✦ Muslims on Twitter have been tweeting photos of themselves using **#Muslims4Lent**, declaring what they will be giving up for Lent as an expression of solidarity and mutual respect for Christians. ✦ Appointed on Feb. 17, **Colleen N. Hanycz** became the first lay and first female president in the 152-year history of La Salle University in Philadelphia. ✦ As New York State lawmakers began in February to consider a bill to legalize physician-assisted suicide, the New York State Catholic Conference launched a new website "to **offer Catholics moral clarity** and guidance on the church's teachings regarding end-of-life decision-making." ✦ The Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions, in a report on Feb. 18, **condemned "racism and xenophobia"** in Europe and urged religious communities to speak out against a growing "nationalism of exclusion" of the type that preceded both world wars.

DISPATCH | LOS ANGELES

A Controversial Canonization

What should disqualify someone from being a saint?

That might seem a funny question. How about sin? But over the course of the last month, people in California and elsewhere have been asking it a lot. In January, Pope Francis announced that in September he will canonize Junípero Serra, the 18th-century Spanish Franciscan priest whose network of missions formed the basis both for Christian evangelization and Spanish colonization of the region.

Pope Francis described Serra as "the evangelizer of the west of the United States," and by all accounts Serra was a man of extraordinary zeal. Over 15 years he walked many hundreds of miles up and down the state to start the missions, though an ulcerated leg kept him in almost constant pain. He fought tirelessly for the work, disputing or even ignoring the orders of the Spanish governors if he thought he was right. (Like most saints, he usually did.)

But Serra was also a missionary of his time. The diary of his first trip north is rich with affection for Native peoples. But fundamentally he was not interested in Native cultures; he was not there to "go in their door" but to help them leave all that behind.

"To become a Christian was to become a European," explains Robert Senkewicz, a professor of history at Santa Clara University and the author of the new book *Junípero Serra: California, Indians, and the Transformation of a Missionary*. Once baptized, Native peoples were forced to live on the mission property—building, farming and learning to live as Spaniards.

Few Native Americans understood going in that baptism was an "irrevocable commitment," says Senkewicz. Many came to the missions not out of any religious motivation but because the livestock brought by the Spanish had destroyed the plants the tribes relied on for food. The missions were their only means of survival.

> Serra was a missionary of his time. He was not interested in Native cultures.

Today, "Rarely do you find a California Native person with a [Native] name like Eagle," says Ron Andrade, a member of the La Jolla Tribe, who is executive director of the Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission. Their names, like their cultures, were largely erased.

Even for modern Native people who support Serra's canonization, like Andrew Galvan of the Ohlone Tribe, who is the curator of Mission Dolores in San Francisco, the current relationship between Native peoples and the church leaves much to be desired. "Most Native peoples have stories where we've been blocked out of the missions," forced to pay to get into the missions their ancestors built and then not consulted on how their history is represented by mission curators.

To measure Serra's actions by 21st-century standards would be unfair. And his motives were the best: that the people might know Jesus. Yet shouldn't the facts to which Andrade, Senkewicz, Galvan and others point also give us pause? What does it say to canonize today someone whose life's work ended up extinguishing whole communities (with the advent of European disease) and even cultures?

Perhaps the bigger question today is, what is canonization for? Is it meant to make a statement about a past life, a kind of Catholic gold star awarded posthumously? As Professor Senkewicz points out, being a saint clearly does not require a sinless life: "If that were the case, St. Peter wouldn't be one."

Philip Chmielewski, S.J., of Loyola Marymount University, who has spent most of his life working on issues of inculturation, wonders if the choice is not about the past, but the future. "Maybe making someone a saint is to pose a question to people from the time the canonization occurs. Maybe Serra is there to ask us, what kind of faith do we want to carry to others?"

Instead of a declaration, he suggests it could be "an invitation, even one to correct the question [that it's asking]."

Along highways 101, 82 and 1, small replicas of mission bells hang from poles shaped like shepherd's crooks, marking the 600 miles the Franciscans traveled to build and support Serra's network of 21 missions. In the end, perhaps Serra's canonization is meant to be for us like the ringing of those bells, a reminder, yes, but also important for the sorts of things it causes to resonate within.

JIM McDERMOTT

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JAMES T. KEANE

Diamonds in the Rust

You're a fan of Bob Dylan, right? But not really. You're a fan of his music. You prefer covers by Adele, Johnny Cash, The Byrds or Joan Baez, because you don't much care for Dylan's voice. And if you're like most people, you think Bob Dylan is sort of a jerk.

He's given us plenty of reasons to think so, and I don't mean in his personal life, which is none of our business. Folks have learned over the decades that to invite Dylan to speak his mind is to court disaster. It started in the early days of his career, when he unleashed a farrago of lies about his age, name and background long before we knew him any better than that.

The worst came in December 1963, two weeks after John F. Kennedy was assassinated, when Dylan turned his acceptance of the Tom Paine Award into a drunken meditation on how "I got to admit that the man who shot President Kennedy, Lee Oswald.... I saw some of myself in him." Then there was the abuse he hailed on Time correspondent Horace Freeland Judson in 1965, captured in the documentary "Don't Look Back." (Judson later called Dylan "a self-indulgent, whining show-off.") Decades of silence or cryptic public remarks have followed. At the Live Aid concert in Philadelphia in 1985, he mused that some of the money raised for African famine relief should be given to American farmers instead. (The organizer, the musician Bob Geldof, called Dylan's remarks "crass, stupid and nationalistic.") Just two years ago, he ran afoul of French antidiscrimination laws against "incitement to hatred" for comparing Croatians to Nazis. Awkward.

And then there's Dylan's demeanor at his own concerts. When I invited one friend (a musician himself) last year to a show, he retorted, "to watch him treat his audience with utter contempt? I'll pass." And it's true; there's no patter with the crowd, no love-fest between star and adoring fans. He walks on stage, he sings his songs the way he wants to (which is almost never the way the fans want them), stares out at the audience, and he's gone. It's been going on for decades.

Who could like a jerk like that?

I love him. I have ever since a day in 1996 when, backpacking around Italy, I bought a bootleg CD of "Bob Dilon's Songs" in a shady mercatino in Naples and listened to it on repeat for days. "Every one of them words rang true," to quote Bob, "And glowed like burnin' coal/ Pouring off of every page/ like it was written in my soul." I'd never heard lyrics like that, never felt so simpatico with a singer. Two decades down the road, I'm still an evangelist and apologist. Dylan is to my mind our nation's new Walt Whitman, our poet of the body and poet of the soul, someone whose songs have influenced not just musicians but our national conscience on everything from war to love to art and aesthetics. The man whose lyrics have become our lexicon is entitled, if you ask me, to be a jerk in public.

All this was on my mind when Dylan received the MusiCares Person of the Year award recently before the 2015 Grammys. Dylanologists everywhere cringed a bit, I suspect, because this was exactly the sort of moment where Dylan often deliberately behaves badly. Remember Michael Jordan's petty, sneering 2009 acceptance speech for the NBA Hall of Fame? It was sure to be something like that.

> To invite Dylan to speak his mind is to court disaster.

Instead, we were given 30 minutes of beautiful staccato prose, expressing Dylan's gratitude for those who helped him and who honored him. He talked of his heroes (and yes, his enemies: "They say I can't sing. I croak. Sound like a frog. Why don't they say similar things about Tom Waits or Leonard Cohen?"), reminisced about his own career, made some terrible puns ("I'm going to get out of here now; I'm going to put an egg in my shoe and beat it") and gave his views on what makes good music or bad art. And he showed a few moments of startling vulnerability: "Like the spiritual song, I'm still just crossing over Jordan, too."

If you loved Dylan already, it was an early valentine; if you didn't, it was still a moment where the batty uncle in the attic showed you what he's been working on up there since 1962. Think on that for a second—Bob Dylan has been someone on your mind since 1962, more than 50 years ago.

He turns 74 this May. It's been 53 years since he wrote "Blowin' in the Wind." He's still singing, writing, thinking. Even if he says he "ain't no prophet, and ain't no prophet's son," it seems he still has much to tell, our Walt Whitman, to an audience that needs to listen.

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DEATH THREAT. Rhett Krawitt, 6, who has leukemia, could die if he catches measles from an unvaccinated child.

REUTERS/ELIJAH NOUVELAGE

Vaccine Wars

WHEN SKEPTICISM GOES VIRAL

BY MICHAEL ROZIER

The outbreak of measles has many concerned about the resurgence of a deadly disease. But what if it is actually the symptom of something much larger?

The outbreak in January, which originated in Disneyland and has spread to over a dozen states, has brought the vaccine debate back to the national spotlight. Many people are criticizing parents who refuse to vaccinate their children. Physicians, parents and public officials point out the benefits of "herd immunity"—that a vaccine not only protects the child who is vaccinated but safeguards those who are not vaccinated by slowing the spread of the disease. Herd immunity is particularly important for infants too young to be vaccinated and children who are immunocompromised, like those battling cancer. Parents who refuse vaccination are accused of putting other peo-

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ple's children at unnecessary risk for deadly diseases.

Parents who oppose vaccines push back, claiming that it is their right as parents to decide whether to vaccinate their children. Some express a desire for a "toxin free" life for their children. Others believe big pharmaceutical companies push vaccine benefits in order to make a profit. And many, shockingly, continue to believe there is a link between vaccines and autism, a claim that has been widely discredited.

Rahm Emanuel, current mayor of Chicago, famously said, "You never want to let a serious crisis go to waste." Many public health officials believe that the most recent measles outbreak is just such a crisis and see it as their opportunity to increase vaccination rates in certain parts of the country, where they are low. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have said that they are "very concerned" about a widespread measles outbreak and are once again promoting vaccination campaigns. White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said, "People should evaluate this for themselves with a bias toward good science and toward the advice of our public health professionals." With all due respect to my public health colleagues and public officials, I think they are missing the point.

I am unequivocally on the side of vaccination. Yet I believe that this crisis cannot not be easily characterized as the fault of the parents who refuse to vaccinate. Some of the blame must also rest on the scientific community, which has too often refused to acknowledge that values and morals play a sometimes decisive role in our decision-making. We cannot know if these parents are violating a social expectation until we have an honest conversation about what our social expectations are.

We will never get to the heart of this issue if we keep pretending that the crisis is based simply on a lack of understanding. It is based on our failure to discuss what we mean by the common good, to have an honest debate about balancing rights and responsibilities and to talk about what we owe our neighbors.

Imagine that instead of getting vaccinated on national television, politicians actually engaged us in a conversation about the role of the common good. We could then talk about the true social consequences of an extreme libertarian philosophy. And we could entertain the notion that our individual opinions cannot, in fact, be absolutized. This moment is too serious to waste on the tired vaccine-autism debate. Let's talk about something that matters.

Personal 'Belief' Exemptions

Try as one might, encouraging "a bias toward good science" will not solve the debate over vaccines. Over a decade ago, a prestigious medical journal and a Playboy playmate of the year made strange partners in laying the foundation for the anti-vaccine movement. The article in The Lancet in 1998 has been retracted, and Jenny McCarthy has been contradicted by piles of data; yet hopes that science will ultimately win the day do not seem to be coming true. Experts must be exhausted from constantly reiterating that the link between vaccines and autism has been discredited. The physician who published the Lancet article has been barred from practicing medicine. There is not much more the public health community or public officials can do to marshal scientific evidence in defense of vaccines. So what is next?

We will never get to the heart of this issue if we keep pretending that the crisis is based on a lack of understanding.

I'm sorry to say it, but in some ways leaders in the science community have contributed to the problem. Since the scientific revolution, that community has made concerted efforts to discredit other domains of knowledge and convince us that science is the one true font from which to draw. In truth, science has good reason to present itself as the most powerful explanatory model for our lives. Many aspects of the world that were once explained by magic and mystery are now very well understood, thanks to generations of scientists and their sacrifices. But some scientific leaders pushed a belief in the scientific method with a slash-and-burn strategy designed to discredit other ways of knowing. And now science is forced to dwell in the world it created. So when scientific arguments do not seem to work, what is left? In practice the solution of many of my colleagues is to keep throwing more science at the problem or to dismiss those who dare challenge it as foolish.

In this case, at least, the scientific community must seek help from an area it discarded as irrelevant long ago. The solution for the low vaccination rates, and many other crises, is to admit that values and beliefs shape people's lives in major ways. There are domains of knowledge—although not empirically testable like gravity and germ theory—that must be debated as openly and clearly as we debate scientific theory.

Many of the parents who refuse to vaccinate their children take advantage of "personal belief exemption" laws that allow them to send their unvaccinated children to school. In Colorado, the state with the lowest vaccination rate, nearly 20 percent of children are not fully immunized. An early childhood center in Santa Monica, Calif., is reported to have a personal belief exemption rate of over 65 percent. This means that there are some communities in the United States that have lower vaccination levels than countries suffering from civil war and famine.

These personal belief exemptions are different from reli-

gious exemptions, although they are often difficult to distinguish. What we do know is that there is something motivating parents to refuse vaccinations even when their physicians give them clear evidence of their importance. Talking about more science is not working. So why aren't we talking about the personal beliefs or values that these parents are invoking? And if we think the social expectations are settled and that these parents are violating them, then shouldn't state laws make exemption more difficult?

Worthy Debates

If the scientific community could admit that values and morals are worthy of debate alongside science, it might find more allies than it expects.

There is scientific consensus on climate change, but there is little action. So what can another report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change actually do? But Pope Francis and his long-awaited encyclical on the environment may move hearts as well as minds. I do not expect climatologists to invoke "our moral responsibility for creation," but they would be wise to recognize that at this point our faith leaders may be able to change more minds than they can.

Those who favor gun control continue to marshal more scientific evidence to support their positions. But, again, these public health experts and social scientists fail to recognize that their opponents will not be swayed by more science. Opponents of gun control evoke values to support their position. Therefore, gun control advocates might be better served by debating which position best fosters a culture of life. Or they might engage in a debate on what we mean by liberty—whether it is liberty from government or liberty for human flourishing. But that will require admitting that morals and values can stand alongside science in the public square.

I am not claiming that if we just talk about values we will all suddenly find we agree with each other. We will disagree on fundamental notions of how we want to construct society. But at least we won't be talking past each other.

The Republican presidential contenders have faced an interesting dilemma during this most recent measles outbreak. Many of them are trying to thread the needle of recognizing the good vaccines do for society while evoking the political dog whistle of "freedom." The reason it has been so difficult for them is that they are trying to hold mutually exclusive positions. You can either give parents unrestricted freedom to vaccinate or not, or you can use the government's coercive power to limit exemptions so that the community reaches herd immunity. But this contradiction in positions will be exposed only if we include values alongside science in our public discourse.

A recent Pew Research survey revealed some noteworthy divisions in this debate. The expected division was based on political philosophy—a slight partisan divide, with Republicans less likely than Democrats to believe that parents should be required to vaccinate their children. The unexpected division was one based on age—younger adults are less likely to believe that parents should be required to vaccinate their children. Only 59 percent of adults age 18 to 29 said parents should be required to vaccinate, compared to 79 percent of adults age 65 and older. This may be attributable to the fact that older adults actually lived through the ravages of many infectious diseases that younger adults have never seen. But what if it is because younger adults are less likely to claim responsibility for the "other"? Then it is not a matter of science better explaining how deadly these diseases are, but a matter of the values that underpin our society.

We are faced with several crises that will not be resolved simply by appealing again to science. As a Jesuit priest working in the field of public health, both of my worlds are interested in the human person fully alive. It took the church far too long to admit that science had many important things to say about the workings of our world. The church was wrong in that. I hope science will be quicker to admit its mistake. We will ultimately stop this measles outbreak, but we should not be fooled into thinking that doing so solves the crisis. The real crisis runs much deeper, and it is far too serious to let it go to waste. A

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All the Angels and Saints

Imagining a church that reflects the diversity of its people

BY EDWARD K. BRAXTON

In order to appreciate the racial divide in the United States, I would like to do something rather unusual. It requires white Catholics to use their imagination in order to enter into the role-reversal presented in the narrative that follows. The narrative portrays an imagined Catholic Church in the United States in which most American Catholics are people of color and white Catholics are members of a very small minority group.

Imagine yourself as a white American teenager living in a poor urban area with few opportunities for you to get a good education and find meaningful employment. Imagine that some of your friends are troublemakers, and when the African-American police come around they often intimidate them. This frightens you because another white friend of yours was shot and killed by African-American police officers when he reached into his pocket for his wallet, which they thought was a gun. Since you were very young, your parents have cautioned you to avoid contact with the police because they may suspect you of wrongdoing.

You and your friends, whose families are struggling to make ends meet, live near the neighborhood Catholic church. You have never been inside the church. You and your family are not members of the Catholic Church, which some of your relatives call a "black racist institution" that traditionally has not shown much interest in inviting white people to join the parish. As a matter of fact, when some white people visited the church for Mass, they were largely ignored and made to feel unwelcome. You and your friends feel that a church that promises the joy of eternal life after you die while offering little to help in your daily struggles is not very meaningful. As a white youth having a hard time with life, you want a church that will be at your side, engaged in the struggle, helping you find a God of the oppressed and an angel of freedom and justice. You want a church that embraces, celebrates and is informed by the "white experience." If God is to really be God for you, he must be God the liberator, who uproots injustice and oppression by his mighty power. For you and your friends, a God of the status quo is dead.

Now imagine that an African-American acquaintance, sensing that you are discouraged, persuades you to go with

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MOST REVEREND EDWARD K. BRAXTON *is the bishop of Belleville, Ill. This article is adapted from the prologue of his pastoral letter for the World Day of Peace 2015, "The Racial Divide in the United States." The full text is available at diobelle.org.*

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him to this very church, St. Charles Lwanga, for Mass. You enter the church, and the first thing you notice is that all images of the sacred are in Afro-centric art. All images of Jesus, Mary, Joseph and all the saints are as people of color (African, Hispanic, Asian or Native American). God the Father himself is painted on the ceiling of the church as a distinguished older black gentleman. You think to yourself, "God the Father is absolute spirit. He has no race or nationality or anatomical gender. Scripture never describes him as an elderly, African-looking, brown-skinned man." You wonder if the Catholic Church believes that only people of African ancestry are in heaven.

Wouldn't the church be more universal and welcoming if the holy men and women of the Bible were pictured as people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds?

You notice that even the angels in the church have African features. If angels have no bodies and no gender, if they are pure spirits, why are they not represented in all races? Just think of the impact it would have on unchurched white people, like you, if they encountered the image of a magnificent white angel with blond hair and blue eyes when they entered a Catholic church. You also notice that in the Catholic Church, "black" symbolizes everything that is good and holy whereas "white" symbolizes evil, sin and death. The images of Satan, devils and demons in the church are all white. Later, you search art books and cannot find one image of Satan painted in dark hues. He is always depicted in light, pale, radiant white colors.

You ask your African-American acquaintance, "Wouldn't the Catholic Church be more truly universal and welcoming of all if the holy men and women of the Bible were pictured as people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds? After all, though we know they were Jewish, no one knows what they actually looked like. Semitic people do not all look like western Europeans." He responds: "That question has been asked before, and the response has usually been that people who are white should realize that the Afro-centric art represents them as well. Afro-centric art is universal. It represents all people. Furthermore, everyone realizes that the all-black religious art is found in Catholic churches for historical reasons. Even though a few churches have added a white saint here and there, for the most part the few white Catholics we have in the church have simply accepted the fact that the majority of churches have few or no images of the citizens of heaven who look like them."

You ask your acquaintance, "Does the Catholic Church intend to perpetuate this all-black image of heaven in the churches of the future?" Your African-American acquaintance replies, "There are a few churches in big cities with a large number of 'minorities' where they have painted white angels and saints. But some of the older white people don't like it. They say they do not believe God looks like them. They also say that the dense, impenetrable darkness of blackness better expresses the deep mystery of God, who dwells in unapproachable night. These white people point out that in many countries where most of the people are European, the people almost never complain about the all-African religious art. They seem to appreciate that black really is beautiful."

"But," you ask, "what about here in the racially diverse United States? What a powerful statement the Catholic Church would make if it mandated all future churches to have racially diverse images of God, Jesus, Mary, saints and angels? Wouldn't this convey a more authentically universal image of heaven? Wouldn't that be a small bridge for crossing the racial divide that continues to undermine the catholicity of the church?" Your African-American acquaintance answers, "I think I understand the point you are trying to make. But, I really don't think that is ever going to happen."

"Why not?" you ask. "Why not?"

Road Map for Church Leaders

Pope Francis' electrifying homily to the new cardinals in St. Peter's Basilica on Feb. 15 stands out as one of the richest, most significant and powerful that he has given in his two-year pontificate. Focused on "the Gospel of the marginalized," it provides a road map for Catholic Church leaders worldwide at this moment in history and for the Synod of Bishops on the Family in October.

He delivered the homily before 165 cardinals, senior Roman Curia officials and some 8,000 priests, religious and laypeople from all continents. He spoke after receiving (several cardinals told me) "overwhelming support" from the College of Cardinals for his ongoing effort to reform the Roman Curia.

Commenting on Jesus' cure of the leper in Mark's Gospel, he said, "Compassion leads Jesus to concrete action: he reinstates the marginalized!" Jesus responds "immediately" to the leper's plea "without waiting to study the situation and all its possible consequences" because "for Jesus, what matters above all is reaching out to save those far off, healing the wounds of the sick, restoring everyone to God's family!"

"This is scandalous to some people!" the pope noted, but "Jesus is not afraid of this kind of scandal! He does not think of the closed-minded who are scandalized even by a work of healing, scandalized before any kind of openness, by any action outside of their mental and spiritual boxes, by any caress or sign of tenderness that does not fit into their usual thinking and their ritual purity. He wanted to reinstate the outcast, to save those outside the camp."

Looking at the Catholic Church leadership today in the light of what Jesus did, Francis finds it at a crossroads: "There are two ways of thinking and of having faith: we can fear to lose the saved and we can want to save the lost." There is "the thinking of the doctors of the law, which would remove the danger by casting out the diseased person," and "the thinking of God, who in his mercy embraces and accepts by reinstating him and turning evil into good, condemnation into salvation and exclusion into proclamation."

Indeed, "these two ways of thinking are present throughout the church's history: casting off and reinstating," he said. He recalled that St. Peter and St. Paul caused scandal, faced criticism, resistance and even hostility for following the path of reinstatement. And, as Cardinal Donald Wuerl noted in his blog on Feb. 12, Francis is also being criticized for doing likewise.

"The church's way, from the time of the Council of Jerusalem, has always been the way of Jesus, the way of mercy and reinstatement," Francis recalled. This means "welcoming the repentant prodigal son; healing the wounds of sin with courage and determination; rolling up our sleeves and not standing by and watching passively the suffering of the world."

"The way of the church is not to condemn anyone for eternity," Pope Francis stated. Rather, "It is to pour out the balm of God's mercy on all those who ask for it with a sincere heart. The way of the church is precisely to leave her four walls behind and to go out in search of those who are distant, those essentially on the 'outskirts' of life."

In healing the leper, he said: "Jesus does not harm the healthy. Rather, he frees them from fear. He does not endanger them, but gives them a brother. He does not devalue the law but instead values those for whom God gave the law. Indeed, Jesus frees the healthy from the temptation of the 'older brother.'"

> Exclusion hurts both the excluded and the excluders.

Francis exhorted the new cardinals "to serve the church in such a way that Christians—edified by our witness—will not be tempted to turn to Jesus without turning to the outcast, to become a closed caste with nothing authentically ecclesial about it." He ended by telling them: "We will not find the Lord unless we truly accept the marginalized!"

In conclusion, I think that this dynamic of casting out and reinstatement represents a powerful prism to discern the pastoral lens that Francis is calling church leaders to adopt and use in a host of pastoral inquiries, ranging from those who are divorced and remarried to those who have totally lost their moral compasses, to those who are gay, to the young who reject the church precisely because it is so often judgmental. Francis' church is one of moral strength and standards but not one of exclusion. For exclusion warps and hurts both the excluded and, perhaps even more deeply, the excluders.

GERARD O'CONNELL

GERARD O'CONNELL *is* ***America****'s Rome correspondent.* ***America****'s Vatican coverage is sponsored in part by the Jesuit communities of the United States. Twitter: @gerryorome.*

Listening in Ferguson

It's not all black and white

BY J. AUGUSTINE WETTA

No monk should ever defend another in the monastery. Nor should he take sides in an argument.... We decree that no one should be permitted to ostracize or to strike any one of his brothers; and if any monk should break this rule, let him be publicly reprimanded, that the others may learn from his mistake.

—Rule of St. Benedict

In two consecutive passages, St. Benedict outlines how a monk should respond when he encounters discord in his community. He should not lash out, even if he feels justified. And he should not choose a side, even though he may think he knows all the facts. Instead, he should listen—as he is compelled to do by the opening words of the Rule itself: he "inclines the ear of his heart" (Prologue, 1.1).

Like most people in North America right now, I have been thinking about Ferguson. Or rather, I have been wondering what I should do about the conflict that has come from it. But I live in a monastery in a suburb of Saint Louis that was recently ranked 12th among the 25 most affluent neighborhoods in North America. What do I know about urban poverty or racism?

Tired of This

So recently I asked permission to drive out to a prayer service in Ferguson, and I caught a ride with my friend Dennis, who works here at the abbey. Dennis is African-American and lives in Ferguson. I asked him, as we were driving out to the service, what he thought of the protests. He smiled and avoided the question. "I don't want any part of that. I'm just trying to get on with my life. Those people are making trouble. They aren't even from the neighborhood."

"But they aren't the only ones making a scene," I said. I wanted to press him for a deeper answer because how else is a white guy like me from West County going to understand this situation if I'm not willing to ask some awkward questions? "Are the cops racist?" I asked. "How come black people keep getting shot? And why is everyone so angry?"

"The police have always been like that," he said. "It isn't going to change."

Of course I noticed that this second answer was a bit different from the first. And I figured if I asked a third time, maybe I'd get an even deeper explanation. I said maybe things should change. I said clearly something must be wrong or this many people wouldn't be this angry. I asked him why so many people think the police are racist.

"There are good police and bad police," he said. "But I'll tell you this much: I've been pulled over three times in your neighborhood. I don't know why they've got to be pulling me over that many times except that they see a black man on this side of town and assume he must be up to something."

Three times. My friend Dennis has been working here for eight years, and he has been pulled over three times. I've lived here for 18 years, and I've been pulled over once: for doing 45 in a 30-mile-an-hour zone, and the cop let me off with a warning. So I asked more questions.

Dennis continued: "A few weeks back, my car broke down, and I had to walk the rest of the way to work," he said. "A guy sitting on his front porch called the police on me. Just for walking down his street at eight in the morning. I know he did because I watched him do it as I walked by. Sure enough, two patrol cars showed up. Look here, I'm just trying to make money, you know? Trying to get by; I don't need that [stuff]."

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/ SEAN GLADWELL

There was some anger. It took some time for me to pry it out of him, but sure enough, it was there. And here's the thing: my friend Dennis is a family man—a married man with three chil-

J. AUGUSTINE WETTA, O.S.B., *is a monk of Saint Louis Abbey and a teacher at the Saint Louis Priory School, where he also coaches rugby and serves as chaplain.*

dren and two jobs, who pays his taxes and pays his rent on time and goes to church on Sunday and educates his kids just like anyone else.

While I was thinking about this, Dennis started to back off a little. Maybe he felt self-conscious. Maybe he felt this kind of talk wasn't something I needed to hear, or maybe he was afraid I'd judge him for it. "But you know, that's just how things are," he said, "I don't have time to be angry about it."

Dennis doesn't have time for the anger. He does not want the anger. He would rather live his life without the anger. And that was pretty much all I was going to get out of him. He didn't want to talk about it any more. I don't blame him. He doesn't want to be lumped in with the looters, bottle-throwers and arsonists. He has other fish to fry—like making a living. Like taking care of his kids. Like getting to work on time (provided he doesn't get pulled over on his way here).

Caught in the Middle

I have this other friend named Charles Lutz. He is a policeman from around here, and he helps with security on campus at our school when he is off duty. So I told him about Dennis and how he'd been pulled over three times, and how when his car broke down, someone called the cops on him.

"I hate that," said Officer Lutz. "Honestly."

Hate what?

"I hate that some old racist with nothing better to do has to call the cops just because he sees a black man walking down his street. It embarrasses me. It's a waste of my time. Plus, I'm the one who ends up looking like a jerk. And the worst part of it is, a peaceful citizen gets harassed by the police."

"You don't have to harass him," I said.

"Look here," he said. "Yesterday, we get a call from a jewelry store owner here in town because there are two black men in his store 'acting suspicious.' Is it a crime to be black in a jewelry store now? Of course not. Do I want to drive over there and get in the middle of that? Of course not. And how do I even walk into the store without making those guys feel like dirt? But what happens if I ignore the call? What happens if I decide not to drop by and, God forbid, those two guys do end up robbing the place? Then who gets blamed for that? I'm caught in the middle. And I hate it."

So here's the situation the way I see it. On the one hand, you have many white cops all across the country who are angry and embarrassed and don't want to be in the middle of this mess. On the other hand, you have black people all across the country who are angry and embarrassed and don't want to be in the middle of this mess. There's righteous anger on both sides. And that means they are trapped. Too often, both sides are being squeezed into a conflict that neither asked for—and by forces way beyond their control.

Max's Way

These forces, however, are not, I believe, beyond our control. I believe we can disarm this trap (or defuse it or unwind it) if we stop focusing on the riots and the protests and even the shootings themselves. I think we can begin to restore peace to our city if, instead of lashing out or taking sides, we simply stop to listen. And maybe if we listen patiently to this anger—if we ask the awkward questions and really listen to the answers—practical solutions will emerge.

There is an eighth grader here at our school named Max. A couple of months ago, he and his older brother asked their mom if they could drive down to Ferguson to help with the cleanup. She understandably declined to send them into an active riot zone.

Still, Max and his brother felt they needed to do something, so they went online and looked up a list of the businesses that had been damaged. They found the name of one of the owners and called her on the telephone. She hung up on them. So they drove out to her house. For three and half hours, they sat in her living room and listened to her anger. And it turned out that unless they had $20,000, there was not much they could do. Well, that was the answer, wasn't it? They went home, started an online petition, and eight days later, they had raised $20,608. And Maria Flores rebuilt her business.

When Max and his brother saw injustice, they didn't lash out in anger. They didn't choose a side. They listened carefully. They reached out with their hearts, they created partnerships, and the answer spoke itself. Now if Max can help change Ferguson, so can we. Let's start really listening. And if one of you hears an answer, let the rest of us know.

Lift Me Up

Our faith means we must count one another.

BY ALANA JOY DAVITT

I opened the letter to find a Post-it note stuck to a magazine article: "You could do this." And that is why I am writing this. Let me explain.

There are few things one can count on in life. For the lucky ones these things include family, friends and the chance to spend time working toward an education or a fulfilling job. I am one of the lucky ones. Each day I have my parents, my brother, my school and classmates, my faith—and a letter in the mailbox from my grandmother. She is the most devout, energetic, lovely Catholic you will ever meet and also the one with the most stationery.

My grandmother is constantly taking time to send an encouraging word, often enclosed with an old picture of me when I came to visit or a clipping of a newspaper article she enjoyed. So when she saw that **America** was calling for articles from young people about "the joys and challenges that come with living out one's faith in the midst of real life," she naturally took out her scissors and sent the clipping my way.

I can particularly appreciate this phrasing, *the midst of real life*, as I am in the middle of my senior year of high school, and it seems as though every major life decision is packed into a truck speeding toward me. If there is one thing I have noticed, though, on this wild road to college acceptance, the first stop in the "real world," it is that few people seem to be very interested in my faith. Maybe this is just a symptom

of our politically correct society. Yet the fact that one college application tells me I may omit any questions that seem to require mention of religion does not strike me as correct at all. If we are really striving to be open-minded people, would it not be better to allow students the opportunity to share their personal beliefs without remorse and without fear of prejudice? My application folder should be leaking light, because the best way I can identify myself amid a sea of other applicants is to share the light and the joy that I receive and try to give as a Catholic.

Colleges are always asking for lists: of grades, classes and scores, of experiences, of accomplishments. Many of the greatest accomplishments of my life, however, involve sharing my faith, and though these are important to me, they might not stand out next to the boy who was voted class president or the girl who developed her own app at age 15.

Even so, I want to tell admissions boards and the whole world about the wide range of special events that have shaped me as a Catholic. This includes the time I had the privilege and joy of singing a song I wrote for our bishop at my confirmation—and my grandparents surprised me by driving 10 hours to be at the church. Or the time I was selected to go on a school trip to Italy and had the chance to go to Mass at St. Peter's Basilica; I cried tears of joy because I felt so close to God gazing up at the small stained glass window of a dove on the center wall, which truly felt like the Holy Spirit present with and in me at that moment. Or, finally, when I wrote a paper for my English teacher, who does not practice any religion, and he commented that my words gave him hope that there truly is a God and a heaven.

Faith is often regarded as a source of inspiration or of hope, but for me—an ambitious, college-bound young woman—my faith is also a source of opportunity. It is a reason to demonstrate my talents and my blessings. Galatians 6:10 reads, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." God granted us each special gifts: perhaps the gift of devoted parents, the gift of a special talent or the gift of strong moral character. He created each of us with something constant in our lives that we can use for

ALANA JOY DAVITT, *a senior at Norfolk Academy in Norfolk, Va., will attend Harvard University on a Navy ROTC scholarship in the fall of 2015.*

good. In my case, because I have been raised with things I can count on—my family, my faith, even my grandma's letters and clippings—my life has been full of love and meaning. I have the opportunity to bring love and meaning into the lives of others by sharing my gifts and trying to set an example by living with purpose.

The great naturalist and author Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "If you would lift me up you must be on higher ground." As Christians our recognition of God's blessings gives us a reason to serve others, and what the Bible and Emerson both describe is my greatest joy: knowing that we all can do so by simply being ourselves. This is a joy that I have now in the midst of real life—a joy I will have in college, in the workforce and perhaps one day as a grandmother myself—encouraging my own family to take every opportunity to lift up others with their faith, to look at one another and say: You could do this. A

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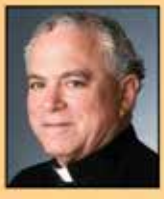

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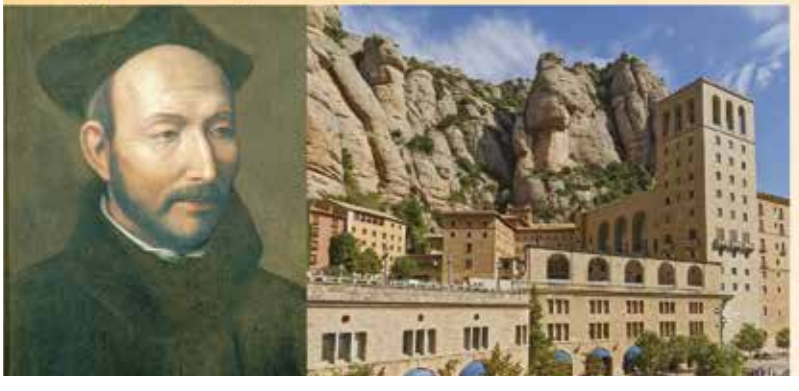

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THEATER | ROB WEINERT-KENDT

FROM RAGS TO REVOLUTIONARY

'Hamilton' tells a true American story

Depending on when you date its birth, it took rock music as much as a decade and a half to move from the pop charts to the Broadway stage, with 1968's "Hair." Hip-hop has been with us nearly twice as long—at least 30 years, if you measure by mainstream success—and as such is long overdue for its own stage musical moment, not least because rap, even more than rock, is a natural narrative form.

That moment has arrived, definitively, with the sensational new musical **Hamilton,** which, like "Hair," is getting its Off-Broadway start at New York's Public Theater, in a hotly anticipated run that has been extended through May 3. It is unlikely to wait long for a commercial Broadway transfer.

Daveed Diggs in "Hamilton."

PHOTOS BY JOAN MARCUS

As surehanded a piece of musical storytelling as has been seen onstage in many a season, "Hamilton" is all the more impressive for tackling a supremely unlikely subject: the founding of the United States, as seen through the eventful life of one its less lionized figures, Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton. But the show's creator, Lin-Manuel Miranda—who wrote the music, lyrics and book and stars in the title role—makes a convincing case for Hamilton, the "ten-dollar founding father without a father," as the first of a distinctly American type: the immigrant outsider of humble beginnings who remakes, and ultimately undoes, himself with sheer chutzpah and hustle.

It is an angle on the nation's creation myth that, like Hamilton's, is both expansive and pragmatic: This is a country where freedom would have a chance to reign like never before, but only if the heavy lifting of governance was met with the same fervor as revolution had been. "Dying is easy, young man/ Living is harder," Gen. George Washington (Christopher Jackson) tells the impetuous, battle-hungry Hamilton when he enlists him as his wartime consigliere. Later, amid the squabbling of his cabinet, President Washington echoes the line: "Fighting is easy/ Governing is harder." It is a timely message for our age of gridlock and retrenchment, in which debates over the size and role of government have if anything only intensified.

Hamilton's story is a dramatic one; it is remarkable it has not yet been given a film or stage treatment. Born out of wedlock in the West Indies and orphaned at 11, he was clerking for a trading charter by age 14. By age 17, with donations from well-wishers who could sense his promise, he was on a boat to New York City, just in time for the budding American Revolution. He rose quickly in both society and the nascent U.S. government on the strength of his searing intelligence and indomitable will. His aptitude for statecraft and financial wizardry, which gave the U.S. its first central bank, were matched only by his talent for making enemies.

Also to be weighed on Hamilton's balance sheet: He was a staunch abolitionist. And though not exactly a womanizer, he had a pronounced weakness for feminine charms and was embroiled in the new nation's first extramarital sex scandal. He also never quite tamed his touchy temper, which surely contributed to his famous end by Aaron Burr's pistol in a needlessly petty duel that followed his own 19-year-old son's death in a similarly avoidable exchange.

Miranda picks up the story in 1776, with revolution already underway, and rifles through both the biography and history deftly, from battles to early congressional debates, as well as domestic scenes. If these don't sound like the makings of musical theater magic, fear not: "Hamilton" has not only some of the densest yet sharpest lyrics, many delivered in dazzling, rapid-fire raps, since the heyday of Stephen

COLONIAL CHIC. Lin-Manuel Miranda and the company of "Hamilton"

Sondheim. It also has a sumptuous, sinuous R&B/pop score that seamlessly weaves rapping, singing and recitative into a nearly nonstop musical quilt. Miranda, onstage a slight, endearingly nebbishy underdog figure with a raspy rap timbre and only an adequate singing voice, accordingly gives some of the show's strongest material to others.

Daveed Diggs has a showstopping entrance as a rakish Thomas Jefferson, newly returned from France, and Leslie Odom Jr.'s strikingly sympathetic Aaron Burr has a series of memorable songs delineating his envy, ambition and love.

The women in Hamilton's life—his wife Eliza (Phillipa Soo) and her sister Angelica (Renee Elise Goldsberry), with whom he was equally smitten—have strong roles in an otherwise male-dominated tale, with a three-song sequence in the first act that handily covers New York's centrality to history, Hamilton's courtship of Eliza and Angelica's regret that she wasn't its target. King George III (Brian D'Arcy James) even steals a scene or two with a catchy don't-leave-me ditty.

How does all the pop-millennial attitude square with the corseted period drama? Remarkably smoothly, thanks in part to the director Thomas Kail's inventive, "Les Miserables"-inspired staging and Andy Blankenbuehler's tireless choreography, much of it performed by a large chorus of singer/dancers who strut and swirl around the leading players. The costumes, by Paul Tazewell, are straight-up colonial, but only up to the neck; the hairstyles onstage, like the score, are defiantly 21st-century, from spiky blonde to nappy curls.

That the cast of "Hamilton" is mostly nonwhite, in fact, is neither commented on nor particularly earth-shattering. But it does speak to our almost-post-Obama moment with a bracing authority, not least because, as told by Miranda, Hamilton embodies both the promise and peril of what he would have called federalism and we might call big government liberalism: If we are bound together as each other's keepers, not in some vague communitarian idyll (à la Jefferson) but as financially interdependent players with real skin in the game, does that enhance human flourishing and freedom or reduce us to interest groups dependent on government largesse?

This still-ongoing debate, as Americans of color might remind us better than anyone, is hardly academic; it has flesh-and-blood stakes. Our nation's policies regarding debt, welfare, immigration and foreign intervention, not to mention the disgraceful legacy of slavery, have always had real, quantifiable winners and losers, and the cast of "Hamilton"—again, without having to drive the point home—helps remind us that our nation, born in protest by young people of high ideals, has been on the right side of history only when it has honored those ideals and fought hard to uphold them.

ROB WEINERT-KENDT, *an arts journalist and associate editor of American Theatre magazine, has written for The New York Times and Time Out New York. He writes a blog called The Wicked Stage.*

FULL IMMERSION THERAPY

It's spring break time; do you know where your collegeFage children are? If they attend a Catholic college, there's a decent chance they're among the thousands of students who are spending it on an immersion trip to any number of communities in need around the globe.

Over the next few weeks, while 1.5 million students descend on Florida and Texas and spend upwards of a billion dollars to drink and party, the Alternative Break Immersion programs sponsored by schools across the country are taking students to places like Camden, N.J., Harlan, Ky., and Pine Ridge, S.D. While there, they build and repair homes, work on Indian reservations, learn about sustainable agriculture, help single mothers.... The list is endless.

At Jesuit universities, these are not considered service trips but immersion experiences, in which students learn from our neighbors outside of insular college campuses. For a week, students are exposed to aspects of life that most of them will never encounter. Some might even have their lives transformed by who they meet and what they experience.

When I hear of the constant hand-wringing about dwindling religious affiliation among millennials, I have mixed feelings. I understand the anxiety, but I also believe it distracts us from seeing a much bigger picture—and a much larger opportunity.

If you're involved in ministry to young people, a frequent question is some variation of the following: "How do I get my son/daughter to go to church?"

The answer—much to the despair of the questioner—is almost always: "You don't."

The question itself is understandable but the wrong one to ask. A better question would be, "Why are our pews emptying out of young adults while these immersion trips—as well as campus-based service learning and community service programs—are filling up?"

It is a failure of our collective imagination not to see a religious impulse at work in millennials. "These trips provide powerful, incarnational experiences for students in ways that traditional worship sometimes doesn't," said Susan Haarman, the Faith and Justice campus minister at Loyola University Chicago. The reality is that incarnational experiences on any level are unusual for students who live highly buffered existences, grounded in tenuous digital "connections" and disembodied, often anonymous online conversation. Immersion programs force students to move from conversation to concrete encounters, sometimes with profound results.

"For many millennials, personal experience is sacrosanct," Haarman said. "They blog and post videos on their YouTube channels, etc., but the personal, human, unfiltered encounters on these trips are feeding a deep need that media-saturated students sometimes can't articulate."

Our hypertext world deals in abstractions that inevitably crumble when faced with someone or something real. In this post-textual environment, authenticity, lives of service and the pursuit of justice speak a language of faith that is far more persuasive than mere words.

It is a language that Pope Francis speaks fluently. "Someone recently mentioned that the image of the pope caressing a severely disfigured man's face said something far more powerful about compassion than all the encyclicals in the world ever could," said Michael McCarthy, S.J., executive director of Santa Clara University's Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education. "Young people who might not expect enlightenment listening to a homily encounter Christ on an immersion."

Lives of service speak a language of faith that is far more persuasive than mere words.

What began as conversation has moved to concrete encounter and now must be understood through contemplation. It is an undeniably transformational Catholic moment.

Haarman believes that this teachable moment applies to both students and the parishes we hope they might come back to. "Often when students return from an A.B.I.," she says, "they read Matthew 25 and say, 'I've seen Christ hungry, fed him and, most important, been fed by him.'"

If these students ever choose to pass through the doors of our churches in the future, they will remain only if they recognize that what goes on inside our church walls bears some tangible relationship to what is happening to the least of our brothers and sisters outside them.

BILL McGARVEY, *a musician and writer, is the author of* The Freshman Survival Guide, *owner of CathNewsUSA.com and was the longtime editor in chief of BustedHalo.com. Twitter: @billmcgarvey.*

A CRY OF HOPE

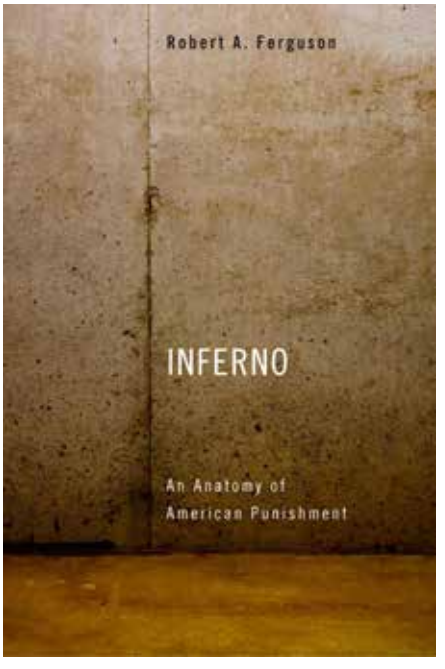
INFERNO
An Anatomy of American Punishment

By Robert A. Ferguson
Harvard University Press. 352p $29.95

"Abandon all hope, you who enter here." That counsel of despair famously confronts the condemned who pass through the gates of Dante's *Inferno*. In that hell, as Robert A. Ferguson observes, everlasting punishment "can never be fully satisfied no matter what the doomed do or say." Ferguson's own *Inferno: An Anatomy of American Punishment* convinces us that our state or federal prisons could aptly place Dante's inscription on their 21st-century front gate. The book's descent into the frightening depths of criminal punishment leaves us nearly despondent, but Ferguson refuses ultimately to submit to Dante's injunction. He proposes, in the end, that American society still retains power to change hell into purgatory.

But first the hell. In the longest portion of *Inferno*, Ferguson opens our eyes to the brutal facts of American prison conditions. "Legal punishment as we know it is sick and getting sicker," he says. The United States exercises a passion to punish that is unique among modern democracies in both its frequency and severity.

As one follows Ferguson's account, the term "American exceptionalism" takes on a new and disgraceful meaning. We possess, he says, a singular "punitive impulse," accompanied by gross indifference, toward the over two million human beings we keep behind our prison walls in conditions of "unique loneliness, fear, suffocation, anger, danger, hopelessness." Out of sight, out of mind. American society, at best, fatally accepts (or on some level is even pleased) that it has caused millions to descend into a world of abject fear and violence within institutions ridden with gangs, where the lives of the punished are filled with unnecessary pain and degradation to the point of being barely worth living. Our enormous (and enormously expensive) human warehouses hold 35 percent of the entire world's prisoners "cheek by jowl, without hope, with nothing to do, under conditions worse than those given to most domestic animals."



Who should be held to answer for this? Ferguson scrutinizes in turn court decisions, legislative policies and ultimately us, the fundamental democratic bearers of the American impulse to punish. We are all "the legal punishers."

As to the courts, key decisions have largely relegated to oblivion the claims of prisoners for relief from most kinds of injuries that they must suffer. In the Supreme Court's long-held view, "courts are ill-equipped to deal with the increasingly urgent problems of prison administration and reform." Except in circumstances so egregious that they are "incompatible with human dignity and [have] no place in civilized society," the Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment will not afford prisoners protection.

It has not helped the more than 100,000 inmates held in prolonged periods of solitary confinement. In effect, once a convict disappears behind the wall, the Eighth Amendment disappears with him, unless the official knows the inmate faces an "*excessive* risk of *serious* harm and then *unreasonably* fails to abate it." Try proving that.

It is not the courts alone that abet harsh penal conditions. Congress's Prison and Litigation Reform Act protects prison officials from liability for any mental and emotional injury that an inmate suffers while in custody, unless *physical* injury is also inflicted. So, if you are merely placed in a cell with human waste, or subjected to the screams of psychiatric patients, or ridiculed for your sexual orientation, or forced to tap dance while naked, or made to crawl around on a leash, you may be out of luck, as some have been, when you look for relief.

Other legislative acts indulge society's punitive appetite. There are 57 "supermax" prisons across 40 states. In those alone, over 20,000 inmates are held in prolonged solitary confinement for at least a year. Mandatory minimum sentences, harsh drug legislation and "three strikes" laws produce vast overcrowding. Lengthy sentences are usual, far beyond anything imposed in other democracies. Budgetary cuts leave inmates who are lingering for years in our "holding pens" (one out of 10 is serving a life sentence) without adequate mental and physical medical care. Life without parole is common (41,000), even for nonviolent crimes.

And then there is us. It is not the judiciary or the legislatures who are the chief agents of punishment. At least 80 percent of the public supports harsher sentencing. "The punitive impulse has

controlled criminal justice in America for almost half a century, and its tenacity continues even though crime rates have dropped in recent decades." What explains our exceptional attitudes toward punishment? Ferguson looks for the social variables. First, he sees a "culture of fear," attributable in part to mass media's pervasive and vivid portrayal of violent crime in movies, videos and news reporting. This fear creates its own reality and produces "an overly reactive reply that it is otherwise difficult to comprehend."

Second, bias sharpens the desire for punishing. It is "easier to relegate someone to...a secular hell when that person appears to be different than you." Most prisoners come from impoverished ethnic minorities. Our fear of "the other" allows us to disregard how often we punish or shame them. Ferguson points to a third factor contributing to the inferno. Americans have become so inured to the existence of our penal hell that fatalism infects us. "That is just the way things are," and there is nothing we can do about it. We do not even care.

In the last segment of his book—when the reader may have given up all hope for reform—Ferguson resists fatalism. As a first positive step, he joins other critics of our penal system who advocate the easing of drug laws, shorter sentences, better physical conditions, the elimination of prison violence and the end of long-term isolation. But, Ferguson argues, more is needed than these "commendable, if stock, recommendations" that stay society's retributive hand. "A different way of thinking is in order." Real reform must base itself on something more than and separate from retribution.

We must create a system that esposes the fundamental principle that the life of each inmate "must continue to be worth living." Ferguson advocates restorative programs aimed at reconstructing a prisoner's "positive self within the imprisoned self." His proposals include creating tiered incentive systems with rewards that encourage productive behavior; a secure environment for education, differentiated according to prisoner capacities; and pilot programs leading gradually toward economically viable reintegration in society. It is essentially important, the author warns, that we protect these restorative efforts against anticipated budgetary attacks from those who privilege punishment over rehabilitation. Currently, American society's punitive impulse confines people in cages with nothing to do and without any future. Ferguson's major re-envisioning of what incarceration offers us is a chance to turn our present incarcerative hell into a purgative place where hope of redemption can still survive.

Fatalists will dismiss Ferguson's proposals as a pipedream. Opponents, including powerful correctional unions, will accuse him of coddling criminals with expensive "hug a thug" programs. Surprisingly, however, isolated judicial, legislative and executive activity within the last few months suggests Ferguson may have the audience he needs to begin reform. A federal court in California has signaled an openness to breathing some life into the moribund Eighth Amendment as applied to prison conditions; a commissioner of the second largest jail in the United States has called for incentive programs; some fiscal and religious conservatives in Congress have joined forces with liberals to propose bills that "get smart on crime" in ways Ferguson has proposed.

One senator has even intimated that our prisons should foster inmates "reach-

The Flea

For him the truth is a flavor,
a pulse made of nutriment,
a living mountain of breath.
Even pinched between
the fingers and released, he springs
to perfect absence, beyond punishment,
a celebrant of undetectable freedom.
Cinder-speck, a vibrant

fiend of punctuation,
no bigger than a typesetter's
semicolon, there he is again.
And again. He leaves tiny misery,
his wound angry but subtle,
a meal cadged by a parasite whose disguise
is the squirrel's scurry,
or the mastiff's drowse.
Hiding when he cannot leap, he is a fugitive

who stays where he is, misery to the tomcat,
vexation to the hound,
purveyor of infection in hosts
too mute upon the summer field
to know the name of what
steals their peace.
Now he says, meaning then.
Here he says, meaning there. Too late.

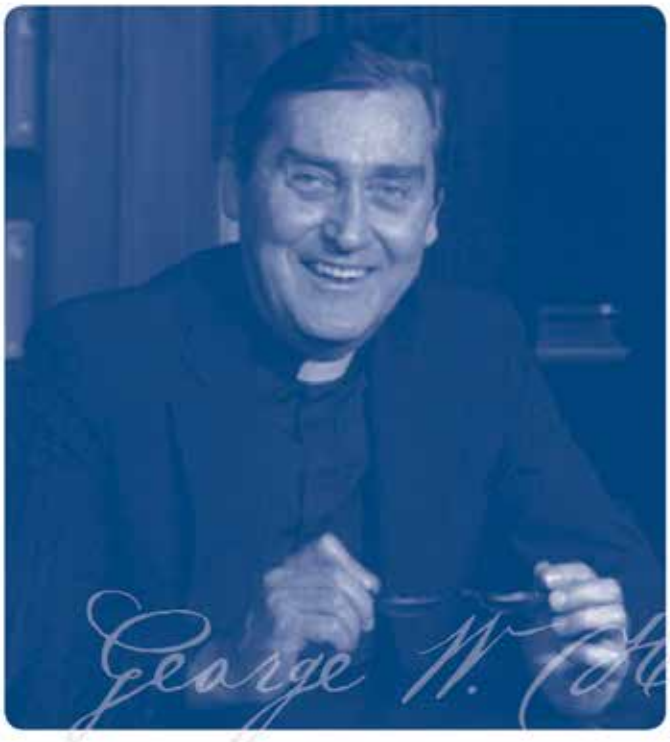
MICHAEL CADNUM

Michael Cadnum *'s 35th book,* Seize the Storm, *has just been published by Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. He also writes haiku on Twitter: @MichaelCadnum.*

GEORGE W. HUNT, S.J., PRIZE

For Excellence In Journalism, Arts & Letters

America THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC REVIEW | Saint Thomas More The Catholic Chapel & Center at Yale University



THE LIFE OF GEORGE W. HUNT, S.J. (1937-2011)

George W. Hunt, S.J., served as the 11th editor in chief of *America*, the national Catholic review published by the Jesuits of the United States. A native of Yonkers, N.Y., Father Hunt entered the Society of Jesus in 1954 and was ordained a priest in 1967. He earned a theology degree from Yale Divinity School in 1970, later remarking that his decision to study Kierkegaard with Professor Paul Holmer was "the best and most fruitful decision in my entire academic life," for it set the stage for a life-long study of the literary arts.

George W. Hunt, S.J., retired as editor in chief in 1998, at the conclusion of the magazine's most prosperous year to-date. He remains the longest serving editor in chief in *America*'s history. Later that year, Father Hunt was named director of the Archbishop Hughes Institute for Religion and Culture at Fordham University, where he dedicated himself to "exploring the relationships between religion and other aspects of contemporary life." George W. Hunt, S.J., Jesuit priest, author and friend, died in 2011 at the age of 74.

THE MISSION OF THE GEORGE W. HUNT, S.J., PRIZE

The Hunt Prize is to be awarded annually and is made possible through the vision and generosity of Fay Vincent Jr., former commissioner of Major League Baseball, who sought to honor his long-standing friend, Father Hunt. The mission of the Prize is five-fold:

I. To promote scholarship, the advancement of learning and the rigor of expression;
II. To support and promote a new generation of journalists, authors and scholars;
III. To memorialize the life and work of George W. Hunt, S.J.;
IV. To forge a lasting partnership between *America* and the Saint Thomas More Chapel and Center at Yale University,
V. To support the intellectual formation of Catholic young adults.

CRITERIA

The Hunt Prize will be awarded to a single individual whose body of work has focused on one or more of the following topical areas:

- Catholicism and Civic Life
- Catholicism and Arts and Letters
- Modern American Fiction
- U.S. Sports
- U.S. History
- Jazz or Classical Music
- American Film and Drama
- Poetry
- Spirituality & Literature

Only English language works of which the nominee is the sole or principal author will be considered.

ELIGIBILITY

Recipients of the George W. Hunt, S.J., Prize must dedicate a substantial portion of their professional energies to writing and must fulfill the following additional criteria:

- He or she must be 45 years of age or younger on the day the prize is awarded;
- He or she should be familiar with the Roman Catholic tradition;
- He or she should be of sound moral character and reputation and must not have published works that are manifestly atheistic or morally offensive.

NOMINATIONS

Nominations for The Hunt Prize will open on George W. Hunt's birthday, at 12 a.m. on January 22, 2015 and the nomination period will close at 11:59 p.m. on March 31. All submissions may be made at: huntprize.org.

FORMAL AWARD AND CEREMONY

The winner will be announced in June 2015. The winner will be awarded a gift of $25,000. Formal awarding will take place at the Saint Thomas More Chapel and Center at Yale University in September 2015.

The recipient of the award will deliver a lecture that is related to his or her primary works, and the lecture will be published as a cover story in *America* within three months of its delivery.

For more information: **huntprize.org**

ing their God-given potential." That sounds like Ferguson's restoration of the positive self. Will all this activity prove to be nothing more than a false dawn? It is much too early to tell; but, at least the signals may justify the author's refusal to despair.

"Criminal justice has gone astray, lost in a dark wood of its own making. It is time, more than time, to find a way out." Ferguson's book opens our eyes in the darkness and points to a possible exit. It should be required reading for judges, legislators, politicians, prison authorities and all of us who are democratically responsible for the inferno that together we have created.

FRANCIS R. HERRMANN, S.J., *is a professor at Boston College Law School.*

ANNA J. BROWN

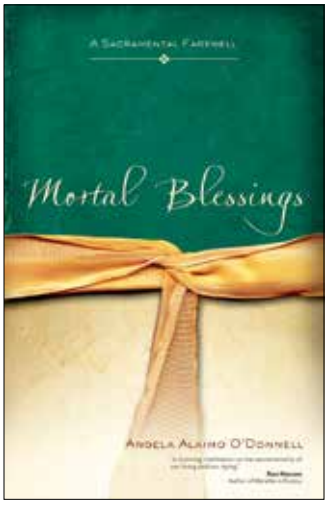
THE LIGHT IN OUR LIVES

MORTAL BLESSINGS
A Sacramental Farewell

By Angela Alaimo O'Donnell
Ave Maria Press. 160p $15.95

In what now seems a moment of serendipity, I received the request to review *Mortal Blessings*, by Angela Alaimo O'Donnell (an America columnist), just as I finished reading and discussing William Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying* with a handful of fellow book club members. Faulkner's agonizing yet powerful account of the death of Addie Bundren, as told by Bundren, her family members and neighbors, left me feeling devastated for days. I suppose it was the way he rendered human vulnerability, our efforts to retain some kind of dignity and integrity, no matter how far-fetched or grotesque our actions may be, in a world that often seems hell-bent to crush every last shred of our humanity, that left such a deep impression. O'Donnell's book, a meditation on the final illness and death of her mother, likewise left a deep impression of grief and sadness but also a way, through her own reading of holy ritual and Catholic sacraments, to bear witness faithfully both to the death of a beloved yet all-too-human one and to death itself.

Much as in the narrative of the Bundren family, there is no sugar coating of the deceased or of the sometimes strained relationship among family members in O'Donnell's book. The book's opening image of an alcoholic (as the reader soon learns) 82-year-old mother, clad in a pink bathrobe, tripping and breaking her hip in the ensuing fall on a ceramic tile floor is one that, upon first read, I wanted to turn from and not look back. When O'Donnell later describes encountering her toothless mother donning a big black wig in an assisted care home, she, too, shares her revulsion at the sight of her mother and her desire not to look. And yet, and yet. Daniel Berrigan, S.J., reminds us that a Catholic reading of the world says that death does not have the final say, that there is a slight edge on the side of life. Thus, for as much as O'Donnell wishes to look and perhaps even walk away, there she is, along with her sisters, happily clothes-shopping for her fashion conscious mother, tearfully captivated while watching the film "Dirty Dancing" with her mother and chuckling at the sight of her mother flirting with a handsome young orderly.



O'Donnell's tales of shopping and flirting, as well as her daily log of the countless other pedestrian tasks associated with care for the sick and dying, soar to new heights when she views this work through the lens of ritual and the sacraments. I was especially taken by her good use of the Rev. Andrew Greeley's writings in this regard: "Catholics live in an enchanted world, a world of statues and holy water, stained glass and votive candles, rosary beads and holy pictures. But these Catholic paraphernalia are mere hints of a deeper and more pervasive religious sensibility which inclines Catholics to see the holy lurking in creation." When O'Donnell, having no holy water on hand, uses her own saliva to trace the cross on her mother's forehead, she powerfully and lovingly puts into practice her understanding of Greeley's words and of her Catholic faith: "Everything is, to use Greeley's term, 'enchanted,' charged with significance, and available to us as a manifestation of divine presence in our daily lives."

The chapters of her fine book, with titles like "The Sacrament of Speech" and "The Sacraments of the Cell Phone and the Wheelchair," offer the reader a rich blend of O'Donnell's experience of the sickness and death of her mother, her original insight, sonnets and rendering of ritual and sacrament and well chosen passages from some of the finest literary and Catholic minds. Through O'Donnell's work, the reader learns how we are to stay rooted, pay attention, be present and live that most Catholic of commands, to love one another. Toward the end of her book, when her mother takes her final few breaths and the finality of death is at

hand, O'Donnell writes of "being undone by the wildness of grief" but then of finding strength in her practice of ritual, sacrament and faith.

In one of the most beautiful accounts in the book, the ability to stay present at this harrowing moment of death allowed O'Donnell and her sisters to remain at their mother's bedside and carefully watch the subtle physical transformation, from the supple to the stone-like quality of the flesh, rendered by death upon her mother's body. "She looks like a saint," says O'Donnell's sister, to which O'Donnell adds, "And Rose was right—even in death she shone." Though humble and tattered, our lives are suffused with the radiant light of the divine; how we might better see and savor that light in our daily lives is the gift of Angela O'Donnell's book.

ANNA J. BROWN, *who teaches political science and directs the Social Justice program at Saint Peter's University, most recently co-edited and contributed to* Faith, Resistance, and the Future: Daniel Berrigan's Challenge to Catholic Social Thought.

DAVID J. MICHAEL

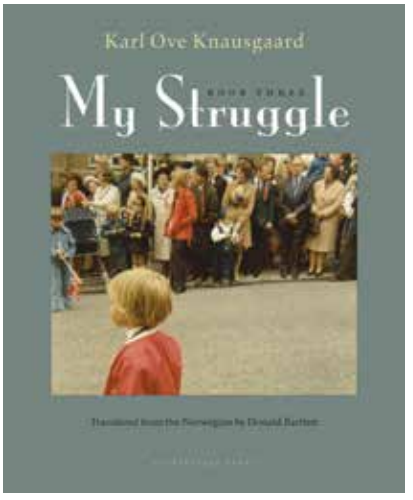
FAITH IN A NEW SHAPE

MY STRUGGLE
Book Three: Boyhood

By Karl Ove Knausgaard

Translated by Don Bartlett
Archipelago. 432p $27

In a 1993 essay, David Foster Wallace suggested a turn away from the irony that had come to characterize his generation of American writers: "The next real literary 'rebels' in this country might well emerge as some weird bunch of anti-rebels, born oglers who dare somehow to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse and instantiate single-entendre principles." With a few exceptions, Wallace's hope has yet to materialize.



Perhaps this is why the books that have taken the U.S. literary scene by storm are a Norwegian writer's chronicle of his everyday life, a six-volume memoir in the guise of a novel that runs to over 5,000 pages and is provocatively titled *Min Kamp*.

Karl Ove Knausgaard is part of what the Swedish critic Victor Malm has dubbed the "Norwegian New Sincerity," a stable of writers characterized by "a retreat to the intimate, the unadorned, and the naked." Knausgaard has become the movement's scion, both at home and abroad. At this summer's book release party for the English translation of *Book Three: Boyhood*, a line of 500 people wrapped around a block in New York.

"A life is simple to understand, the elements that determine it are few," he writes in the second volume of *My Struggle*, the English translation for the series. "In mine there were two. My father and the fact that I had never belonged anywhere." But these elements are less organizing principles than forces affecting the volumes' progress. The books progress like a moon, spinning in an orbit around two objects—his father and a sense of restlessness—which are

often glimpsed but whose gravity is always felt.

Volume one of *My Struggle* begins with a grand meditation on what happens to a body in death and then seamlessly transitions into a childhood memory in which the young Karl Ove is watching the TV news report on a lost fishing boat. In the footage of a choppy sea, he glimpses the outline of a face and runs off to tell his father, who mocks him. The scene sets the tone of a house dominated by his father's moods, a relationship dominated by his father's antagonism and a book that is largely concerned with death.

The first part consists of a wandering through detailed memories of his teenage years, when his family began to fall apart and his father began the slow slide into the alcoholism that would eventually kill him. But his father does not actually die until part two of the book, which takes place when Knausgaard is 30 and chronicles his return to his grandmother's house, where his father spent his final months drinking himself to death. Knausgaard finds a formerly well-ordered house strewn with bottles and human excrement, his grandmother herself now an alcoholic. He sets about cleaning the place, ostensibly so the funeral can be held there, but really it is an attempt to erase his father's destruction. One hundred pages chronicling the deep cleaning of a house sounds a taxing proposition, and yet it is effortless reading.

This endless dedication to minutiae is equally present in volume two, *A Man in Love*, but the setting, and the man, have changed. The book opens with a picture of fatherhood: the writer and his wife on holiday, catering to their three young children at a cheap fair. The rest of the book's 500-odd pages might be seen as an attempt to explain to himself how he arrived at such a domesticated point. He reccounts his move from Norway to Sweden, a flight from a country and marriage he says were suffocating him, his falling violently in love with a new woman and the birth of their children. But the specifics of what he fled from remain blurry. The presence of both his father and his ex are forcefully felt, though they are nearly absent from the book.

With *Book Three*, his father is back in focus. He had received a job teaching middle school in the countryside, and the young family had moved to a new, planned estate on the coast of Norway that had been developed for the burgeoning middle class in a country in the early stages of transitioning from a relatively poor country of fishing and farming to a nation bloated with oil money. Everything seemed new and modern. "And for those of us who were children, that meant no history. Everything was happening for the first time." The book, the most linear of the first three, reads as an account of the early years of a New Norway, a family, and a boy who is

both sensitive and precocious.

Like most boys, Karl Ove is also a bit mischievous, which makes for amusing reading; he writes about looking for porn magazines in the local dump or accidentally setting fire to a small island. But the levity is continually broken by the specter of his father, of whose presence Karl Ove is always aware. In one instance, his father force-feeds apples to him until he cries—all because he ate an apple from the kitchen without asking permission. In another, his father slaps him for losing a sock at swimming lessons and forbids him from going back to the pool. Knausgaard's mother, an absent-minded, cheerful woman who works as a nurse, exists mostly in the background.

> She saved me because if she hadn't been there I would have grown up alone with Dad and sooner or later I would have taken my life, one way or another. But she was there, Dad's darkness had a counterbalance, I am alive and the fact that I do not live my life to the full has nothing to do with the balance of my childhood. I am alive, I have my own children, and with them I have tried to achieve only one aim: that they shouldn't be afraid of their father.

In a small country like Norway, where everyone knows somebody who knows somebody, the confessional style of *Book Three* is not a bloodless proposition. His father's family no longer speaks to him. But the rigorous earnestness and honesty seems less courageous than compulsive, the act of someone possessed by graphomania. However, Knausgaard is doing more than navel-gazing or trying to come to grips with his childhood. At the reading in New York, he had this to say about his project:

> There are some basic ideas about life that were dominating before. The idea of God, for instance. The idea of faith. The Divine. All those things that have just disappeared. Is it coming back in some other shapes? That's what interests me, really. Is it still possible to talk about faith? What is it for us? And I can't do this as a kind of abstraction. So what I do, I write about what I see and hope that there is something in there, there is some connection.

What could be characterized as self-absorption is in fact something more: a search for the religious through the aesthetic. In looking for the mystical, Knausgaard turns to his memories and everyday experience, which he mines ceaselessly and laboriously in his art. This technique is not without drawbacks, namely ocassional boredom. But with *My Struggle: Book Three: Boyhood*, one reads not to find out what happens but because one has come into contact with a man in the grip of genius. A difficult man who possesses the courage, the attention, and the capacity of spirit to look very long and hard at his life and the world around him and describe it in prose that eschews irony and distance. For readers, this is a welcome if demanding gift.

DAVID J. MICHAEL *is a writer and producer living in Brooklyn.*

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The Weakness of Sin

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT (B), MARCH 15, 2015

Readings: 2 Chr 36:14–23; Ps 137:1–6; Eph 2:4–10; Jn 3:14–21

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world (Jn 3:17)

One of the darkest times in the life of the Jewish people was the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Babylonians and the subsequent exile of the people of God. According to the Chronicler, this was not an action God wanted, "but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord against his people became so great that there was no remedy." Only then did the Babylonians come.

And the Babylonians came with fury. They killed young and old alike "and had no compassion on young men or young women, the aged or the feeble"; the wealth of the king was looted and brought to Babylon; the Temple was burned to the ground and the walls of Jerusalem broken down; and those who were not killed were taken into exile in Babylon to become servants.

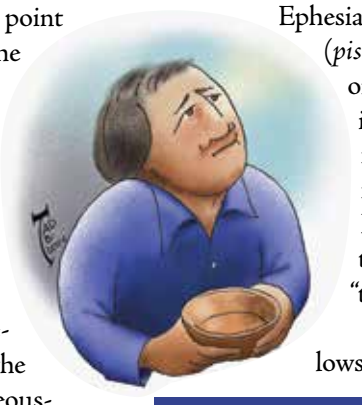
It was as they were weeping by the rivers of Babylon that God came to the exiled Jews and told them to go home. This return was brought about by the conquerors of Babylon, King Cyrus of Persia and his army, "in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah." Out of the darkness came light.

It was not the case that God's salvation came because the lives of the Judeans were now lived in perfect righteousness, but because God looked in mercy upon his people. We know from Ezra, Nehemiah and Haggai that the people needed to return to the forgotten law of God, reform their lives and rebuild the ruined Temple. God did not wait for them to achieve righteousness but allowed the conditions for righteousness to flourish.

This is precisely the point made by the author of the Letter to the Ephesians, traditionally thought to be Paul, who speaks of God reaching out to humanity "even when we were dead through our trespasses." God reached out to reward us not because we had achieved the necessary level of righteousness but because God is merciful and desires to seat us "in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." This all takes place through God's gracious initiative.

Ephesians says that "by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." This could not be clearer: salvation is gift, salvation is grace. Yet we are also told that we are saved "through faith" (*pistis*), which is itself a part of the gift. Salvation cannot be earned, bought or bargained for, but faith is the essential human response. Faith in God's gracious gift allows us to be conformed to God's image, since we were "created in Christ Jesus for good works [*ergois agathois*], which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."

In John's Gospel Jesus tells us that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." The word translated "believe" in Jn 3:16 is the verbal form of *pistis*, the same word translated "faith" in Ephesians. All who have faith (*pisteuôn*) in God's Son are on the path to conforming themselves to God's image in order to share in eternal life or, in the language of Ephesians, to share Christ's life in "the heavenly places."



ART: TAD A. DUNNE

It is this faith that allows us, even in our sinful state, to see that the "light has come into the world" and "those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds [*erga*] have been done in God." Ephesians tells us that we have been created for "good works," while the Gospel of John says those in the "light" do their "deeds" in God. The same Greek word (*ergon*) lies behind "works" in Ephesians and "deeds" in the Gospel of John.

God's salvation is an undeserved gift that begins with faith. But our response to God's grace naturally blossoms into good works, "so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God." These deeds are not the means to merit salvation but the joyous response to God's merciful gift of salvation.

JOHN W. MARTENS

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Reflect on how God's gracious gift has inspired you to good works.

JOHN W. MARTENS *is an associate professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn. Twitter: @BibleJunkies.*

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